UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

# The Cultural Gravity of a Neighborhood Temple:
# *Lay Practice and Temple Buddhism in Contemporary Shanghai*

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

by

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The dissertation of Harrison Blaine Carter is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the participants at Puci Temple who have made this research possible and who have shown me unbelievable care. I will be forever grateful.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Cultural Gravity of a Neighborhood Temple:
*Lay Practice and Temple Buddhism in Contemporary Shanghai*

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This qualitative research focuses on one Buddhist temple in urban Shanghai from the ground up to better understand the contours of lay practice oriented toward and inspired by Buddhism in contemporary China. It helps fill an important gap in the scholarship on contemporary Chinese Buddhism which has tended toward top-down investigations of elite temples and practitioners, textual traditions, and state influence. A religious ecology framework emphasizing the relationships between elements is used to describe the temple community and contribute to conceptualizing a spectrum of lay Buddhist practice in China today.

The temple has two clear groups of practitioners; a core group of regularly participating lay Buddhists and a wider, more numerous, group whose practices are rooted in popular religious

culture. Each has clear in-group similarity and practices based on a distinct religious foundation. However, participants of both groups share a place of worship, cultural heritage, and certain values. I outline a temple ecology built on interdependence and, at times, ambivalence between the groups. The temple promotes a generalized culture that allows for both groups to fulfill their aims and the community to thrive. Comprehensive analysis of participant practices also allows for conceptualizing the ecology of lay practice oriented toward Buddhism more broadly in a way that draws out the important connections between the lay Buddhist and popular practices found at the temple. A theoretically grounded defining feature of practicing lay Buddhism is proposed that can effectively account for the breadth and distinctiveness of temple practices and contribute to describing a spectrum of lay Buddhist practice in urban China today.

Finally, the findings about lay practice on the ground challenge the extent which efforts to modernize, contain, and control Buddhism have been successful in purifying Buddhism of its popular elements. At this local temple, instead, both groups are accepted and supported which is necessary for its survival and success. The temple is also an important venue for the spread of Buddhism and renewal of shared values in the community. These findings about the complexities of urban temple Buddhism in China should encourage additional reflection about the forces shaping Chinese Buddhism today.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

On *Dongzhi* (冬至) 2017, like all the days on the ritual calendar reserved for honoring one's ancestors, the temple fires were hot. Hot in the very real sense of the roaring furnaces accommodating one family after the next burning large red bags full of paper money used to venerate their ancestors (*laozuzong* 老祖宗), but also hot in the sense of *honghuo* (红火), fiery hot with a palpable energy that has long marked temple life in China's religious history (Chau 2006). *Dongzhi* is the traditional festival around the winter solstice. *Dongzhi*, along with Tomb Sweeping Festival (*Qingming Jie* 清明节) and the Hungry Ghost Festival (*Zhongyuan Jie* 中元节), have traditionally been times for Chinese families to come together for activities to honor of their ancestors in a variety of locations including temples. Ancestor veneration is a particularly important practice for many Chinese because they believe "…they are linked to their descendants in a variety of ways: cultural, religious, moral and communal" and that maintaining an active relationship with them impacts their families continued well-being (Yao and Zhao 2010:113–14). *Dongzhi* is also one of the major dates on the Buddhist ritual calendar where dedicated lay Buddhists come together for rituals directed toward ancestors. It was these reasons that drew a wide range of participants to the temple on a chilly morning in December.

The Puci Temple (*pucitang* 普慈堂[1]) courtyard was quite a scene; abuzz with chaotic energy and crowded with people. The temple is full of people several times per month for important days on the ritual calendar which draw in larger numbers of participants than the other days. However, days like *Dongzhi* that emphasize ancestors are especially crowded because, in

[1] This is a Pseudonym for the temple that is at the core of this research project. The English translation for the Pseudonymization is "Universal Benevolence Temple." No temples of this name exist in Shanghai. There is at least one temple in another city in China by this name, but this research is not addressing it or any other.

addition to the usual regular visitors coming to light incense and make the rounds of supplication, many more people from the neighborhood who don't normally attend come on these days with the explicit purpose of venerating their ancestors by burning paper money. The burning of paper money is a widespread practice in China that emphasizes the social relations between the living and the dead and offers an opportunity for the practitioner to show respect to their ancestors and potentially offer them material assistance in the afterlife (see Blake 2012).

Additional metal barrels are prepared to accommodate the practice and, on special days like *Dongzhi*, the agreement with the local officials and neighbors to refrain from burning paper money on busy days is lifted[2]. Thick smoke billows out of the temple from 6am when the temple opens until the early afternoon when the stream of visitors begins to slow. Individuals and families line up in front of the barrels holding large red paper bags filled with folded silver paper ingots with the names of ancestors written on them and wait their turn toss their bags into the fire and offer a prayer. Many others make their way into the Ksitigarbha Hall (*Dizang Dian* 地藏殿), which houses the temples long-term memorial tablets that memorialize some participant's ancestors and an image of Ksitigarbha (*Dizangwang Pusa* 地藏王菩萨), to make offerings of food and/or money and pray. Ksitigarbha, extremely popular among all the temple's participants, "is best known in Chinese religion today as the savior par excellence of the dead, especially of those undergoing the torments in hell because of their wicked ways. (Ng 2007:3)" The other halls see their share of visitors and in every other open space in the temple courtyard families are huddled together folding silver ingots (*xibo* 锡箔) and stuffing them into the ritual red paper

[2] The temple does not allow burning of paper money on most 1st and 15th of the lunar month. On these days, paper money will be collected and then burned all at once in the afternoon to limit the impact on the surrounding neighbors.

bags. Large signs are posted along side of one of the halls with instructions on what to write on the ritual bags. This is meant to assist the visitors, the majority of which are not very familiar with the ritual procedures. Temple volunteers posted by the fires and around the temple do their best to provide structure and try their best to ensure that temple rules, especially ones related to fire safety, are followed.

Mid-morning, amidst the crowded scene in the courtyard and surrounding halls, a small buzz is heard, someone has come up from the ritual going on downstairs to let the volunteers near the Ksitigarbha Hall (*dizangdian* 地藏殿) know that those participating in the ritual assembly, tucked away downstairs in a ritual space below the main hall, will soon be making their way upstairs to perform the 'transfer of merit' (*huixiang* 回响), a portion of the ritual in which all the participants must come upstairs to chant in the Ksitigarbha Hall. The volunteers move to clear the hall and make a lane through the crowd as a line of lay Buddhist *jushi*[3] with their hand pressed together chanting, led by a procession of monks, emerge in the courtyard, seemingly from nowhere. Most of the people upstairs had no idea that there was a Buddhist ritual taking place downstairs while they were doing their individual practices upstairs.

When these *jushi*, more than 50 strong, all dressed in their ritual robes (*haiqing* 海清) trailing a group of monks in yellow robes emerge, the crowds look on with a combination of amazement and confusion. Solemnly chanting together, it seems the crowd does not know what to make of them. The doors to the hastily emptied Ksitigarbha Hall open quickly and they take their places inside before the doors are closed behind them. While they chant, onlookers outside

[3] Much more on this term later, but this dissertation makes a distinction between formal lay Buddhist *jushi* who have taken on a more formal Buddhist identity and the wider community of *xiangke* participants who have a different relationship to institutional Buddhism.

the hall stack deeply outside the doors and those in the front press their faces against the glass windows to peer in to see what's going on inside. Others take a cue from the sounds of chanting inside to press their hands together, as in prayer, out of respect, some more familiar with the particulars of the chanting than others. The volunteers responsible for the hall stand guard out front of the closed doors. After a few minutes, some amongst the crowd begin to bristle at being unable to go inside. After all, the hall is a focal point for all of the visitors on *Dongzhi*. The bristling participants came to honor their ancestors and they need access to the image of Ksitigarbha and, perhaps, visit their family memorial tablet inside.

While most are understanding and patient, others get frustrated and seem to see little in common between what they came to do and the ritual playing out in front of them. Finally, after a few moments, the *jushi* and the monks leave the hall by making their way through a new hole made by the volunteers and disappear, yet again, behind and below the main hall. Within moments, the scene upstairs around the Ksitigarbha Hall returns to the ordered chaos from just moments before…as if it had never happened. On this *Dongzhi*, a day of great important to many across china, both those who consider themselves Buddhist and many more who do not have come to this local temple to practice. Veneration of ancestors is still a very important activity in contemporary China with recent analysis stating that more than 70% of the adult population still report performing related practices (Hu 2016:180). Further, in Chinese cities today more and more people are performing these types of activities at Buddhist temples as opposed to grave sites or in common spaces in their neighborhoods[4]. At this local temple on this traditional holiday, two very different types of religious practice come face to face with each other.

[4] The movement of these practices into the temple is something that will be addressed in Chs. 3 and 5

## RESEARCH OVERVIEW

A visit to an urban Buddhist temple in China today on a popular holiday makes clear that they continue to be an important site for the lay religious practice of many Chinese including those who more explicitly practice Buddhism and those who don't. Historically, Buddhist temples have drawn in a wide range of participants and Buddhism has long been intertwined with popular religious practices that are diffused in Chinese society. Despite massive changes in Chinese society and religious life over the past century, this is still true today. It is clear from observation, acknowledged in the literature, and is common knowledge for Chinese people.

However, there is scant little research that takes a close look at the full scope of contemporary lay practice at Buddhist temples. Instead much research about the modernization of Buddhism and contemporary Buddhist practice in China has taken a top-down approach. For a variety of reasons, it has tended to focus on the most visible or devout forms of Buddhist practice and emphasized boundary work being undertaken by various actors to separate Buddhism from popular religious practice. The establishment of a modern form of Buddhism, purified of popular elements, was an emphasis of early 20th century Buddhist reformers and today the state, and state controlled Buddhist organizations, work to shape and contain Buddhism in China, including getting rid of popular religious influence, for the purposes of control. Despite these important trends in Buddhism and its study, the fact of the complexity of the lay practice of Buddhism and its connection to China's popular religious culture remains.

This research takes a bottom-up, qualitative approach to investigate lay practice at a single Buddhist temple in order to better understand the contours of lay practice that are oriented and inspired by Buddhism in urban China today. Who are these visitors and what do they come to do? Why do they come to the temple to practice? There is a narrative binary between the two

groups at the temple, but how can we describe their shape and difference in a theoretically grounded way? What can the relationship between these types of practices and how they interact at the temple tell us about lay practice in urban China beyond the temple? Further, how do these two groups fit together to form a single religious community? What does that community look like and how do they make it work? And finally, what does a view that considers the full range of lay practice contribute to our understanding of Buddhism in China today?

We utilize a religious ecology framework which emphasizes the relationships between the various elements to describe both the temple itself and to conceptualize a spectrum of lay Buddhist practice. We find that Puci Temple has two clear groups of practitioners including a core group of regularly participating lay Buddhists and a wider, more numerous, community whose practices are based on popular religious culture. These participants demonstrate clear in-group similarities and can be said to be practicing based on two very different religious foundations. However, these two groups also share a common place of worship, cultural heritage, and set of values. Despite the clear difference between the groups, we demonstrate that the temple relies on both groups to operate. The temple structure and culture promote a generalist environment and maintenance of an ambivalent status quo between the groups which contributes to the success of the whole. Despite the separation and difference between the groups, we argue that there is community at the temple, both within and among the groups. In fact, the temple serves as an important environment for exchange between them and a source of the low-key spread of lay Buddhism.

Our deep look at the practices of the temple participants also gives us an opportunity to better conceptualize the ecology of lay practice oriented to Buddhism more broadly in a way that makes the important connection to the popular practices we find at the temple. We utilize Adam

Chau's "modalities of doing religion" to escape institutional boundaries and argue that lay Buddhist practice can be defined around the application of a personal-cultivation mode of practice to Buddhist inspired goals and, further, that there is a spectrum of lay practice that on one end finds a more traditional practitioners comfortable with syncretic elements rooted in popular religious culture and on the other end practitioners that have moved to purify Buddhism of its popular elements.

Finally, our findings focused on the grassroots level of lay practice challenge the extent to which efforts to modernize, contain, and control Buddhism have been successful in purifying Buddhism of its popular elements. At this local temple, instead, the support of both groups is necessary for its survival and success. It also serves a tool for the spread of Buddhism and renewal of shared values among entire community. Our research indicates that the importance and influence of top-down attempts to shape and delimit Buddhist practice among the laity may be overstated or in need of further contextualization.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *1) Pursuing Diversity in the Comparative Study of Religion*

The academic study of religion demonstrates a clear pattern throughout its history in its attempts to define, describe, and understand its object[5]. There has always been an implied aim to study all the diversity of religious life in a comparative manner, but, as scholars have pushed for fuller understanding, they have been forced to reckon with how to define religion, mark boundaries around what is considered religious life, and manage the practicalities of studying

[5] These aims in the study of religion date all the way back to the beginnings of the "Science of Religion" and scholars like CP Tiele and Friedrich Max Müller (see Sharpe 1975)

religious phenomenon and culture most effectively. In this pursuit there has always been a struggle between unity and diversity.

The struggle has much to do with the fact that religion defies definition. Scholars have taken two important paths toward conceptualizing religion which serve as a theoretical basis for seeking it out. The first defines and delimits the object of study using positive, substantive definitions. Proponents note that it allows them to clearly identify their research target for convenient comparative scholarship and analysis (see Berger 1974; Stark and Bainbridge 1987). It is especially useful in variable based research (McGuire 2002). The second relies on functionalist definitions which identify religion by what is does and generally see it as a lasting feature of human society. Functional definitions have the advantage of being non-essentialist (McKinnon 2002) whereas substantial definitions are critiqued for falling into the "substantialist fallacy, a case of misplaced concreteness" (Fitzgerald 1997:106). Functionalist definitions allow for the incorporation of more diverse forms of religious life; however, these approaches often struggle with ambiguity including where to draw the boundary between religion and other forms of culture. The problem of identifying the primary object of the study of religion and where we should focus our scholarship is well acknowledged. Some have called for the elimination of the category of religion all together (Smith 1963), but most scholars continue to see religion, as something distinct from other forms of culture, as an important analytic category (McKinnon 2002).

These questions have become more important in recent decades as religion has returned to a place of prominence in the social sciences and on the global stage. The once dominant secularization paradigm has crumbled proving that years of research arguing that modernity would bring about the end of religion was false (Berger 1999). Instead, the past decades have

seen a re-emergence of religion in public and social life (Habermas 2006) as multiple modernities (Eisenstadt 2000) have and continue to play out and interact.

Religion's re-emergence continues to raise the same age-old challenges for scholars. What is our object when we study religion and how do we study the breadth of religious life in a globalized world? Encounters with other cultures have forced Western scholarship of all kinds to come to grips with the privileged position it had always unreflexively afforded itself (Chakrabarty 2009; Said 1979). Critical scholars of religion have forced us to see the way we define religion according to our Western religious tradition reflexively (Asad 1993, 2003; Scott 2006). Following this impulse, there have been increasing calls from scholars for the mainstream of the sociology of religion, which still overwhelmingly on focuses on Christianity in the United States and other forms of institutionalized religion, to seek religion on the "edge" and push ourselves to better understand the breath of religious life we see around the world today through the provincialization of Western forms (Bender 2013; Cadge, Levitt, and Smilde 2011; Smith 2008).

*2) Studying Contemporary Chinese Religion*

Chinese religion is a particularly important case with bearing on these trends in the study of religion that has garnered increasing attention over the past 30 years (Zhuo 2003). It has been experiencing a "renaissance" of new and renewed forms of religious life since the reform and opening after years of suppression under Mao (Madsen 2011). In many ways the study of religion in China, including the successes and the challenges of the research, is an important proving ground for the comparative study of religion. It offers challenges to our Western theories of religious life (Fan 2011) and encourages researchers to be reflexive about the ways our Western, Protestant forms of religious life come to influence the way we see religion in general.

The process of modernization in China, beginning in the late 19th century and continuing through the middle of the next century, led to a reshaping of the category of religion. The word for religion itself, *zong jiao* (宗教), is a 19th century import from the West via Japan (Nedostup 2001:23). The combination of Chinese characters used imply a sense an exclusive piety that speaks to its construction in a Western image (Fan 2011). Under this new construction of the category, institutional forms of Christianity, Buddhism, Daoism, and Islam became religion's standard bearers and whatever did not fit this new package of religion was shuffled into other categories like superstition and culture (Yang 2008). In addition to and following this modernization of the conceptualization of religion, religious practice and traditions were further suppressed as the communist period progressed and the cultural revolution threatened what remained of traditional culture including all religion.

Chinese religion has experienced much tumult and change, but much like religion was written off as an anachronism in the West and has since returned with new importance, the last 30 years of new and surprising development of religious life in China has led to renewed interest among scholars. Initially there researchers were overwhelmingly foreign, but domestic scholarship has also been increasing (Zhuo 2003). Interest has especially focused on the re-establishment of places of worship throughout China; popular religion, especially in the countryside; and the rapid expansion of Christianity (see e.g. Chau 2006; Overmyer 2003; Yang and Lang 2011). There has also been tremendous interest in the control and containment of religion by the state and state-controlled religious organizations (see e.g. Ashiwa and Wank 2009; Cao 2018; Yang 2008).

*3) Approaches to Studying Chinese Religion*

While we have seen successful and important research over the past decades, much of the work has tended to focus on institutional forms of Christianity and traditional Chinese religions (Zhuo 2003). In doing so, there has also been an emphasis on important leaders and organizations as well as the most visible, self-identifying communities. With exciting things to observe and plenty of opportunity this makes sense, and many scholars eagerly applied Western research methods and assumptions to the study of Chinese religious life. This research has been important and successful, however, a focus on institutional forms in China has important drawbacks that are related to the (re)construction of the category of religion mentioned. While even the most generous surveys find that less than 30% of the Chinese population identify as religious and government official numbers far fewer, recent comprehensive surveys of the religious landscape in China (Reed 2007; Yang 2010; Yao 2007) show a complicated religious field. While identification is low, one survey reports that as many as "85 percent of [Chinese] people either hold some supernatural beliefs or practice some kind of religion" (Yang 2010). This gap between identification and practice in rooted in the particulars of the Chinese case and relates to the notion that religion is diffused throughout Chinese society (Yang 1961).

*Market theory.*

There have been a variety of approaches, but research rooted in the supply-side theory of religious markets (Stark and Finke 2000), which has become a particularly important theory in the United States (Warner 1993), has taken a prominent position in the study of Chinese religion. This approach has produced some of the most successful recent research on contemporary Chinese religion (Madsen 2012). The empirical work emerging from this framework is laudable, but market approaches to the study of religion require a substantive definition. In laying out his definition for the study of religion in China, religious markets scholar Yang Fenggang defines

what he sees as "conventional" or "full" religion in china as being "…a unified system of beliefs and practices about life and the world relative to the supernatural that unite the believers or followers into a social organization of moral community" (Yang 2012: 36, 42-43). Under his definition, Christianity, Islam, and institutionalized Buddhism are representative examples. The problem is that this understanding of religion is clearly informed by western conception (Madsen 2012). Yang argues that this move allows his sociology of religion work in China to be in line with, and allow more direct comparisons to other work done in the sociology of religion field in the United States (Yang 2012; Yang and Lang 2011).

The benefits of this type of research are important to keep in mind but defining "formal religion" and emphasizing regulation of religious markets creates issues for studying contemporary Chinese religion. First, the emphasis on the market and the role of the state in regulation and de-regulation of religious markets means that market theory, as an approach, will always be complicated by political issues, a topic we will return to below. Further, too much focus on institutional forms of religion in China brings along with it profound loss. If all kinds of religious life that are "less" than full religion and are something less deserving of our attention, much of the important complexity of Chinese religious life falls from view. A focus on these modern, Western forms of institutional religion seems to fly in historical understandings of religion's place in Chinese society and the construction of the category of religion in modernity.

There have been critical reactions to the use of market theory and other conventional Western approaches to study of Chinese religious life. These scholars have built these critiques on the acknowledgment of the tension in the category of religion itself in modernity and the evidence of religious life that defies neat categorization. Some scholars have pointed out the limitation of western theorizing (Fan 2011) and others have tried to develop new, more

comprehensive frameworks for understanding the religious situation in China today (see e.g. Goossaert and Palmer 2011). Domestic and International scholars have tried to approach Chinese religion through alternative models and in ways that are more sensitive to the history or religion in China and more sensitive to the emic and etic vocabularies that are in tension as scholars describe Chinese religion.

Through this process of debate in the scholarship, the complicated nature of religious life in China has become accepted. It is no longer a question but a shared understanding that must be grappled with if we are going to pursue a more complete picture of religion in China and understand its comparative relationship to religion elsewhere. In fact, even market theorists acknowledge that religion in China is complex and that religious life extends beyond the "formal religion" it privileges, but instead argue that a defined object is necessary for comparative academic study (Yang 2012:26–27). What is needed is a different kind of framework that can be used to study the complexity and interconnectivity of Chinese religious life.

*Religious ecology.*

One productive alternative way to think about Chinese religion has been the use of an ecological metaphor. Goosaert and Palmer's (2011) *The Religious Question in Modern China* relies heavily on the ecological metaphor as they look Chinese religion in historical perspective and argue that religion must be considered as something in constant ecological tension with politics and economics from which it cannot be completely untangled. Other scholars, importantly a number of Chinese scholars, have developed a related religious ecology framework which has been put in direct tension with market theory in the literature[6] and has been proposed

[6] Note that the religious ecology framework was first written about before Goosaert and Palmers book and is referred to within.

as a new framework for studying diversity in Chinese religious life (Clart 2013). Phillip Clart (2013) cites Chinese scholar Mou Zhongjia, a Chinese proponent of the approach, who said, "the new approach would focus not on the relationship of culture and nature, but on the interrelations of elements within a cultural system" (188). Here there is an acknowledgement that religion can't be defined as something unitary and separate from other forms of culture, but instead offers the ability to focus on complexity, change, and tension within and between religions and religious elements.

The religious ecology framework, as it has been used in the literature, has both political and theoretical dimensions. The political dimension of religious ecology is directly related to what about what we have said above conceptualizations of religion and the use of religious market theory for studying Chinese religion. Chinese scholars like Mou Zhongjian use religious ecology to point out that the strength China's religious situation historically has been the unique harmony between the different religious traditions and elements, and he argues that the balance should be protected[7]. Market theory has been critiqued for arguing for the liberalization of government regulation of religion in China which would undoubtedly benefit Christianity. The religious ecology scholars enter this political debate by arguing for additional government regulation in order to restore and nurture religious balance and harmony as well as limit an unnatural and excessive advance by Christianity. Chinese scholars note that Christianity has not been as successful in Taiwan where traditional beliefs and practices have more room to operate (Clart 2013:189–91). These political debates are a logical extension of these different frameworks for approaching the Chinese religious landscape, however, it is the theoretical

[7] He offers 3 types of religious ecology. This harmonious type, where multiple traditions are in balance, he argued was unique to China/East Asia

implications of this framework that is of the most concern to this study because it allows for us to study variation and tensions both within Buddhism and also between Buddhism and other forms of religious life, notably encounters with popular religious culture.

Some scholars have remained focused on the political implications of these competing frameworks, but others have begun to utilize the theoretical dimensions of religious ecology to ask new and important questions. Philip Clart has written about the political debate, but also notes that the religious ecology approach provides a theoretical basis for exploring more diversity in Chinese religion. He also argues that it offers the potential to see Christianity as something more than an "eternal misfit" (195) in competition with other religious firms and also offers the ability to look at the relationship between popular religion and institutional forms of religious life. Further, he identifies and encourages scholars to further seek theoretical connections between religious ecology and the functionalism found in work like that of CK Yang (196). In this we can see where the theoretical dimension of the debate here ties back to the overall discussion of how to conceptualize and pursue the study of religion in comparative perspective.

Some scholars have already begun to utilize the religious ecology framework for empirical investigation. They have done this by focusing on the relational elements of the framework at different levels of analysis. Focusing on the relations between different elements in a given system has been seen as one way to challenge substantive approaches (Emirbayer 1997). Sun Yanfei, in her article on contemporary Buddhist ecology, defines the aim of the religious ecology approach in this way:

> "The concept of religious ecology aims to capture the diversity of religions. It also puts an emphasis on interrelations—relationships among religions, among groups within one religion, and between religious groups and other social institutions.

> Empirically, a religious ecology is always conceived for analytic purposes, depending on the research question. So, we can talk about the global religious ecology, the religious ecology of present-day China, or the Buddhist ecology in contemporary mainland China. (Sun 2011:805)"

This theoretical emphasis in the religious ecology framework -- that religious life is in states of relations with other elements within and without -- can help us to focus on the margins and diversity of Chinese religion. Scholars have put this to work looking at different elements or varieties within a religion like Buddhism (e.g. Sun 2011) and looking at the relationship between popular religion and more institutional forms of religious life[8]. This emphasis on relations at different levels of analysis provides an important foundation for seeking understanding of religious life that have been marginalized and understudied.

*4) Religious Ecology of Urban Temple Buddhism*

This research is about temple Buddhism in urban Shanghai and is focused on understanding the everyday practice of lay practitioners. It is also interested in the relationship between practices at the temple that are more associated with formal lay Buddhism and those that are more closely associated with Chinese popular religious culture. The religious ecology approach is particularly useful for this enterprise in that it is focused on the relations between different types of institutions or practitioners and recognizes that it is nearly impossible to understand Buddhism, or any other institutional tradition in China, without a consideration of the interplay with popular religious culture. We will also find as we move to the individual temple and individual practitioner level of analysis investigating these relations becomes more important.

[8] Clart give the example of the work of anthropologist Chen Xiaoyi who looked at the relation between popular religion and other practices in Guizhou (Clart 2013: 192-195)

*The study of contemporary Chinese Buddhism.*

The study of Buddhism in China has followed patterns reminiscent of the overall patterns in the study of religion we have mentioned. The focus on institutional Buddhism is built on both the attention to the renewal of religion after reform and a long scholarly history in religious studies. It is not fair to say that the study of Buddhism has been greatly influenced by theories of religious markets, but the emphasis in the scholarship on modern, protestant forms of Buddhism certainly fit the trend. Scholarship on modern Buddhism, both pre-revolution and post-reform, have largely focused on important leaders and strong institutions or groups. Contemporary Buddhism continues to be understudied since reform[9].

Social scientific research on Buddhism in the early modern period tended to focus on the interplay between Buddhism and Western modernity which included changes to organizations and practices toward more modern forms of Buddhism (Pittman 2001; Welch 1967). Scholarship on the struggles of Buddhism in the face of government control was the main theme of the communist period (Welch 1972). Meanwhile religious studies scholars have focused and continue to focus much of their efforts on historical work looking at important peoples and textual traditions (Clart 2007:17). This emphasis continues today and some scholars in the field have recognized a need for religious studies scholars to put more emphasis on the experience of lay practitioners (Poceski 2017).

Research on contemporary Buddhism since reform is still underserved compared to the research done on Christianity and other topics. However, there has been some important research completed. This work, too, however, has an institutional and top-down focus. There has been a

[9] For example, Jones (2010:8) and Charleux and Goossaert (2013) both make this point

lot of interest in the most "successful" Buddhist organizations in East Asia like the Tzu Chi Foundation and Foguang Mountain which are also representative examples of modern forms of Buddhist practice (Chandler 2004; Huang 2009). Some scholars have looked at the ways these organizations have begun to have influence on the mainland (Huang 2018). Other studies of mainland contemporary Buddhism have looked at things like the reconstruction of Buddhism temples (Chan 2005; Fisher 2008) and the interplay between Buddhist renewal and tourist development (Kang 2009). Additionally, as mentioned, Sun used the religious ecology framework to look at Buddhism and categorize types of Buddhist actors[10] and analyze the dynamics of their relations with each other and with the state.

What is still lacking in the study of contemporary Chinese Buddhism is deeper attention to what real people are doing in order try to understand how Buddhism works today for all who engage with it. While Sun (2011) importantly pointed out different types of Buddhist actors at an institutional level, what we find looking at an individual temple where every day lay Buddhist practice is taking place is that the neat boundaries begin to break down. While there are important tensions between different types of Buddhist organizations, as we move down another level of analysis, to that of a single temple, there are new tensions that cut across categories we find at a higher level. Same goes for individuals in that the practice of Buddhism is varied and the only way to look at the variations and diversity in the practice of Buddhism is to focus on the everyday practice of real practitioners.

Lay practice has received some attention recently, but it is still very limited. There have been some studies of historical lay Buddhism (see Ter Haar 2001), but those examples are rare.

[10] Here actor refers to organizes forms of Buddhism like temples, lay organizations, wandering monks, etc

Recently an important article was published tracing the development of Lay Buddhist organizations in the 20th century, but that work, too, unabashedly focused on the most prominent figures and organizations (Zhang and Ji 2018). Research on lay practice, especially in the city, is scant at best. Fisher (2014) who focused on the morality of lay Buddhist practitioners he met at the Temple of Universal Rescue in Beijing. Additionally, Jones (2010) did fieldwork in Nanjing in order to understand the religious field of engagement for formal lay Buddhists and importantly identified some important commonalities in identity and practice. These works offer important perspectives on lay practice, but they both generally focused on the most formal, self-identifying lay Buddhists. Further, while both of these scholars touch on issues related to temple Buddhism, as far as I am aware, there have been no other attempts to focus on lay practice at a single urban temple in order to understand the relations between the various practitioners and variety of practices that are well-known to take place there.

*The study of popular religious culture.*

Many practices found in Buddhist temples (and temples of all kinds) across China, both today and historically, defy classification as Buddhism and are more appropriated associated with popular religious culture. This is widely recognized by scholars and is common knowledge for many Chinese people. However, there have been few attempts to describe and analyze them. Some scholars seem to be content to see these practices as something less than Buddhism and thus of secondary concern. Popular religion elsewhere, especially in the countryside, meanwhile, has been an important topic for scholars who have focused on the re-establishment of community and individual practices (Chau 2006; Overmyer 2003). The popular practices we see in urban temples may have received less attention because they are seen as too general or lacking in the community elements we see in traditional rural popular religion, but I argue that the practices we

find at temple that seem to fall outside of Buddhism should be considered an important example of popular religious culture for the purposes of analysis. Philip Clart argues that the category of popular religion is important for describing "…the variety of ways religion is constructed or "done" beyond the institutional and textual contexts of the "Great Traditions" (Clart 2007:25). This is exactly the situation that we find in the temple where the varieties of practices are in tension with our understanding of Buddhism and its boundaries.

While, as mentioned, the study of popular religion tends to be focused on rural areas, recent research shows that popular religious practices, even in the countryside, are switching from community based forms of organized popular practice to more personal, family based modes of engagement (Sun 2014). These types of individual practices have much in common with the practices we see among the wider community at the temple in the city. Other scholars have indicated that popular religion is less practiced in the cities, but some quantitative research has challenged that idea by showing that popular practices are more common in cities than expected and have important overlap with Buddhist practice (Leamaster and Hu 2014).

This gap in the literature around popular religious practices in urban settings provides an important impetus for exploring the varieties of practice we find at an urban Buddhist temple. Clart, who has written extensively about popular religion and its important place in the Chinese religious landscape, notes that the ability to incorporate popular religion into the dynamics of the Chinese religious landscape is one of the most important aspects of the religious ecology framework (2013). The religious ecology framework applied to the people and practices at a local temple will allow us to explore the relations between popular religious practices and Buddhist practices and between the different types of practitioners who share the same religious space.

*5) Lived Religion Approach to "Doing" Chinese Religion*

Thus far we have argued that the religious ecology framework which emphasizes dynamic relations both within and between religions is the most appropriate framework for approaching the complexity of Chinese religious life. It is particularly appropriate for this research where the emphasis is on a single temple environment where diverse practices take place in a single religious site, and where we want to focus on the full scope of participation at a single temple as opposed to looking at certain types of practices at one site or across sites. What we are trying to do is look at the whole picture (including at the margins where scholars may not yet have looked) in order to better understand different forms of lay Buddhist engagement and the relationship between practices that may be consider Buddhist and those more directly rooted in popular religious culture. Most work utilizing this framework has focused on higher levels of analysis, but it seems primed for thinking about micro-level dynamics as well.

While the ecological framework encourages researchers to go looking for the dynamic relations between people and practices (as opposed to looking for certain types of practices), the question of the most effective way is to study this complexity remains. What methodology is most appropriate for this kind of investigation? Lived religion is an approach that has gained some traction in the mainstream sociology of religion and serves as a methodological answer to just this type of problem.

The aim of lived religion approaches is to be able to transcend the institutional boundaries of religious life to see how religion is practiced by people in their everyday lives. Lived religion scholars have focused on "religion as practiced" and the "everyday thinking and doing of lay men and women" (Hall 1997: vii). Focusing on individuals and how they practice in their everyday lives is important because, time and again, scholars have found that there is a

difference between what you would expect from practitioners of a given religion and what you find in practice (McGuire 2002:4–6). Lived religion as an approach takes seriously the fact that scholars have tended to make religion appear static as opposed to dynamic as well as make it appear that religious followers practiced in a manner expected of them by religious leaders and organizations (Orsi 1997). These scholars have found that even in a Western religious context people do not always practice a religion exclusively even though this is an underlying assumption of protestant religion in the West (McGuire 2008:11). Instead, scholars find that religion on the level of individual practices is messy and dynamic.

Built into the logic of lived religion approaches is the privileging of unreflective assumptions about how religion works in the West. By studying peoples lived practices, it becomes possible to look at the way practitioners combine practice rooted in institutional religion with popular forms, for example paganism in the history of Christianity. By focusing on individuals and practices, it also allows scholars to avoid the distinctions between high and low forms of religious practice (Hall 1997). This foundation has also encouraged scholars of lived religion to point to ways in which religion might work very differently in other parts of the world on the individual level.

We can begin to see in this discussion of lived religion how this approach might be helpful for this project focused on the everyday practices at the Buddhist temple. Even the language of popular religion is applicable to the West as well as to our case in China. Clart (2007) has argued that lived religion is an important method for understanding the relationship between popular religious culture in China and other forms of religious practice because it allows you to avoid choosing to study either popular religion or some other religion. Instead, one can focus on the practices themselves and understand the interplay between them (16–17).

For conceptualizing our project about Chinese urban temple Buddhism and lay practice, we follow some scholars of Chinese religion who have already begun to take this kind of methodological approach. Fisher (2010) argues that a "person-centered approach" is most appropriate for exploring Buddhist temple sites; he encourages scholars to focus on the individuals, discourse, and practices as opposed to trying to create a direct link between specific Buddhist histories and modern practices. Here you can see the recognition that the practices in the temple need to be analyzed separately from your expectations based on canonical or textual Buddhism. In line with the theoretical direction of lived religion, he knows that a focus on individual practices at the temple will allow for a better understanding of the whole.

Additionally, the recognition of the need to escape institutional bounds in the pursuit of religion practice in China, led Adam Chau (2006, 2011) to develop his "modalities of doing [Chinese] religion" which identify different modes of religious practices commonly found in China that cut across religious traditions. Chau (2006) argues that his modalities allow scholars to transcend the debate between unity and diversity of practice in the Chinese religious landscape, and further states that these modalities "…are far more 'real' than conceptual fetishes such as 'Buddhism', 'Daosim' and 'Confucianism'" (2011:549). For Chau a focus on the individuals and the practices will also lead to better understanding of the meanings attached to them.

The lessons of lived religion and concrete advice of like-minded scholars of religion provide an excellent foundation for this project which seeks to better understand the religious ecology of lay practice at an urban temple. This method will allow us to better understand different approaches to practice both within groups, like among different kinds of lay Buddhists, and also help us to draw distinctions between different kinds of practitioners by analyzing

different sets of modalities, for example ones that may help us conceptualize boundaries and make connections between practices that may be considered Buddhist and others that might be better understood as part of popular religious culture.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Choosing a Site – Seeking the Everyday*

In exploring the relevant literature for this project, we have tried to make clear that there are important gaps in the study of contemporary lay Buddhism. Scholars of Chinese religion in a variety of disciplines have tended to emphasize textual approaches to Buddhism and, relatedly, this has led to an emphasis in research on Monastics and practices of the educated elite. This is more understandable for historical study where available materials limit the researchers' field of view (though there has been a recognition of overemphasis on elite traditions and a push for seeking materials that offer a fuller perspective on non-elite lay practice). However, in the study of contemporary Buddhism where there is more possibility, we still tend to emphasize the point of view of monastics, the most dedicated and visible practitioners, and the most important temples and organizations. This research was designed to break this pattern of study in order to get a better view of the everyday practice of lay Buddhism from the ground up.

Where does one seek everyday lay practice related to Buddhism? As mentioned, part of the challenge of studying religion in China is how self-identity and boundary making in relation to religion works. The construction of religion in China lends itself to focusing on those practitioners who combine identity, practice, and belief in a way our theories of religious life most easily accommodate. This project aimed to probe the boundary of lay practice in a way that adds to existing literature on lay Buddhist practice by exploring the breadth of lay practice

oriented toward Buddhism including the relationship between committed lay Buddhists and a wider community of worshippers who practice alongside committed Buddhists at temples today as they have throughout Chinese history. This is a binary that is acknowledged but underexplored in the literature on contemporary and historical Buddhism. It is also an active narrative category used on the ground by lay Buddhists denoting a difference between formally lay Buddhist *jushi* (居士) and a wider community of temple participants known as x*iangke* (香客). In order to look at these 2 groups and try to understand the relationship between them, the best place to look is a temple.

Temples are the most visible Buddhist symbols in China, but they have always been a place where worshippers of all kinds have come to practice regardless of any religious affiliation. Temples, though, are not all created equal. In seeking a view of temple Buddhism from the ground, it was important to find a temple that was less prominent and served a local community. This kind of temple does not draw large numbers of tourists, nor does it draw in lay Buddhist from afar for pilgrimage or other activities. In addition to these requirements, it was also necessary to find one that was accessible from my base of research support at Fudan University in Shanghai to ensure that the research program was practical.

A temple was identified that fulfilled all the practical and theoretical requirements for a research site. Tucked away in a local neighborhood that is developing along with the city itself, it sits at the intersection of 3 districts in the near north part of the city. The temple is both vibrant and out of the way. It has an active community of lay Buddhist practitioners that take part in regular cultivation activities and is also supported by a vibrant wider community of practitioners that flood the temple on important days on the lunar calendar and take advantage of ritual services on offer. However, you won't find more than a mention of this temple in materials about

Buddhist temples in Shanghai and certainly won't find it on tourist maps. Additionally, while the neighborhood feels out of the way, it is in the shadow of an important subway line and just a few minutes away from the university by bicycle.

*Gaining Access – Living the Everyday*

Identifying the type of temple environment that would be most appropriate for pursuing our research questions was one part of the equation but gaining access to the temple for the purposes of research was the other, more challenging, part. The challenge of access was two-fold and complicated by being a foreign researcher. Foreign researchers in China have struggled to gain deep access to traditional Chinese religions like Buddhism which would allow them to participate, at least to a large extent, as just a member of the group[11], and this access problem has tended to push researchers toward studying Christianity or practitioners of Chinese religions who are more international, more educated, and have a better understanding of the research enterprise[12]. Here at the temple, I first had to gain access to the site itself and be able to participate, and then, over the course of nearly 18 months in the field, I would work to gain the trust of the monastics, staff, and regular participants and be able to have deeper, more explicit interviews about the temple, its people, and its practices.

The temple was chosen for its ability to fulfill the aims of the research as described above, but also because an advisor of mine believed they had a connection they could use to introduce me to the temple through the monastic leadership. However, that plan did not materialize due to circumstances outside my or my advisors' control, and so I was forced to

[11] Certainly, this is never possible in full and all attempts to maintain reflexivity were made
[12] This insight is based on the overwhelming preponderance of foreign research on Christianity and from personal correspondence with foreign researchers that have been active in the field in China including Gareth Fisher and Megan Rogers

approach the situation in a new way. I was going to have to take a bottom up approach, and the chosen temple still seemed like the best place to start given its characteristics and location, but the process would prove difficult.

The temple is largely quiet outside of the incense days (*xiangqi* 香期) that draw large crowds several times a month according to the lunar calendar. I started showing up at the temple several times per week but found myself a fish out of water as a foreigner either walking aimlessly around a quiet temple, staying for a while and then leaving with no opportunity to engage, or on incense days standing amidst a sea of people, also unable to engage with the participants in a meaningful way. This went on with no real progress…for months. It was only a lucky encounter on a hot summer day in August of 2016 that would change everything and open the door. I had seen the chanting groups before on my visits, normally the ladies were tucked away in the Guanyin Hall (*guanyindian* 观音殿) chanting which made interaction difficult.

In the late summer, when the weather is hot, sometimes sutra chanting groups will set their table out in the courtyard to chant in order to catch the breeze and avoid turning on the air conditioner. On this day, I saw them chanting, ambled over, and watched them awkwardly. After a few moments, they took a break. It was then that I spoke to Zhong Qin (钟勤) for the first time, a woman who would not only become my primary informant and like a mother to me, but also was one of the most important lay Buddhist participants at the temple. She asked me if I wanted to join them for the next portion of the sutra chanting and I quickly agreed. They laid out a copy of *The Lotus Sutra* (*miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法莲华经) in front of me and we began. I struggled a bit with the traditional characters and the pace, but I was able to follow along with the reading[13]

[13] The term used to express that you could keep up with the chanting is *neng gendeshang*（能跟得上）

and did my best to chant where I could. The ladies seemed very pleased with my efforts. I asked them if I could come back next time they met, and they agreed. I felt so relieved and excited, but had no idea it would be first of hundreds of chanting sessions I would participate in.

I was able to parlay this first formal encounter with regular participants at the temple into regular and diverse practice at the temple. I began with the Tues, Thurs, Sat sutra chanting small group that I first met, and then began to attend chanting with the Sunday group regularly as well. Participating in the sutra chanting groups gave me access to attending rituals and then, finally, I was also able join the volunteering team so that I could be involved in all the different activities to which the regular participants at the temple had access. Around the time I gained access, I moved into an apartment just behind the temple which gave me the ability to spend as much time at the temple as necessary.

Participating in regular activities at the temple marked the first major step in the access needed for the project. However, there was another layer of access that I did not completely anticipate. In order to be able to complete all the aspects of the research as intended, I would need to gain trust and familiarity with the participants, staff, and monastics at the temple in order to help them to understand my aims as a researcher and contribute to the project by sitting down for extended and candid in-depth interviews.

During my time as a participant researcher at the temple, I always represented myself as truthfully as possible. I was consistent in my description of myself as a student researcher there to do PhD research in sociology about Buddhism and the temple. What I found was a population that was very unfamiliar with what that meant. They struggled to understand why I was there, but they were so amazingly kind and generous to me. It was only slowly over time, that they understood what I was there to do and how they could help me. They always wanted to help but

didn't necessarily know how. The participants, especially the older retired sutra chanters, doted on me constantly bringing me clothes, food, religious materials. It became a challenge for the research because I needed to maintain focus on collecting the necessary data. I continued to practice and work alongside the temple's regular participant and staff, and, after about a year, I finally crossed a threshold of understanding with all the players which allowed me to pursue my research aims explicitly, utilize the temple grounds for explicit research purposes, and be offered interviews with key monastics and core staff. The nuns I interviewed in the final days of my trip expressed to me that they decided to offer me the interviews only after watching my dedication to the temple over the course of my time there.

*A Mixed Methods Approach*

A mixed methods qualitative research program was designed to study the temple and its lay practitioners. In order to try to get a view from the ground at the temple and get a wide view of everyday practice of lay practitioners, I follow scholars of lived religion who have focused on people, their practices, and narratives surrounding them (see McGuire 2008). Given the aim to focus on a wide variety of lay practices at the temple, I was inspired by Fisher's (2010) "person-centered approach" to studying temples where he encourages scholars to focus on the individuals, the discourse, and the practices as opposed to trying to create a direct link between specific Buddhist histories and modern practices.

The research took place over 2 years. Preliminary data collection began in February 2016 and the primary data collection completed in January of 2018. This included approximately 1000 hours of participant observation between the main temple site, other Buddhist and religious sites, and accompanying participants to other activities. Additionally, 55 long-form interviews were conducted with temple participants, staff, and monastics in order to ask deeper questions and

provide space for participants to talk freely about their experience. Initial field work began in February 2016, access for more regular participation at the temple began in August 2016, and most of the interviews were conducted during the final 6 months in the field.

*1) Participant observation.*

The ethnographic component of the research was intended to give deep access to the temple's participants and activities in such a way that they became routine. The participant observation was extensive. It was rooted in the temple and extended outward from that center in order to get a better understanding of lay practice beyond the temple. Sutra chanting and ritual participation, volunteering, and accompanying participants to activities away from the temple were the 3 main emphases.

Sutra chanting groups were my initial entry point into regular participation at the temple as mentioned above. There are 3 sutra chanting groups at the temple (M/W/F, T/Th/S, Sunday). I was a regular participant in 2 of those groups attending chanting session weekly on Tuesdays Thursday, and Sunday. Other chanting sessions on different days were attended for comparison, but with less regularity. Regular participation in these groups which included 10-15 hours weekly for nearly 18 months offered tremendous opportunity for observation. The depth and regularity of this aspect of the participant observation gave deep insight into the religious practice of this set of participants, opportunity for daily informal interaction with lay practitioners, staff, and monastics during meals and downtime, and also an insider view of the day to day functioning of the temple. Certainly also, the relationships built in the sutra chanting groups were the foundation of recruitment for the long-form interviews to be discussed below.

The dedicated participants of the sutra chanting groups also make up most of the participants in the temples' ritual assemblies, and so participating in them led to my participation in the ritual assemblies as well. While the ritual assemblies happen according to a general ritual calendar and can usually be attended by the public, they are not widely advertised at the temple. During the chanting groups, however, the assemblies are often discussed, and participants can sign up for the assemblies through the chanting group leaders. The extended time in the field offered the opportunity to attend at least part of each ritual activity on the yearly calendar. Participating in these activities offered insight into the ways in which dedicated lay Buddhists combined liturgical ritual practice with their other cultivational practices.

Participating with sutra chanting groups and attending ritual assemblies provided a good base for understanding the practices of the dedicated regular participants at the temple, but the participant observation as a member of the temple's volunteering work offered a wider view of the totality of practices at the temple. The volunteering group at the temple serves as supplementary temple staff that help manage the thousands of visitors that come on important days. Volunteers are needed for the 1st and 15th of each lunar month and then on other holidays that dot the calendar. Participation required arrival before the temple opened at 6am and lasted until cleanup was completed around 2pm. I became a regular member of the team responsible for managing the temple's candelabra (*lazhutai* 蜡烛台) where visitors light candles and incense before making the rounds to pray before the temple's various Buddhist images.

Participating as a volunteer provided fantastic access into the everyday practice of temple participants and the realities of temple operations. My volunteering post offered an opportunity to build deep relationships with the other volunteers at the candelabra which consisted of mostly men, an important minority perspective among regular participants at the temple, and also

allowed for extended contact with volunteers at other posts. As we will discuss later, there is significant differentiation in the types of participant and the practices of those in the sutra chanting groups and the main volunteers, and so it was important to have exposure to both.

Exposure to other volunteers was important, but the most important research benefit of participating as a volunteer was extended exposure to the wider community of temple participants who do not participate in regular activities but comprise the majority of the temple's visitors. Nearly all visitors come to the candelabra to begin their visit which meant that I had the chance to observe and interact with people as I worked throughout the day. This gave me an opportunity to have small discussions with countless participants each time I volunteered. This was critical because, as we will see below, collecting data on the wider community was a challenge.

Finally, volunteering at the temple allowed me additional insight into temple operations. Participating in the sutra chanting groups and being around the temple when it was quiet, allowed me to see how the temple was managed on a normal day. The volunteering gave me insight into the volunteering program to be sure, but, more importantly, it allowed me to build relationships with temple staff and key volunteers. The candelabra volunteers are led by the 2 groundskeepers of the temple and, additionally, most staff members and monastics are around on busy days which allowed me to develop relationships and ask questions. It was the volunteering that also led the temple to see me as a reliable and regular, and I would eventually start being called upon to help the monastics and staff with tasks outside of the traditional structure which provided additional insider insight.

The last aspect of the participant observation was research that extended beyond the temple walls. The temple was the center of the research project, but we sought out opportunities

to follow participants and their networks to other Buddhist activities and sites. The participants met at the temple opened a wide variety of doors to understanding Buddhist practice in Shanghai. I was able to visit other temples and ritual activities, participate in a variety of lay Buddhist cultivation activities and groups, and accompany people I met at the temple for Buddhist inspired leisure activities and pilgrimages. These opportunities for participant observation outside of the temple offered opportunity for me to understand the greater context of what I had seen at the temple and better understand the temple fits into the overall practice of its lay Buddhist practitioners.

*2) In-depth interviews.*

Participant observation was foundational to understanding temple operations, learning from participants, and experiencing the everyday routines at the temple. However, interactions and discussions during participant observation are necessarily limited. Long-form semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to probe important questions raised during the participant observation related to the temple and its activities. Further, these deep interviews focused on dedicated lay Buddhist participants in the temple's regular activities like sutra chanting and volunteering. As such, these interviews also provided an opportunity for these participants to talk more about their Buddhist practices inside and outside of the temple, the meanings and motivations attached to them, and offer important insight into the shape of lay Buddhism in urban China today.

In-depth interviews were conducted with individuals met through participant observation at the temple. The interviews, most around 1.5hrs in length[14], were structured loosely around an

[14] The shortest of the interviews last approximately 45 minutes and the longest interview with one individual lasted nearly 3 hours.

interview guide, but the conversations were allowed to flow naturally (Weiss 1995). The main interview guide for lay participants focused on drawing out personal narratives of practice and thus questions focused practices inside and outside of the temple, how they started practicing, and the role of the temple in their practice and in the community. Interview guides for key staff and monastics were modified to ask more detailed questions about temple operations. For all interviews, attempts were made to keep an open and free-flowing interview that allowed additional information to be gained though narratives as opposed to only a specific set of questions and goals (Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett 2012). Most interviews were conducted one on one, but several interviews included more than one respondent. Interviews were conducted at a variety of public locations including the temple grounds and nearby coffee shops or restaurants[15].

The final sample consisted of 55 total respondents with regularly participating lay Buddhists, staff, monastics, and members of the wider community. Among these 55 respondents, 43 of them were dedicated lay Buddhists that participated in regular activities at the temple including sutra chanting and volunteering and the remaining participants were staff, monastics, and members of the wider community. A purposeful sampling strategy (see Palinkas et al. 2015; Patton 2015) was employed in order to accomplish two distinct goals. The first goal was to interview enough regular participants to try to get to a point of saturation in understanding the practices of the dedicated lay Buddhist participants at the temple. Understanding that the various groups would have internal variation, participants were recruited from different groups until saturation of responses was reached. This included 15 members of the weekday sutra chanting groups, 14 members of the more diverse Sunday sutra chanters, and 14 members of the

[15] It was the exception, but several interviews were conducted in private spaces including a private home and a neighborhood community center

volunteering group or whom I met at some other temple activity. Of these 43 lay Buddhist respondents 31 are women, most live in districts adjacent to the temple, the majority do not have beyond a high school education, and 25 are now retired.

The second aim with the interviews was to be able to gain deeper insight into the temple and its operations through key interviews with staff, monastics, and members of the wider community. These interviewees were purposively selected to give insights into the areas they know most about. Interviews were conducted with 5 staff members including the temple accountant, both groundskeepers, and the 2 staff members who have the most contact with the monastics and the wider community. Further 3 of the 6 nuns at the temple were interviewed and these 3 nuns have the most contact with the lay participant community. The remaining interviews were conducted with members of the wider temple community that could provide depth to the many shorter interactions I had with those type of participants.

*Limitations*

This research project is limited in several ways. As argued in what follows, understanding temple Buddhism and the shape of lay Buddhist practice from the point of view of the temple and its participants fills gaps in the literature which has tended to emphasize the elite forms of both. However, while rooting the research in the temple has much potential for contribution and comparison, it also raises important limitations and considerations for the analysis.

The temple itself is different than many other temples that have been studied previously in its size and stature. It provides important insight into temple Buddhism in that it is removed from the influence of tourism and important organizations, but it is importantly not

representative of all temple Buddhism. The nuns at the temple will tell you that all temples are more or less the same, but that the what they offer and how they are staffed is very contingent on the size of the temple, the number of monastics, and the available resources. As such, it is important to understand that a single case-study is not enough to speak how temple Buddhism works in other temples in Shanghai or elsewhere. It is enough however to point at important trends and relationships found in urban temples and point in directions for future research.

The particularity of the dedicated lay Buddhists who are regular participants at the temple is also a strength and limitation of the current study. As will be argued, recent work on lay Buddhist practice in the city tended to focus on younger, more elite practitioners. In some ways, the sample of lay Buddhists in this current study is skewed in the opposite direction. It focused on local temple participants who tend to be older, less educated, and more traditional. While this is an important contribution to the academic conversation because it serves to balance out existing research, it is important to understand that the way Buddhism is talked about and practiced at the temple is not representative of all lay Buddhism in China or even in Shanghai. It only speaks in depth of the practices particular to this population and begins to allow us to make comparisons and contribute to a fuller picture of the breadth of lay Buddhist practice in urban China today.

Finally, there were limitations in terms of access to the wider community of participants at the temple. A key advantage, as mentioned, was that focusing on the temple allowed the researchers to probe the boundary between different types of lay practice at the temple and importantly between a core group of dedicated lay Buddhists and a wider community of participants. This study makes advances in understanding the practices of the wider community of participants at the temple and the relationship between their practices and those of the core

group of regular lay Buddhist participants, but this serves as the starting point for future research. Countless short conversations with the wider community contributed to understanding their practice along with information gleaned about this group from the in-depth interviews allowed for important analysis, but there remains much work to be done, especially with connecting the practices of these participants at the temple with their daily lives. This research was unable to get additional information because we were instructed not to explicitly engage them for research purposes and, further, most of these participants are hesitant to have deeper discussions about their practices. Future research will need to identify more effective ways to investigate these practitioners and their practice.

## DISSERTATION ROADMAP

The argument in the dissertation proceeds by diving deeply into the context of the local temple environment in Ch. 2. We will discuss the religious landscape in Shanghai, the shape of Buddhist networks in the city, and how the local temple we focused on fits in. Then, we will detail the history of the temple and trace its re-development following reform and opening into the vibrant community we find today. We find that the stages of development over the past 40 years serves as a great mirror tracing the re-establishment of lay Buddhist practice in China over the same time period. Further, we will describe the physical structure of the temple and detail the services it offers to its community of participants. Finally, we will introduce the people who bring life, energy, and purpose to the temple including the temple monastics, staff, and the two main groups of participants that make up the community of practitioners.

Ch. 3 focuses on the practices of two main groups of participants found at the temple, the *jushi* and *xiangke*. We look at how both groups "do religion" at the temple, including the regularly occurring practices of the core group of lay Buddhist *jushi* and the more individually

oriented practices of the wider community of *xiangke.* By detailing the practices of the different participants, we also come to understand the different aims and meanings they associate with their activities. In Ch. 4, we build on our understanding of the different practices at the temple to look at in-group and inter-group similarity and difference. Looking at the practices and associated meanings in Ch. 3 offers support for clear group distinctions found on the ground in the temple and in the literature on lay Buddhism. In fact, we find that each of these groups is practicing based on different religious traditions with the *jushi* practicing a more formal Buddhism and the *xiangke* practicing based on generalized popular religious culture. However, there is also much that is shared between these two groups in terms of Chinese culture that brings them both together in temple.

Ch. 5 will utilize our understanding of the different types of lay practitioners we detailed in Ch. 4 and deep interaction and interviews with lay Buddhist *jushi* at the temple to look more closely at ecology of contemporary lay practice inspired by Buddhism at the temple and beyond. Looking at the ideal types of the two groups in the temple is helpful for understanding the basics of group difference, but, unfortunately, it is not enough to conceptualize the line between them. Too often scholars have tried to define lay Buddhism around the content of their beliefs. Our rich data on the regularly participating *jushi* at the temple gives up an opportunity to deeply explore their practices inside and outside of the temple, variations in their personal packages of Buddhism, and compare them to the practices of the wider community of *xiangke*. This allows us to define lay Buddhism around their modes of practice in a way that provides a theoretical foundation for future scholarship of lay Buddhist practice. Further, after defining the ley feature of lay Buddhist practice, we contribute to the development of a spectrum of lay Buddhism which finds on one side traditional practitioners who find no need to purify their practices of popular

elements, and on the other a more modern, intellectual form of Buddhism that tends toward exclusivity. In developing this spectrum, we better understand the range of ways to practice lay Buddhism and have the tools to understand how the practices of the *xiangke* directly connect to this spectrum.

In Ch. 6, we will return to our focus on how the two groups of participants fit together at the local temple and detail the religious ecology of the temple itself in terms of the roles and relationships between them. We will discuss what each group gets out of their participation and show what each of the different groups at the temple contributes to the overall whole. The temple is successful because it can fulfill its own practical needs and provide a positive and inclusive environment for all. We find that the temple can provide for all the participants without producing tension despite the religious difference between the different groups. The temple does this by maintaining a generalist and inclusive environment that prevents too much exchange of religious ideas through structural and cultural means. The maintenance of a kind of ambivalent status quo between, as well as among, the two groups at the temple is key to the temple's success.

Ch. 7 concludes the dissertation by arguing that there are important forms of community at the temple despite the differences between the temple's participants. We find a strong sense of community identity among the regular participating lay Buddhist *jushi* and, further, that there are other forms of community that encompasses all the participants from both groups. Finally, we will detail how the temple becomes an important location for exchange between the two groups including creating an important environment for the spread of Buddhism in China today. The exploration of the religious ecology of the temple and the shape of the temple participants' practice presented in this dissertation challenge the way scholars should think about Buddhism in

China today. It challenges the dominant narratives about state control of Buddhism's spread and the content of 'official Buddhism.' A look from the ground up at a single Buddhist temple reveals a more complex reality.

## Chapter 2: Puci Temple in Context

Visible from a main subway line that passes by just a few hundred meters way, Puci Temple (*pucitang* 普慈堂) is hard to miss -- with the classic tall compound walls freshly painted in vibrant gold and distinctive barrel tile roofs visible from a distance. It is an unmistakable symbol and landmark in the neighborhood; a beautiful building in a part of the city where new construction reminds that it is in a constant state of updating and upgrading. It wasn't always like this, like Buddhism in the city, the temple used to be tucked away, out of the gaze and interest of most in the neighborhood much less beyond. Many in the neighborhood didn't even know it existed. But, just as Buddhism has grown in reputation and seen increased participation in the city, so has this temple been renewed and remade to become a vibrant center in this changing neighborhood. The development of the temple community over the past 30 years mirrors the development of Buddhism and that of the city itself. The temple is and was a neighborhood temple, but what that means and looks like has changed in recent years.

### THE SHANGHAI RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE AND THE TEMPLE

Shanghai is a city with a diverse and important religious history. It also continues to provide the conditions for diverse religious life that has been, and continues to be, impacted deeply by the city's history, development, and changing population. Benoit Vermander et al.'s (2018) recent overview on religion in contemporary Shanghai beautifully demonstrates that the metropolis of more than 24 million[16] is a melting pot of religious life full of "dynamism" that should be receiving more attention from observers of religion (4). The Shanghai religious

[16] Vermander et al. also cite this 24 million number, but further confirmation at http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0302/c90000-9023611.html

landscape has been shaped by changing foreign and domestic influences throughout its history. Vermander et al. note that the city's religious landscape maintains its vitality and dynamic character due to the mixture of local and international faith communities, today and historically, and also because Shanghai's growth has welcomed new populations of Chinese from throughout the country who have contributed to the city's religious life and change. These conditions offer opportunity to study "how religious lines of demarcation are drawn, policed, and challenged in today's metropolises" (4).

While Shanghai today welcomes a variety of additional international faiths practiced by mostly foreign residents, according to 2014 numbers, the city contains 413 houses of worship among the 5 officially recognized religions in mainland China (Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestant Christianity, and Catholicism). The city, owing to its international history and present, has the most Christian churches in the country (Vermander et al. 2018:4). The influence of Christianity and other foreign, modern ideas about religion in Shanghai had a big impact on Chinese religion in the early 20th century and continues to influence religious life today. The city continues to experience religious renewal and places of worship continue to be (re)opened or renovated, however the quantity of places of worship overall is still far lower than early 20th century numbers from before the communist period (Yang 2012:28).

Buddhism in Shanghai has a long history and has also been profoundly influenced by Shanghai's dynamism during the 20th century. Shanghai was a sleepy network of fishing villages and other small towns for much of its history before becoming increasingly important culturally and economically in late imperial and modern times. The history of Buddhism in Shanghai goes all the way back to the earliest days of Buddhism's spread into China from the time of the Wu Kingdom. It continued developing through the Tang and the Song while Shanghai was

something of a backwater in the cultural shadow of Nanjing. Shanghai continued to see temples built and Buddhism expand all the way up to the Qing (Zhuang 2013:80-81). However, Zhuang (2013) argues that Buddhism in Shanghai before the Qing had little impact of the shape and development of Buddhism in China. It was only beginning in the Qing and continuing through the republican period that Shanghai that the city became "the center of the 'modern Chinese Buddhist Revival'" (82).

During this time, secular and religious elites, like the famous reformist monk Taixu, were aiming to modernize Buddhism, and the direction in which it was developing was influenced by the shape of liberal protestant Christianity (Vermander et al. 2018:26). The number of Buddhist temples rose rapidly to more than 300 by 1945. Buddhist organizations, including many lay organizations, came into existence, and it was also a hotbed for secular and religious research and discourse among elite laity and monastics (Zhuang 2013:83–87). Shanghai was stable politically and active intellectually which "provided the ideal environment and conditions for eminent monks of every sect from other provinces to come to Shanghai and disseminate Buddhism" (87). A part of this process included working to separating formal Buddhism from popular religious practice seen as superstitious and anti-modern. However, while this was a time of organizational and, at times, denominational development, Zhuang notes that there remained soft boundaries between the various types of Buddhism in practice which is a characteristic that this research indicates remains in some Buddhist communities today. Further, it has been argued that there has been an overemphasis on elite Buddhism at this time that minimized the continued importance of popular culture (Tarocco 2007).

The "golden age[17]" of Buddhism in Shanghai, however, would not last. Buddhism, and the other varieties of religious life in Shanghai, would not escape the radical social and cultural changes of the communist period. From the high mark of more than 300 temples, the number of Buddhist temples in Shanghai after the cultural revolution reportedly dropped to as low as 19[18]. Much of Buddhist life in Shanghai was snuffed out and the places of worship converted or destroyed. As we will see, the local temple that is the focus of this research suffered a similar fate. The city grew in population over the 20th century and those new residents brought with them various religious practices and ideas from around China. Since reform and opening Buddhism has seen a tremendous rebirth in Shanghai and as of 2014 there were a 113 Buddhist temples whom attracted, officially, 5.5 million participants that year (Vermander et al. 2018:4). While certainly still down in overall numbers since the height of early 20th century Buddhism, it has proven a resilient and important part of the modern city.

Puci Temple, the focus of this research, is a product of this development and specific history. It serves a local community, but one that has changed rapidly over time and invited in new populations of participants including many who have lived in Shanghai all their lives and others who have more recently made it their home. For temples outside of the city center like this one, there has been a movement from rural to urban and, more recently, from working class neighborhoods toward white collar gentrification. While Shanghai remains influenced by the modern revival of Buddhism including the influence of liberal protestant ideas about the shape of religion, Shanghai is still a place where traditional forms of religious life are being practiced and being adapted to new modern conditions every day. At this local temple, we find a diverse local

[17] (Zhuang 2013:87)
[18] Yang Fenggang cited in Vermander (2018), pg. 31

population that uses the temple space to fulfill their religious and cultural needs who have very little to do with elite Buddhist culture in Shanghai.

Buddhism in the city falls under the management of the Shanghai Buddhist Association. The most recognizable symbols of Buddhism in the city, however, are the 3 major temples: Jade Buddha, Jingan, and Longhua. Vermander et al. say these religious landmarks make an arc across the city the city and form the core of the Shanghai Buddhist network (2018:73). He notes, and our data confirms, that these temples hold a special place of reverence for participants in Shanghai temple Buddhism. While many of the more devout of the lay Buddhists of the temple will say that they do not differentiate between the different temples because the Buddha and Bodhisattva are the same, in practice many people believe these prominent temples to be especially efficacious. Multiple interviewees had made pilgrimages to temples like Longhua to address things like their own or family members' major health problems before they become practicing Buddhists. These prominent temples draw in many different types of visitors including tourists and pilgrims from afar. As such they also have tremendous economic and political power. This makes them prominent targets for research, but it also makes them their own kind of unique religious environment.

Under the management of the association but away from the spotlight, Puci Temple sits away from the spotlight of these most famous temples. It is home to the varieties of religious practice that happen in Buddhist temples in urban neighborhoods without the outside influence of many tourists, pilgrims, politicians, or important monastics and scholars. Instead, the temple is a product of its local community and its development since reform and opening. While the temple is local and small in scale, it has taken advantage of the rising status of Buddhism in the city and money available to temples in order to expand into the shape we find today.

## THE TEMPLE'S HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

Puci Temple has a long history in Shanghai. In reality, what is now an urban neighborhood temple in Shanghai was until recent development was just a town quite outside of the center of the city. Older local participants at the temple recall that the area was just open fields when they were younger, and it only recently has become a rapidly gentrifying urban hub. Today, new residential high rises are going up throughout the neighborhood which represent a stark change from what was a working class rural cum urban part of the city. The temple began as a Daoist place of worship of a similar name[19] in the mid-17th century, during the reign of the Qing emperor Kangxi. It remained under the leadership of Daoist priests until it was converted to a Buddhist temple in the late 19th century. A report on the temple's history indicates that the Daoist temple community had been in a period of decline before its conversion to Buddhism.

It was after the conversion to Buddhism in the late Qing that the temple took on the Tiantai tradition and a succession of Abbots. This denominational lineage, handed down through generations of monastics, continues to be maintained at the temple and there is a shrine in the temple office (*ketang* 客堂) to their legacy, but the specifics of the Tiantai tradition hold little practical impact on the current community. China has 8 main denominational traditions of Mahayana Buddhism; these are textual traditions passed down from one Buddhist monastic to the next which proscribe certain understandings and sets of practices for pursuing Buddhist aims. However, these denominations have never had much impact on the impact on everyday practitioners, something we will address as we discuss lay practice at Puci Temple.

[19]The temple would come to change just one character with the same pronunciation when it converted to a Buddhist temple

In the 1950s there were 5 monks living at the temple before changing political circumstances leading up to the cultural revolution led to the closing of the temple[20]. At this time, according to discussions with temple participants, the temple space was converted into a shoe factory and tight-quartered housing was constructed covering much of what used to be the temple grounds. Everything up to this point in the story is line with the official history of the temple as can be found in published reports online. Further, according to that information, the temple was shuttered until 1989 when things were put in motion to revive the temple and it was officially restored under the direction of the Shanghai Buddhist Association and the new abbess (Laoshitai 老师太[21]) in 1990. However, the oral history of the temple as told by its participants is much more interesting. While we must acknowledge that this history is being told in the present by insiders and details of the story seem to venture into the territory of hagiography, it does seem relevant to understanding the development of the temple and the community. While some online reports indicate that Laoshitai was previously a nun who was forced to leave the clergy in 1950s and was restored, according to my informants who knew her well, she was just lay practitioner in the neighborhood who had attended and volunteered at the temple before the monks were forced to leave.

As the story goes, Laoshitai had a dream around this time. In the dream it was made clear that if she committed to performing morning and evening devotions at the temple every day and dedicate herself to her own cultivation, then one day the temple would be restored. She was provided a small room in the back of the shoe factory (which was mainly setup in what is now

[20] This historical information has come from one published paper, confirmed by another online resource, and also compared to interview data. In order to maintain consistent anonymization, I will not be providing the citations for this information.

[21] We will refer to her as Laoshitai 老师太, which is a term of respect for an old nun, to protect her identity, but this was also how she was referred to by everyone I spoke with.

the Main Hall). There she committed to her vow, and every day she performed morning and evening devotions and chanted the Lotus Sutra (*Miaofa Lianhua Jing* 妙法莲华经) twice. This went on for many years until the late 1980s when the situation changed. Her vow had come to fruition, and the temple would be allowed to officially reopen. It is said that she had another dream around that time in which she was asked how a temple could be re-consecrated with no monastics. Following this dream, she officially left home (*chujia* 出家)[22] to become a nun and the first female monastic to head the temple.

It is with the re-establishment of the temple as an official place of worship under the Shanghai Buddhist association that the story of the lay participation and the development of the contemporary community really began. It is important to understand that the temple and the neighborhood looked very different at that time. The temple consisted of little more than the re-converted Main Hall which was surrounded by dense communist era residential buildings. The temple building wasn't visible from the road, and the only thing that indicated its presence was a small sign above a narrow alleyway. It was very much hidden away, and some current participants from the neighborhood recall growing up in the neighborhood and never knowing the temple existed. Those participants who attended the temple in those early years after re-establishment all remembered the condition of the temple in the same way: It was very small and "when it rained big outside, it rained small inside[23]."

Laoshitai had taken control of the temple and it had gained official status, but the conditions were still very difficult. There were no other monastics to support the temple and

[22] This term 'leave home' means to leave the secular world to become a monastic
[23]"外面大雨，里面小雨"

there was no established lay community. It was around this time that Zhong Qin (钟勤), still one of the most important of the temple laity, started to visit the temple and met Laoshitai. Zhong Qin was working a full time as a cashier in a company cafeteria and didn't have much time, but Laoshitai took a shine to her and each day when Zhong Qin would come, Laoshitai would encourage her to come back the next day to help with morning and evening devotions. This was the beginning of the lay community of the temple, and from those early days until now lay people have been crucial to the temple's operations. Temple participation and the core lay community slowly developed from there, and, by the mid-nineties, Laoshitai founded the first lay sutra chanting group at the temple to bring the sound of the sutra to the temple and support the memorial tablets that hung in the temple in honor of participant ancestors. Tangwei (唐贞), an early sutra chanter who still leads one of the groups, recalls that in the very beginning it was just a small group of people chanting the Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Sutra (*Dizang Jing* 地藏经), but the group grew and eventually split into the 3 groups that exist today.

The temple also had some support from the wider community or residents in the neighborhood in those early days after re-opening. It was a busy place on important days on the ritual calendar, but the space was limited and so was the participation overall. Chen Wen (陈文), a temple groundskeeper, told me that at that time a few hundred people made the place seem crammed to the gills, but today several thousand feels like nothing. Over the next decade or so, the core group of lay Buddhist supporters participating in the chanting groups, volunteering, and otherwise helping out Laoshitai had grown. It soon became time for Laoshitai to consider her succession plan. According to reports, she refused many other options, including nuns from other temples, and insisted that one of the temple's lay Buddhists, a dedicated young woman named

Ms. Gao (高), take over for her. Ms. Gao accepted and left for Buddhist College to pursue her training as a monastic. By the mid-2000s, Ms. Gao had returned to the temple as Ven. Gao (*gaoshifu* 高师父) to take her place as the new abbess and Laoshitai passed away.

The temple community continued to grow and become stronger by this time, and Ven. Gao was able to think seriously about being able to renovate the temple. The lay community was instrumental in helping that come about. This included the dedicated lay Buddhists at the temple and the wider community of participants in the neighborhood. It was a working class neighborhood at that time and people still didn't have a lot of money, but many respondents, including people from the temple, neighborhood, and construction company, told me that the local participants were amazing in their commitment to the project and giving what they could. In addition to the vision of Ven. Gao and support of the laity, the ability to expand the temple came about due to support from the local government. A representative from the construction company told me that the deal was done because an important local official was school classmates with the boss from the construction company. The local official went to the construction company with the plan, saying that that he could deal with the property issues and the neighbors, they could do construction, and the temple will be responsible for coming up with the money. Without this support, the expansion of the temple would have been impossible. So much had to be arranged including buying up the residential housing surrounding the temple, moving the residents, and completely razing them to the ground. This process took several years before construction was able to be taken on in earnest. In the end, each group did their part. The local official made the difficult arrangements in the neighborhood and the temple raised money and secured loans for construction. According to records, the project was meant to take just over

1 year of time and cost 1.783 Million USD, but the it took about 2 years and cost around 2.4 Million USD[24].

When the temple was completed and re-dedicated in 2010, it was a totally new place; converted from a tiny tucked away hall into a beautifully expanded traditional style structure that couldn't be missed. It changed the perception and visibility of the temple in the neighborhood. The renovations created new opportunities for the core lay Buddhists who had already been participating, but it also importantly expanded the profile of the temple in the local community among people who don't consider themselves Buddhists. They temple started getting many more requests from the local community for certain services, like funerary services, and the temple worked to provide for these people. The most obvious way this happened was through forging a relationship with another temple to bring in monks to offer ritual services, something we will discuss below.

In any event, the temple had a new look and its community was growing and changing right along with the neighborhood. What used to be an outpost village of fields, then working class housing, now continues to gentrify. The families long in the neighborhood have seen their financial situation change completely owing to property values, and new middle-class residents are moving into new construction high rises near the convenient public transportation. As Vermander et al. have said, the city has expanded by connecting previously disconnected neighborhood into a whole through transportation networks like the subway which also impacts religious networks (2018:32–33). This trend continues even today. Just several years ago a large open-air market closed next to the temple. It used to bring many visitors from outside the

[24] This information was taken from a combination of published sources including the initial bid submitted by the company and an interview with a former employee of the construction company who was involved in the project from start to finish including the re-touch in 2017.

neighborhood, but now the empty space will soon be filled with high-rises bringing in new potential participants. As the neighborhood changes, so does the temple community.

## PUCI TEMPLE (*PUCITANG* 普慈堂) TODAY

As described, the temple has undergone some drastic changes to its physical form and its community of participants over the past 30 years. It has gone from a single hall down a tiny alley and mostly unknown many neighbors, to a beautiful example of a modern renovation of a temple in the traditional style and a prominent feature in the changing neighborhood. Like all temples and most religious spaces in China, Puci Temple is and was a compound. It is common for religious spaces in China to be surrounded by walls that mark the space off as separate and/or sacred and also mediates connections with the neighborhood and society (Vermander et al. 2018:80). Buddhist temples and monasteries have long had this character. Buddhist temples large and small also have similar layouts and key buildings (Charleux and Goossaert 2013). Buddhist temples in China can take on, or be referred to by, several names such as *si* (寺), *yuan* (院), or *an* (庵). While temples whose name ends in *si or yuan* are usually larger temples or monasteries and *an*, or *antang* (庵堂), often refer to smaller female led hermitages, these names "have no precise legal value" and "can be used for any Buddhist community." Further, there is no necessary true distinction between a Buddhist temple and monastery (309).

This local temple's name ends in *tang* (堂) and is a smaller temple led by a group of nuns, and, as such, it is often referred to as a *niguan* (尼姑庵)[25]. It clearly fits the everyday usage of *an*, or *antang*. However, the temple has always had the same name including long before the

[25] Note that *nigu* means nun and *an* means temple, so a *niguan* is a temple of nuns.

temple was led by nuns. This speaks to the fact that there is a general similarity between all Buddhist temples and monasteries in China. Ven. Shi [26](*shishifu* 石师父), one of the temple's nuns, began our interview[27] together by emphasizing what all temples have in common, not how they differ. She wanted to make clear that if I tried to understand the operations of the temple as an *antang* with its own particularities as such, then I would be misunderstanding the big picture. She said all temples in Shanghai are the same in that they all agree to follow the Buddha and the rules set out for managing temples. More important to understanding the type of temple and its operations in relation to others were its size and urban setting.

The temple's small size and limited number of monastics impacts it in several ways. First, as a small temple, the leadership of the temple is passed down from one leader to the next and there is usually less turnover in monastic leadership. It is also less common for monastics to come and stay for a short period of time. Further, the small temple simply has less resources in terms of people, space, and funds. All temples large and small generally follow the same management rules and structure, but at a small temple there will be less people to fulfill all the necessary roles. As such, some roles, departments, and activities will be eliminated or will be administered by non-monastic staff or volunteers. At a large temple, you will find more monastics taking on more diverse roles because there are monastics available to take on those responsibilities. Puci Temple, as we will see, relies heavily on its staff and volunteers to ensure the smooth operations.

Ven. Shi proposed that it was even more important to think about the differences between urban temples and larger monasteries and other temples outside of cities. She notes that many of

[26] I use the title Venerable (Ven.) to refer to Buddhist monastics in English
[27] 1/5/2018 1pm

these traditional rural temples have been able to maintain sustained success by drawing people in to participate in serious cultivation activities like chanting scripture, meditating, chanting the name of the Buddha, etc. Bringing in lay Buddhists from afar to participate in these types of activities requires a very dedicated type of lay participant. She says that in an urban setting like shanghai:

> In places like Shanghai, it is more like a modern kind of management, Why? Because the younger people of Shanghai, if they come to believe in Buddhism, don't necessarily have enough patience. Not enough patience to chant the name of the Buddha with you, come together to chant the name of the Buddha, they also will not be able to come together do other things or sing, etc. They come here to seek comfort. They just don't have the time to have you instruct and enlighten them[28]

She is pointing out an important point about the temple that we will continue to consider as we analyze the temple and the participants that make up its community. The community is diverse, and the temple aims to accommodate all its participants and their varied religious needs and understandings. Puci Temple serves a wide, mostly local audience which includes dedicated lay Buddhists seeking formal cultivation opportunities and many others who come to perform a variety of practices rooted in traditions for popular religious culture. This is an important distinction as we think about who Buddhist temple's serve and how they are to operate successfully. Some temples, including many temples in rural or suburban areas, cater to more specific types of religious practices and practitioners, whereas local urban temples like this one must take on a much more general character and include a wider range of participants.

[28] Interview 1/5/2018 "像上海这样的话，比较接近于现代化的管理的话，为什么，因为上海的年轻人，如果她来信佛，但是她不一定就是说能耐得住，他不会耐得住一心跟你念佛的，一起念佛的，也不会一起跟你做做唱唱什么的，他就是来寻求这个心理安慰，他就是没有时间来清理开导教示."

Vermander et al. have also noted that Shanghai's Buddhist temples need to be particularly open and accommodating (2018:97).

The shared urban character of Shanghai's Buddhist temples means that they have much in common in terms of operations and audience. However, the temples differ in their scale, resources, and primary audience. The largest and most famous temples have a very different set of circumstances than the local temple's like Puci Temple. However, Puci Temple and its community have become stronger in recent decades, and the temple is an excellent example of a neighborhood Buddhist temple today that has developed in parallel to Shanghai Buddhism since reform.

As mentioned, Puci Temple has been able to take advantage of the renewal of Buddhism in Shanghai and the increased interest and money available for the restoration of temple's in the city. It has renovated and expanded into its current form which is representative of modern attempts to produce Buddhist temples that reflect the traditional style. The renovations took place more than a decade ago, but a recent retouch and additional upgrades in 2017, show the temple is still thriving. This temple's physical shape after the renovation reflects the traditional layout and building materials of Buddhist temples in China. It's tall gold compound walls and timber frame structure reflect a long history of Buddhist temple and monastery building. The main difference in physical structure between a temple and monastery is the size and the emphasis on living quarters. All of them have very similar layouts and buildings. The larger temples will have more buildings, but they all maintain the same basic structures and form (Charleux and Goossaert 2013). At Puci Temple, the structure is very simple and classic where the main exterior courtyard that is the heart of the temple's public space lies between the 4 main halls of the temple.

As one enters the temple's main gate, the flow of the building will take them to the left past the canteen and into the outer courtyard where the incense burners are centrally placed, and the temple's candelabra is setup in one corner. As one stands in the center of the courtyard and looks to the north, the temples Main Hall (*daxiong baodian* 大雄宝殿) sits tall above its stone staircase representing the mountain that temples traditionally sit upon. To the west and the east respectively sit halls dedicated to the Bodhisattva Guanyin (*guanyin pusa* 观音菩萨) and the Earth Store Bodhisattva, Ksitigarbha (*dizang pusa* 地藏菩萨). The Guanyin Hall houses a large statue of the Bodhisattva of Mercy with 1000 hands (*qianshou guanyin* 千手观音) and outside the hall another image of Guanyin, the Drip Guanyin (*dishuiguanyin* 滴水观音). Known as the Bodhisattva of mercy "…who responds to anyone's cry for help regardless of class, gender, or even moral qualifications" (Yü 2001:5), Guanyin is one of the most important of the figures in the Chinese religious pantheon for both Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike (25). While Guanyin is merciful as it relates to the living, the Ksitigarbha is important because of the relation to ancestors. Inside the Hall sits the main image of the Bodhisattva and the walls of the entire hall are covered with the temple's long-term memorial tablets dedicated to ancestors. Finally, back to south in the direction of the temple's main entrance is the Heavenly King Hall (*Tianwang Dian* 天王殿) which houses an image of Maitreya (*mile fo* 弥勒佛), the future Buddha, among others. This Hall is usually the last hall for visitation people visit leave the temple, though the circuit people make to kowtow before the various images was variable.

In addition to these primary halls, the temple space has a number of other buildings and spaces for use by different participants, monastics, and staff. Off the main outer courtyard, in additional to the main halls there is also the temple canteen, the temple's office for outside

affairs (*ketang* 客堂), a small hall with an image of the God of Wealth (*caishen* 财神[29]), and an annex hall also related to the Earth Store Bodhisattva where short-term (1 year) memorial tablets are hung. Below the main hall is additional ritual hall decorated in the Tibetan style that is used for organized rituals as well as a space for chanting the name of Amitabha (*nianfo tang* 念佛堂). To the west of the main outer courtyard sits the residences of the temple where the first floor has two inner courtyards, guest quarters, nuns dining room, abbess's workspace, and some nuns housing. The second floor of the temple over the residence area has additional nuns' quarters, the accounting office, and an additional private dining room.

The way the temple space is used and experienced depends on who is utilizing it. The temple is comprised of layers of public, private, and semi-private space which are experienced differently by different types of participant. Certain areas are off limits to all but the nuns except by invitation of special circumstances. These areas include the nun's quarters, interior courtyard, and the office and workshop of the abbess. I, myself, have only entered this area a couple of times at the invitation of the abbess. Even then, there was a feeling of transgression in this most private area of the temple. Outside of the threshold of the inner quarters, the space becomes more open to more of the temple's participants, especially the staff and the most regular of the temples participants. Certain areas of the temple, like the guest quarters and outer courtyard, the nuns dining room, the kitchen, staff offices, storerooms, and upstairs dining area are semi-private in that the average visitor would not feel comfortable or be restricted from entering these spaces, but for core members of the community these spaces are accessible, and access to these spaces, at least at certain times, brings a feeling of belonging and comfort to those participants. For

[29] a popular god related to fortune that has also taken a place in the Buddhist pantheon in China as a Bodhisattva

example, when I first arrived at the temple, I felt very uncomfortable entering the nun's dining room. It felt solemn and intimidating. However, over time, this became a place of comfort where I could eat a meal alongside the nuns and other volunteers to get away from the occasionally ruckus and crowed public areas. The public areas of the temple are open to all visitors to the temple anytime the temple is open. This includes all the ground level halls, the canteen, and the most outer courtyard. These are areas that all people are encouraged to visit, and the majority of the temple's participants will never have reason to see or spend time in any of the other spaces.

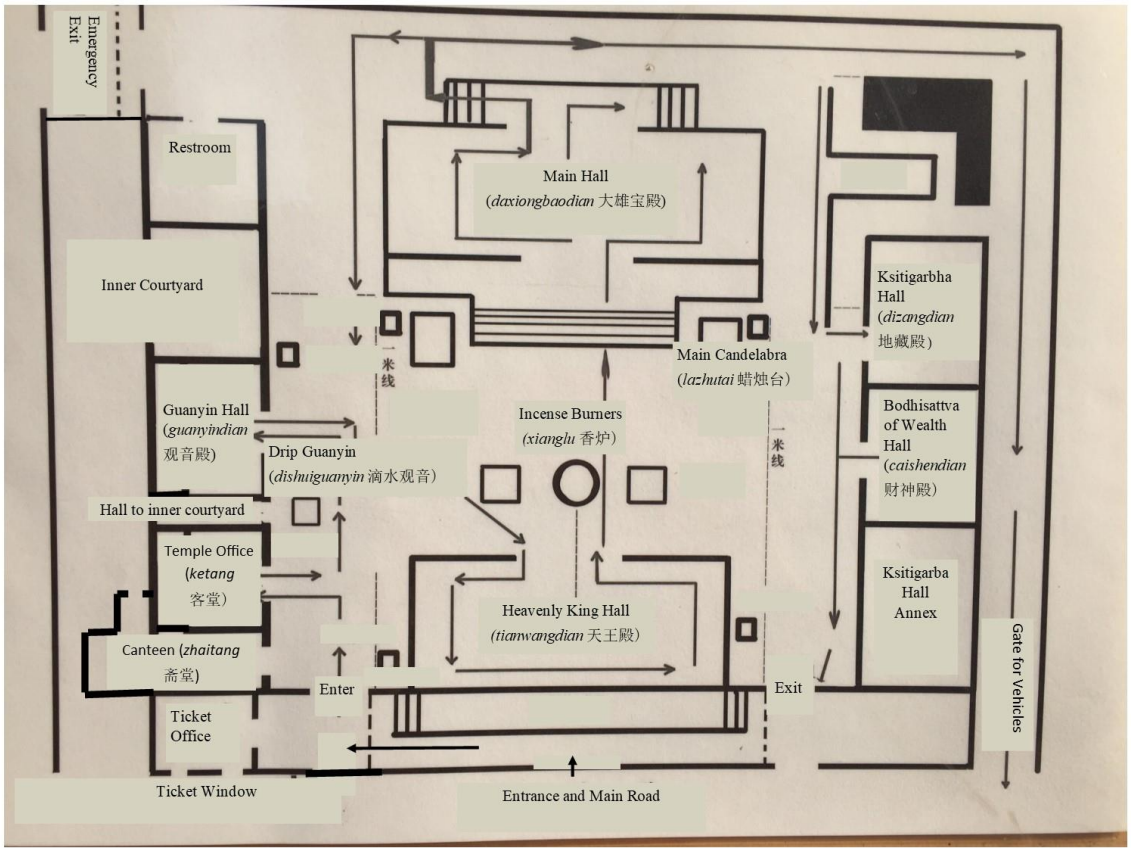


**Figure 2.1: Diagram of Puci Temple**

MONASTICS AND TEMPLE STAFF

*Monastics*

The monastics at the temple consist of a core group of nuns who are the official stewards of the temple and de-facto leaders of the temple community and an additional group of monks from another temple who come and lead rituals daily. The monastics, as we will see more in Ch. 6, fulfill crucial roles at the temple that provide structural stability and help provide opportunities for a wide range of practices at the temple for its community. The temple also provides an environment that allows these monastics to fulfill personal and professional goals.

As mentioned in the brief history of the temple above, Puci Temple has been led by Ven. Gao for about 15 years. A former core lay Buddhist participant at the temple under Laoshitai, she dedicated her life to Buddhism with the aim to lead this temple. Early on, there were few nuns, but over the years the community of monastics has grown in strength and numbers. 6 nuns are currently posted at the temple. 5 of them currently reside there and the 6th nun is finishing her final years of Buddhist College and will return to the temple when she completes her studies[30]. Ven. Gao has the longest tenure of the nuns, but the group overall has maintained a stability that the nuns I spoke with indicated was rare and cherished. Ven. Shi, originally from Hubei, arrived in the early 2000s and was followed closely by Ven. He (*heshifu* 贺师父) who hails from China's Northeast. Ven. Cui (*cuishifu* 崔师父) came several years later, and most recently, about 5 years ago, Ven. Lu (*lushifu* 卢师父) and her daughter, the nun away at Buddhist college, arrived, found they were a good fit, and plan to make their future there.

[30] Of note, the nun currently at the Buddhist College is also the daughter of one of the other nuns. They are the most recent additions and they had been at the temple about 5 years in 2017.

The nuns each have responsibility for a work post (*gangwei* 岗位) at the temple to ensure the temple is properly administered. Ven. Gao, as abbess of the temple, is the ultimate decision maker, oversees the work units, and serves as a resource for the other nuns. She works directly with key city and religious officials, and she will also offer audience to community members who seek her advice. Ven. Shi, who commands the respect of the other nuns and staff, heads the *ketang* 客堂. At this post she is responsible for managing the temple's participant engagement which includes, among other things, scheduling funerary rituals, managing the sutra chanting groups, and overseeing the grounds. Ven. He oversees safety and the small temple shop. Fire safety is a priority, and she attends periodic training outside the temple in order to maintain best safety practices at the temple. Ven. Cui heads the accounting, the kitchen, and attends more outside meetings than the others. Finally, Ven. Lu is responsible for daily rituals and the accepting of donations (*xieyuan* 写缘) from visitors during open hours. They work closely together and in cooperation with the staff and volunteers to ensure the temple operates smoothly.

The other group of Monastics don't reside at Puci Temple but come daily (or near daily depending on the schedule) from a temple on the outskirts of Shanghai to perform rituals for the community. As such, they take on an important ritual function for the participants of the temple and, at least for the wider community of *xiangke* participants, may be the most visible of the temple monastics. They perform up to 4 funerary rituals per day to participants looking to honor their family members at the temple, and they also lead important ritual assemblies for the lay Buddhist *jushi* on key days throughout the year.

Puci Temple had not previously offered funerary rituals, but, after the renovation the local community expressed to the nuns that they would really appreciate being able to perform

funerary rituals in the neighborhood. In response to the calls of the community and in coordination with the Buddhist Association, a connection was made between the two temples and the monks began to offer services to the community at the urban temple. As we will discuss in Ch. 6, this served as a financial boon to the monk's temple and a boost to the Puci Temple's own local community. Usually 7 monks, the appropriate number for the ritual, arrive each morning in a plain white panel before making the hour plus drive back to their temple in the afternoon. In addition to the funerary rituals, the monks have also taken over as the ritual leaders for certain important rituals at the temple that are attended mostly by the temple's regular lay Buddhist participants. While these monks have no formal affiliation with the temple, they are an important source of ritual leadership and reputation.

*Temple Staff*

A staff of about a dozen people are employed to support the nuns in the administration and operation of the temple. The roles of the staff roughly correspond to the work units of the nuns and they fall under their respective purviews. 2 staff members alternate time at each of the ticket booth and temple shop, 2 groundskeepers keep up the property, and a few chefs handle the kitchen depending on need. Each of these staff members reports to the nun who is responsible for their work unit. In addition, there are 3 staff members that work directly with nuns and share responsibilities. Zhang Gui (张贵) handles the accounting and reports to Ven. Cui. Su Qiao (苏巧) alternates days with Ven. Lu to collect donations in the Main Hall. Finally, Xiao Li (萧莉) alternates days with Ven. Shi to manage the office for external affairs (*ketang* 客堂).

As mentioned above, the main difference between small and large temples are the amount of resources and monastics available to fulfill administrative and operational roles. In a small

temple, there are simply not enough monastics to cover all the necessary roles in the temple, and so staff members (and volunteers) are recruited to fulfill roles that would otherwise be filled by monastics. The pay for the staff is minimal, amounting to a small stipend, but for the staff I spoke with, the money was secondary to the satisfaction they get from the job itself. Aside from the chefs, the staff consists almost entirely of retirees who are on an additional fixed income and for whom the stipend from the temple provides additional security but was not the primary aim. Several of the staff members, including the 2 staff members who alternate days with the nuns and have the most contact with participants, were long-time dedicated lay Buddhist volunteers at the temple before joining the staff. Even the staff members who were less explicitly dedicated to Buddhist practice appreciated the solemn environment and drew great pleasure in the purpose of having formal work responsibilities at the temple.

These staff members along with the nuns and the temple's dedicated volunteers provide the administrative foundation for the temple's operation. Together, they guide the temple through its calendar and services in order to provide for the temple's diverse community of participants.

## THE RITUAL CALENDAR AND THE TEMPLE'S RELIGIOUS LIFE

The temple offers a variety of services to its participants which include organized group cultivation, organized ritual activities, a staffed and prepared temple on major festival days, and offering open and flexible space for independently driven individual or family practice. These activities are available at different times and intended for different groups of participants who come to the temple with different aims. In traditional Chinese culture, religious life for all people regardless of their specific religious understandings is attuned to the lunar calendar and the festivals that mark the important times of the year.

The calendar is punctuated by important dates that take on specific meanings and demand certain practices from various participants, and the practices at the temple and its atmosphere changes based on the type of day on the calendar. As Vermander et al. note, "religious spaces combine with sacred moments in the map of Shanghai's symbolic space-time" (44), and, as such, the temples atmosphere and offerings also changes depending on the type of day. The year begins and ends with Spring Festival which is the busiest time of the year for the temple. Following Spring Festival, the calendar progresses along with the seasons and phases of the moon. Each 1st and 15th of the lunar month is a call for observance and so the temple sees the number of visitors swell. Further, throughout the year there are important holidays related to Buddha and Boddhisatva as well as the veneration of ancestors. All of these are relevant to the various participants at the temple regardless of their specific religious belief or identity, though the practices and ideas about those days differ. In terms of the religious life at the temple, these days can be broken up into two different kinds of days: ordinary days (*pingri* 平日) and incense days (*xiangqi* 香期).

On the ordinary days, the temple is open for any participant to use for their own personal practices. It is opened by a groundskeeper in the morning at 7am and then closed in the afternoon around 3:30pm when it is time for the nuns to perform the evening devotion[31]. During this time, anyone can enter and utilize the facilities so long as they pay the 5rmb for the entrance ticket. On these ordinary days, the flow of people through the temple is slow. People come to light incense and pray before the various images of the Buddha and Bodhisattva, offer donations, and occasionally seek out the counsel of the temple's nuns. Each visitor is given 3 sticks of incense

[31] The listed closing time is 3:30, but the reality is that the door is locked shortly before evening devotions begin between 3:30 and 4.

to light for free with their entrance ticket, but visitors may also bring in offerings from outside or purchase additional incense, candles, or paper money from the temple store to burn during their visit[32]. In addition to the slow flow of visitors who come on these days for their own personal reasons and practice, there is other religious life to be found. If you visit the temple on these days, especially in the morning you will find two other activities. First, on most days, you will find the monks performing funerary rituals for members of the community. Additionally, each day sutra chanting groups meet to chant, usually in the Guanyin Hall. Importantly, the atmosphere on these days has a strong Buddhist character where formal lay and monastic Buddhists outnumber other visitors. The most visible of the participants on these days are the monks and the lay Buddhists who both practice wearing traditional clothing that marks a more formal status.

In stark contrast to the quiet atmosphere and Buddhist atmosphere of the ordinary days, are the incense days that dot the lunar calendar when the temple comes alive with intense activity and becomes inundated with thousands of visitors coming to light incense and pray. The bustling atmosphere of the temple on these incense days shows a very different kind of religious life at the temple. These days include the 1st and 15th of each lunar month, the major days of spring festival, days of reverence for important Buddha and Bodhisattva, and the key days on the calendar for ancestor worship. As opposed to the ordinary days when organized temple activities get started around 8am, on these incense days the temple is alive with activity by 6am. Inside the temple, volunteers gather in preparation for the thousands of visitors, some of which will have already begun to lineup outside the gates before the doors open. As we will see, both the

[32] Visitors are not supposed to bring in outside items like incense or paper money that they sell at the temple shop, but many do. On a trip back to the temple in August 2019, I found that all but one of the private shops selling these items outside the temple had been permanently closed. I was told the temple and the city were involved in these shops being closed.

volunteers and the visitors coming to worship on these days are performing religious activities relevant to their own religious lives. As the name indicates, the constant stream of worshippers lighting of incense is most visible, but other activities are taking place at the temple on these days as well. On the 1st and 15th of the lunar month, the daily sutra chanting groups and the monks performing funerary rituals will still take their usual place in the temple and chant despite the busy atmosphere that surrounds them. On some incense days there will be formal rituals attended lay Buddhist participants and led by monastics held at the temple that happen simultaneously with, but quite separately from, the worshippers visiting for individual practice. The varieties of religious life and participation are much more visible at the temple on these incense days than ordinary days.

## OVERVIEW OF TEMPLE PARTICIPANTS

We have introduced the temple, it's history, the people who manage it, and an idea of the services it offers, but we have not yet introduced the participants who practice at the temple and bring life to the temple organization. The temple participants, taken as a whole, display tremendous variation in terms of their practices, religious self-identity, and orientations to Buddhism. However, as we mentioned briefly at the outset, there are two main analytical groups where clear lines of difference are drawn. These main groups, on the ground at the temple, are most commonly referred to as *jushi* (居士 lay Buddhists) and *xiangke* (香客 incense customers), and this emic distinction between the groups is also pointed out in the literature on contemporary Buddhism. We need to make clear the ideal typical distinctions between these two groups here, so that we can analyze the relations between and within the groups in the coming chapters. We find that these groups have very different practices, beliefs, and religious identity and that their practices are rooted in different religious foundations. However, all of the participants share the

same sacred space, religious symbols, traditional holidays, and cultural milieu. Both these groups taken together makeup the full community of temple participants, at least a community in some sense (a topic we will explore in Ch.7).

Chinese Buddhist temples are very different houses of worship in the United States where denominational Christianity offers a model of institutionalized packages of religious practice (Ammerman 2011). Chau's work (2006, 2011) on modes of religious practice in China has effectively argued that protestant-style confessional religious identity is seldom found at Chinese religious sites. Vermander et al. also state that "…Buddhist and Daoist temples accommodate layers of ritual and canonical traditions" (2018:80). At Puci Temple, also, very little practice is institutionalized into packages and paired with meanings that are shared widely by groups of participants and where boundary work, in relation to other groups inside or outside the temple, is being done. This differs from protestant-style congregations where correct understanding of doctrine and practice generally move from the top down and give greater order, coherence, and shared identity to the religious community. Therefore, we must take seriously the internal variation in participant practice and relationships between them in order to understand the religious ecology of the temple itself. **Figure 2.2** shows an overview of all the temple participants and breaks them down in two important ways.

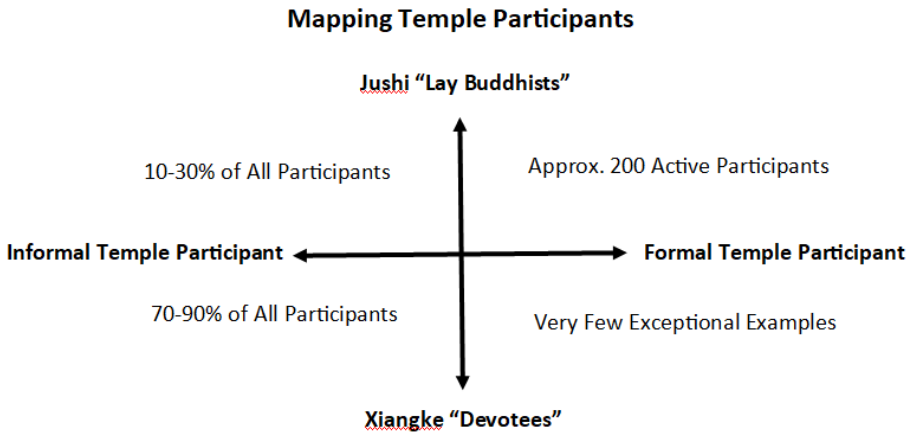


**Figure 2.2: Overview of Temple Participation**

The first dimension in the figure (x axis) is the extent to which people participate in formal or semi-formal organized temple activities. There 2 main types of activities at the temple. The first type are organized activities which generally require advance planning or registration in order to attend and for which the visitors attend regularly and make up a recognizable group. The second kind of participation is more individual and open to all. The temple offers flexible and inclusive opportunities for individual worship and practice during open hours, on important days on the lunar calendar, and one-off funerary ritual services oriented to the families. Where participants fall on this dimension impacts the extent to which the temple is an important social component of their religious practice and is a predictor of the type of practice in which they engage. Those who participate formally in organized, regular activities are far more likely to participate in other temple activities and feel a strong attachment to the temple and other members of the community. Those who do not participate in these activities are much more likely to utilize the temple on an individual or family basis and have few close connections with other people at the temple.

The second dimension (y axis) is the religious identity of the participant in relation to Buddhism as an institutionalized religion. This form difference is something we will analyze in great depth in the following chapters, but for now we can understand this difference by looking at participants self, and narrative, identities in addition to the way the literature draws lines between the two groups. Nearly all of the participants in organized group activities at the temple self-identify as Buddhists, but the majority of the other participants do not.

There are several hundred active participants in these organized temple activities (much more on them in Ch. 4 and 5), and, among these people, most have an explicit Buddhist identity, and, by nature of their practice, the scholarship can identify them as Buddhists unproblematically. These are the people who come to the temple to chant sutras, attend ritual assemblies, volunteer, etc. Most of the temple's overall visitors, however, do not participate in any formal organized activities at the temple.

Estimating the total population of participants that visit the temple is difficult, but we can point to the temple's popularity by looking at attendance on important occasions. The temple usually welcomes around 2-3 thousand ticket purchasing visitors on a sleepier 1$^{st}$ or 15$^{th}$ of the lunar month that falls during the week and on busier festivals and key dates might welcome upwards of 5-8 thousand guests. The crowds are especially thick on key days around Spring Festival when, according to the office staff, more than 10,000 people visit the temple. On quiet ordinary days, when there is nothing on the calendar, the outside visitors are fewer and the main people you will find are the regular participants there to chant scripture and families on premise to conduct funerary rituals. The identities of the wider community of participants is hard to pin

down owing to the challenge of surveying them[33], but according to estimates from informants including lay people and monastics, between 70-90% of the visitors did not self-identify with Buddhism explicitly. That means that another 10-30% of the visitors are people with an explicit Buddhist identity, but who don't formally participate in organized temple activities[34].

*Terminology of Lay Buddhist Engagement*

In looking at the breakdown of temple participation, and as mentioned above, we find that there are two main groups of practitioners at the temple that practice in different ways. In order to be able to detail these groups along with their participants and practices in the following chapters, it is necessary first to introduce these two main groups of participants and some terminology used in the literature and on the ground at the temple that will help us analyze and describe them. In the scholarship on the lay practice oriented toward Buddhism and on the ground at the temple, practitioners are split into 2 analytically opposed groups. On the ground at the temple, there is an emic distinction is between *jushi* (居士) and *xiangke* (香客), and in the literature there has been debate about how to talk about this difference, and relevant scholarship has been described this divide as between Lay Practitioners and Devotees (Fisher 2014); Buddhist Lives and Buddhist Options (Ter Haar 2001); or between those who are "using" vs "practicing" Buddhism (Jones 2010). It is my hope that the theoretical work in this dissertation will contribute to a more grounded discussion of this binary.

[33] Ven. Shi asked me specifically to avoid direct engagement with unfamiliar *xiangke* at the temple in a research mode. This made getting a wide survey of these visitors challenging and I was careful not to go against what was asked of me.

[34] While formal counting stats were not possible to record, my observations based on my discussions with guests during my time there lines up with the statistics cited by participants during the interviews

The *jushi* at the temple have taken on a clear Buddhist identity and this often means they have taken on a formal commitment to Buddhism by taking refuge in the 3 jewels (*guiyi sanbao* 皈依三宝). Taking refuge is ritual in which one formally becomes a lay Buddhist and express faith in the three jewels – Buddha, Dharma, Sangha[35]. As Fisher notes, the term *jushi* is used by practitioners to indicate that they are lay Buddhists or people who cultivate at home (*zaijia xiuxingren* 在家修行人) (Fisher 2014:215). The category of lay Buddhist itself is a translation of this emic terminology but is also an analytical category. As mentioned above, they have been called lay Buddhists (Fisher 2014; Jones 2010), practicing Buddhists (Jones 2010), and those living "Buddhist lives" (Ter Haar 2001). These scholars, studying lay Buddhism both historically and contemporarily, have generally defined it around practitioners' soteriological goals along with the commitment and methods with which they pursue them. We will dig deeper into the defining characteristics of this group later, but for now it's important to understand that these people display a higher degree of commitment to Buddhism and have a stronger Buddhist identity than their foil at the temple. As mentioned, nearly all people who participate in regular activities at the temple identify with this category, but one need not participate in regular temple activities to be a lay Buddhist *jushi*.

*Xiangke* is a category used by people at the temple, including the *jushi* and monastics, to refer to all the visitors to the temple who are not committed Buddhist practitioners and seen as distinctly "other." The term *xiangke*, some places translated as pilgrim, directly translates to "incense guests", and, at a basic level, coming to light incense is what this group is most known for, an activity common at temples of all kinds throughout China both historically and today.

[35] Taking refuge is also sometimes referred to as "conversion" to Buddhism. However, as I note several places in the dissertation, taking part in the ritual is not always an indicator that someone has shifted from a *xiangke* position to that of a practicing lay Buddhist *jushi*

They are most typified by the swell of visitors twice monthly on the 1st and 15th of the lunar month, on major holidays around birthdays of important Buddha or Bodhisattva (especially for Guanyin on the lunar calendar dates 3/19, 6/19, 9/19), and on major cultural holidays, especially those related to the veneration of ancestors (e.g. *Qingming* 清明, *Zhongyuan Jie* 中元节, *Dongzhi* 冬至). These participants are recognized, by committed Buddhists and themselves alike, as having less commitment than the lay Buddhist *jushi* and less grasp of Buddhist doctrine. The fact that there are many people engaging with Buddhism without taking a on Buddhist identity is a common pattern in the history of Han Chinese Buddhism (Chau 2011:556).

Research on contemporary urban Buddhism, historical lay Buddhism, and modern popular religion[36] acknowledge that temples draw in this type of visitor, but little research has looked at them deeply. Fisher (2014) refers to them as devotees, which he says "implies less commitment (214)," Ter Haar (2001) emphasized the way people utilized Buddhist Options as part of folk religious[37] practices of the masses, and Jones (2010) marks the distinction between people those who practice Buddhism and those who "'use' Buddhism in a folk mode (168)." The reference to popular practices also emphasizes that this mode of temple practice has long been popular among the common people. Others note how Buddhist temples have long accommodated and incorporated elements from other religious traditions (see e.g. Charleux and Goossaert 2013; Vermander et al. 2018). As mentioned, our goal is to explore the religious ecology of lay practices and people at the temple, and as we continue to do that, it will also allow for insights

[36] See (Sun 2014:469)
[37] For the purposed of this research, when possible we will refer to popular religious practices instead of folk religious practices, but in this case they refer to the same idea. In doing this I follow Clart (2007)

into the wider ecology of Buddhist practice in Chinese cities today. In doing that, we hope to establish a more structured theoretical framework for understanding this important binary.

## CONCLUSION

The temple provides an incredible base for understanding lay engagement with Buddhism and better understand how temple Buddhism works in China today. Puci Temple has been re-established and remade right along with the development of the city. It mirrors those changes and provides for its participants changing and diverse needs. In the temple we find that it serves 2 ideal typical groups of participants. These participants are separated by their identity and relationship to Buddhism, but they all find themselves participating in a temple environment that seems designed to accommodate them all. In the following chapters we will explore these groups in a deeper way and see how they come together in the temple to form a unique religious community.

## Chapter 3: "Doing" Temple Buddhism: Lay Practice at Puci Temple

Chapter 2 offered a close look at the Puci Temple (*pucitang* 普慈堂) itself that included a look at its physical location, context amidst the religious landscape of Shanghai, its history of development alongside the massive political and cultural changes in modern China, physical structure, and services it offers to the participants who visit. We also introduced the monastics and staff along with the two main groups of participants found at the temple: The regularly participating lay Buddhist *jushi* (居士) and the wider community of *xiangke* (香客) practitioners. The aim of this chapter is to take a "person-centered approach" (Fisher 2010) to look closely at how these participants come to "do religion" at the temple and understand the variety of activities engaged in, and through that also find the meanings attached to them[38].

First, we will take a close look at the temple's regularly participating *jushi*. We call them regular participants because they come to the temple, at least semi-regularly, to participate in organized activities where participants may need to register in advance, be given advanced notice via social networks, go through some process of acceptance, and/or must sign-in to on arrival. The overwhelming majority of these non-monastic participants have taken on an explicitly Buddhist identity, generally referring to each other as *jushi* or, informally, *shixiong* (师兄 ), a term of respect that indicates they are fellows in the study of Buddhism. These core participants mainly get involved at the temple through participating in sutra chanting groups, volunteering, and attending ritual assemblies.

[38] In developing his argument for use of the modalities of doing Chinese religion, (Chau 2011) has noted how meanings emerge from attention to practices.

Self-identifying lay Buddhists, like these regularly participating *jushi*, receive the most attention in the literature, participate in the most organized activities, and have the strongest explicit relationship with Buddhism, but they are not the most numerous of the temple's participants. Most participants who visit the temple do not attend organized events at the temple, but, instead, come to worship at the temple on days of import on the lunar calendar, what the temple calls incense days (*xiangqi* 香期), activities around personal life events, or for specific ritual services oriented to family concerns. While some visitors to the temple that do not participate in regular activities may also identify as lay Buddhist *jushi*, most of these visitors are who the temple leadership and temple *jushi* interviewed refer to as *xiangke*, and for whom the literature has a variety of terms. These participants are known to have less commitment than lay Buddhist *jushi* and can be understood as engaging with Buddhism through a reliance on popular religious culture and with similarity to practices observable throughout the history of Buddhism in China (Ter Haar 2001) and other areas in the Buddhist world (see e.g. Soucy 2012). They most notably come to the temple to supplicate for material blessings for their family and to perform important traditional cultural activities related to one's ancestors. Unfortunately, the literature too often explicitly or implicitly dismisses these participants as less worthy of detailed attention from scholars of religion. However, these *xiangke* are the most numerous of the temple's participants by a wide margin and are important to understanding lay practice at the temple as a whole.

Here we look at the totality of practices of both groups at Puci Temple in order to begin to understand the religious ecology of the temple itself and the how people "do" temple Buddhism there. We find two sets of practices and practitioners who come to address very different aims and have different understandings of their practice.

## *JUSHI* PARTICIPATION AND ORGANIZED TEMPLE ACTIVITIES

As mentioned in Ch. 2 and as seen in scholarly work on lay Buddhism, temples offer services that are available for practicing lay Buddhists to take advantage of. In fact, it has been said that temples are the "most prominent producers" of opportunities for lay Buddhist practice (Jones 2010:67). Here we look at the practices organized at the temple and the people that participate in them. We find that those who regularly participate in organized activities at the temple share much in common in terms of their religious identity and their purpose for practicing at the temple.

The temple offers 3 main types of organized activities. While these activities are open to the public, participants are generally required to register in advance and sometimes must undergo an informal process of approval. The temple offers small groups focused on the chanting of Buddhist sutra, a volunteering group that helps the temple operate, and a variety of ritual assemblies. There is much overlap between those participating in these activities and those who participate in them share an overall group identity, but the activities also have distinct purposes and attract different kinds of lay Buddhist *jushi*, something will begin to address below and continue in the following chapters.

### *Sutra Chanting Small Groups* (*nianjing xiaozu* 念经小组)

The most prominent set of organized activities at Puci Temple are the sutra chanting small groups. The small groups are also, according to the participants, something that makes the temple a unique place for Buddhist practitioners. Lay people can come together in groups and chant sutra in an environment that is, on one hand, an intimate and solemn and, on the other hand, quite relaxed and comfortable. This is because the temple is a place where the 3 jewels of

Buddhism – the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha - all reside (*sanbaodi* 三宝地), but that also provides the opportunity to chant sutra among only fellow lay people. It is one of the few places in Shanghai where this kind of sutra chanting cultivation is possible.

The temple has 3 established independent small groups for chanting sutra and, between them, there is a group of lay practitioners at the temple chanting every day except for on public holidays and a brief recess during the hottest weeks of summer. There is a Monday, Wednesday, Friday[39] group; a Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday group; and a Sunday group. Each of the groups operates quite independently but is under the quiet guidance and watchful eye of Ven. Shi (*shishifu* 石师父) under her responsibility for external affairs (*ketang* 客堂). These groups are open to the public, and people may ask to join or be invited by current participants or a nun. Once you join, you must make at least some commitment. Participants are asked to be regular in your attendance or risk being asked to leave[40].

The groups are required to chant at least a half day, and chanting starts at promptly 8am. There is an invocation followed by the chanting of the primary sutra for the day (or a part of a sutra). This takes several hours and when the main chanting is done, the group will finish their session of chanting with the 'transfer of merit' (*huixiang* 回响) which allows the chanters to transfer a portion of the merit they have accumulated chanting to those whom they have dedicated their chanting. Following morning chanting, lunch is prepared by the temple chefs for a small fee to those who are interested, and then some groups will continue chanting in the

[39] This Monday, Wednesday, Friday group is made up of some of the oldest long-time Jushi at the temple and currently they are only chanting on Monday and Wednesday. Members of the Tu, Th, Sat group have stepped in to come and chant on Friday mornings so each day the temple

[40] I never saw anyone be removed from the group, but several participants told of the process of being accepted and that if they did not come consistently that they would be asked to leave

afternoon[41]. The groups focus on 2 main sutras: The Lotus Sutra (*Miaofa Lianhua Jing* 妙法莲华经) and The Sutra of Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha's Fundamental Vows (*Dizang pusa benyuanjing* 地藏菩萨本愿经). These selections are related to the Tiantai Buddhist tradition of the temple mentioned in Ch.2 from a monastic perspective, but that has little bearing on the participants themselves (nor does it influence the nun's personal practice either). These 2 sutras are also some of the most popular and relevant sutra for Mahayana lay Buddhists in China. The Lotus Sutra, according the participants is the sutra that most helps you understand karma and how to achieve Buddhahood, what some called the "*Chengfo Jing* (成佛经 - trans. Becoming a Buddha Sutra)," and then Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha Sutra is focused on those people who have passed on and has a prominent place in Chinese Buddhism where filial piety and attention to ones ancestors are a ritual priority.

Lay group chanting at the temple began in the late 90's after the current abbess, Ven. Gao (*gaoshifu* 高师父), returned from Buddhist college. According to two chanting group leaders, they were started for 2 main reasons. The first was to help the temple and its reputation in the community. At that time, the temple already offered memorial tablets (*paiwei* 牌位) as a service to community members who wanted to honor their deceased family members, but they did not offer funerary rituals (*fashi* 法事). As the current head of the longest standing group said of the purpose of sutra chanting at the temple, "It's for the memorial tablets, don't we have to chant sutra so they can hear it?[42]" The temple at that time was short on nuns, so the *jushi* started to

[41] Afternoon chanting depends on the group and group leader. The Sunday group had recently extended their practice into the afternoon and it is expected that all will attend. Differently, the T,Th,Sat group has voluntary sessions attended only by the group members interested.
[42] Interview 11/22/17 "就是弄牌位，牌位嘛不是要 念经给他们听嘛"

come daily to help the new head nun with morning and evening devotions and chant sutra for the departed souls (*wangling* 亡灵) who were memorialized at the temple. According to the participants, they are not able to release the souls of these people (*chaodu* (超度)) which must be left to monastics, but they can help these ancestors hear the words of the Buddha with which they can cultivate themselves, and then, at the end of chanting, they *huixiang* (回响) to transfer some of the merit from the sutra chanting to those that have passed, themselves, and their loved ones. The second reason was that Ven. Gao was formerly a *jushi* alongside these very same people at the temple, and she saw instituting this kind of group cultivation activity as beneficial for the lay women's practice. This decision, and the 3 groups that arose from it, were a powerful force in the temple's development and remain an important component of the temple community.

Participants in the chanting groups today are still taking advantage of this opportunity, and the activity continues to draw new people into the temple's regular group of *jushi*. As mentioned, there are not many temples in Shanghai where people can come together and chant in a place that is both a temple and a relaxed environment with other lay practitioners[43]. The most popular place for sutra chanting in Shanghai is the Lay Buddhist Assocation (*jushilin* 居士林) where, at times, hundreds of lay people will come together to chant sutra or participate in other lay lead cultivation activities, but there are not monastics at the lay association unless they are specially invited in for some activity. As one of the longtime members of the sutra groups said to me when comparing her chanting at the temple to other places, "...this atmosphere is different, the joy in the dharma is also different. After all, there is support from Buddha and Bodhisattva in

[43] This is somewhat up for debate among the respondents. Many said they knew of no other temples that offered this kind of opportunity to *jushi*, but I did hear about several places where it is happening at other temples in the city.

the temple, so at home is much worse than at the temple.[44]" While most of the participants come from adjacent districts in Shanghai, this activity, more than the others, tends to bring people in from further afield than the rituals or volunteering, and, when people move away, they often continue commuting to the activity from their new home.

As mentioned, these groups serve a religious purpose at the temple in that they allow the memorial tablets to hear the Dharma, but it was mostly the group leaders, nuns, and older members who spoke about the purpose of chanting in those terms. For most of the participants, they participate in the chanting groups because is an opportunity for personal cultivation. The participants see it as a chance to collect merit, shed karmic debt, and develop their understanding of Buddhist doctrine while meanwhile receiving a variety of psychological benefits. Further, coming together to accomplish these goals has benefits of its own.

*Sutra chanting aims and benefits.*

The *jushi* who chant sutra at the temple all see their practice as a cultivation activity that will help them shed karmic debt and collect merit. They all hope to cultivate towards these aims, but, as Sun Jie (孙杰) the leader of the Sunday group told me, that there are two purposes that sutra chanters offer as their primary motivation for it. Sun Jie said the majority of people focus on shedding karmic debt in order to hope for a smoother life, but that this still falls, in his opinion, within the realm of superstition. He says he tries to focus on another aim but acknowledges that the majority can also achieve their aim of a smoother life. He said, "Is it possible to achieve? yes, definitely, because if you chant sutra, you are definitely shedding

[44] Interview 11/23/17 "…这个氛围不一样，法喜也不一样的， 道场里头毕竟有佛菩萨的扶持，家里头还是比庙里头差多了"

karmic debt, right? The other one is for fewer people, that is the level of knowledge. This is for becoming enlightened, for universal redemption, and for escaping the abyss of suffering.[45]" This distinction he draws here between him and his fellow *jushi* is something we will continue to return to in later chapters in order to understand internal variation between practicing *jushi* and also between *jushi* and the wider community of *xiangke*.

Han Zhi (韩芝), a 58 year old who has been chanting sutra for several years echoed Sun Jie's statement, she told me "The most important aim of chanting sutra is to lead everyone into the scripture, and to correctly and accurately cultivate according to the laws of the dharma with the ultimate aim of transcending the cycle of life and death and go to Western Bliss.[46]" All of the sutra chanters, even if they may have hopes for shorter term benefits as well, share this sentiment and see their chanting as an important method for shedding karmic debt and collecting merit for themselves and their loved ones[47]. Some were careful, like Sun Jie and Han Zhi to focus on the longer view of merit and breaking the karmic cycle but were comfortable talking about their hopes for returns in this life. Dong Hao (董豪), a 56-year-old business owner, is more matter a fact about his purpose for coming to chant on Sundays. "Recently as I have been chanting I have been thinking about protecting my body, so that I can be a bit healthier, and peace […] it's a motivation […] if karmic debt is shed then things will be smoother, that's what you think in your heart[48]," he said. There is no tension within the group between these two related aims for their

[45] Interview 7/7/2017 "能不能做到？能，肯定能。因为你诵经 肯定能消除业障，对不对？那么还有一种也是少数的，这个就是智信的层面，为了自己成佛，为了度众生。为了能够 脱离."
[46] Interview 11/23/2017 "念经最重要的目标就是，带领大家就是，深入经藏，如理如法的修行，了出 生死呀。进入经藏，今后的最终 目标就是了脱生死，往生西方极乐 世界."
[47] As mentioned above, at the end of a session of sutra chanting, they will *huixiang*. This allows them to pass some of the merit collected on to their loved ones. You can *huixiang* for anyone, but this is especially relevant for those people who have memorial tablets or extending-life tablets hanging in the temple halls.
[48] Interview 12/8/2017 "我最近念的，我就想，哦哟，保佑身体，身体能健康一点，平安 […] (这是) 动力啊 […] 业障少了，就更加顺利，你心里是这样想的."

sutra chanting, instead, the inclusiveness of these groups is an important characteristic of the temple community that we will return to in Ch. 6.

In addition to shedding karmic debt and collecting merit, chanting sutra is the primary, or one of the primary, ways that the participants in the sutra chanting groups develop their understanding of Buddhist doctrine. Yu Wei (于伟), 64, has been attending a weekday chanting group since retirement and spends little time formally studying Buddhism in other ways[49]. She says the purpose of chanting sutra is to learn what they say because "[…] what the Buddha and Bodhisattva say, their words, you must follow […]" and regularly chanting sutra helps with the slow process of understanding. "You need to read a lot, recite a lot, and only in this way will you slowly come to understand the meaning of the sutra[50]," she said. Pan Lin (潘琳), a 38 year old college graduate, is a little bit different because she spends a bit more time reading Buddhist materials other than just the sutra themselves, but she still finds that "[…] every time you chant sutra you are certain to have some inspiration. Every time you chant sutra, you will find that, oh, this sentence, I did not catch it last time and will obtain some knowledge from it[51]." As we will see, different participants practice Buddhism by developing their knowledge and cultivating in different ways, but, for all the chanters, gaining knowledge and wisdom directly from the sutra was a component of their practice. Variation can be seen in attitudes about the extent to which you can develop knowledge through chanting. While many, especially the older and less educated of the chanters, felt strongly that this knowledge could be gained simply by dogged

[49] She says she will occasionally read materials shared on the phone or computer, but that is limited and irregular
[50] Interview 1/16/2018 "[…] 佛菩萨怎么说的，说的话，你要照着做 […] 你要多念多诵，你才慢慢能够理解他里面的意思，懂他里面的道理."
[51] Interview 12/12/2017 "每一次的诵经，肯定就是说，你会有一定的感悟的。每一次诵经，你可以会发现，这句，哎，上一次诵经我没有在意，然后也从中获取一些知识。"

repetition[52], other chanters felt that what you can gain from chanting, especially at the speed the groups chant, is necessarily limited and deeper knowledge should be sought elsewhere.

Another important aspect of joining the sutra chanting groups is the ability to gain knowledge and merit alongside others. This is the social component of the practice. Coming together for cultivation activities like chanting scripture is call *gongxiu* (共修 – group cultivation). While there is debate amongst the *jushi* as to whether coming together for cultivation leads to additional merit for everyone[53], all agree that coming together to practice has practical benefits. Many of the members of the various chanting groups talked about how it was more difficult to chant scriptures at home because they are more likely to be distracted by phones or family and more likely to stop in the middle. Coming to chant with the group makes it easier to persevere which aids in the collection of merit. Further, some participants expressed that they were happy to have other people around to ask questions about the text. Guo Mei (郭梅), 56, sums up the benefits of group cultivating in a way that echoes the response of others. She says it brings her great happiness and that "[…] the meaning when cultivating with others is deeper than cultivating by oneself[54]."

*Sutra chanting group variation.*

There is much that the 3 chanting groups have in common, and all three of the group leaders will tell you that the groups are the same because in Buddhism one should not have a discerning heart (*fenbiexin* 分别心) and that they are all following the direction of the nuns.

[52] There is a saying I often heard from older aunties that "once you read it 100 times, you will begin to understand"
[53] This is a matter of doctrinal interpretation, some people said this unprompted, others said that was a misinterpretation.
[54] Interview 11/16/2017 "…共修比一个人修意义更大."

However, there is significant observed difference between the groups in terms of the demographics and style. The Monday, Wednesday, Friday group now consists of a dwindling group of about a dozen regular participants. This group is entirely made up of women of advanced retirement age who have been chanting together for a long time. They are well practiced and chant sutra at a breakneck pace[55]. They reflect their stern and serious leader, 70-year-old Tang Wei, who has been chanting since the groups were established and they don't often add new people to their group. They do not have an online presence in the form of a WeChat group, and when they need to communicate with each other about when to attend some event, the leader will call each member on the telephone as opposed to utilizing other technology.

The Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday group, given that it meets mostly during the work week, is also largely made up of retired women, however they are comparatively younger and are a little more relaxed and flexible than the other weekday group. Their leader, 60-year-old Zhong Qin, is perhaps the most important lay Buddhist at the temple. Her tireless efforts to create community through promoting a forgiving inclusiveness and setting a pious example for the other *jushi* have made it so that when new retired people express interest in the chanting groups, the nuns will direct them to Zhong Qin and her group[56]. Associated with this group are more than 30 active participants, but on any given day there will be around 15 chanters in attendance.

[55] I participated in many sessions of chanting during my time at the temple and attended all 3 groups at different times. I was quite proficient in chanting, but the speed these ladies chanted at was incredibly difficult for me.
[56] I was a regular participant in this group on Tuesday's and Thursday's for more than a year. During that time, the group accepted several new members.

The final group meets only 1 day per week on Sundays and has greater group diversity than the others. Meeting on the weekend allows for more working people to attend, and, as a result, this group is significantly younger and more diverse than the other 2. While older retired women still predominate and women outpace men about 4 to 1, there are noticeably more male and pre-retirement sutra chanters. This group has a dedicated WeChat group consisting of about 60 people, but on any given Sunday attendance averages 25 people. The WeChat group allows the leader to communicate with the participants, share some basic Buddhist teachings (with approval of the nuns), collect monthly donations for an informal charity project[57], and also create accountability by encouraging participants to request off (*qingjia* 请假) in the group if they aren't able to attend. The above-mentioned leader of the group, Sun Jie, is a 25-year-old male elementary school teacher with a master's in psychology. He takes his leadership seriously and an intellectual approach to his study of Buddhism. These characteristics are reflected in the group. He has worked with the nuns in the 3 years since he started leading the group to improve the group's chanting, implement stricter rules, and slowly add some additional study components into the group that extend beyond the activity itself. Pan Lin, introduced above, put it this way, "[some older *jushi* in the other groups] are set in the one way. They do it well, the way they play the instruments, the way they sing, is good, but it is set and unchangeable. [The Sunday group] wants to do the correct thing, so we have discussions with the nuns [about how to be better][58]" Her take on the difference between the practice of different *jushi* at the temple is apt and points to the difference we find along the spectrum of lay Buddhist practice that we will detail in Ch.5.

[57] The group collects money through the WeChat group each week to buy dog food for the animal rescue project run by the visiting male monastics at their temple

[58] Interview 12/13/2017 "他们就是很根深蒂固了。比如说，一个唱腔也好，比如说，一个唱赞子的，敲法器的点也好，反正他们是根深蒂固的，不能改变的。然后我们呢，就会做对的事情，跟师父探讨一下."

*Volunteering at the Temple*

Volunteering (*yigong* 义工) is an important and prominent form of engagement at temples throughout China today as it has been historically[59]. At this local temple, volunteering is crucial to its operations and it is also an important cultivation activity for its core participants. Participants have several options for getting involved in temple volunteering.

Most of the volunteering runs through the primary volunteering structure that is organized by a lay person and falls under the purview of Ven. Shi who is responsible for external affairs. This structure organizes and manages the volunteers that will come to help on each 1st and 15th of the lunar month and other important days on the ritual calendar. In addition to this main volunteering group, there are some additional opportunities for volunteering at the temple. Some participants arrange directly with the nuns to come and volunteer around the temple on ordinary days. Each day of the week has a couple volunteers on site taking up basic responsibilities like sweeping, mopping, arranging flowers, helping visitors with questions, and anything else the staff and nuns may need. Further, in addition to the volunteers who come to help on specified days, the sutra chanting groups also pitch in to clean and organize the temple between the morning and afternoon sessions and, when their chanting falls on an incense day, then they will also take on certain important responsibilities including counting and organizing the donations from the merit box, and cleaning semi-private spaces. Finally, Spring Festival is a special time for the temple and for its regular members. It is a time that requires additional help but is also a time when many people would like to be involved. Volunteering during the days of spring festival is something of a reward for regular participation in temple groups during the

[59] See Jones (2010) pg. 97-98

remainder of the year. Attendance rolls from chanting groups, rituals, and volunteering serve are used as a basis for their inclusion as a volunteer on the most special occasions.

In order to become a volunteer at the temple, you must speak to the lay person in charge of volunteering who can be found in the temple office (*ketang* 客堂) on any incense day. According to Ven. Shi, becoming accepted to participate in volunteering requires one to undergo an informal examination by the nuns with the aid of experienced volunteers. During our time in the field, there was a shift toward an abundance of volunteers at the temple which has recently led to the strengthening of this structure[60]. The nun and the lead volunteer may let the potential volunteer know that they do not need volunteers at that time, which is usually true, but it is also a pretext for observing this person a bit more. Often volunteers are introduced to the temple leadership by current volunteers which smooths the process.

The main group of volunteers at the temple are indispensable on incense days. As mentioned above, between two and ten thousand people might come through the door of the temple over the span of just 8 hours or so. Volunteers should arrive at the temple sometime in the hour before it opens at 6am, report to the office to receive their official placard denoting them as volunteers at the temple and be assigned their post for the day. Those arriving early enough will make their way back to the nuns dining room for a hearty breakfast of porridge, steamed buns, and pickled vegetables before setting to work for the morning.

While most volunteers will be assigned to the same post regularly, this is up to the organizing volunteer, a gentle man in his mid-sixties. Volunteers are spread at work posts all

[60] One of the very last meetings I attended before leaving the field was a volunteer staff meeting where the nun in charge gave a stern talk to the group about how the structure of volunteering would be enforced moving forward. There had been much turnover in recent years from older volunteers to newer volunteers. At this moment, there was plenty of new help, but the nuns and staff now are wanting them to be more adherent to the structure.

around the temple. A group of about a half dozen hard-working aunties are assigned to wash dishes in the kitchen area as thousands of visitors come to take advantage of the delicious vegetarian noodles. Others are placed at the bathroom for cleaning duty, at the front door the pass out incense, or asked to assist in selling tickets or goods from the small shop. Groups of 3-5 people are posted at each of the major halls of the temple where volunteers help to direct the flow of people and ensure safety rules, like no incense in the halls, are followed. Still more volunteers, about a half dozen, are needed to collect donations from the visitors for the various programs[61] on offer under the guidance of the temple accounting team. Finally, a group of mostly male volunteers, which for more than a year included me, take responsibility for the 2 large candelabra (*lazhutai* 蜡烛台) prepared for the worshippers to place a candle and light their bundle of incense. Altogether, a successful day volunteering at the temple requires the cooperation of upwards of 40 people. Lunch is provided to volunteers at a discounted price to those that come as visitors, and, by early afternoon, the throng of worshippers thins. At that time, the volunteer team springs into action to clean the entire temple from top to bottom, count the donations, and reset the space for the following day.

*Volunteering aims and benefits.*

The participants that come to volunteer have more variation in their Buddhist practice than members of the sutra chanting groups. However, there is much that these volunteers share in the way they talk about the aims and benefits of their practice of volunteering at the temple. Most of the volunteers, as mentioned, are practicing Buddhists and we can consider them temple *jushi*, but volunteers also take on another name that is both and action and a title. They are *hufa* (护法)

[61] These are referred to as *huodong* (活动) and these could include the temple building fund, auspicious lanterns, writing names for dedication in upcoming rituals, regular donations to the temple, and others.

which translates as protectors of the Dharma. In practice, it refers to people who help at a temple, and it also implies a personal relationship with that temple. This title was not used on the ground as much as seen, for example, in Fisher's case of lay Buddhists in Beijing[62], but it was used as a verb and occasionally a noun to describe what people come to do when volunteering at the temple.

Following our expectations of the use of this type of language, some temple volunteers spoke about caring for the temple as part of the reason why they volunteered. Song Jie (宋洁), a 74-year-old female participant, prioritizes volunteering at the temple over her participation in the sutra chanting groups, and feels like the hard work is necessary for the temple. She says:

> I think the temple relies on just a few monastics and it's just not possible to manage it by themselves because there are just a few of them and too many people come. If it's too many, then people are needed to manage things. You will be given a post and you must do the things for that post. You must diligently complete these tasks. If you do well, then the temple will be operating peacefully and successfully, and, if you don't, then it may bring about some trouble, right?[63]

Liang Yi (梁毅), a 68-year-old male volunteer who worked alongside me at the candelabra but very seldom attended any other temple events, told me that volunteering was for "protecting the three jewels, benefitting all life[64]" and that he could do that by ensuring those that visited his candle area had a good experience.

However, Liang Yi, a man who enjoys talking about his Buddhist practice, made sure that I understood that while he has those aims in mind and wants to good for the temple, his

[62] See (Fisher 2014)
[63] Interview 11/21/2017 "我是想庙，单靠师傅几个人，管不了。因为我们这个庙不是人少，是进来的人太多了。太多的话么就要人来管，要派你到哪个岗位，哪个岗位要做什么事情，你要认认真真把这个事情做好。你做好了，这个庙里的顺序，运转起来都是平平安安的，顺顺当当的，如果你这个环节做的不好，那你不是找麻烦吗？对吧."
[64] Interview 11/20/2017 "护持三宝，利于众生"

volunteering practice was for himself alone. He explains this using a phrase that came up again and again in my encounters with people at the temple. He says he gets from Buddhism "[…] a type of benefits me and benefits them spirit[65]" where one helps themselves while helping others at the same time. Here he expresses that, while there is a benefit to others in his practice, the true reason he volunteers in the way he does is to help himself. Liang Yi's clarity in expressing the motivations behind his practice is not shared by all volunteers and is a product of his personal orientation to Buddhism.

Other volunteers don't talk about their experience with as much nuance but point in the same direction. During my time at the temple, Yuan Xiu (袁秀), a 63-year-old female retiree, got permission from the nuns to start coming to volunteer at the temple on 2 ordinary days a week. She gets up each of those mornings and comes into the temple at opening and stays nearly until closing. Throughout the day she does odd jobs, mostly cleaning and organizing things. She has been coming to the temple for many years, but before it was just to light incense and leave. In recent years she has had health problems, and someone suggested volunteering at the temple as a potential solution. She decided to give it a shot and is clear about her purpose. She says, "It's for me, it's for me, right? I say it's for me and not for other people. I don't worry about other people...it is only for me[66]." This sentiment is even more clearly stated by Su Qiao (苏巧), a current staff member who volunteered for many years before that, when she says, "While it

[65] Interview 11/20/2017 "[…] 一种自利利他的一种精神."
[66] Interview 12/13/2017 "为自己，为自己，对吧？我说我为自己。不是为人家，人家我不管的，所以为自己."

appears that the volunteers come to provide service to everyone that participates, in reality they are shedding their own karmic debt[67]."

An unabashed focus on collecting merit is a feature of volunteering in traditional Chinese lay Buddhist practice. The volunteering that we see at this local temple in Shanghai is a good example of what Adam Chau calls "karma-teering" (in Huang and Feener 2013:135). "Karma-teers" approach their volunteering activity with the primary aim of collecting merit. Just like for Liang Yi and Yuan Xiu, volunteer service at the temple is a religious practice that brings personal benefit. This type of volunteering stands in stark contrast to the ethos of volunteering in the West and which has been seen to be developing in lay Buddhist organizations with a focus on charitable acts like, for example, the Tzu Chi Foundation or other forms of modern humanistic Buddhism (Wu Keping in Huang and Feener 2013: Panel 5). In Ch. 6 we will further investigate the role the volunteers having this perspective has in the maintenance of the temple community.

Volunteers at the temple include a range of different types of participants owing to its openness and the fact that the activity has little connection to doctrinal or ritual concerns. We will return to a discussion of the participants we have introduced here as we explore the spectrum on lay Buddhist practice in Ch.5. Below we will look at the final type of regular activity at the temple that is taken advantage of by lay Buddhist practitioners: ritual assemblies.

*Ritual Assemblies at the Temple*

Puci Temple holds ritual assemblies that can be attended by its regular participant *jushi* and, less often, by the wider community of *xiangke*. However, the temple's offering of ritual assemblies is limited in comparison to larger temples in the outskirts of Shanghai or elsewhere. It

[67] Interview 12/28/2017 "你是来做义工的，看起来你是来做义工，是为大家服务，其实都是消自己的业障."

is common for sutra chanters and volunteers at the temple to incorporate these rituals into their practice at the temple. Many of these people will also attend larger assemblies, for example the Grand Water and Land Assembly (*shuilu fahui* 水陆法会), at larger temples elsewhere but are generally quite pleased that they can come to their local temple for smaller assemblies in a solemn and convenient location. The assemblies vary in terms of who attends and who is the intended audience. There are 2 main kinds of assembly: *pufo* (普佛) and *fahui* (法会).

*Pufo.*

The first kind of ritual assembly that happens regularly at the temple are *pufo*. They happen at important dates related to the Buddha and Bodhisattva, like birthdays, and are meant to offer praise. They also take place at important ritual moments during the year like the annual changing of the memorial tablets. These rituals are the responsibility of the nuns to perform and would be happening with or without lay participation, and so attendance varies quite widely depending on which day, who wishes to participate, and to whom they are oriented.

On days of minor and sparsely attended *pufo*, they will be held before the temple opens in the Main Hall (*daxiongbaodian* 大雄宝殿) and they are only attended by the most dedicated of the older female *jushi*, usually less than a dozen. Those who wish to attend need to be in place and ready to go in the main hall by 5:30am. Attendees will find that the nun in charge of the ritual has left the front door of the temple complex cracked and will make their way inside to the main hall where, slowly, other nuns will emerge from their quarters and join the lay people assembled. At these smallest rituals certain core members of the laity stand alongside the nuns and assist them by playing ritual instruments which outnumber the nuns themselves. This cooperation is a hold-over from when there were even less nuns at the temple and lay people

were needed to take on these roles, and this type of participation is almost unheard of for lay people in other temples. Participating in this way is meaningful cultivation for these dedicated few, but we never saw anyone attend these other than long-standing retired female members of the chanting groups. Tang Wei regularly attends these *pufo* and expressed to me that their group tries to come more often to these events because they have been with the nuns doing them for so long and most of them live close to the temple.

Other *pufo* are similar in shape but receive more significantly more attention from the temple's lay participants. These coincide with busier days at the temple, for example days focused on the Bodhisattva Guanyin[68], and will be held in the ritual space below the main hall after the temple has officially opened for the day. These are also led by the temple's own nuns, but they are joined by a larger set of *jushi* from the reading groups and a select group of *xiangtou* (香头 trans. head incense lighters) who are chosen by the nuns from among the wider community to take a primary position during the *pufo* as a kind of honor. These rituals, like the other activities we find at the temple, are opportunities for the lay people to stand alongside the monastics, cultivate themselves, and show respect to the Buddha and Bodhisattva (*fopusa* 菩萨) in ways that the *jushi* see as correct application of the dharma (*ruli rufa* 如理如法) and befitting their Buddhist practice.

Finally, there are a couple of other important *pufo* that take place during the year where the *jushi* cultivate themselves as with the other *pufo* described, but also play an important role in helping the temple serve the *xiangke* community. These are, once again, set in the main hall of

[68] Days for the Bodhisattva Guanyin are 3/19, 6/19, and 9/19 on the lunar calendar

the temple, but for a different reason. Whereas most *pufo* are out of the view of the *xiangke* wider public, during these rituals the wider community is encouraged to participate.

The first is on the birthday of Shakyamuni where, over the past 3 years, the temple has done *muyu* (沐浴), a ritual celebrating the birth of the Buddha. During this ritual, lay participants ritually bathe a small statue of the Buddha as a child that stands in a fountain. This has been a very well-received addition to the ritual calendar and, demonstrating its importance, it is one of the 2 times during the year that I saw Ven. Gao emerge from her private quarters to take part in organized ritual activities[69]. It is very well attended by the temples *jushi* who are informed in advance when the ritual will begin and take their places at the appropriate time in the main hall dressed in their lay robes (*haiqing* 海青) which are a visible indicator that they are formal lay Buddhists[70]. Additionally, since it is held during the day on an incense day, it has caused great excitement among the wider community of *xiangke* who have already come that day to perform individual practices and are very interested in the commotion in the main hall. Here the practiced chanting and insider knowledge of the dedicated lay Buddhists helps to lend an air of solemnity and order to the ritual as throngs of curious outsiders line up beyond the threshold of the main hall doors to have a look and get involved. After the *jushi* have all taken their turn bathing the Buddha, the many members of the wider community who have come to precipice of the hall to see what was happening inside, are allowed to line up and participate in bathing the Buddha as well.

[69] The other being Chinese New Year
[70] I mentioned the clothing here because it marks the jushi and the xiangke apart for this ritual, but the jushi will wear these ritual garments to chant sutra and attend any ritual.

The second special *pufo* is the *zhongkao pufo* (中考普佛) which is a ritual for middle school entrance exam which is held on the birthday of *wenshu pusa* (文殊菩萨圣诞), the Bodhisattva of wisdom. For this ritual, also held during open hours in the main hall, *jushi* from each of the chanting groups play an important role. They are asked at sutra chanting during the week leading up to the *pufo* to practice an additional incantation (*zhouyu* 咒语) and come to perform the ritual alongside the nuns for the benefit of the wider community that has donated some small money (100 RMB) to participate in the ritual[71] that they believe will bring benefit for their children or grandchildren. Certainly this ritual, like the others, is also an opportunity for the *jushi* to collect merit and show respect the Bodhisattva, but also some told me that singing together in harmony after practicing together during the week serves to create a more positive experience for the outsiders who have come to attend and add to the solemnity of the ritual.

*Ritual assemblies.*

The other main ritual activity at the temple are the ritual assemblies (*fahui* 法会) which are each 3 days long each and are held 3 times per year around the major holidays related to ancestors (*Qingming Jie* 清明节，*Zhongyuan Jie* 中元节[72]，*Dongzhi* 冬至). These activities are designed and intended for the temple's regularly participating *jushi*. Participants are required to sign up in advance with preference given to those who sign up for all 3 days and who regularly attend the chanting groups. On the busiest days of the assembly more than 50 people will attend. You will see nearly all the members of the sutra chanting groups (especially if it falls on a weekend), former members of the chanting groups, and a variety of the temple's other regular

[71] This is not a fee to participate, but a dedication of the ritual to a particular person, in this case a student. The name will be written on a piece of paper and then will be ritually burned at the end

[72] Also commonly referred to by the *jushi* as *qiyueban (七月半)* meaning middle of the 7th month

participants. They all come to chant The Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Sutra (*dizangjing* 地藏经) in the ritual hall beneath the main hall under the direction of the same monks who come to the temple to do the funerary rituals for the community[73].

These are very important assemblies at the temple for the lay Buddhist practitioners, and they stand in stark contrast to the other activities we find at the temple on these holidays. These ritual assemblies provide an opportunity for these practitioners to pray for and show respect to their family members who have passed on in a manner that both shows their filial piety and respect for traditions, but is also is in line with their Buddhist practice and associated understandings of life and death. These assemblies offer them an opportunity to release the souls of their loved ones (*chaodu* 超度) and help them move up in the sense of their karmic journey and give them a better chance to study the dharma themselves. They do this through the chanting of the sutra and dedicating that practice to an ancestor. This is done both through the transfer of merit at the end of the ritual, but also by paying a small amount of money to write their name down on a temporary paper memorial tablet (20RMB, minimum of 5 names). The tablets are posted during the ritual and then ritually burned upon its completion[74]. These rituals at the temple provide a way for the lay Buddhist community to be filial in a Buddhist way without having to go to a faraway temple or gravesite.

One final thing to note about the ritual assemblies at the temple which is important is that that many of these formal ritual opportunities which generally take place separated from the

[73] Now that the temple has the relationship with the monks from the temple on the outskirts of Shanghai, they have taken the opportunity to have male leadership for these assemblies. My understanding is that they did have these assemblies under the direction of the nuns before, but the *jushi* are all quite pleased to have male leadership for these types of events. Many of them expressed that the monks chanting with them was both more efficacious and more beautiful to listen to.

[74] *Xiangke* also participate in this part of the ritual and this will be discussed below

wider community of *xiangke*, most of the time quite literally underground and separated by physical barriers from the people practicing above in very different ways. This physical separation also speaks to the difference between the way of ritually interacting with one's ancestors as part of these rituals and the way of interacting with them being performed by most of the *xiangke* upstairs. This separation has important implications for understanding the religious ecology of the temple and is something we will return to later, especially in Ch. 6. But, before we get ahead of ourselves, let's focus on the practices and associated meanings for the wider community of *xiangke* who visit the temple.

## *XIANGKE* PARTICIPATION – THE TEMPLE'S WIDER COMMUNITY

In this chapter thus far, we have taken a close look at temple *jushi* who participate in regularly scheduled temple activities and together are core group of participants at Puci Temple. However, as we started out the chapter setting up, despite being the focus of contemporary scholarship on lay Buddhism, the *jushi* are not the most numerous of the temple's participants. The majority of the temple's participants, 70-90% of the total visitors, do not see themselves as *jushi,* or otherwise committed Buddhist practitioners, and will not meet our standard for defining a practicing lay Buddhist[75]. Among the wider community of participants that take part in the activities we will describe some are dedicated lay Buddhists like the temple's regular *jushi*, however they are in the minority, so we will be focusing on those identifiable as *xiangke* participants through their own words or observation of their practice. We find a group of people who utilize the temple to address problems in their lives and also to fulfill cultural duties related to filial obligations to their ancestors.

[75] Further discussion of this point in Ch. 5

*Activities on Incense Days (xiangqi 香期)*

The busiest and most vibrant times at the temple are the incense days on the lunar calendar including the 1st and 15th of each month (*chuyi* 初一, *shiwu* 十五), days dedicated to particular Buddha and Bodhisattva, and on days traditionally dedicated to veneration of ancestors. Of the thousands that come to worship on these days, most of them do not consider themselves Buddhists and they are coming to the temple for different reasons than the *jushi* we have discussed thus far[76]. They come to participate in practices that Ter Haar (2001) would call "Buddhist inspired options," but whose practice differs from that of the lay Buddhists' in ways that both they and the more committed practitioners recognize. The two most common types of activities on these days are: 1) supplicating to the Buddha and Bodhisattva for material blessings -- what Buddhists call *rentian fubao* (人天福报) - through prayer and presenting incense and/or offerings (money, flowers, fruit, etc), and 2) veneration of ancestors including the burning of paper money as a way to help provide for those ancestors which, itself, is also a way of asking the Buddha and Bodhisattva for help.

I spent a lot of time talking to people who come to visit the temple to light incense and worship before the Buddha (*shaoxiangbaifo* 烧香拜佛) and the temple volunteers in order to try and understand who the wider community *xiangke* are and why they were there to practice. The most common response was embodied by what Xu Fang (许芳), a 67-year-old *jushi*, told me, "[…] 80% of them don't understand anything, but they are a part of an inherited Chinese tradition. They all know that the Bodhisattva will protect people […][77]." So, she says, *xiangke*

[76] Note that the *jushi* may also practice on these days, but the majority of participants are *xiangke*.

[77] Interview 11/23/2017 "[…] 80%都不懂的，但是都是中国人一个传承，他都知道菩萨会保佑一方人的 […]"

come to seek help with issues in their lives related to family, health, and others. This was not just what the lay Buddhists *jushi* thought they did, but also how they describe it themselves. Ma Zhen (马珍), a 58-year-old *xiangke*, has been visiting the temple for many years. She especially likes to come on the days dedicated to the Bodhisattva *Guanyin* (观音菩萨) with whom she feels a particular closeness like many Chinese (Yü 2001). I asked her what her aim was in coming to the temple and she said she comes to "worship (*jibai* 祭拜)" in order to "supplicate for my own family...[for things like] peace and health.[78]" This language of "worship" was common among the *xiangke* and also in the way the nuns described the practices of the *xiangke*. The language of "worship" is generally avoided by Buddhists since the Buddha and Bodhisattva are generally not seen as deities in the same way as they are in traditional popular religion. Zhang Gui (张贵), now a *jushi* on the temple staff, for years came to the temple once a year on the night before Chinese New Year (*danian sanshi* 大年三十) in order to supplicate before the images and pray for wealth (*qiufacai* 求发财) as one of the temple's many *xiangke*. While Zhang Gui now looks back on these practices as misguided, Ma Zhen does not as her practices are part of her cultural repertoire and feel natural. As Ven. He told me, "[the *xiangke*] are only coming to pray...pray is all. They pray for their family matters, they light incense and worship before the Buddha [...] The custom here is to come on the first and fifteenth of the lunar month to burn incense, protect the peace of the family, that's how it is[79]." Whether they come twice a month, once a year, or just in times of trouble, the many *xiangke* who come to seek blessings for themselves and their family at the

[78] Interview 11/13/2017 "那么求求自己家人的，平平安安吧，身体健康."
[79] Interview 1/4/2018 "他们只是为了祈祷，祈祷，就是，他自己祈祷他家里的事情，烧香拜佛 [...] 他们这里的习惯就是初一十五要到庙里烧香，保家人平安，就是这样的."

temple are leaning on a general cultural milieu that includes Buddhism as opposed to some particular interpretation of Buddhist doctrine.

The most visible way these visitors supplicate before the images at the temple is to light incense, pray, and donate money in the merit boxes in front of each image. This is the foundational practice at the temple that nearly every visitor will participate in. In addition, participants may bring additional offerings of fruit, grains, oil, flowers, or other items to place on the altars in the various halls. In most cases these items will be collected at the end of the day and distributed between the nuns, volunteers, and other *jushi*. As the wider community is bringing in these items, sometimes people will bring in non-vegetarian items which will need to be removed from the temple. Also, some traditional practices call for people to keep the items after they have been blessed, so sometimes people will retrieve items from the altars after they have placed them. Further, on the incense days the various programs for donations, including auspicious lanterns (*jixiang deng* 吉祥灯), extending-life tablets (*yansheng paiwai* 延生牌位), general donations (*xieyuan* 写缘), etc, each have their own table staffed with volunteers to collect donations[80]. The wider community of *xiangke* considers these donations part of their supplication practices. They sometimes speak of it in terms of merit, but it is not necessarily a nuanced understanding.

In addition to lighting incense, praying, and offering donations in supplication to the Buddha and Bodhisattva for blessings, many *xiangke* also follow tradition in another way by coming to venerate their ancestors. Sometimes this looks very similar to the above practices in that people may just come to light incense and pray in front of the temples Buddhist images with

[80] These are available to participate in any day, but the tables are put out on busy days because they are very popular with the *xiangke* on incense days

the intent to show respect or bring material benefit to their ancestors. Some come to the temple to perform these activities because they have purchased a short or long-term memorial tablet for their ancestors to have hang in the temple, and other believe that coming to the temple to pray for their ancestors is the best possible environment and so seek it out. The most visible action toward this end, however, is the burning of paper money. Participants coming to burn paper money are most numerous on key holidays for ancestors, but also throughout the year to mark anniversaries of family passing on and other important occasions. Ven. He said, "Also, [these things are] the common people's cultural tradition, for example burning silver ingots and the like […]," but, she is also clear to note " [t]hat is not a Buddhist thing, silver ingots are not a Buddhist thing, it's our people's popular custom[81]." Her words make the important point that these activities are accepted, but not considered part of formal Buddhism or correct Buddhist practice.

Participants can regularly be seen burning silver ingots (*xibo* 锡箔) and less commonly gold ingots (*yuanbao* 元宝)[82]. The silver colored paper is meant to be burned for the use of one's ancestors and the gold meant to supplicate the Buddha and Bodhisattva. As such, these practices are also a type of supplication (*qiu* 求). They hope that they will be able to materially impact the lives of their ancestors through these practices. Of course, not everyone who comes to venerate ancestors need have a strict belief in the efficacy of their actions. Li Hong (李红), a 35-year-old female *xiangke* who tries to come to the temple on days focused on ancestors, told me that she believes she is like many others who aren't 100% sure that their actions at the temple have direct

[81] Interview 1/4/2018 "而且这是百姓的风俗习惯嘛，比如烧锡箔什么的，不是佛教的东西，锡箔不是佛教的东西，属于民族风俗习惯"

[82] The temple has an agreement to limit burning of paper money throughout the day on incense days, so instead the visitors stack the paper in the corner of the temple, a stack often reaching several feet high, and the volunteers will burn in all at once in the afternoon.

impacts on her ancestors, but think at least it brings a feeling of solace (*anwei* 安慰), and she hopes it is able to offer solace to her ancestors as well. Incense days dedicated to ancestor veneration are the most attended outside of Chinese New Year, and many of the people who come to burn paper money do not attend at other times during the year.

*Open Space and Support on Ordinary Days (pingri 平日)*

The temple is busiest on incense days, but the temple is open to the wider community on ordinary days during its open hours of 7am - 3:30pm and, during those hours, it is open for people to come and take advantage of the temple's public space. In many ways, the activities of the *xiangke* on these ordinary days is similar to those that occur on incense days. However, visits on these ordinary days are more likely to be in direct response to an immediate difficulties or life events as opposed to visits on particular incense days which are more likely to reflect a regular routine or family tradition.

Visitors come to light incense and pray, donate money, or, in special cases, seek the guidance of the Abbess. In each of these cases, as above, the most commonly stated reason for them coming was to supplicate (*qiu* 求) for something to fix or protect something in their life. I asked Ven. Lu, the nun who is responsible for collecting donations on ordinary days, about the motivations of the visitors to the temple as she has direct daily contact with *xiangke* practitioners. She, herself once a *xiangke* practitioner, told me, "They come with a supplicating heart [...] normally they are all coming to supplicate, a lot just come to supplicate. They are just like I was. If you are really able to have no requests, then that's good. But they are few [...][83]." Ven. Lu also

[83] Interview "他们是有求心来的 […] 一般都是有求来的，很多就是有求来的，跟我一样，如果能真的能够那个的话，那就无求，那就好了. 那也很少 […]"

notes that this certainly encapsulates the practices of the *xiangke*, but also many of the *jushi* also may maintain similar practices, a point we will return to later.

Supplication before deities, including Buddha and Bodhisattva, to deal with issues in one's life is a common form of practice in China and is not a surprise to those at the temple. This importance of this motive can also be seen in my discussions with the fortune teller who sits daily just outside the temple gate. His clientele is the very same group of *xiangke*, he told me:

> Those that come to temple to burn incense, they certainly have some kind of issue they are dealing with....besides those who are most devoted to Buddhist belief, those who are Buddhist disciples, normal people, when they are having good times they won't come and light incense. This is a law of nature. They are just acting in accordance with natural law. When they come they certainly have some issues to deal with, when they have issues they come and sit here, sometimes when they come to supplicate to the Buddha, they just want to come out here and have their fortune read and ask some questions, it's just like this, for doing these type of things this is a place that draws people in.[84]

As the fortune teller notes, most people come to the temple seeking help or spiritual support for immediate, personal issues they are dealing with and that this is something that is deeply engrained in Chinese culture.

While most of these people come into the temple and practice by themselves through lighting incense, praying, presenting offerings, and making donations, a smaller subset of the wider population comes to the temple to seek the guidance of the head nun. It is not very common for the regular *jushi* or *xiangke* to meet with the nuns to seek guidance, but the nuns told me that this was an informal service offered and taken advantage of by some members of the community. Ven. Shi will meet with people who are seeking spiritual or personal guidance first,

[84] Interview 11/1/2017 "但是你想想，来庙烧香的，肯定都是有事的。你像他春风得意，他来烧香的时候。。就是说除了你对这个宗教信仰非常崇信，你是信徒的那个崇拜，一般的人，他春风得意的时候是不会来这个烧香的。这是一个自然规律。他就是一个自然规律。他来的时候肯定是有事的，有事的嘛他坐在这儿，有时候他求了佛，他就想算一下，问一下，这就是，干这一行的，比较吸引的一个场所"

and she will decide if they will be offered an audience with the abbess. Most people that the abbess meets with are not practicing lay Buddhists, but, instead, are *xiangke* participants who are experiencing personal trouble or, sometimes, company bosses dealing with stress or looking for some way to ensure their business develops smoothly.

We have said that most of the wider community of *xiangke* come when they need something. This could be a hope for a better result in the future or to manage a crisis in the present. However, there is another important reason that brings some *xiangke* into the temple. Some *xiangke*, especially businesspeople and families of businesspeople, come to the temple in good times to give back (*huanyuan* 还愿) upon encountering good fortune. This concept is widespread in Chinese culture where there is an understanding that in a moral universe, if one supplicates before a deity and they receive help, then they must give back (Arthur 2019:109). This is related to the types of requests that people come to make at the temple, including businesspeople, in order to beseech the Buddha and Bodhisattva for economic prosperity. The idea of giving back to the temple financially for economic success is something that is ingrained in Shanghai culture and popular religious culture more generally, not just among practicing Buddhists.

Whether a family experiencing success had come to the temple before to request it or not, they are likely to donate some money back to the temple when things are going well. This is part of the reason that temples do so well in affluent cities like Shanghai. The people coming to make these donations need not be well versed in Buddhism or in how to make such a donation. I once had the opportunity to watch the wife of a local businessman walk up to the donation table in the main hall and pull out 10,000RMB in fresh bills straight from the bank. She said she wanted to donate it, but it was clear from her face that she had little understanding of how that was

supposed to happen. The staff member was patient and suggested that she break up the donations between the various programs (*huodong* 活动) available for donations at that time. In describing the various ways to donate the staff member was appreciative and kind, but there was no effort to educate the lady on Buddhist doctrinal understandings.

*Funerary Rituals and other Organized Ritual Services*

In addition to coming to the temple on incense days and ordinary days in order to seek material blessings or venerate their ancestors. The wider community of *xiangke* can also take advantage of certain ritual services offered at the temple. The most prominent of these, as mentioned in ch.2, are the funerary rituals (*fashi* 法事) where a group of monks from another temple on the outskirts of Shanghai come to Puci Temple daily to offer funerary ritual services to participants. While the temple has long offered memorial tablets to their *jushi* and *xiangke* participants, it was not until after the renovations were completed in 2010 that they began to offer this service. According to the nuns, they began to consider offering rituals at the request of *xiangke*. As the community became more familiar with the new and improved temple, the nuns were frequently asked if they would consider offering rituals. This would prevent the people living in the neighborhood from having to make a long trip across or outside the city to another temple or to a gravesite.

The cooperation between the two temples with the assistance of the Shanghai Buddhist Association has worked out well for all involved. The community has shown a strong desire for these rituals where the monks may perform up to 4 rituals a day, 2 in the morning simultaneously and 2 in the afternoon. It promotes the temple in the local community and provides a steady

stream of income for the monks' temple[85]. The rituals are a set price of 3500RMB as set by the temple office, and that money is split evenly between the 2 temples. Families have the option to donate additionally to the monks individually during the ritual itself, but the cost to reserve and perform the ritual never fluctuates, and the temple staff refuses to accept money to make special arrangements. It is important to understand that these funerary rituals are not geared toward the regularly participating lay Buddhist *jushi,* but for the wider community and they are rooted in popular tradition. As Ven. Shi who is responsible for booking the rituals told me, "Those coming to do the ritual don't necessarily believe, the vast majority, ha, if you are talking about that...I could say 8/9 are not believers[86]." She says families perform these rituals out of a sense of filial piety and that for some it is a sincere act of filial piety which offers them solace, while for others it is more about the fear of not looking like they are fulfilling their filial duties. Chen Wen, who helps the monks prepare the rituals each day, similarly told me:

> [They] aren't necessarily Buddhists, they just think that to do the releasing of the souls may have a little benefit to those who have passed. So, they call on a few monastics to do the releasing of the souls for them. I think it's just that people want to be respectful of their ancestors, and also let you, me, other people see (them do it) this in reality is just culture[87].

These rituals are certainly done in proper liturgical style. The monks and nuns both told me how important it was from a Buddhist perspective to offer these rituals and perform them well. While most of the families that come to participate in these rituals are not Buddhists and

[85] The temple in a neighborhood on the outskirts of Shanghai has very few *xiangke* to support it. This is an issue we will consider more when we discuss the role of the *xiangke* in financially supporting the temple in Ch.6.
[86] Interview 1/5/2018 "来做这个 佛事的，他 不一定信，他是根据多数，大多数， 比如说有那个的话，我可以说 8/9 是不信仰的"
[87] Interview 11/1/2017 "不一定是佛教徒，也不一定是佛教徒，他们就是觉得做做超度，对过世的人有点好处，所以他们就是叫两个师父给她超度超度，我认为就是对过世的人的尊重，做给你啊，我啊，其他的人看一下，我觉得就是对过世的人，父母亲过世了，就给他超度一下，请几个师傅，你也看到了，我也看到了，这其实上就是文化."

have no understanding of releasing the souls (*chaodu* 超度) which is at the heart of the ritual, in the views of the monastics the rituals do have a positive impact on those that have passed and, also, the fact that these families are choosing to perform them at all, is positive. In addition to offering their liturgical expertise in performing these rituals according to proper Buddhist ritual procedure, they are designed to accommodate traditional understandings. Each ritual culminates with the monks leading the family in the burning of paper money. We have shown that this is a popular adaption and not part of Buddhist doctrine. It is, instead, one way in which the temple supports the practices of the *xiangke.*

Another ritual offering geared toward to wider community of *xiangke* is one mentioned above in discussion of the regular participants, the ritual for the middle school entrance exam (*zhongkaopufo* 中考普佛). Once a year, the temple offers a service to allow parents, grandparents, and friends to participate in the ritual in order to beseech Bodhisattva of wisdom (*wenshupusa* 文殊菩萨) for help for their loved one on the exam. Here also, the *jushi* and the nuns are leading a ritual for the Bodhisattva in the same way as they do throughout the year on various other holidays -- the meanings are the same. However, in this case, on incense days in the weeks leading up to the event, visitors to the temple are offered the opportunity to sign up to participate in the ritual. They are told to come at the specific day and time where they are led through the ritual by the nuns with the help of the *jushi*. Then, after the ritual, the participants are provided with a bottle of water and fruit, both blessed from having been placed on the altar, to bring to the test-taking student. Here, too, the juxtaposition between the more nuanced understanding of ritual and the more immediate understandings of the *xiangke* are clearly on display.

*Aims and Benefits of Xiangke Practices*

We have begun to describe some of the main practices in which that the wider community of *xiangke* at the temple participate. We have seen that the majority of these are focused immediate benefits in their lives and the lives of their families and ancestors. The *xiangke* place particular emphasis on filial piety which puts the emphasis of much of their practice on their immediate families or recently deceased ancestors and fulfilling family obligations. Here we want to describe how these participants view the aims and benefits of these practices.

We have said that many *xiangke* practices are directed toward pursuing material blessings that address problems in their life or meant to protect their families. In the most literal sense, these practices are directed at the results and, as such, and the outcome is tied to their efficaciousness (*ling* 灵). This is the most important factor in determining where *xiangke* engaging in traditional practices choose to go. Ma Zhen, like many other *xiangke* at the temple, told me that she chose to keep coming to the temple to make requests for her family regularly because, simply, "[Puci Temple] is very efficacious![88]" Chinese people have long had this approach to deities in the popular pantheon and, as Liang Yi put it, "It has 2500 years of being passed down. If it didn't have any results, then the common people wouldn't believe in it, so it definitely can offer some results[89]." Xiao Li (萧莉), who has a lot of contact with the *xiangke* as the staff member who helps Ven. Shi with external affairs, told me that the reputation of the temple, especially the images of Bodhisattva Guanyin, have a strong reputation for their efficaciousness among the temples wider community *xiangke* and beyond. In interviews with

[88] Interview 11/13/2017 "[普慈堂]老灵的!"
[89] Interview 11/20/2017 "那如果传承 2500 年，他没有结果的，老百姓不会相信的。那肯定有结果"

temple's lay Buddhist *jushi*, stories of the temple's efficaciousness and protection were also common. While some *jushi* may change their understanding of why supplication is successful, many of them still extoll the ineffable (*bukesiyi* 不可思议) power of the Buddha and Bodhisattva (*fopusa* 佛菩萨).

Certainly, the efficaciousness of the temple matters to the *xiangke* that come to seek material benefits, but as mentioned, not all participants take a strong view of their practice and look at them in terms of the results. In fact, most people when pressed would not say whether they believed there was a direct relationship between their request and any result. More of the *xiangke* I spoke were like Li Hong, introduced above, who say the practices oriented toward ancestors or for their living families bring important psychological benefits. She said it brought her a feeling of solace. Others said that when they placed these hopes and prayers on to the Buddha and Bodhisattva that is was a type of *jituo* (寄托), a term meaning to place one's hope an find spiritual sustenance. This type of psychological benefit was highlighted in how Zhang Gui spoke about his yearly practices as a *xiangke*. He said, "[…] when you go and light incense every year your mentality will be a bit more even-keeled. At least then, I have prayed that this year will be pretty smooth[90]." We can see that regardless of material benefits gained, the practice itself can bring important emotional benefits to *xiangke* practitioners.

In addition to benefitting from the efficaciousness of their practices and/or the psychological boost and being able to fulfill their filial obligations, people participating in these in these ways at the temple also spoke about how these practices help them to think about how to

[90] "Interview 11/8/2017 "[…] 因为每年去烧香，你心态会比较平静一点吧。起码我祈祷过了，我这一年会比较顺利."

act outside of the temple. While these descriptions from the *xiangke* do not amount to concerted action toward cultivating oneself like we see among the lay Buddhist *jushi*, there was the sense that going to the temple, supplicating before the Buddha and Bodhisattva, and demonstrating their sincerity helped them know how to behave. I was sitting with a *jushi* volunteer one afternoon at the temple and an interested *xiangke,* a man in his 50s, came close enough to hear our conversation and chose to join in. I decided to ask him why he was there that day and he responded, "You just asked me (what I am doing here), and I say I don't understand anything, I just came here to find ways to be more virtuous." He explained that there was so much of what goes on outside of the temple has the potential to trick and deceive people, drawing them away from virtue. For him, the Buddha and Bodhisattva in the temple represent something uncorruptible. He expresses a simplified understanding of karma saying that the Buddha and Bodhisattva keep track of his good and bad deeds and that we must ultimately account for that. In his view, "Many more of the masses, including those of us who didn't understand before, are now coming to believe in this more and more, it's just like this.[91]"

What he expressed, even amidst his professed ignorance, was a theme that was common among people talking about their practices as a *xiangke* and also a theme in the *hopes*[92] of the temple's lay Buddhist *jushi* for the community for *xiangke*: that these practices lead people toward an ethical spirituality Han Zhi echoed these sentiments in thinking of the benefits of the years she spent participating at temples as a *xiangke*, she said, "Through subtle influence I came to understand a few things including what I should do and what I should not do, it's like this. So,

[91] Interview 12/13/2017 "你刚才问我，我其实什么也不懂，但是呢，我想，就是想办法做得善一点吧 […] 众多的人，包括我们原来不懂的，现在就是越来越相信这个，就这个道理."
[92] Emphasis added, we will return to this important point in Ch. 6

it can also bring them this kind of benefit, just a little bit of understanding of what you should do and what you should not do[93]."

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have begun the process of understanding the totality of the lay practice of temple Buddhism at Puci Temple. In trying to understand the practices at the temple, it was necessary to break down the temple practices into those practices by the two main groups of participants, the regularly participating *jushi* and the wider community of *xiangke*. As mentioned, the *jushi* we have focused on all participate in regular organized activities at the temple which include sutra chanting, volunteering, and ritual activities. The wider community of *xiangke* generally do not participate in regularly organized activities at the temple, but instead utilize the temple space on incense days and ordinary days to perform individual or family-oriented practices including supplicating for material blessings and veneration their ancestors.

We have also seen that despite it being very clear that these groups have very different practices, different aims, and focus on different benefits, each of these groups is able to address its religious needs and receive distinct benefits from their participation at the temple. In the next chapter, we will continue to try to understand more about these two ideal typical groups of participants at the temple. What we find is two very different groups operating on very different religious foundations, but who share the temple and an overarching Chinese culture which is valued by them both.

[93] Interview 11/23/17 "我也是在潜移默化之中了解了一点事情，什么该做了， 什么不该做了，是这样的。 时时刻刻？也会给他们带来这方面的利益，就一点点明理 了，什么该做， 什么不该做了."

## Chapter 4: The *Jushi* and *Xiangke* as Ideal Typical Groups

In Ch. 3 we looked at the specific practices of the two main groups of participants at the temple we have begun to describe, the regularly participating lay Buddhist *jushi* and the much more numerous wider community of *xiangke*. It is very clear that the two groups are have very different primary practices and aims for coming to the Puci Temple. Additionally, the meaning they get from them and the extent to which they make it part of their personal identity is varied.

In this chapter we will look closer at these groups and utilize our analysis of their practices at the temple to have a closer look at each and then make some important comparisons. This will also continue to help us build our understanding of the religious ecology of the temple community and, additionally, of the lay practice of Buddhism. In this chapter we will see how the difference the two groups display in the temple points to important differences between practices of the *jushi* and *xiangke* as it relates to Buddhism and Buddhist doctrine, and also to important similarities that connect the groups through shared values and traditional culture. In Ch. 5 we will extend this argument outside of the temple to try to firm theoretical draw lines between the lay Buddhism of the *jushi* and the popular religious practice of the *xiangke*.

The *jushi* at the temple share much in common and have a distinct group identity. Some aspects of what they share in common matches how other scholars have described lay Buddhists elsewhere. While we begin to point to internal variation among the *jushi*, a topic we will dive deeply into in Ch. 5, they share much in common and importantly understand themselves and their practice as something quite other than that of the temple's many *xiangke*. The *xiangke*, themselves, also have much in common and while they lack the same kind of group cohesiveness we find among the regularly participating *jushi*, they share aims and understandings with each other and also see their own practices as being of a different category of things than those of the

temple's *jushi*. I argue that the practices of the *xiangke* should be considered practices rooted in popular religious culture, a category in tension with official Buddhism.

The descriptions of the activities and the associated meanings make clear that we should understand *jushi* and *xiangke* as two ideal typical groups with different religious foundations. We can see clear lines of differentiation in terms of identity, purpose, and frequency. These are important and we will continue to investigate the ways in which these different groups are able to work together to fulfill the needs of both groups in Ch. 6, but there are also important ways in which there is similarity and connection between the temple's 2 main groups. These groups share much in common in terms of the calendar, values, and concept of a shared moral universe. These groups together make up the entirety of the temple community and share the same space, symbols, and cultural history. As Fisher (2012:350) notes, these variety of visitors to temples in china use repertoires that are built upon popular practices from imperial times that have been broken down and remade in modern times.

## *JUSHI* AT THE TEMPLE

### *Who Are the Temple Jushi?*

We have pointed out that the temple has a group of about 200 hundred *jushi* who take part in regular organized activities at the temple and amount to a recognizable group. The average *jushi* at the temple is a woman past retirement age and that matches popular conceptions around who practices lay Buddhism in Chinese temples. While it is certainly a stereotype we will challenge, there is much truth to it. It is especially true of the participants in regular activities that often fall on the weekdays including 2 out of 3 sutra chanting groups and the main volunteering group. Nearly all of the weekday chanters are retirees and, among the regular attendees totally

about 40, only 1 is a man. The makeup of the volunteers is somewhat more varied, but still is dominated by women and retirees. Men makeup about 15% of the regular volunteers, but of those men, all but a couple irregularly participating younger men, all are either retired, unemployed, or a member of the temple staff. The most diverse group of regular participants at the temple is the Sunday chanting group because it meets just once a week on the weekend. This group is led by younger members, the rate of male participation is about 20%, and there is a much wider range of ages.

Approximately 80% of the temple *jushi* interviewed at the temple lived in an adjacent district to the temple which speaks to the local character of the temple, but, in fact, participation in these organized activities makes the *jushi* more likely to come from afar than the wider community of *xiangke*. This is because once *jushi* start to participate in the group activities, they often continue coming even after they have moved away. Also, some were introduced to the temple through lay Buddhist networks and ended up at the temple that way. Additionally, of the *jushi* interviewed, less than 40% of them had a college degree or higher. The education level is, in an important way, an artefact of the composition of the group. People of retirement age in China today had little opportunity to pursue advanced education owing to political situation of their time. However, it also speaks to the fact that many of the participants are from a more working-class background and can provide different perspectives from lay Buddhist elites.

*What Do the Temple's Jushi Have in Common?*

While we have already begun to point toward the internal variation within the temple's regularly participating *jushi*, there is much that these participants have in common. So, what is it that marks these people of as a group? What is it about these people's practices that moves us as researchers, and they themselves, to make the distinction between a practicing lay Buddhist like

them and someone who is not, like the temple's wider community of *xiangke*? As Gareth Fisher notes, in some recent scholarship anyone who practices Buddhism that is not a monastic has been said to be a lay devotee (2014:215–16), but both on the ground and in the research the binary between the 2 groups is clear. In fact, thus far I have been able to talk about the groups without defining them because the *jushi* themselves recognize that they are part of a different group than the xiangke, and this difference is also recognized by most of the *xiangke.* The fact that there is a difference between *jushi* and *xiangke* is common knowledge in China, however the problem remains that the line between them still lacks theoretical structure.

Ter Haar (2001) in his look at lay Buddhism in the 12th-14th centuries says that there was a difference between people living "Buddhist Lives" and people using "Buddhist Options." While he is looking at the situation surrounding lay Buddhism nearly a 1000 years ago, much of the same could be said about the situation we find at the temple today. He says someone that lives a Buddhist life "…adopt[s] a set of practices, aiming to achieve larger Buddhist soteriological goals. Instead of religious activities at single points in time and directed towards well-defined goals, they would change their entire lifestyle to varying degrees" (2001:98). Following Ter Haar, Jones defines lay Buddhist practice in Nanjing as a divide between those who "use Buddhism" and those "practicing Buddhism." She also focuses on soteriological goals, but takes it a step further stating "all lay Buddhists affirm the goal of liberation, learn the Buddha's teachings, practice self-cultivation, and try to practice moral living" (2010:175).

While I don't agree with either scholar has a strong enough foundation for defining lay Buddhism, a question we will focus on in the next chapter, they do point to important difference between the *jushi* and *xiangke* that makes them distinct groups both in the literature and for the participants on the ground. The ways in which the *jushi* the talk about their practices and make

distinction between themselves and the *xiangke* certainly reflect the characterizations of lay Buddhists found elsewhere. We find that the temple's *jushi* share much in common including taking on some kind of Buddhist identity, experiencing a change in understanding, establishing regular cultivation practices, and seeing Buddhism as a framework for moral living.

*1) Buddhist identity and self-identification.*

It is important to think about the language of Buddhist identity to gain a better understanding of the temple's *jushi* and lay Buddhism. I take seriously, as other have in looking at lay Buddhism (see e.g. Soucy 2012), anyone who understands themselves as a Buddhist. Nearly all the *jushi* interviewed, including all the members of the sutra chanting groups, had an explicit lay Buddhist identity. These respondents considered themselves 佛弟子 (*fodizi* – Disciples of the Buddha) by nature of their taking refuge in the 3 jewels (*guiyisanbao* 皈依三宝) and incorporating that identity in their daily lives. However, the data reveals that simply taking refuge is not a direct indicator of concerted lay practice and taking on a lay Buddhist identity. In the stories of many *jushi*, we find that they had taken refuge at some time in the past, but at that time it was not an impetus for them to begin practicing and shift their identity. They commonly told me that they had taken refuge years before they started practicing, but that, at the time, they had no understanding of Buddhism or how to practice. There are also examples in the data where people had not taken refuge, but directly associated themselves with the *jushi* or, at least, drew firm lines between their practice and that of the *xiangke.* Certainly, the clearest examples of lay Buddhists are people who self-identify as disciples of the Buddha, have formally taken refuge, and have begun regular cultivation. These people are unproblematically Buddhists. However, it is more complicated than that because there is slippage about what it means to be a Buddhist and language is an issue.

In thinking about who is a Buddhist and issues of language we must also grapple with the English translation of the word Buddhist disciple (佛教徒 *fojiaotu*) which is a word used often in survey research of religion in China, but almost never used on the ground[94]. What we find are strong-identity lay Buddhists associate the term *fojiaotu* (佛教徒) with *fodizi* (佛弟子) and think that to be a Buddhist you must take refuge. However, some other people who are less obviously lay Buddhists may also associate themselves with that label when prompted. The problem is that this label is fluid, and, since it is not used on the ground, it can be taken up in ways that are problematic for conceptualizing lay Buddhism. An interview I conducted with one sutra chanter *jushi* and her friend, who I coded as a temple *xiangke*, encapsulated the issue. I asked them both if they were Buddhist disciples (*fojiaotu*). They both said yes, but then the sutra chanter promptly corrected her friend and said she was not Buddhist. She then turned to me and said, "When I was at the level that she is, I would also tell people I was and I believed it, but after I gained some understanding I came to think that her level still can't really be called that, she just has belief. She is at that level.[95]" This exchange speaks to something that Jones mentioned in her work, that as the state continues to soften its stance on belief and as Buddhism as an entity gains additional social cache, more and more people will move to take on a Buddhist identity. This contrasts with the other impulse in China over the past century to restrict religious identity to the smallest box as possible. These issues of language and identity make finding a more solid foundation for understanding the spectrum of lay practice we find at the temple and beyond even more

[94] This importantly contributes to the idea in the western world that China has very view religious believers
[95] Interview 10/9/2017 "我在他这个阶段也会告诉你我是的，我是信这个。。我理解之后我就会觉得他这个阶段还不能真正称为（佛教徒），他只是相信。他只是阶段性的."

important. In the end, regardless of the label used, all of the temple *jushi* understood that their practice was something of a different nature than that of the temple *xiangk*e.

*2) Change in understanding and the language of study.*

As I have mentioned, orientation toward Buddhist soteriological goals[96] has been a key in understanding lay Buddhist practice. In our sample, too, soteriological goals were something shared widely among the temple's *jushi*. While Jones' respondents tended to use liberation (*jietuo* 解脱) to describe their soteriological aims, our participants most commonly talked of transcending the cycle of life and death (*liaoshengsi* 了生死), but both are pointing to the same goal rooted in Buddhist Dharma. In additional to talking about transcending life and death in generally, respondents who more closely followed a Pure Land path commonly spoke about going to Western Bliss (*jileshijie* 极乐世界), a related soteriological goal. Practitioners of Pure Land, one of the 8 Chinese Buddhist denominations, emphasizes reliance on the benevolence of the Buddha Amitabha to deliver practitioners to rebirth in Western Bliss when they die regardless of the karmic baggage they may carry (Andrews 1993:16–17). However, not every respondent spoke in these direct terms.

Change in understanding, however, was a theme that was shared across the sample. In describing their move toward Buddhism, they most often contrasted their current understanding with what they had thought previously instead of offering up specific doctrinal understandings or emphasizing soteriological goals. Many of these people used to engage with Buddhism in very different ways, ones more like the practices of the *xiangke*, and these were the comparison. They had, at least in their view, a better understanding now, especially of karma. Su Qiao's

[96] Soteriological goals are aimed at salvation or deliverance.

formulation is representative, she said, “Now we understand, but before we didn't. We just worshipped before the Buddha and lit incense and we thought it was good enough, but now that I have entered into the temple, I know, oh, first I must cultivate my karmic reward and also shed karmic debt[97].”

Along with this change in understanding came a language of study. We would ask people how they encountered Buddhism and the next sentence would almost always begin with “I have been studying Buddhism…” This is an important pattern to notice and it speaks directly to Jones’ attention to learning the dharma as a key element of lay practice. However, I believe that all we can say is that there is a change in attitude toward understanding the dharma and a shift toward a language of study. As we look deeper, we find that the extent to which people study the dharma is extremely variable. Jones states that most of her respondents expressed at least a desire for a teacher and a more systematic style of study, but this was mostly absent in my sample. Just 2 of the 43 *jushi* interviewed participated in systematic study of Buddhist doctrine, and not one person expressed an unrequited desire to find a teacher to guide them. I argue that the language of study also reflects peoples view of themselves as having experienced some change in their understanding of Buddhism.

*3) Establishing cultivation practices.*

Cultivation, in terms of what lay practitioners “do” is a clear focus of this research and all the respondents coded as lay Buddhists took part in some cultivation practices regularly or semi-regularly. These included the activities detailed above at the temple and a wide variety of activities outside the temple including home practice, group releasing of life activities, charity

[97] Interview 12/28/2017 “现在我们懂了呀，以前我们不懂，只晓得拜拜佛啊，烧烧香啊，也蛮好的，现在我进了庙里面，我知道，哦，一个，修自己，修自己的福报，另外一个就是消自己的业障.”

participation, public rituals at other temples, and others which we will detail in the next chapter. How is it that people take that change in understanding of the Dharma, whatever change that may be, and put it into action? The patterns of practice are largely dependent on circumstances and context of their change in understanding, one's education level, and stage in the life course.

*4) Framework for moral living and personal growth.*

The last important element of practice shared across the sample of *jushi* at the temple was a focus on putting teachings into action toward living a moral life. This is also emphasized by Jones' definition of lay Buddhist practice. *Jushi* in our sample detailed the way Buddhism changed how they acted and thought about the world, and they viewed that as a key component and benefit of their lay practice and identity. They said Buddhism teaches "how to be a (good) person" (*zenmezuoren* 怎么做人) or "help people become more virtuous" (*rangrenxiangshan* 让人向善). In providing the path for them to interpret and act in their own lives, this direction provided by Buddhism also brings about feelings of self-assuredness and security in their lives.

Han Zhi emphasized the importance of right action in line with Buddhist teachings in her lay practice, saying you "must use the standards of the Bodhisattva to measure yourself. You must go do it, learn from the Buddha and Bodhisattva. Going and doing makes one a true Buddhist not just saying one is[98]." Certainly motivation for going and doing can come from the merit earned from taking part in good deeds and cultivation activities, but it is also about living by the standards of virtue and benevolence set by the Bodhisattva and using what you learn from the teachings of Buddhism to act in a virtuous manner. Buddhism provides a structure that helps

[98] Interview 11/23/2017 "要以佛菩萨的标准衡量自己，要去这么做，向佛菩萨学习，去做一个真正的佛教徒，不是一个口头上的佛教徒."

people to make sense of and act in the world. Sun Jie's story provides one such example of how Buddhism provided a way for him to reinterpret his circumstances and change his actions which led to positive outcomes and personal growth. Sun Jie had a rocky relationship with his parents growing up, but his encounter with Buddhism pushed him to re-evaluate his role in contributing to the problem. He was able to use his newfound knowledge from Buddhism to reinterpret his understanding of the concept of filial piety (*xiao* 孝). Armed with this new interpretation of *xiao* and a better understanding of his previous actions, he was able to rebuild the relationship with his family.

The *jushi* certainly describe the ways that Buddhism led them to act in more virtuous ways that lead to positive outcomes in their lives, but it also gives them a framework for dealing with daily troubles and engaging with people. Many of the interviewees described big changes to their personality owing to their study of Buddhism rooted in a change in understanding about where their troubles (*fannao* 烦恼) had come from. One of the most common things people shared with us was the change to their temperament in their everyday lives. Tian Lin (田林), a 70-year-old male sutra chanter, clearly associated his change in attitude and personal development with his understanding of Buddhism, and his words mirrored those of many others. He said, "After I started studying, the way I deal with things is different, because I can see things clearly. Sometimes I have difficulty, I know that this is karma from previous lives. I suffer what I should suffer, instead of feeling resentment about it[99]." Not only do the *jushi* describe big changes to their actions and personality, but they also told me it gives them a self-assuredness in their actions and a feeling of security knowing that they were operating within the framework

[99] Interview 12/7/2017 "后来学了这个以后，处理方法就两样了，因为看清楚了，好像。有时候遇到难事了，我就知道这是前世的因缘，该受的应该受，不去怨天怨地了."

provided by their Buddhist studies. Dong Hao offered up a metaphor to help him explain how Buddhism provides this in his life, he said:

> [when] people cross a bridge on either side there is a railing and when we cross the bridge, we may not need the railings. But, what does it represent if a bridge has railings? Safety, feeling at ease...and we can cross the bridge without using the railings. For me, when I first started studying Buddhism it was like the railings of a bridge that helped me feel like I was protected[100].

The *jushi* interviewed at the temple all felt that their entry into Buddhist practice led to changes to the way they approach life and offered a roadmap toward more virtuous action.

By pointing out what is shared among this group of regularly participating group of *jushi* at the temple, we can see what they have in common and how draw the lines between their practice and that of the *xiangke* who practice side by side with them at the temple. In the next chapter, we will look at this foundation and further variation among them to argue for a more grounded definition of practicing lay Buddhism, but first we can look to the *xiangke* to see how they fit together as a distinct group different from the temple *jushi*.

## *XIANGKE* AT THE TEMPLE

### *Who Are the Temple Xiangke?*

The temple *xiangke* are made up mostly of people in the neighborhood surrounding the temple. Puci Temple welcomes a very local community of *xiangke* because, as discussed in Ch. 2, the temple itself is local in its orientation. It is not a well-known temple that draws in many *xiangke* or *jushi* participants from afar. Nearly all the *xiangke* encountered at the temple lived in the neighborhoods adjacent to the temple itself and most commonly came to the temple by foot,

[100] Interview 12/8/2017 “人过桥，两边有栏杆，我们过桥的时候可以不扶栏，可是，有了栏杆，代表什么？安全，安心，我们可以过桥不.”扶栏杆。对我来说，佛教刚刚开始就是像过桥的栏杆，让我的人生好像有人保护.”

bicycle, scooter, or public bus. Practical circumstances prevented a wide survey of the *xiangke* for the purposes of understanding demographic trends[101], but there have been some important demographic changes to the *xiangke* community at the temple that are worth mentioning.

Certainly, there is a stereotype around old ladies coming to pray at the temple and, while it is fair to say that the visitors of the temple are majority women and continues to skew in an older direction, the *xiangke* that come to the temple are more diverse than the stereotype would have us believe. In many ways this is on pattern with life-cycle patterns of religion in other places in the world  Often older people move closer to religion as they age and face mortality (see e.g. Putnam and Campbell 2012). Additionally, women have played a big role in temple life, especially in the last 30 years (see Sun 2014) In the West, there is another bump around childbearing age, but, since Chinese religious practice has less emphasis on passing down religious practice (Jones 2010:108), we don't see as many young families. However, there certainly are instances of families coming together at the temple and where transmission from one generation to the next is taking place. One family I met practices together nearly every 1st and 15th of the lunar month. The father is businessman in the steel industry and his practice is tied to his hopes for business success. But, for this family, who is are originally from Fujian province where religious practice is emphasized more strongly, he does his best to come to temple to light incense with his wife and 2 young daughters.

My observations, along with those of the temple staff and core volunteers, indicate that the temple is slowly shifting toward a younger and more diverse group of *xiangke*. Much of the demographics of participation are tied to opportunity for practice. When important days fall on

[101] See note in Ch.1 about limitations of the study's methodology

the weekend, the temple's diversity skyrockets. When it is a weekday, it is decidedly less diverse. This can also be seen in the ebb and flow of visitors when important days are during the workweek. At 6am, there will be the usual line of retired and dedicated older ladies, but then, before work begins, between 7-9am, there is a rush of decidedly younger *xiangke*. Sticking out during this period is uptick in young men (and women) in white collar attire who come to pray for success in their jobs as realtors, salespeople, etc. Zhang Gui told me that he has noticed a trend toward younger participants at the temple, but also noted that this trend is more pronounced at other temples that are closer to more white-collar jobs and residences. His observations speak to the way the neighborhood surrounding local temples shape the demographics of those who participate.

Ch.2 detailed how the temple has changed since reform and those changes, along with those to the neighborhood, have influenced temple participation and makeup of the wider community of *xiangke*. This temple has always been very local which means it is generally not a place for tourists to visit like many other temples in China and it is generally under the radar on the religious map of Shanghai. It does not hold important events for the Buddhist association or large events intended to draw crowds from elsewhere in the city. From its reconstitution after reform until the renovations, it was tiny and hidden away, only people who wanted to find it knew it was there. At that time, it felt busy but it was tiny, so the overall numbers were low and the attendees were largely the retired ladies of the neighborhood.

The neighborhood where the temple sits used to be very much on the outskirts of town. First farmland, then working class housing, and now it is a quickly gentrifying and developing area owing to its convenient subway access to the center of the city. After renovations the temple grew both in size and influence. It welcomed in more people and the temple and the surrounding

shops peddling ritual materials were buoyed by a massive open-air market that used to sit between the temple and the subway that sold steel, heavy manufactured goods, as well as odds and ends. It was a chaotic place, but it also brought many *xiangke* into the temple for a variety of purposes. The temple fortune teller and the surrounding businesses all report that the market leaving impacting their business[102]. Now the neighborhood is shifting again as the market is being replaced by brand new residential housing that will be sold at prices that continue to change the demographics of the temple. As this happens, following trends elsewhere in the city, we expect the demographics of the *xiangke* to continue to diversify

Since this is a local oriented temple, nearly everyone encountered at the temple lived in the surrounding districts. The minority of people encountered came to the temple as part of religious practice seeking out other temples in a way similar to the *paomiao* 跑庙 activities of the *jushi*[103]. Some told me they were looking for particularly *efficacious* temples and had heard about it. Others hear about the temple in other ways. I ran into a confused couple one time that told me they had come to the temple looking for a particularly efficacious old tree, but they seem to have come to the wrong place. This aligns with the insight of Xiao Li who said that, since the renovation was completed, the stories of the temple's efficaciousness have spread, and she's found that more and more people from other parts of the cities have started to come and seek out the temple.

*Xiangke, Culture, and the Buddhifcation*[104] *of Popular Religion*

[102] There used to be up to 6 fortune tellers on this block, but now only 1 remains. The shops surrounding the temple peddling religious items told me business is way down
[103] See ch. 5
[104] Term borrowed from (Sun 2014)

We have detailed some of the practices of the lay Buddhist *jushi* at the temple and have placed them in juxtaposition with the practices of the wider community of *xiangke* who we have said have a more traditional form of practice rooted in popular religious culture. But, what do we mean by that? The scholars we have engaged with in this chapter have associated these other practices with "using Buddhism" in a "folk mode[105]" or taking advantage of "Buddhist options" as part of a wider popular religious culture[106]. In any event, in order to solidify our argument about lay Buddhism and its relationship to *xiangke* practices, we must establish what we mean when we say that the practices of the *xiangke* are traditional practices that we can associate with the history and culture of popular religion in China.

Popular religion or folk religion are general terms used to encompasses local religious practices and any other types of practice found in China that doesn't fit neatly into the institutional forms of Buddhism, Daoism, or Confucianism. The use of popular religion in the study of Chinese religion has been problematic at times where it has been used as a foil for elite religion or otherwise overly reified (Clart 2007). Popular religion is most distinct when it is studied in rural areas where local tradition creates recognizable structure and community participation. While some scholars have chosen to set out the difference between popular religion and other forms and others have sought to unify, Clart (2007) supports the notion[107] that it "…is not a matter of deciding between the two options, but treating them as poles that create a dynamic tension which is the true locus of the production of culture (16)." As mentioned in Ch.1, there has been a push toward institutionalizing popular religion, but that push minimizes the tension that we see between popular practice and Buddhist practice at the temple. Our research

[105] See Jones 2010
[106] See Ter Haar 2001
[107] His argument follows Catherine Bell's analysis

here emphasizes the need to study the religious ecology of temple and within Chinese culture more broadly where forms of traditional practice from the realm of popular religion are inextricable from other forms of institutionalized Buddhist practice.

Is it clear that the practices of the temple's *xiangke* we have described can be associated with popular religion? I argue, following Clart, that the category of popular religion is useful in its generality and can be applied to this situation. He argues that the category of popular religion is beneficial to research because it "encompass[es] the variety of ways religion is constructed or "done" beyond the institutional and textual contexts of the "Great Traditions," even while considering these contexts as factors in the religious life-world(s) under study (Clart 2007:25)." Stephen Teiser also importantly notes that one way of understanding popular religion is as "forms of religion practiced by almost all Chinese people, regardless of social and economic standing, level of literacy, region, or explicit religious identification" (Teiser in Lopez 1996: 19). As such, I conceptualize the practices of the *xiangke* at the temple as being part of a generalized Chinese popular religious tradition.

We take Clart's understanding of popular religion and apply it to the case of the temple because the practices of the *xiangke* speak to "potential difference" and thus make it useful as an analytic category in tension with more formal lay Buddhist practice. Further, we find that the practices of the *xiangke* at the temple line up with research on popular religion in several ways. They tend toward irregularity and often practice only when an immediate need arises, and these needs are often tied to the individual or the family unit (Chau 2006:62–63). Popular religious practices also are often unproblematically syncretic and the differences between different traditions are not always emphasized. The practices of the *xiangke* at the temple also mirror the description of how popular religious practitioners today have shifted toward using temples in

voluntary and personal, as opposed to communal, ways (Sun 2014). In China's history and in other areas of East Asia, these types of practices in the temple are a part of a more robust set of practices that included other non-Buddhist temples, relational engagement with a wide variety of deities, and also the use of ritual specialists from a variety of traditions (see e.g. Soucy 2012; Ter Haar 2001). The practices we find at the temple in the city today are not as deeply enmeshed in a deeper popular religious culture for several important reasons.

Instead, the *xiangke* who practice at the temple are utilizing a cultural repertoire that is more generalized than it was historically. Fisher (2012) argued this point about the devotees he met making the supplication circuit at the Temple of Universal Rescue in Beijing, and we find that it is also an appropriate way to describe the practices at the temple in Shanghai. Vermander et al. also pointed out this pattern of generalized popular practices (2018:46). So, while the *xiangke* are operating in similar ways as people who drew on popular religious culture in the past, for historical and social reasons they are grasping for traditions that have been broken down and remade following the massive political and social changes in the 20th century. This includes both the obvious changes to the religious culture in the late Qing and republican periods as well as the suppression of religious practice during the time of Mao. Important also here is the movement of people as Shanghai is a city of immigrants which a century ago was a sleepy collection of villages. Movement of people also leads to the breakdown of local popular traditions, traditions that are remade in a new place and time.

I argue that we can understand popular religious practices we see from the *xiangke* at the temple as being part of a process of Buddhification of popular religious practice in the city today. Sun Yanfei (2014) introduces the concept of Buddhification to describe changes to popular religion in rural Zhejiang. There popular religious temples have taken on more characteristics of

Buddhism and practice at temples has shifted from communal to personal and voluntary. She these newly emphasized popular practices focus more on "individual interest" and include "supplication, pilgrimages, and participation in liturgical services" (471). The practices of the *xiangke* at Puci Temple in its urban setting are very similar to these more personal and voluntary forms of popular practice, but what the directionality of the Buddhification is different. As opposed to a shift toward Buddhism through converting popular temples and practices into a more Buddhist form, in the city we find Buddhification by subtraction.

Shanghai, as a late developing metropolis, never had the coverage and variety of religious spaces, ritual providers, and other practices that other areas of China had. Additionally, religious life in urban areas was impacted more heavily by campaigns during the communist period before reform. Where rural areas may have lost only 10 years of time and thus had a better chance of picking traditions back up with less loss, the cities had closer to 30 years of breakdown on popular practice and thus many participants today may have not practiced before that period themselves (Jones 2010:125). The people that I met at the temple did not grow up in a robust milieu of popular practice. Instead, while some long-time Shanghai temple goers remember going to the Daoist City God Temple (*chenghuangmiao* 城隍庙), most reported that any practices they remember from childhood, be it lighting incense or venerating ancestors, took place in one of the few Buddhist temples in the city. And so, today, when they are reaching for help or need to perform family oriented cultural rituals like funerary rituals, they turn to Buddhist options. Many of the *xiangke* I spoke with admitted that they were fuzzy on the boundaries between Buddhism, Daoism, and other practices, and this was exceedingly clear in how the lay

Buddhist *jushi* reflected on their time as *xiangke*. Xu Jing (徐静), a *jushi*, saw the adaption of popular practices into the temple in just that way saying, "Now they all are Buddhified[108]."

Furthermore, in the city today, more and more traditional practices rooted in popular religious culture are being moved into the temple. In Shanghai today Buddhist temples outnumber other temples by a wide margin. The loss of these temples represents a decrease in options for practitioners and also a drop in available knowledge and tradition to draw upon that is compounded by the fact that almost everyone in Shanghai was from somewhere else just 1-2 generations ago. It is not only the loss of temples that push people toward Buddhist temples to practice in traditional ways. According to Ven. Shi, more and more people are seeking out ritual services at the temple because there are fewer ritual specialists for them to call upon to come to their homes.

Another way popular practices are experiencing Buddhification is by being moved into the Buddhist temple is through municipal regulations. *Dongzhi* (冬至 Winter Solstice Festival) of 2017 was an intense day for the volunteers, I ended the day completely covered in the black ash from furnaces that burned the paper money of a seemingly endless procession of families. Amidst the chaos, I spoke to many about why they chose to come to the temple and asked if they came other times of year. While some talked about the temple as a good place for the activity, I was surprised by the number of people that came because they we no longer permitted to perform the practice in their own neighborhood. One popular method for ancestor veneration is to place a chalk circle on the ground outside and burn the paper money within, but as the city

[108] Interview 11/11/2017 "现在都佛花了"

continues develops, more and more neighborhoods are prohibiting burning paper money in public spaces.

While the practices of the *xiangke* are more general than they were historically and moving in the direction of Buddhification, they are importantly still popular practices. They are popular in the way Teiser and Clart point too: that the popular religious culture and practices are diffused widely in Chinese culture. The practices of the *xiangke* reflect continuities with popular practices that are widespread in China. They emphasize, among other things, primacy of the family, syncretic sources of spirituality, and a moral universe (see Fan and Whitehead 2011). They also tend to be practical in orientation and concerned with issues like "health and healing, hope for good fortune, [and] smoothing troubled relations" (Fan et al. 2005:54).In this way, the cultural repertoire that the *xiangke* are drawing on is what Fan et al. have called a "China's common spiritual heritage" (Fan et al. 2005). This heritage is something shared by all the participants at the temple and is a concept we will return to when we discuss the connections between the *jushi* and *xiangke*.

*Considering Xiangke Identity*

One final issue that needs be addressed related to the wider community of *xiangke* that come to the temple and make up the majority of the overall temple participants is that of their own identity. We have said that the term *xiangke* and *jushi* are used extensively on the ground, but they are terms usually used by the *jushi*, monastics, and staff. They are also terms implied in the literature. However, we never heard someone refer to themselves as a *xiangke*. So, then how do they understand what they are doing at the temple in terms of how they understand their own identity?

The temple's wider community of *xiangke* do not consider themselves *jushi*, a term they are familiar with, and certainly not disciples of the Buddha (*fodizi* 佛弟子), a term only used by the most dedicated Buddhists. Also, as mentioned above, they seldom associate themselves with the common translation for Buddhist disciple (*fojiaotu* 佛教徒), though that may be changing over time. Instead, the *xiangke* I spoke with at the temple tended to identify themselves in opposition to those terms. They did not seem to be worried about giving the impression of being a Buddhist because they did not want to be associated with religion, but, instead, because they understood that their own practice was something less than Buddhism (whatever that may be in their eyes). They most often moved quickly to saying they were just normal people, something less than whatever a practicing Buddhist may be. I heard this many times and people used various Chinese words to express this "normality" including *yibande* (一般的), *pingchangde* (平常的), and *putongde* (普通的) which are all variations on the same theme. The distancing themselves from Buddhism and religion was sometimes in stark contrast to the context of our discussion. I will never forget a young lady in her mid-20s that I met around 3am on the eve of Chinese New Year 2017 sitting contemplatively eating noodles in the temple canteen. I struck up a conversation -- I talked to her about Buddhism and what she was doing there. I said, you must be quite serious about your practice to be here at this time. She said, "I am just a normal person[109]." She told me she came to the temple every year on this night to light incense and pray because it made her feel close to her parents who lived in another city and to her grandmother who had passed.

[109] Field Notes 1/28/2017 "我就是普通的人"

Saying that they were just “regular” or “normal” was one way in which they expressed that they did not consider themselves Buddhist or some other kind of religionist, and they also created this distance by saying that they “do not understand (*budongde* 不懂得).” *Xiangke* that visited the temple often had a limited understanding of the practices they were doing, mirroring what has been said about the general nature of these types of practices, and this was something that they themselves recognized. I often tried to engage *xiangke* in light discussion of their activities and expressing lack of understanding was a common, knee-jerk response. They felt that they barely understood and, thus, could not feel confident explaining to me. However, unlike the lay Buddhists who may not feel confident explaining their Buddhist understandings for fear of karmic consequences for conveying a misunderstanding of the dharma (说偏 *shuopian*), these *xiangke* seemed to be genuine in saying they don’t understand in comparison to whoever they saw as Buddhist or religious people[110].

While these people did not consider themselves Buddhists, they did not shy away from the concept of belief (*xinyang* 信仰). It was common in response to my inquiries into their practice for them to respond that they “have belief (*youxinyang* 有信仰)” or “have a little belief (*youdianxinyang* 有点信仰).” These types of answers came in response to me asking the purpose of their practice, if they were Buddhist disciples (*fojiaotu* 佛教徒), and. occasionally, if they believe in the Buddha (*xinfo* 信佛). Participants most commonly expressed belief in the Bodhisattva (*pusa* 菩萨) and this was especially common when discussing the Bodhisattva

[110] One example of this being the procedures for burning paper money on a holiday for ancestors. The temple would leave out example bags with instructions for how to fill out the name and date on the bag. Again, this is not a Buddhist practice per se, but supported by the temple

Guanyin (*guanyinpusa* 观音菩萨). The use of the concept of belief by this kind of practitioner drawing on popular religious culture is surprising. Adam Chau's work on popular religion in Shaanbei found that the word belief was conspicuously absent from the participants vocabulary (2006:61). Scholars have indicated that a discussion of belief, along with religion, is something of an anathema for average Chinese practitioners influenced by popular religious culture.

While it is possible that, given some of my interactions included use of the word belief, that we have overemphasized the extent to which belief was a relevant concept among these *xiangke*, I do not think that is the case. The concept of belief came up again and again in my discussions with both *xiangke* and lay Buddhists. The *xiangke* were reaching to express a reason why they were there in supplication and it seems that belief is a concept they felt comfortable using. The *jushi* talked about belief in a different way that offers clues about how belief is being used among both groups at the temple. They referred directly to the beliefs of the *xiangke* and make connection between them and a change in the state's stance toward belief. Over the past several years Xi Jinping and the government have shifted their stance on the position of belief in society. According to the people I met at the temple, belief, be it more traditional form of belief or a more formal Buddhist one, is an important component in maintaining a harmonious society. Lay Buddhists and *xiangke* alike told me that traditional beliefs were a way to ensure that Chinese society was set on firm ethical footing and oriented away from pure materialism. We will return to this idea again in Ch. 6, but it is important to note here that the *xiangke* often consider themselves, and are consider by others, to be believers.

The *xiangke* of the temple may not think of themselves as Buddhists or religionists, but they are there performing practices oriented toward the Buddha and Bodhisattva and, often, consider themselves believers. This makes it even more important to take seriously the ways in

which these participants “do religion” and better understand the ecological relationship between their practices and those of the lay Buddhists.

## DISCUSSION

We opened this chapter presenting a picture of each of the main groups of participants at the temple. We have added clarity and structure to a distinction that is both discussed in the literature and is a relevant binary on the ground at the temple itself. As we have shown, there are two recognizably different groups of temple participants who practice at the temple in different ways, with different aims and understandings, and even based on two distinct religious foundations. However, there is also much they do share and, together, they make up the community at the temple and there would be no temple without each of these juxtaposed groups.

### *Difference*

#### *1) Identity.*

Lay Buddhists are the most likely participants to take on an explicit Buddhist identity and associate themselves with religious practice, while the *xiangke* are still likely to distance themselves from labels associated with Buddhism or Religion. The strongest form of identity is found among Lay Buddhist practitioners who have taken refuge in the three treasures (皈依三宝) and begun concerted practice among other Buddhists. These participants are comfortable with a variety of identity labels including *jushi* (居士), *fodizi* (佛弟子), *fojiaotu* (佛教徒) and feel no need to distance their practice from the concept of religion (宗教 *zongjiao*). These strong identity lay Buddhists have the clearest self-identity, but other lay Buddhists, at least by the definition we have established, may not feel comfortable with all of these labels. Of particular

note, are people who have begun to concerted practice in the personal cultivational modality and recognize themselves as different from their parents or other *xiangke* but have yet to take refuge and may not yet consider themselves pious or dedicated enough for the strong identity. Observations indicate this has a lot to do with the context of their practice, those who spend more time with strong identity lay Buddhists are more likely to feel less intimidated by the labels.

The wider community of *xiangke* participants, however, work to distance themselves from common labels amounting to a Buddhist or other religious identity. They recognize that their own practices and understandings of them do not amount to formal Buddhism or religion, whatever they understand that to be. This position is common in China and has been owing to the status of religion in Chinese society over the past 100 years, the definition of a religious practitioner is exceedingly narrow. Unless you are devout, you do not associate. We can see this in their descriptions of themselves as "normal people" "who do not understand." We do, however, find a willingness for these *xiangke* to express that they have belief. The willingness to express this is a new finding in the research and may indicate a trend in how belief and the associated popular practices are viewed in urban society which, according to the participants, is related to a changing state position of the role of belief in a harmonious society.

*2) Purpose and understanding.*

We have detailed the ways in which the lay Buddhist *jushi's* practice is oriented toward goals rooted in Buddhist ideas and culture. Most commonly soteriological goals based on the Buddha Dharma like the aforementioned transcending the cycle of life and death (*liao shengsi* 了生死) and being delivered to Western Bliss (*jileshijie* 极乐世界). These goals pursued through concerted cultivation practices were often rooted in a specific understanding of the Dharma that

practitioners have from the context and content of their practice. We have seen also, however, that this image of the learned Buddhist following the path set out by the Dharma is an ideal type, at best. We find that among the participants we consider lay Buddhists there is significant variation along both dimensions. Therefore, we will argue that instead of looking at the content of practice to conceptualize lay Buddhism, we should look at *how* that purpose is pursued and how that may or may not relate to their understanding.

The *xiangke* participants, owing to the narrative binary between these groups, also present an ideal type in terms of purpose and understanding that places them in stark contrast to the temple's *jushi*. Most *xiangke* come to the temple seeking material blessings (*rentianfobao* 人天福报) for themselves and their families (both living and passed). They come to take advantage of personal aspects of the temple much in the way that Sun (2014) finds people practicing temple-based popular religion in Zhejiang. The temple's *xiangke* don't claim a deep understanding of their practices or recognize a connection to any overarching set of religious practices. For them, these practices at the temple are traditional activities that they should be performing for themselves and their families based on need. They may believe in the efficaciousness of these practices, but do not generally have a deeper understanding of the religious sources of their practices or how to discern Buddhist practices from popular ones. Nor, importantly, did we find that it is a relevant consideration for them.

*3) Frequency.*

Frequency of practice is another important and obvious difference between the *jushi* and the *xiangke* at the temple. We have implied a regularity in practice among the *jushi* at the temple and, as we will see more in the next chapter, this consistency is important for their lay Buddhist

goals. Thinking about the *jushi* as a group this way does not mean that there is a minimum threshold, but that continued, regular practice is the hallmark of a practicing lay Buddhist. Most of the *jushi* interviewed also detailed their daily practice at home and how that was punctuated by participation at the temple and elsewhere[111]. Regular participation alone at the temple demonstrates a commitment to regular practice where weekday groups meet 2-3 times per week, the Sunday group weekly, and the volunteers at least 2 times per month.

On the other hand, infrequency in a way that differs significantly from what we see from the *jushi*, is a known feature of popular religious practices in China. As Chau notes of his participants:

> The average shaanbei religious "believer" does not own any religious text to read, does not form a congregation to meet at regular religious intervals, and does not pray to any particular deity with any frequency. His or her religiosity is normally diffused but is intensified by some personal or familial crisis (Chau 2006:62–63)

The *xiangke* at the temple's practices and their frequency seem to have much in common Chau's participants and that lends additional evidence that we should consider their practices as part of Chinese popular religious practice even it is more generalized and has experienced Buddhification in the context of this urban temple. Certainly, some *xiangke* come to practice with more regularity either centered on the 1st and/or 15th of the lunar calendar or focused on the holidays associated with Guanyin or some other Buddha or Bodhisattva which, as the nuns told me, is the tradition in the neighborhood, but they are still coming to perform personal practices and certainly aren't coming to "form a congregation." Others, like Zhang Gui did when *xiangke*, come once or twice a year on days that deem important for themselves or owing to family traditions and obligations. However, there is little practice beyond these trips to the temple and

[111] Details of outside participation in Ch. 5

most of the *xiangke* only come when the circumstances of life dictate it. While the infrequency and associated absence of regular practice distinguishes them from temple's *jushi* and perhaps distances them from practicing lay Buddhism, but we must be careful not to apply normative judgement to the extent to which they are practicing religion. Too often these people are invisible in the study of religion in China. However, some research, like that of Nancy Ammerman (1997), shows that depth, understanding, and infrequency does not necessarily make religion unimportant in people lives. The lack of self-identity makes these people harder to study (whereas many non-practicing Christians in the west maintain a Christian identity) but understanding the value of these practices (or lack thereof) remains an important and open question in research on Chinese religion.

*Connections*

Developing a schema for distinguishing difference between the ideal types of the *xiangke* and *jushi* at the temple is important for trying to understand religious ecology of temple itself and lay Buddhist practice more broadly. This will allow us to contribute additional information to the literature that already focuses on committed lay Buddhists like the temple's *jushi*. However, pointing out the connections between the *xiangke* and *jushi* as it relates to the temple and their practices is also important. Too often, the practices of the *xiangke* that emerge from a generalized popular religious culture are hand-waved as something less than formal Buddhism or formal religion and is largely ignored. In pointing out some of the ways in which these two groups are connected, especially in the context of their practices at a shared sacred site, I begin to setup the argument in the chapters that follow that see how important both groups are to the temple and temple Buddhism in China more generally. We find that when both groups practice,

they often share time and space, symbols and images, and some relevant cultural concepts and understandings.

Obvious as it appears, it is important to emphasize that, despite of all the differences in practices and orientations between the different practitioners we find at the temple, they are all practicing at the same place, a local Buddhist temple. Further, all these people view this place as having sacred and spiritual import. The reasons they give for coming to the temple may be different, but participants from each of these groups determined that should go and perform certain practices rooted in religious culture and the temple was the best place for them to do so. Certainly, as we have also argued, there are structural reasons why popular practices are being pushed into the temple, but these participants, both the lay Buddhist *jushi* and the *xiangke*, have decided to practice in public at the temple. Not only to they share this sacred space of the temple, but they do so with a shared calendar and set of overarching values.

We have said that frequency of practice is a major point of difference between the lay Buddhist *jushi* and the wider community of *xiangke*, and that point gains additional relevance when practices both in and out of the temple are considered. However, practices of both groups within the temple as mentioned in Ch. 2 have a shared sense of time and tradition based on the lunar calendar. The busiest and most important days at the temple are important days for all involved, *jushi* and *xiangke*. This is because they occur on dates that have relevance both for the dedicated lay Buddhists and the wider community that is drawing on shared Chinese popular religious culture. The meaning behind trips to the temple according to the ritual calendar may be different, but both groups believe that it is important to venerate ancestors and show respect to the Buddha and Bodhisattva according to a shared calendar. We often find these two groups sharing the same space and time but practicing differently. This separation within the space is sometimes

physical and at other times interpersonal, which is a topic we will return to in Ch. 6. The connections often go even deeper than this, however, as the two groups also share symbols and practices.

The most visible shared practice at the temple are incense burning, kneeling before the Buddha and Bodhisattva, and offering donations in the form of money or goods. These are the most common and fundamental practices found at the temple. When the lay Buddhist *jushi* and the *xiangke* light incense and kneel before the Buddha (*shaoxiangbaifo* 烧香拜佛), the practices are often indistinguishable. Sure, a trained eye may be able to sense a confidence or see signs of difference in actions or appearance, but they are nearly identical activities. Both practices share the same space, symbol (for example, an image of a Buddha or Bodhisattva), and general form of practice (kneeling, lighting incense, presenting offerings). The differences in understanding of the very same practices could be wide, but we have already shown that understandings of practices vary widely within each of the groups as well. The shared practices alone should demand that we seek to understand the ecology of temple Buddhism in a way that accounts for the practices of both groups.

Beyond the connections between the groups in terms of shared sacred space, time, symbols, and practices there are also connections related to more general forms of culture that remain important to the practices of both groups and motivate their practices. We have mentioned that the wider community of *xiangke* practice based on a cultural repertoire based on shared popular religious culture and that it is built upon a spiritual heritage (Fan et al. 2005) shared widely across Chinese culture. Fan et al. argue that this heritage has been well documented in rural areas and her research extends this understanding to urban populations. The Chinese spiritual heritage, according to Fan et al., emerges from “plural sources of spiritual

nourishment" including Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism (Fan et al. 2005:55). Foundational to this shared spiritual heritage is the connectedness between individuals, especially the family, and the concept of moral reciprocity (Fan and Whitehead 2011). Moral reciprocity here is the idea that actions, good or bad have consequences, thus the universe is moral. In fact, Fan et al. note that most fundamental shared moral universe a basic understanding of recompense for actions, a simple form of karma, that was long ago borrowed from Buddhism but are now "woven thoroughly into the fabric of Chinese culture" (Fan et al. 2005:55). While participants from different groups may have a different understanding of how the universe is moral, it is an important shared concept across both groups. These ideas offer a foundation for the practices of both even if the meanings for these concepts may differ.

Another important shared cultural foundation of both groups, related to the fact that Chinese culture puts family connectedness front and center, is an emphasis on filial piety (*xiao* 孝) in the practices of both groups. The *jushi* and the *xiangke* at the temple emphasize the respect for, and veneration of, parents and ancestors in their practice. Buddhism has long served as a bridge between Buddhist and popular culture in this regard and Puci Temple today is no different. Some *jushi* may not completely approve of the ways in which the *xiangke* come to practice, but the reality is there is more shared than there is difference. They are both drawing on a shared cultural understanding that the temple is the place to go and demonstrate that they are filial. These types of shared understandings about the way the world works draws shows the relationship between the groups and why they should be considered part of the same religious ecology and milieu. We will see in Ch.7 how these shared values and overarching shared spiritual heritage serves as the basis for important community formation and renewal at the temple.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter we taken an analysis of the people and practices at Puci Temple and used them to develop a better understanding the difference between regularly participating, lay Buddhist *jushi* and the temple's wider community of *xiangke*. We have been able to point out what is shared by the members of these groups and show that they are practicing based on two very different religious foundations. However, we have also started to point to the ways in which they may be more similarity than a simple binary would lead us to believe. In the remaining chapters we will continue to draw out the ways in which boundaries and difference are reinforced at the temple, but we will describe the way they work together and support each other at the temple in explicit and implicit ways. We will also utilize our understanding of how these groups fit together to propose a theoretical definition of practicing lay Buddhism that makes clear the difference between the two groups and where they are connected. Further, we will see that leaving the *xiangke* out of our discussion of the religious ecology of Buddhism at the temple and of the wider religious ecology of Buddhism in China is misguided and that the relationship between these different types of people "doing religion" at the temple is critical for the continued success of the temple itself. In the next chapter we will see how variation within the practices of the temple's *jushi* provides a window into understanding the ecology of lay Buddhist practice in China today.

## Chapter 5: In the Temple and Beyond – *Varieties of Lay Buddhist Practice*

Our deep exploration of both groups of participants and practices at Puci Temple (*pucitang* 普慈堂) also provides a fantastic opportunity contribute to a better understanding of the varieties of lay Buddhism in China today more broadly. To do so, we must consider the practices of the participants both inside and outside of the temple. A focus on the practices of the participants lends insight into the varieties of ways they engage with Buddhism including in some ways that emphasize formal and exclusive Buddhism, and others that continue to have much in common with the more traditional forms of popular practice we see from the temple's *xiangke*. The deep interviews with the temple's *jushi* about their engagement with Buddhism provide key data which allows us to contribute an important new perspective to the academic discussion of contemporary lay Buddhist practice in China today.

In this chapter we look at how the activities the *jushi* participate in the temple connect to other practices they engage in outside of the temple to make up their "personal packages[112]" of Buddhist practice. We have already demonstrated that the temple's *jushi* have much in common with each other and have a group identity, especially in the temple, but we have also begun to point to internal variation among the group. Here we will further explore their internal difference and utilize it to offer new findings about the ecology of lay Buddhism in China today. In making this contribution, we will utilize Chau's (2011) "modalities of doing religion" in China to propose a theoretically grounded defining feature of lay Buddhism. We will also utilize this schema to further develop a spectrum that describes the varieties of lay Buddhist practice.

[112] Word borrowed from Jones 2010

Previous attempts to define and describe the varieties of lay Buddhist practice have lacked firm theoretical grounding and are unable to adequately elucidate the difference between the *jushi* and the *xiangke* we find at Puci Temple and elsewhere. By focusing on what the participants do, their modes of practices, and the ways in which they pursue them, we are able look at packages of practice in order to conceptualize internal difference. In doing so, we will also draw out the important connections between the formal practice of lay Buddhism and the popular religious practices we see from the temple's *xiangke* and many other Chinese people. Of those who meet our definition of a practicing lay Buddhist, we find on one side a more traditional practitioners of Buddhism that embraces popular religious elements and are unproblematically syncretic, and on the other a more modern, rational Buddhist that tend to embrace the more structured, confessional, and intellectual.

## A VIEW OF LAY BUDDHISM FROM THE GROUND AT THE TEMPLE

In Chs. 3 and 4 we looked at the activities the *jushi* participate in at the temple to explore the opportunities the temple provides for them and get a closer look at how these dedicated Lay Buddhists make meaning from participating in the chanting groups, volunteering program, and ritual assemblies. This investigation revealed a group of people that had much in common in their practice at the temple and how they understood it. They also showed continuity with the way lay Buddhists have been described elsewhere. As has been mentioned and you might expect, there is significant overlap between the people who participate in the different activities at the temple. Certainly, there is no way to think about the small groups for each activity as totally separate from each other and, while you also can't say that this group is exclusive or even cohesive, for many of them, their practice at the temple is the locus of their Buddhist practice. This is especially true for the chanting groups whose members, as we will look at more below,

often also participate in the ritual assemblies and contribute to volunteering efforts. We have also seen that these *jushi* share quite a bit in common in terms of identity, practice, and worldview.

However, while the *jushi* participants have important similarities and group cohesiveness, we must be careful not to see these *jushi* as a monolithic group whose similarity as rooted in an institutionalized combination of practices set forth by the temple. As we will continue to explore in the following chapters, and has been argued by Jones (2010:77), urban temples are generalist organizations that provide a range of opportunities that can be utilized by lay practitioners in a number of ways. While temple does provide what Jones calls the "traditional devotee" package of volunteering and ritual services, it is also a node in the wider practice of many of the lay Buddhists in ways that challenge simplified stereotypes of temple Buddhism. The practices that we see within the temple walls are not the entirety of the Buddhist practice for these individuals, they all take part in additional practice outside of the temple walls, be that individually or with formal or informal groups.

Combining various types of practice into individual packages of Buddhist practice has long been a feature of Chinese lay Buddhism. Jones (2010) argues that this is owing to the inclusiveness of Buddhist doctrine and also influence of state control[113]. In the interviews with these regular participants, I focused on what they "do" both inside and outside of the temple and was able to identify a variety of common activities. Jones's work in Nanjing offers up her own categories of lay Buddhist options, and my work seems to echo hers in significant ways. However, we will see that there is a very different emphasis among sample of temple *jushi*.

[113] See Ch. 3 in Jones (2010) for her more extended argument

Jones sets up the available lay Buddhist opportunities for practice by talking about red and grey market[114] producers of lay Buddhism. Our participants are encountered at the temple, an official "red" producer (though we will challenge what this means in Ch.7), and this certainly influences how the rest of their packages are constructed[115]. The participants at the temple also take part in Buddhist activities though other legitimate producers of Buddhism, unofficial organized Buddhist activities, informal group activities, and personal practices. It should also be noted that these activities come from a mixture of different Buddhist entities including all 3 types of Buddhist groups that Sun (2011) notes in her breakdown of the religious ecology of Buddhism in contemporary china which says a lot about the diversity of lay practice.

*Lay Buddhist Practices Beyond the Temple Walls*

*1) Official producers.*

The *jushi* encountered at the temple reported taking part in regular activities at other official producers of Buddhism including other temples and the Shanghai Lay Buddhist Association (*shanghai fojiao jushilin* 上海佛教居士林). The most common practice of this type was attending certain important rituals at larger temples either on the outskirts of Shanghai or in other cities. It is common among temple participants because this practice is an extension of their ritual activities at the Puci Temple. However, the small temple run by nuns does not have the ability to put on a ritual like, for example, the Grand Water and Land Assembly (*shuilufahui* 水陆法会) which requires the cooperation of many male monastics. It is common for people from

[114] She takes this formulation from Yang Fenggang (2006). I will not be discussing application of market theory here, but instead use these as expedient categories for noting official vs unofficial organized practices.
[115] Meaning that we take for granted that the type of packages of the people we find at the temple is not representative of all lay Buddhist practitioners.

the temple, especially members of the sutra chanting groups, to attend this kind of assembly. Some expressed that they attended them simply because they could not do them at Puci Temple, but others also attended for additional rituals, ones that may be offered locally, and the most common reasons for attending were either that was the location of their family memorial tablet or that they had some previous fa connection (*yuanfen* 缘分) with a monastic at that temple. The ritual assemblies at these larger temples are often longer, sometimes a week-long or more[116], and they are presided over by male monastics which at least a few respondents admitted made the ritual feel more solemn. Several temples came up multiple times and were attended by multiple regular temple *jushi* which demonstrates how networks of lay Buddhist flow through different sets of producers.

Some of the participants at the temple also went to other temples for intensive study and cultivation. Last year a small group from the Sunday chanting group went together to spend a long weekend at *Gaoming Si* (高明寺) in Yangzhou, Jiangsu which is a famous temple for Chan meditation, and during interviews, 16 of the 43 lay Buddhist respondents directly mentioned a trip they had made to a temple for intensive cultivation in the recent past. (See Figure 5.1) Respondents talked in positive terms about their experiences. They believed that this kind of seclusion (*biguan* 闭关) was good for their practice and helped them to live up to certain standards[117]. He Xia (何霞), a 66-year-old who is now quite serious about her practice oriented toward Pure Land Buddhism, used to spend a lot of time taking pilgrimages and leisure trips to holy sites around China, but now her trips outside the city are focused only on trips to temples

[116] One need not attend all 7 days. go for the final 2 days of an assembly that fell on the weekend. The longest a respondent mentioned spending at an assembly was 30 days.
[117] For example, eating vegetarian while they were staying at the temple

specializing in Pure Land cultivation. Here, she is seeking out producers that fit her personal orientation.

Finally, the last official producer that is attended by some of the temples *jushi* is the Shanghai Lay Buddhist Association which is an association solely dedicated to lay Buddhist practice, run by and for lay Buddhists. The space in central Shanghai does not have any monastics and will only occasionally invite monastics for special activities. However, it is the most vibrant place for sutra chanting in Shanghai where up to several hundred chanters at one time will come to practice in the large halls. They also offer chanting and other activities during the day mainly for the older generation, but also have evening events that are led by younger lay people. There is significant overlap between the sutra chanting opportunities at the temple and at the lay association, so most of the participants I encountered participated there only semi-regularly when it did not interfere with their chanting at the temple. Further, I met a lot of people from the association through informal Buddhist networks at the temple during Buddhist inspired leisure activities that I will mention below.

*2) Unofficial, organized producers.*

In addition to these legitimate and organized activities, and perhaps more common, are put on by organized, but unofficial producers of lay Buddhist practice. These practices are "grey" or unofficial in the sense that they do not operate officially through legitimate producers of Buddhism[118]. However, we must not understand these practices as underground, clandestine, or even, at times, truly unaffiliated with official producers.

[118] Seems unnecessary here to rehash the arguments of many about the impact of state control over official and unofficial religion.

Organized unofficial activities can be split into 2 different types. The first type is the most common that I encountered in my discussions with lay Buddhists at the temples. They are organized, but unsystematic practices meaning that they offer opportunities for cultivation, but not formal systematic study. Of these, releasing life activity groups (*fanshengqun* 放生群) are the most prevalent. Releasing life is quite common among the temple *jushi* and likely the most popular lay activity in the city, especially among young people. I was told this by many, including several for whom it was their very first organized encounter with Buddhism. I was told these groups are so popular because they are very easy to search for online. Often, initial participation in a releasing life activity leads to introduction to other kinds of cultivation practice. This is true of the Pure Land chanting group that meets twice monthly at the temple. They also organize a releasing life activity and that serves as an informal recruitment tool for their chanting group. The releasing of life is another way for practitioners to accumulate merit and shed karmic debt. Participants will meet lay organizers at an agreed upon location near the river, spend some time chanting, and then release buckets of small fish into the water that had been purchased in advance via funds collected in advance by crowdsourcing from the participants.

Groups, like the one just mentioned, dedicated to chanting the name of the Amitabha Buddha in the Pure Land tradition are other examples of organized, unofficial and unsystematic cultivation. The temple itself offers the ritual space downstairs to this lay group for practice twice a month. The group itself is not associated with the temple nor under the direction of the nuns. Instead, they offer them space for their chanting for free[119] twice per month. The group follows in the tradition of a famous Pure Land temple in the south of China, but, as we know

[119] While the group is not formally charged by the temple, the group does collect a nominal amount of money from group members each time they come to practice at the temple. The 20RMB covers the entrance, lunch, and cost of utilities. This money is informally deposited in the merit boxes as general donations.

from how state regulations are structured, the group is not able to be officially connected to the temple. This did not, however, prevent anyone from talking about the relationship between their practices and the temple, further, the members of the group often visited the temple for intensive study and cultivation.

Another of these organized cultivation opportunities that a subset of temple participants also engaged in was Buddhist, specifically Pure Land, inspired volunteering at a local retirement home and nearby hospice care center. At the retirement home, volunteers come to entertain and spend time with residents and share with them the power of Amitabha Buddha (*Amituofo* 阿弥陀佛) to deliver them to Western Bliss (*jile shijie* 极乐世界) when their time comes. This was the most explicit proselytizing activity I encountered in the field, but at the retirement home, the group is careful only to spread their religious message to the guests who are open to hearing it, and this is a stipulation for their cooperation with the facility. When I attended, I found that their efforts brought much joy to the lives of the residents. The main goal here for the volunteers is collecting merit and teaching those near the end of life to chant the name of Amitabha Buddha. I also found that the emphasis on Pure Land teachings, specifically a strong focus on chanting the name of the Buddha, gave the people I met from this group a much more distinct confessional identity[120].

These various organized cultivation activities provide important opportunities for lay Buddhists to seek out practices that fit their orientation to Buddhism, but there were also several respondents that participated in a second type of more structured lay organization which included both cultivation and systematic study. These groups were the least common type of outside

[120] Like the temple Pure Land group, they too speak of their way of practice as passed on to them from a prominent Jingtu temple, this time in the North.

organization I encountered, but also the most structured. These groups have a more modern, intellectual approach to Buddhism and the participants are generally more educated and skewed a bit younger than the other organizations we have mentioned. Here people come to study and cultivate under the direction of a lay leader and with the aid of study materials from usually distant monastics. Here there is an emphasis on discussion and growth in terms of understanding of the dharma. These groups also assign homework (*gongke* 功课) which keeps participants of a structured path of development. As such, people participating in these groups have a stronger emphasis on the details of the type of Buddhism they are practicing and are more likely to draw boundaries about their type of practice and that of others.

*3) Informal group activities.*

Organized, unofficial group activities and official organization activities were not the only ways in which the lay Buddhists I met practiced Buddhism together. Some *jushi* also got together in smaller social networks for both explicit cultivation and more informal, leisure inflected cultivation. One example of this type of practice takes place in the home of He Xia, where weekly she holds a small salon to chant the name of Amitabha Buddha. She never fancied herself an organizer of religious practice, but she was encouraged to do this by another lay person she met on a cultivation retreat at a prominent Pure Land temple. He told her that she had the unique ability for those who have passed to hear her voice when she chants the name of Amitabha, and so she should start a chanting group for herself and for them. She was nervous, but she started this small group with her close friends at home and it has become very important to them all. As their ages increase, several of the members use digital communication to telecommute into the meeting for them all to cultivate together.

In addition to this type of cultivation focused informal group activity, I also spent many days during my time in Shanghai on day trips with a close-knit group of friends composed of members of the weekday sutra chanting groups from the temple and their personal networks of lay Buddhist friends[121]. These trips were generally organized by the head of the Tues, Thursday, Saturday chanting group, but in her capacity as a social node, not a lay religious leader. These trips consisted of visits to temple, vegetarian restaurants, and, sometimes, parks and other non-religious sites. This activity is generally known as *paomiao*[122] (跑庙 trans. running around to temples). Visiting these temples give the *jushi* an opportunity to venerate images of the Buddha and Bodhisattva, see new temples, and, most importantly contribute alms[123] (*fabushi* 发布施). They report that going to these temples is another way of collecting merit that also contributes to the spread of Buddhism, a type of *jieyuan* (结缘 forming Buddhic bonds[124]). There was a special emphasis on visiting *ku miao* (苦庙), poorer temples who need help from lay Buddhists in the city. However, among the *jushi* there is disagreement as to whether donating to poorer temples earned more merit. All did agree though that this was preferable to donating money at the prominent temples in the city and even preferable to donating at Puci Temple where they spend the most of their time.

In addition to these trips in and around the city, many of the participants spoke of trips outside the city to visit pilgrimage sites, most prominently the sacred mountains. Shanghai is

[121] Many of whom they know through the Lay Buddhist Association and who come to the temple occasionally. However, many of these people live further away and thus don't come regularly to the temple.
[122] This activity has a mixed reputation among lay practitioners on different places on the spectrum that we will introduce below. Some found that this type of travel to other temples was not a good use of their time since all images are the same everywhere and Buddhists should not have a discerning heart.
[123] This could be money in the merit boxes, contributing to building funds, or bringing fruit, rice, or oil.
[124] See Fisher (2014) Ch. 3

quite close to *Putuoshan* (普陀山) and *Jiuhuashan* (九华山), and so it is convenient for lay practitioners to travel privately or in informally organized groups of fellow practitioners. This style of pilgrimage has long been a part of lay practice in China, both those who are explicitly Buddhist and those who have practice in a more popular fashion (Yu in Naquin et al. 1992: 190-245).

*4) Individual practices.*

The last type of lay practice that our respondents take part in outside of the temple are individual practices. These are clearly less visible than the group activities but were important components to the practice of most of the *jushi* interviewed. The most common individual practice encountered was morning devotions. Of the 43 interviewees coded as *jushi* from the temple, 26 of them explicitly mentioned a morning devotion routine[125]. This could be as simple as presenting incense or a glass of water before a Buddhist image or a more elaborate ritual practice lasting upwards of an hour. For most of the sutra chanters, this morning devotion mirrored the morning devotion from the temple and utilized the same ritual text.

Participants also report spending time cultivating and studying at home. This could include chanting scriptures, chanting the name of Amitabha, listening to monastics talk about scriptures, or just scrolling through Buddhist materials shared with them on social media. For many people, these practices were what they hoped to do at home but only did so when they had time. Others would make their home study part of a vow they had taken where they would show their piety by promising (*fayuan* 发愿) to chant a given sutra a certain amount of times. The

[125] See Figure 5.1. I only had 3 people explicitly said they did no morning devotion. In other of the interviews, there is no mention of the morning devotion in response to questions about practices, but that does not rule it out.

extent of these home-based practices varied widely, and most of the people expressed their preference for cultivating alongside others.

The most structured of the home practices were those of the respondents who had taken on a more explicit Pure Land approach to Buddhism. While many of them focus only on reciting the name of Amitabha as many times as they could throughout the day, others set requirements for themselves, usually between 10-20 thousand times per day. Some used an APP put out by an official Pure Land temple that allowed them to keep track of their daily count, and others were members of informal WeChat groups where they post their daily number and receive positive feedback from others.

| Temple *jushi* Respondents (43) | Personal practices | official outside org for cultivation/study | official outside org for ritual | Unofficial, systematic cultivation/study | Unofficial, unsystematic group cultivation | Informal pilgrimage or temple visits | Taken refuge / further vows |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Weekday Chanter (15) | 15 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 15 |
| Sunday Chanter (14) | 13 | 6 | 4 | 0 | 4 | 9 | 13 |
| Volunteer/other (14) | 13 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 7 | 5 | 10 |

**Figure 5.1: Jushi Respondents' Lay Practices Beyond the Temple**

*One Temple, Variations in Lay Practice*

In looking at the types of activities that the *jushi* participate outside of the temple, we can start to get a feel for the different types of personal packages that are being undertaken by the variety of *jushi* practitioners at the temple. There seems to be two general types: 1) those for whom the temple, and other official temples, are the primary sites for their practice and 2) those for whom the temple is an element of their practice which in oriented elsewhere. In this, we can

begin to see a trend in the way in which the people practice at the temple and how it points to different ways of practicing lay Buddhism.

We will come back to this wider variation within participants later, but there is a clear trend visible in Figure 5.1. We find those *jushi* who participate in sutra chanting groups, especially the weekday groups where retired older ladies are most common, are much more likely to focus solely on the temple or the temple plus activities at additional official producers like temples or the lay association. Those people whose primary regular activity at the temple is volunteering or whom I met at the temple in some other way, and to an extent the more diverse Sunday sutra chanting group, have a wider variety of practices, including notably more participation in unofficial organized cultivation activities.

Song Jie's (宋洁) personal package is like many fellow members of the weekdays chanting groups. She is a 74-year-old retired elementary school teacher[126] who has lived in the neighborhood around the temple since she was a young adult. She became more interested in Buddhism as her mother's health failed and she began to go to temple to light incense on her mom's behalf. After her mother's passing, she placed her memorial tablet in the temple and started going to light incense on the 1st of each lunar month. Once she retired, she decided to take refuge in the 3 jewels and begin to spend more time practicing Buddhism. She started taking part in the sutra chanting group and became a regular volunteer at the temple. She says she is focused on the types of practices where she can collect merit for herself and pass some of it on to her parents, a task made more poignant by the presence of their memorial tablets. She also enjoys visiting other temples where she can donate alms, a type of cultivation activity that she finds

[126] She does not have a college degree as elementary school teachers of her era needed only a *zhongzhuan* (中专) certificate

particularly impactful. She will also occasionally visit other temples for rituals, but almost all her practice is focused on Puci Temple and occasional visits to other official producers of Buddhism.

Liang Yi[127] (梁毅) was very regular and reliable in his participation in the volunteering group, almost never missing an opportunity. He was also different than many others; confident in the way he talked about his Buddhist practice and more willing than most to express it. However, he never attended ritual assemblies nor participated in the sutra chanting groups at the temple, and I also never heard him talk of visiting other temples. I spent some time with him outside the temple by joining him at an organized and systematic lay Buddhist group where he is a core member. They meet each Sunday for cultivation and study in a room at an office building setup to look like a temple hall. The group is well organized and offers him a systematic course of study. As part of the group, they also organize a releasing life activity weekly, and Liang Yi is an informal leader. He explained to me that his Buddhist practice was of 2 kinds; one where he cultivates for wisdom and one where he cultivates purely for merit. His time at the temple allowed him to collect merit at the most convenient location to his house, but his time at the temple otherwise had little impact on his religious outlook.

Here we can begin to see how the temple's opportunities for lay Buddhist practice can accommodate a range of personal packages of Buddhism. As we continue to develop the argument in this chapter, we will continue to work to understand the different ways of being a lay Buddhist in Shanghai today.

## EXPLORING THE CONTOURS OF LAY BUDDHISM

[127] We met Liang Yi once before in Ch. 3. He is a 68-year-old male participant.

In this research we have tried to point out the two important groups of practitioners found in Buddhist temples like Puci Temple and begin to describe their similarity and difference. We have done this because on the ground and in the literature difference between them is understood, but the line between them has been left vague. To address this issue in our understanding of lay practice, we will try to define lay Buddhism in a way that accounts for the narrative divide between *xiangke* and *jushi* found on the ground and the sociological literature using a theoretical schema that allows us to understand difference without casting normative judgements about the shape of "formal" Buddhism[128]. I argue it is important to define lay Buddhism around practices as opposed to the content of their beliefs.

In Ch. 4, Jones' 2010 attempt to define lay Buddhism is mentioned where she said, "all lay Buddhists affirm the goal of liberation, learn the Buddha's teachings, practice self-cultivation, and try to practice moral living" (2010:175). We have demonstrated how this is a strong characterization that describes the temple's *jushi* quite well. However, she strongly asserts that "all of these are necessary" (175) to be considered a lay Buddhist. In her elaboration the different elements though, she finds that, among her respondents, some were downplayed or absent. I argue here that, while these core elements of lay Buddhist practice amount to a good ideal type, since it is focused on the content of practice as opposed to the practices themselves it struggles to deal with the messiness of the variation within lay Buddhist practice and describe the relationship between *jushi* and *xiangke*.

While Jones has not adequately defined a lay Buddhist, she does refer to a schema that I believe can serve this purpose and, in fact, is designed to do just that. Chau (2006, 2011)

[128] I am thinking, in particular, about Jones' work where she claims with no justification that "traditional devotees" are the "lowest common denominator" of lay Buddhists on pg. 77

develops what he calls the "modalities for doing religion" which he says encompass the variety of ways that Chinese people have engaged in religious practice throughout their history. It is a framework that calls on people to look at the practices of individuals as opposed to the type of religion they are practicing. His work grapples with some of the very same issues as we are in this research. How do we understand religious practice when so much spills out of institutional boundaries and challenges our understanding of religion? This is a question particularly relevant for Western scholars struggling to avoid privileging protestant forms. Chau (2006) argues that his modalities allow scholars to transcend the debate between unity and diversity of practice in the Chinese religious landscape, and further states that these modalities "…are far more 'real' than conceptual fetishes such as 'Buddhism', 'Daoism' and 'Confucianism'" (2011:549). Once we utilize this schema to more firmly conceptualize lay Buddhism, we will also be able to utilize it to further develop the spectrum of lay Buddhist practice that explains what we find in urban China today and build on the important work Jones and other scholars have already begun.

Chau says that his modalities are "relatively well-defined forms that different people can adopt and combine to deal with different concerns in life; however, the specific contents with these forms can vary widely" (2011:549). He defines these 5 modes as follows:

> **(1) discursive/scriptural**, involving mostly the composition and use of texts; **(2) personal cultivational**, involving a long-term interest in cultivating and transforming oneself; **(3) liturgical,** involving elaborate ritual procedures conducted by ritual specialists; **(4) immediate-practical**, aiming at quick results using simple ritual or magical techniques; and **(5) relational**, emphasising the relationship between humans and deities (or ancestors) as well as among humans in religious practices. (Chau 2011:549, *emphasis added*)

The modalities Chau describes help us to describe the varieties of ways that lay people practice oriented toward, or inspired by, Buddhism. We are also able to see how individuals combine these various modes of practice which will help us conceptualize internal variation. In our

descriptions of the practices of the temple participants, we can see all these different modes in action.

The *xiangke* that come to practice at Puci Temple mainly operate in the immediate-practical and liturgical modes. Supplication before the Buddha and Bodhisattva for material blessings is a classic example of the immediate-practical mode and performing funerary rituals is a good example of a practice in the liturgical mode. The practices we have mentioned that the temple *jushi* take part in come from a wider range of Chau's modes. Some of the *jushi* still report supplication in the immediate-practical mode and most also participate in rituals in the liturgical mode (including many that the *xiangke* do not). Additionally, all the *jushi* at the temple report regular practices in the personal cultivational mode which include sutra chanting, volunteering, releasing life, chanting the name of the Buddha, and others. *Jushi* also report some activities in the relational mode which include veneration of ancestors and worshipping before the Buddha in a way that is combined with, or minimizes, the immediate-practical mode. Finally, a limited number of temple *jushi* report practices in the discursive/scriptural mode. Chanting scripture may also be considered part of this mode, but a better example of this type of modality would be those *jushi* who have taken on a more systematic mode of study, like Liang Yi.

*The Defining Feature of Lay Buddhism*

As part of Jones' attempt to define and describe lay Buddhism in Nanjing, she, as mentioned, refers to Chau's modes, but ultimately does not use them. Instead, she uses her own modes to posit a spectrum of lay Buddhist practice[129]. Her modes and Chau's are similar,

[129] While I do not agree with her justification for not utilizing the schema on pg. 188, I do understand the choice not to use it. It was developed in Chau's 2006 book which Jones refers to but was further elaborated in a 2011 piece that came out after Jones' work.

however. She says that lay Buddhists utilize 4 modes of practice: intellectual – focused on study; self-transformation – focused on cultivation; compassion – focused on helping others; and pragmatic – focused on solving material problems (2010:185–187). She acknowledges that lay Buddhists may use multiple modes of practice simultaneously and argues that the modes can be combined in any number of ways and then be analyzed on spectrum of lay Buddhist practice. She says:

> I contend that we can see lay Buddhists as falling along a continuum of comfort with ritualism, from those that don't question the ritual aspects of Buddhism and primarily practice through rituals, to those who completely reject any ritual aspects and present their own practice and the ideas of Buddhism as completely rationalized (189)

In connecting practices with a spectrum from ritual to rational, she is pointing specifically to spectrums proposed to encompass Buddhism and Chinese religion (Cadge 2005; Weller 1987), but also to a general trend in the sociology of religion, starting with Max Weber, that sees religion as developing in the direction of rationality. This direction also matches the direction of early 20th century Buddhist reformers like Taixu (Pittman 2001). Her work is significant and provides an important foundation and direction for our study of lay Buddhism from the ground at the temple in Shanghai. However, I find that her modes do not seem to be able to point out the difference, at times, between a lay Buddhist practitioner and someone whom she says is "using Buddhism." This is exactly the distinction we need to probe to begin to make grounded distinctions between *jushi* and *xiangke*. While she argues that "all of the four modes are considered valid ways of practicing Buddhism," she had already noted, for example, that people operating solely in the pragmatic mode are not, by her definition, practicing lay Buddhists. Adapting her spectrum to use Chau's modes, however, as we will see, allows us to see what

combinations of modalities apply to different lay Buddhists and help us to draw out the line between a *jushi* and a *xiangke*.

Further, the way Jones groups people on her spectrum speaks to the fact that, by her own admission[130], her sample is skewed toward younger and more educated practitioners. In that, it seems to view the "traditional practitioners" as anachronistic retired women with very limited variation, while finding puzzling variation at the more rational end of the spectrum where her data is stronger[131]. In many ways, the data from the temple is the opposite. By way of being rooted in the local temple, it is tilted toward an older and less educated population which tends to be more traditional in their orientation and have more exposure to popular religious culture.

Chau's modalities of Chinese religion allows us to define lay Buddhist practice and develop a spectrum of lay Buddhism that finds on one side a more traditional way of practicing Buddhism that embrace popular religious elements and syncretism common historically in China, and on the other a more modern, rational form of Buddhism that tends toward the more structured, confessional, and intellectual. This iteration of the spectrum, like Jones', seems to fit with the general direction in the sociology of religion in thinking about traditional and modern forms of religious practice, but, as we will see, our conceptualization of the spectrum utilizing Chau will offer a more grounded way to describe variation among lay Buddhists and make clear how that spectrum is connected to the traditional practices of the *xiangke*.

**I argue that the key defining feature of lay Buddhist practice in urban China today is the pursuit any Buddhist inspired goal by way of utilizing the personal cultivational mode of doing Chinese religion.** Therefore, practicing lay Buddhists, should be understood as

[130] See Jones (2010) pg. 21
[131] Jones is forced into creating a catchall category of "eclectics" for respondents that challenged the model

such not through attention to the content of their beliefs, but through the ways in which they "do religion" and make meaning from it. Certainly, as we have seen with the temple's *jushi*, their personal cultivational practice is most commonly directed toward specific Buddhist soteriological goals (e.g. *liao shengsi* 了生死), but, as Jones mentions in her data and I certainly found as well, not all people who are dedicated to Buddhist practice have a clear idea of, or emphasize, soteriological goals. Often, the aims are simpler and more direct, like desire for a smoother life or to be a better person. What is clear from spending time with a sample of people "living Buddhist lives" is the way their practice has shifted from away from practices that are only driven by immediate need, family circumstance, or general interest toward a set of concerted practices built on a change in understanding based on Buddhist ideas or inspired, at least, by Buddhist culture.

This shift is certainly akin to the efficacy-based vs dharma-based distinction in Chau's work (2011), but that distinction alone is not enough because we have seen where it is possible for people to employ both efficacy based and dharma based approaches. The addition of practices in the personal cultivational modality does not necessarily lead to dropping of other modes, including the immediate-practical mode. The shift, though, from supplicate to cultivate (*qiu* 求 to *xiu* 修) is the classic example of a shift toward practicing lay Buddhism and away from reliance on popular religious culture alone. Jones emphasizes this distinction as well but is forced to acknowledge that many people she encountered, especially older and more traditional people, did not completely shift out of this pragmatic mode which is why she included it in her discussion of the traditional devotees in her sample. In my interviews with the temple's *jushi*, I found many such people, and the ways in which these practitioners conceptualized ritual supplication was decidedly varied and often fuzzy or contradictory.

I argue that the key in the shift toward practicing lay Buddhism is not a shift in understanding about how Buddhism works or how supplication works, but the shift toward living a Buddhist life in the personal cultivational mode. Ter Haar's (2001) formulation of a 'Buddhist life' is instructive here, but I believe it is more effective to ground this understanding in the modalities of doing religion schema by attaching it the personal cultivational modality. We can see this boundary as the lynchpin of this divide through how the temple participants I interviewed, including the lay people and the monastics, move to define others in relation to their understanding of Buddhist practice. I spent a great deal of effort trying to probe the boundary between those that my respondents considered Buddhists and those whom they did not. How was it that they conceptualized the line between *jushi* and *xiangke*? As mentioned, this did not completely overlap with any label (like that of Buddhist disciple *xintu* 信徒) or status like taking refuge in the 3 jewels (*guiyisanbao* 皈依三宝). Most important was whether one takes their understanding of Buddhism and its potential (whatever that might be) and put it to work in their lives.

These ideas expressed by the participants match up closely with the conceptualization of Ven. Shi (*shishifu* 石师父) when I asked her to help me understand the various types of people who come to the temple to practice. She explained to me that the people that visit the temple were really of 3 types: *xintu* (信徒), *xinzhong* (信众), and *xiangke* (香客). The *xintu*[132] are the official Buddhists who have taken refuge and formally taken the Buddha as their teacher and begun to practice, and the *xiagke* are the opposite, those who only come to deal with a specific problem, to follow family traditions, for leisure, or some other purpose. The critical category

[132] She used 信徒 here to refer to 佛弟子 since I had brought the word up, so in this case the meanings are matching

here for our understanding of lay Buddhism is her conceptualization of the middle ground, the *xinzhong*, because it seems to point directly toward the importance of the personal cultivational modality in conceptualizing lay Buddhism. She said:

> *Xinzhong* have an established foundation with the Buddha Dharma. Buddhism has an influence on them. For example, if they are a *xinzhong*. [They are] now a follower of Buddhism, so there are many things (they should not do) […] It's just that they will be a little more tolerant, have a more tolerant heart, they will pay attention to the Buddha's instruction, the meaning of the Buddha's instruction, they put it to work in their everyday lives, when they interact with their families, colleagues, and with strangers. They will more or less use it in their everyday lives...these are the *xinzhong*[133].

Her focus is on how the person acts on an on-going basis, how they take their understanding of the Buddha Dharma and allow it to guide their development as a person. Certainly, she hopes that this action will be based on a strong and grounded understanding of the doctrine, but this is not necessary. As Chau notes, there "are both elite and popular forms" of the personal cultivational modality (2011:550). The advantage of conceptualizing lay Buddhism as any package of practice that incorporates a personal cultivational mode of practice inspired by Buddhism is in looking at the marginal cases. One such marginal case from my sample is Huang Lan (黄兰).

I met Huang Lan, 34, at the temple on a quiet afternoon where I found her sitting contemplatively by herself. She smiled at me and so I engaged her in light conversation. The unmarried saleswoman said she likes visiting temples when she needs respite from the hustle and bustle of her life and the city, and she remembers fondly the feeling of going to the temple as a

[133] Interview 1/5/2018 "信众就是有一定佛法基础的，就是佛法会对他有影响力，比如说他是信众，我现在是佛教徒了，有很多事情我不应该去诅咒人，不应该去骂人，或者不应该去跟人家吵吵 […] 就是相对来说他会多一点包容，多一点包容心，他会以佛的教导，就是佛教导的那些道理啊，他来运用到日常生活中，跟家人的相处，跟同事的相处，跟陌生人的相处，他会多多少少运用到日常生活当中去。这是信众"

child in Fujian. In a later interview, Huang Lan explained to me that she has not taken refuge in the three jewels and has never participated in a group cultivation activity. However, she considers herself "like the *jushi* type[134]" and at least slightly different than her parents who she referred to as simple believers (akin to *xiangke*). She says learning about Buddhism and doing some personal cultivation practices like reading Buddhist materials online, helping animals, and chanting short sutra have aided her ability to cultivate internally (*neixindexiuxing* 内心的修行) and that has helped her to help her live happier. I argue that Huang Lan has taken an understanding rooted in Buddhism and put it to work in the personal cultivational mode. As such, according to our definition we can be understand her to be a practicing lay Buddhist.

*A Spectrum of Lay Buddhist Practice*

Now that we have worked to provide a new foundation for understanding what it means to be a practicing lay Buddhist, we can expand upon our use of the modalities of doing religion schema to continue developing a spectrum of Lay Buddhism practice that finds on one end a more traditional, popular form and, on the other end, a more rational, modern form. What is missing in order to better understand variations in lay practice, and as we will see in the following chapters a better understanding of the relation between *jushi* and *xiangke*, is attention to the religious ecology of Buddhism. This is especially important within the temple environment and as it relates to traditional, popular modes of engagement with "Buddhist options" that have been common historically, and, as I will continue to argue in the following chapters, are still important today. These traditional ways of engaging with Buddhism come as part of a cultural repertoire of popular practices that are in contrast to a more rational modern forms of practicing

[134] Interview 11/10/2017 "像居士之类的"

Buddhism which are more intellectual and fit a modern, protestant conception of religious practice. As scholars have looked at this spectrum previously, they have recognized the difference between the traditional and the modern, but they have failed make clear that the traditional side of the spectrum is intimately related to popular religious practices we find at the temple and elsewhere in China today.

The temple is the perfect place to observe variation in forms of lay Practice and how those practices are made up of different combinations and instantiations of the religious modalities. As mentioned, Jones's data favors the rational modern side of the spectrum with a sample made up of highly educated lay Buddhists, many of whom come from the intellectual sphere or jobs where the political discussion about religion is poignant. As such, I take her understanding of the more rational end of the spectrum seriously and try to incorporate it with the new data from our study which features more variation on the traditional side.

I argue that there is a spectrum of Lay Buddhism that on one end finds people who find no need to draw hard lines between popular practices in the immediate, relational, and liturgical modes and their Buddhist practice in the personal/cultivational mode (or other modes). These people are living Buddhists lives, but still participate in a variety of traditional activities. They do not find it necessary to purify their practices of traditional elements that are not justifiable from a Buddhist doctrinal perspective. This traditional side of the spectrum is closest to the Jones' "traditional devotees," but, as mentioned her formulation seems to be founded a bit on stereotype owing to lack of data. The most traditional of these respondents add the personal cultivational mode but continue to maintain a continuity of practice with their previous popular-style engagements with the other modalities. For example, as mentioned, often people will continue to

supplicate before Buddhist images, or other images, in the immediate-practical modality while adding personal-cultivational practices inspired by Buddhism.

Another example is comfort combining immediate-practical and relational practices oriented toward ancestors or other deities with their Buddhist practice in the personal cultivational mode. Ven. Shi was very influenced by her mothers' practice of Buddhism, but she told me her mother's practice was very different from her own, and I find it falls strongly on the traditional side of the spectrum. She said that her mother had taken refuge and begun to chant the name of Amitabha, but that she never made a distinction between deities and Buddha (*shenfobufen* 神佛不分). She interacted with them all the same, believing they had the power to offer help or punish[135]. Here, Ven. Shi's mom is clearly a lay Buddhist, but one who has not modified her practices in the immediate and relational modes even as she has taken on her personal cultivational practices and identity as a lay Buddhist.

Additionally, lay Buddhists at this side of the spectrum are also quite comfortable with ritual in the liturgical mode. In fact, the majority of the temple's *jushi* combine the personal-cultivational and liturgical modes. The temple itself is a place that emphasizes traditional liturgical elements including more popular funerary rituals, but also ritual assemblies and *pufo* attended by the temple's *jushi*. Therefore, lay Buddhists at the temple are more likely to be traditional in the sense that they fall on the left side of the spectrum and are more likely to be comfortable with Buddhist practice that emphasizes ritual in the liturgical mode.

On the other end of the spectrum, we find lay practitioners that operate mostly in the personal cultivation and discursive/scriptural modes, and they have worked to either purify their

[135] The nun wanted me to be clear that Buddha or Bodhisattva would never punish, and this misunderstanding was common where folk and Buddhist elements are mixed together.

practices in the immediate, liturgical, relational modes to align with their understanding and practice of Buddhism or they have dropped these modes altogether. While respondents on the far right of the spectrum aren't very common among the *jushi* at the temple we encountered, the "rational scholars" from Jones' work are exemplars of this type of practice. They represent an elite form of lay Buddhist practice which we find most commonly among respondents with an advanced education and intellectual approach to Buddhism. They are more often found away from temples which emphasize ritual in the liturgical mode and are more likely to distance themselves from popular traditional practices. As Jones notes, these lay Buddhists are usually willing and prepared to talk about their practice and this makes them a conspicuous group (Jones 2010:193–94), but they are in no way the most common lay Buddhists in China today. As the type of practice moves further to the right on the spectrum it leaves behind popular, syncretic elements and focuses on intellectual and textual approaches which tend to be made up of more modern, confessional forms of lay Buddhism.

In between these two poles are a wide variety of personal packages that combine the personal cultivational approach with other modes in a variety of ways and where, within those modes, there are different orientations. In looking at these combinations, we still find a clear spectrum where practitioners have different levels of comfort with combining their Buddhist practice with traditional elements rooted in popular religious culture. It is not fair to say that as people become more rational in their practice that they must leave behind some of these other modes because there are many ways to practice Buddhism. Let us explore some of the key difference we find along the spectrum within our data.

*Making requests and purifying the immediate-practical mode.*

One of the most prominent features of this spectrum and, as we have discussed, for understanding lay Buddhism, is the matter of ritual supplication in the immediate-practical mode. This supplication could be as one lights incense in front of a Buddhist image or how they conceptualize the transfer of merit (*huixiang* 回响) at the end of a sutra chanting session or ritual. There is a difference between a direct request in the immediate-practical mode (*yousuoqiu* 有所求) where one is focused on reward or benefit in this life (*rentian fubao* 人天福报) and other understandings of Buddhism where practitioners see changes in their life as direct result of their karmic history, including the good and the bad in this and previous lives. In the case of the latter group, when they kneel before an image, or communicate with Buddha or Bodhisattva in their practice, they are operating in the relational mode, which emphasizes the on-going relationship with the Buddha and Bodhisattva, and rejecting the immediate practical mode. In this case, respondents will often say that when they pray, they make general calls for world peace and/or to thank the Buddha and Bodhisattva (*fopusa* 佛菩萨) for their support and guidance.

This type of difference in understanding can be seen among the *jushi* interviewed at the temple. In describing attitudes toward sutra chanting in Ch. 3, I already introduced 2 members of the Sunday chanting group who differ along these lines. Dong Hao (董豪), the businessman mentioned, acknowledged while he knows he should focus on being thankful, he did still make requests (*qiu* 求), especially when he takes his yearly pilgrimage to Mt. Putuo. He says over the years he would most often pray for business success, but now, since he is older, mostly for the health of he and his family. Meanwhile, Sun Jie (孙杰), the young sutra chanting leader, is very careful never even to give the appearance of having any kind of beseeching heart (*qiuxin* 求心) in his practice as this would be antithetical to his understanding of the Dharma and unacceptable

in his own practice. Xu Jing (徐静), also a member of the Sunday group, operates more on a middle ground. She acknowledges that when she kneels before an image, she will still ask for family harmony, health, and work success. "I will still supplicate, but it is more respectful to the Buddhist image, like kneeling before a teacher I must be respectful[136]," she said. In these examples, we can begin to see the extent to which different lay Buddhist feel the need to distance themselves from supplication in the immediate-practical mode.

*Ancestor worship, filial piety, and difference in the relational mode.*

The way in which lay Buddhist *jushi* engage in different modalities with respect to their ancestors is another area where their Buddhist practice is clearly placed into tension with traditional practices at the temple and elsewhere. As such, how lay Buddhists engage (or don't engage) in them speaks to where they fall on the spectrum of lay Buddhist practices we are describing. Religious practices related to veneration of ancestors have always been important for all peoples in China regardless of religious affiliation. All of those interviewed at the temple place an emphasis on practices oriented toward ancestors, but some of the lay Buddhist *jushi*, those who fall further to the right on our spectrum of lay practice, have modified their practice during holidays dedicated to ancestors such as *Qingming Jie* 清明节, *Dongzhi* 冬至, and *Zhongyuan Jie* (中元节) to distance themselves from popular practices and align them more closely with a doctrinal Buddhist understanding of how they should practice in ways that show respect and offer benefit to their ancestors. This often has to do with a change in ritual prescription, for example, beginning to chant *Dizang Jing* 地藏经 at a ritual assembly in order to help collect merit for their ancestors in an effort to release their souls (超度 chaodu). This

[136] Interview 11/11/2017 "求还是会求的，但就是说会比较恭敬佛像，就像拜老师一样的，要尊敬他."

orientation stands in contrast to folk oriented practices related to ancestors that are common among the temple's *xiangke* and the Chinese general population.

In looking at the differences in practices oriented to ancestors, it is helpful to look at the burning of paper money which is the most popular practice of the temple's *xiangke* and, as mentioned, falls clearly outside of the bounds of formal Buddhism. This is an activity that falls firmly in the relational mode given that it emphasizes the relationship between families and their ancestors, but it also has an immediate-practical component in that some practitioners believe these ritual actions will have direct impact on their ancestors' condition. The burning of paper money, including silver ingots (*xibo* 锡箔), for ancestors, and gold ingots (*yuanbao* 元宝), to supplicate Bodhisattva, is one of the most visible activities at the temple and thus was something I discussed with the lay Buddhist interviewees. In their responses we can see very different approaches to dealing with these traditional activities related to ancestors from *jushi* who fall differently on the spectrum of lay practice.

Guo Mei (郭梅), a female 56-year-old sutra chanter, has never felt like her participating in traditional practices related to her ancestors conflicted with her personal cultivational approach to Buddhism. She stated clearly:

> I think I will still do these things. Sometimes on *Qingming*, *Dongzhi*, I will also burn some silver ingots for my mother. I believe I will do this forever [...] It was most important to my mother to fold silver ingots every year to burn for her ancestors. I approve. If you ask me to disapprove, I will forever not disapprove […].[137]

[137] Interview 11/16/2017 "我觉得我自己还会做这个事情，我有时候清明，冬至，也会给我母亲烧点锡箔，我觉得我会永远这样下去的 […] 我母亲每年就是折锡箔，她最大的事情就是折锡箔，烧给老祖宗，我认可，你叫我反对，我永远不会反对 […]"

Here we can see that she refuses to draw a line between these traditional practices and her understanding of Buddhism. It is not that she demands on doctrinal grounds that they are both correct, but she also feels no need to avoid syncretism and reject those practices in order to justify or feel comfortable in her Buddhist practice. However, other lay practitioners I met felt differently. One strong example on the other side of this issue is Ye Feng (叶峰). This 68-year-old male volunteer and informal leader of the Pure Land chanting group that meets at the temple did not feel comfortable with these practices that we saw each time we volunteered together. This type of religious practice does not fit with his understanding of Buddhism and, in his view, should be avoided. He put it this way:

> While they were alive how were you to them? When they were near death how were you to them? Did you do these things well? Now all you can do is repent and show your sincerity, show your repenting heart. You can only do it this way, so in reality [burning paper money and other traditional practices] do not have even a little bit of meaning. These things are already a foregone conclusion, it's really not that you can burn a couple sheets of paper, bow a few heads, and solve the problem. You can't solve it (that way).[138]

Ye Feng believes these popular practices in the immediate-practical and relational modes are ineffective and, at least in his mind, superstitious. Different lay Buddhist *jushi* along a spectrum of comfort with popular practices like the burning of paper money that are associated with veneration and support of ancestors, but they need not give them up in order to practice Buddhism. Other *jushi*, like Song Jie, take a more middle ground position. She said she used to

[138] Interview 12/18/2017 "他生前的时候你怎么对他，临终的时候你怎么对他，这些事情你做没做好，你现在只能忏悔，表明你的思念之情，表明你的忏悔之心。你只能这样做，其实一点含义都没有。这些已经是定局了，并不是你烧两张纸，磕两个头就能解决的。解决不了."

burn paper money regularly, but now has a different understanding of the practice. However, she won't give it up completely, she still will burn some on key holidays. "Just a bit[139]," She says.

*Systematization, confessionalism, and the discursive/scriptural modality.*

Another important aspect of lay practice that speaks to their position on our posited spectrum of lay Buddhism is the extent to which practitioners follow a specific, and to some degree systematic, path of practice and study. A shift toward this more systematic and, as a result, confessional approach, has much to do with the addition of the discursive/scriptural modality to one's lay practice and tends to lead to the purification or rejection of other modes of practice.

The average sutra chanting *jushi* at the temple does not follow a systematic path of study, does not associate their practice with any particular denomination, pass judgement about which path(s) are correct, nor, importantly, believe that it is important for people to study along a particular path, either systematically or informally. These *jushi* express that when they take refuge in the three jewels, they do not do so to follow a specific denomination or monastic teacher, but instead they say that all denominations take refuge together (*guiyi zaiyiqi* 皈依在一起). When they study it is generally informal and the materials, usually shared among friends on social media, come from a variety of religious producers with no focus on systematization or attention to boundaries. This is especially true of the sutra chanters, but among them there is still internal variation in terms of how they practice, and that is maintained by generalist stance the

[139] Interview 11/21/2017 "意思意思"

temple takes in providing opportunities and support for their *jushi* and wider community of *xiangke* we will discuss in Ch.6.

However, this very general orientation to doctrine was not a position shared by all the lay Buddhists at the temple. We found several circumstances in which people moved toward a more systematic approach and those that did believed that picking a path to pursue was important for themselves and for other lay practitioners. In some cases, especially for the Pure Land Buddhists, this led to a stronger confessional identity. In general, it was the addition of a discursive/scriptural approach that led to (or presupposed) this shift in practice and how they viewed the purpose of lay Buddhist practice. As practitioners add discursive/scriptural modes of practice to their personal packages of Buddhism, they start to believe that it is not possible to study all the different path at once. As Jones well documents (2010:178–79) and is also very clear in my data, very few Buddhists will argue that any one path is better than any other. Instead, in their own practice and what they thought would be best for others, they say it is best to find the path that works for a person's given unique circumstances, the one with which they have a fateful connection (*yuanfen* 缘分) and is befitting their [spiritual] foundation (*genji* 根基). This was true of people who take part in formal systematic study in the discursive/scriptural mode and those who do so more informally.

Most people who incorporate a concerted discursive/scriptural approach in their practice still tend to avoid confessional labels. They are content with an understanding of the path they are on and focusing on that path instead of others and see no need to view themselves as one of the 8 main Chinese Buddhist denominations (*zongpai* 宗派) or any other confessional designation. These types of participants usually said they believed that choosing a path was more effectual but stopped short of taking on a strong confessional identity or stating that others

should choose that path. However, this general pattern seems to be challenged by encounters with some people who have more firmly oriented their practice in the direction of Pure Land Buddhism. Here we continue to see the interaction with the discursive/scriptural approach.

While among the Pure Land practitioners I met there were some who studied deeply and others who did not, people who felt affinity with the Pure Land traditional were more likely to label themselves as such and more likely to encourage others to follow that path (as opposed to others). There was an additional element of confessionalism, and this seems to follow from cultural influence of the Venerable Jingkong and the success of certain important Pure Land temples in supporting and directing lay practitioners. During my time with lay Buddhists in Shanghai, I was very seldom directly proselytized to as most people were just so pleased that I was interested in Buddhism. However, I did feel moments of pressure to accept Pure Land understandings of the world, especially when I went to volunteer with lay Pure Land groups. The Pure Land practitioners I encountered were more likely to argue that one should stick to chanting the name of *Amitabha* and the core sutra of the Pure Land canon or else risk wasting timing going down a wrong path that might put your deliverance to Western Bliss in jeopardy. In its more direct form, this was not a common occurrence, but certainly people who practice with Pure Land associated lay groups, both those who deeply engage with the discursive/scriptural modality and those who do not, are more likely to view their practice through a confessional lens.

*Demographic Trends along the Lay Buddhist Spectrum*

As we have argued, as one moves from left to right along the spectrum, the practices in the immediate-practical mode gets shifted toward the relational mode or dropped altogether. As one moves further to the right, other modes continue to be purified based on ones understanding

of Buddhist doctrine or dropped altogether. For example, it is common for those further right on the spectrum to drop the liturgical mode altogether (taking them further away from the temple generally). As we move yet further to the right the discursive/scriptural modality becomes more salient and we are left with an elite package of Buddhism made up of the personal cultivational and discursive/scriptural modes.

There are more people than ever who have access to different ways of practicing lay Buddhism and, thus, I agree with Jones when she says that there are more people than ever who have the possibility of moving toward living Buddhist lives in a variety of ways. Also, more practitioners than ever are moving toward the more rational modern side of the spectrum. This is owing to several important sociological factors including a rising level of education in the population and access to the preponderance of information about Buddhism available online and shared through social media. Further, Christianity and Western understandings of religion have been influential, and, as others have argued, protestant forms of Buddhism are becoming more popular in mainland China and have been wildly successful in other parts of East Asia like the Tzu Chi Foundation (see e.g. Huang 2009; Poceski 2016). Historically, lay Buddhism as we have come to define it was limited to a very elite subset of all possible practitioners because the level of education needed to pursue lay Buddhism was very high.

Many people see lay Buddhism through the lens of its extremes, either as an elite scholarly or philosophical activity rooted in texts or through the lens of the more traditional stereotype of a bunch of uneducated old ladies at the temple. To be sure, the two most important factors in determining the type of lay Buddhism that people practice are age and education level. This is clear both in our data at the temple and in Jones's. However, I hope, from the examples above, we have begun to show that the we can't lump all lay Buddhists at the temple together

and force on them some stereotypical vision of the uneducated, retired female *jushi* who is limited in understanding. In fact the ecology of lay practice at the temple is quite complicated, and in challenging stereotypes about temple practice, I want to further demonstrate how the temple can be a base not only for the practice the most traditional of the retired *jushi*, but can also be a place that supports practitioners who fall along the spectrum on lay Buddhist practice in a variety of places, including young people with a more traditional focus and older people with more modern orientations.

I met Hu Ping (胡萍) at the temple in the fall of 2017. She was 24 and had just recently chose to leave a successful job as a salesperson in hopes to finding a new job more in line with her Buddhist values. Since she had free time, she started coming more often to volunteer and chant sutra and believed it would help her find a better new job. She has a limited education background and had come to Shanghai from Anhui Province after she turned 18 seeking work. She came into contact with Buddhism in Shanghai through difficult personal circumstances. An unplanned pregnancy led to an abortion and a breakup with her boyfriend. This impacted her deeply, and a colleague at the time suggested she should go to a temple and release the soul of the baby (*chaodu* 超度). She did so and found it extremely helpful emotionally and materially. She then parlayed that experience into formally taking refuge in the three jewels and more extensive practices including releasing life activities, group chanting activities, and regular visiting temples to donate money and ask for help in her work life. She credits her supplication with getting a high paying job and changing her life. She is particularly drawn to temples and ritualized practice. She also regularly participates in traditional activities for her ancestors and see no conflict between these practices and her understanding of Buddhism.

Zhu Xiang (朱翔), 29, is another young lay Buddhist I met at the temple who falls on the traditional side of the spectrum. He has taken refuge in the three jewels and considers himself a practicing Buddhist, but his history and personal package really speak to the close relationship between popular and lay Buddhist practice. He is from an area in Guangdong Province where, he says, the religious atmosphere is much stronger than it is in Shanghai. There, he says, they are oriented toward the Daoist deities *Laoye* (老爷) and *Mazu* (妈祖). He grew up with religious events punctuating the calendar and remembers spending time at temples when he was young because his adult family volunteered. He left home for Shanghai after a middle school to pursue economic opportunities in the big city. He has been quite successful in that endeavor and now owns his own beauty products business. Alone in Shanghai, at one of his first jobs he met an Aunty who would take him under his wing. It turned out she was a sutra chanter at Puci Temple and brought him along to light incense on the first of the lunar month. This felt right to him and set him on a path of practice which involved volunteering and, for a couple of years, sutra chanting on Sundays. As he told me, there is much that Buddhism and his practices from home share and, he says he simply took his practices from childhood oriented toward *Laoye* and *Mazu* and applied them directly to his Buddhist practice. Now most of the images in his home are Buddhist, the temple is Buddhist, but ultimately, in his own view, the practices are the same. Given this type of background, he has not felt any need to purify his Buddhist practice of its inflection with his traditional beliefs.

The education level of these two participants may impact the way they practice, but we can also see in them that the more traditional side of the spectrum need not only be inhabited by uneducated old ladies. Additionally, we must similarly avoid pigeonholing older folks with a limited education according to stereotype. At the temple we also find examples of older

participants with a limited education that fall further to the right on the spectrum than we may be expected.

Liang Yi, who we have met before, owing to the political circumstances of his youth has just a middle school education. Born and raised in the neighborhood where the temple is located, he is now retired from a job in international logistics. He had always had a positive impression of Buddhism from his mother who used to burn incense at the temple, and so, for most of his life, he would go to temple in times of trouble ask for help. He, like many others, would begin a deeper type of practice and take on an identity as a *jushi* after retirement. However, unlike others, he did not end up in the temple chanting sutra, participating in ritual, or lay practices steeped in popular religious culture. Instead, he was introduced to Buddhism through a family friend's daughter who had become a nun in Japan and was drawn to a more intellectual approach to Buddhism. He was then introduced to an organized lay Buddhist group that is focused on systematic study in the Pure Land tradition. His Pure Land group, however, is not purely focused on reciting the name of Amitabha, but also emphasizes systematic study and other cultivation activities. The group is a mixture of old and young and Liang Yi gets particularly energized through engaging with the many college students who attend. His practice is focused on the personal cultivation and discursive/scriptural modalities. He really enjoys coming to the temple, but for him operating in the immediate-practical mode or even the liturgical mode seems out of touch with his understanding of the dharma.

He Xia (何) is a 66-year-old female who attends the Sunday sutra chanting group regularly but is also an active participant in a Pure Land volunteering group and has a confessional Pure Land identity. Originally from Shandong Province, after high school she was a sent down youth in Xinjiang where she met her husband who was from Shanghai. They married

and returned to her husband's hometown of Shanghai when they were allowed, but she was unable to acquire a local residence permit (*hukou* 户口) and for years times were very difficult because she was forced to live on the margins of society. After finally gaining official residence status in the 90s, she took a job at a school cafeteria where she worked until retirement. She was introduced to Buddhism by a friend around that time as a possible way to deal with her families ongoing economic difficulties. Things turned around and she credited her supplication at the temple for the change in fortune. For several years, she chanted some sutra and enjoyed visiting temples in Shanghai and beyond to practice in ways that reflect the traditional side of the lay Buddhist spectrum. A chance encountered with a copy of The Sutra of Amitabha (*amituojing* 阿弥陀经) annotated by the Ven. Jingkong, however, changed her whole practice and she shifted right on the spectrum. She changed her thinking and eliminated supplication in the immediate-practical mode from her practice and started studying Pure Land Buddhism in a more systematic manner. This would lead her to cutting out a variety of other activities including pilgrimages and ritual assemblies in the liturgical mode. Now, other than Sunday chanting at Puci Temple that she keeps up because of personal relationships, she will only travel to official Pure Land temples for cultivation and study. In fact, she struggles with herself over this. Many of her Pure Land friends challenge her on whether she should be chanting non-Pure Land sutra and volunteering outside of the Pure Land group. She is conflicted, and the main reason she still volunteers at the temple and does some outside activities is that her son is a follower of humanistic Buddhism and encourages her to stay engaged in the world.

## CONCLUSION

We have tried to establish a foundation for understanding lay Buddhism by looking at how lay practitioners "do religion" and think about the modalities they use to pursue their practice. Additionally, we have begun to elaborate a spectrum of Lay Buddhist practice that one side finds lay practitioners who find no need to draw firm lines between their lay Buddhist practice in the personal cultivational mode and traditional popular practices in the immediate, liturgical, and relational modes, and, on the other side, we find more rational modern style of lay Buddhism which tends to purify other modalities of elements of practice that do not fit with their understanding of Buddhist doctrine. Additionally, the more toward the rational end of the spectrum people are, the more likely they are to drop other modes altogether and end up with a personal package of lay Buddhism made up of the personal cultivational and discursive/scriptural modalities.

There are some clear demographic trends associated with this spectrum. The more traditional end of the spectrum is more closely aligned with older people with a more limited education, and the rational end younger more educated practitioners. However, as we have seen, this may be the general rule, but it does not hold up to the variety in the data. Instead we find that traditional approaches are an entry point for many people, young and old, because of its influence on Chinese society at large (something we will return to in more detail in Ch. 7). We also find that while the rational end of the spectrum tends to attract younger, educated participants, there are examples of older people with a limited education who still pursue personal packages that fall on the more rational modern end of the spectrum. Further, the temple and its environment support the practices of these various *jushi* and their diverse personal packages of lay Buddhist practice.

Another important thing to note in thinking about a spectrum of lay practice is that practicing Buddhism is not meant to be static. There is movement and development built into the endeavor and it is seen as a process by those who take part in it. One is meant to progress. If we apply this understanding to the spectrum of lay practice we have been detailing, we find that in general people move from left to right on the spectrum over time as their practice develops. **However, all forms of practicing lay Buddhism are sufficient**. Often, either owing to cultural or educational limits, or simply because it works for them, practitioners maintain long-term stability in their package of practice. They may still progress by taking on additional vows[140] or adding other forms of cultivation, but their practice need not necessarily move toward a more rational, modern form.

A deep focus on the dedicated lay Buddhist *jushi* who take part in regular activities of the temple has given us a better understanding of lay Buddhist practice in urban China. We have contributed to a better theoretical understanding of lay Buddhism by defining it using the Chau's modalities of Chinese religion as any practice based on Buddhist ideas or culture that incorporates the personal cultivational modality into their personal package of practice. In doing so we are also able to continue to develop a spectrum of lay Buddhist practice that one side finds practitioners who are comfortable combining their Buddhist practice with more traditional modes of practice rooted in China's popular religious culture and on the other people operating in a more modern, intellectual style that tends to be more confessional, systematic, and purified of popular elements.

The way we have structured our findings in this chapter also highlight the perspective of the temple and the importance of understanding the relationship between concerted lay Buddhis

[140] For example: The Five Precepts (*wujie* 五戒) or The Bodhisattva Precepts (*pusjie* 菩萨戒)

practice and popular practices and, thus, between the *jushi* and *xiangke* we find at the temple. People we find at the temple who now meet our definition of practicing lay Buddhists have a history of practicing in ways rooted in popular religious culture. While taking part in popular religious practices like those we see from the *xiangke* at the temple is not a prerequisite beginning concerted lay Buddhist practice, it was a common pathway for the *jushi* at the temple[141]. The temple itself also demonstrates why it is so important to acknowledge the connection between the lay Buddhist practices of the *jushi* and popular practices of the *xiangke* when thinking about the contours of lay Buddhism in China today. At the temple we find both lay Buddhist *jushi* at various points on the spectrum (but skewed toward the traditional), and a wider community of *xiangke* participants who are operating based on popular religious culture in the immediate/practical, relational, and liturgical modes, but whom fall short of our definition of lay Buddhists because they do not incorporate practices in the personal cultivational mode.

In connecting the *xiangke* and the *jushi* by way of this spectrum of practice and by connecting the formal practice of Buddhism directly with popular religious culture, we begin to see the temple as an important site that accommodates both religious foundations and one where there is the potential for exchange for exchange between them that is beneficial for temple Buddhism and the future of Buddhism in contemporary China. Recent quantitative analysis by Leamaster and Hu (2014) also points out that there are higher levels of popular practice in the cities than expected and that those practices are often have a positive correlation with the formal practice of Buddhism. Their findings and the circumstances on the ground at the temple point to the need to better understand the ecology of lay practice that includes both lay Buddhist and popular religious practice. Leamaster and Hu seem surprised to find a connection between

[141] We will return to a discussion of this pathway in Ch. 7

Buddhist and popular religious practice, but our data here in this chapter and elsewhere that shows the intimate connection between popular and Buddhist practice makes this finding seem obvious. In the next chapter we will deeply explore the fact that Buddhist temples like this local temple are structured in such a way to accommodate both the *jushi* and *xiangke*, and where, in fact, the temple requires the support and the help of both groups of participants in order to function to support everyone.

## Chapter 6:
## Religious Ecology of a Neighborhood Temple – Making it Work, Together

We have seen in the previous chapters how Puci Temple (*pucitang* 普慈堂) provides opportunities for practice for a variety of participants and where, within the same space, there is room for diverse religious practices, meanings, and identities. In this environment, the monastics, lay Buddhist *jushi* (居士), and the wider community of *xiangke* (香客) are all able to fulfill their individual aims and, in doing so, play important roles in the overall operation and success of the temple. The temple as an organizational entity integrates its diverse participants and provides a structure that supports the diverse practices and aims of the entire community. In order to provide for and support its community, the temple, itself, must also fulfill its practical and economic needs.

In speaking about the differences between these practices of the *jushi* and *xiangke*, we have drawn some attention to the fact that participants from each group recognize the other group as something quite different from themselves. As have mentioned and will see in further detail below, many of the lay Buddhist *jushi*, and even the temple's nuns, don't see many of the wider practices of the *xiangke* as Buddhist in the same way as their own. While these practices are marked off by those participants as something other than Buddhism, it is the combination of both groups and their associated practices that make the temple community possible at all.

The type of structure where there is a wide variety of practices in a single place of worship, even arguably from different religious traditions, is far removed from the protestant congregational model  where there are shared collective identities, practices and beliefs that so often guides scholarly understandings of religious communities. Vermander et al. (2018) noted that both Buddhist and Daoist temple compounds in China are more "open and accommodating"

in order to "dispense sacredness" to a diverse group of practitioners (97–99). However, most research on Chinese Buddhism has focused on certain sets of practices or groups across locations as opposed to focusing how the varieties of practices and groups at a single temple site fit together. This research offers an opportunity to utilize principles of the religious ecology framework to analyze the micro-ecology of a single temple. In doing so, we look at the relationships between various types of religious participants, practices, and even the different religious traditions that come together there. In analyzing the tension and harmony within these relations, we can learn more about how the temple works for all who participate and learn more about the varieties and shape of temple Buddhism and lay practice more broadly.

How then does the temple work for everyone? It works because mutual reliance between the participants is built into the structure and culture of the temple. In fact, we find that a noticeable *lack of relations* and structured separation between the groups that promotes the status quo is key. The culture supporting this environment is rooted in Buddhist doctrine, and it helps to prevent conflict and promote inclusivity. It has been said that Buddhist temples are generalist organizations, and, as mentioned in Ch. 3, scholars have pointed to how it provides general opportunities for a range of lay Buddhist practitioners. However, we argue here that the temple's generalist character goes much further. It not only promotes a general environment for accommodating a range of practitioners along the spectrum of lay Buddhist practice, but further accommodates and supports a range of practices more closely associated with popular religious culture than doctrinal Buddhism and, in fact, we find *these practices* are the most critical to the temple's operations. This delicate balance of cooperation between groups of participants creates an environment that allows for a successful temple community that is many things to many people.

## THE TEMPLE PROVIDES FOR ITS DIVERSE PARTICIPANTS

The preceding chapters have detailed the practices of the diverse participants of the temple and some of the meanings associated with those practices. We have found significant and important difference between the practices of the *jushi* and the *xiangke* as well as within those groups. The differences are so great that the participants can be classified as practicing based on two distinct religious foundations. While we have also shown that there are important connections between them, each of the groups of participants at the temple has something very different that they hope to get out of their practice at the temple.

### *Monastics*

The nuns, as the administrators and leaders of the temple, are pursuing both personal and related professional goals. I spoke some of the nuns and others about the priorities for the monastic leadership at temple. All parties recognize that the monastics must balance the administration of the temple with their own personal cultivation. As such, the needs of the temple's nuns are related to each. While the temple's *jushi* often told me that the priority of the monastics was their own cultivation, the nuns I spoke with told me that, between their own cultivation and the administration of the temple, their responsibilities as stewards of the temple come first. The nuns must first complete their administrative duties before they can focus on their own personal objectives, and each nun has their own administrative responsibilities as detailed in Ch. 2.

The administration of the temple may be the priority, but these professional aims and their success undergirds the personal aims expressed by the nuns with whom I spoke. Once their duties at the temple are completed, they can control their own time and priorities. As such, the

nuns hope that the temple will continue to operate in a way that gives them enough free time to pursue their own studies and interests. Additionally, while the nuns certainly spoke of the importance of their individual cultivation practices, what they valued most from the current environment at Puci Temple was its stability in terms of the culture, routine, and, especially, the relationships with the other nuns. The nuns I spoke with all told me how special this temple was to them because being a monastic was often a job which involved interpersonal drama and regular moves between temples. Ven. He (*heshifu* 贺师父) told me she has stayed for more than a decade because, "People should have a thankful heart, like with the other monastics, they are good to me, and so we must thank [them]. And also, we have the *jushi*...who are all really good. We also don't have much conflict here, and so I have stayed awhile[142]." The temple and its nuns seem to be an exception where the nuns are long-tenured and the relationships amongst them reportedly stable and supportive. The nuns also have, like all monastics, an aim to spread the Buddha Dharma and draw in more participants, however, the nuns at the temple told me that they do so according to their own personalities and in accordance with the need to take a patient approach. They are not the most outgoing group and are happy with the way the temple currently allows them to maintain stability and promote the practice of Buddhism in the community on their own terms.

The monks who come to the temple to perform ritual functions also have much to gain from their participation at the temple. For them, the financial resources gained from their efforts as ritual providers at the temple allow them to administer their own temple which otherwise struggles financially (a point we will return to below). This allows for stability in their monastic

[142] Interview 1/4/2018 "人要有感恩的心么，跟师父的这种。。师父对我很好，所以我们要感恩师父的。。还有这些居士，你们都属于这些居士，还有这些居士，都很好嘛，也没有太大的冲突，就在这里呆着."

community that provides the opportunity for them to cultivate personally. Further, Puci Temple not only provides direct financial resources through the rituals, but the temple community also provides these monks with another form of support. Their temple has one advantage, a lot of space, and relatedly they foster many rescue dogs there. It is a charitable program that fits well with their Buddhist values of preserving life. The Sunday chanting group at the temple has become involved in this project and raise money weekly in their group WeChat in order to provide dog food and other items of need to the program.

*Regularly Participating Lay Buddhist Jushi*

The regular participating *jushi* at the temple who come to volunteer, chant scriptures, and/or attend ritual have much to gain from their participation. They importantly seek opportunities for cultivation[143] and they also relish the opportunity to be around the environment of the temple. Additionally, while much has been said about the practice of lay Buddhism not requiring the temple for anything at all[144], those who are part of the smaller core groups of lay Buddhists at the temple say that the chance to cultivate in such a sacred and symbolic place is very important to them. Cheng Lei (程磊), a member of the Pure Land chanting group who is also a regular temple volunteer told me that their group used to meet at a different type of location but is glad they now meet in the temple because "[…] it is best at a temple. Buddhist doctrine has Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, right? The three jewels. We are at the place of the three jewels, the temple, and it is here that when you study you are blessed, right?[145]" At least,

[143] Ch. 3 detailed the varieties of cultivation activities that the temple offers these participants.
[144] For example, one of the main takeaways from the Lay Buddhists in (Jones 2010) were the possibilities for lay practice without ever needing to take part in a temple community
[145] Interview 12/18/2017 "就是说最好是寺院，佛法不是佛法僧吗？三宝，咱们是在三宝地，寺院，就在这里学有加持力。对吧?"

the temple's *jushi* believe that it is their *yuanfen* (缘分)[146] and beneficial to their cultivation to have the chance to practice where the three treasures are together.

In addition to the chance to cultivate at a sacred location among the three jewels, Puci Temple also offers them opportunity to perform their filial and other cultural duties in such a way that aligns with their own practice (depending on where they are on the lay Buddhist spectrum). Here at the temple, the lay Buddhists can engage in traditional practices oriented toward one's family and filial obligations in multiple ways. They can participate in more popularly oriented practices alongside the *xiangke,* more formal rituals involving recitation of sutra, or some combination of both. Having the temple as home base for these practices also often prevents them from having to go to other temples further from their home or a distant gravesite and allows them to fulfill their duty to their family and practice Buddhism conveniently in the way they see fit.

*Wider Community of Xiangke*

The wider community of *xiangke* at the temple have very different aims than either the *jushi* or the nuns. The x*iangke* utilize the temple and its resources for individual and family-based popular religious practices and in doing so, like at other times in Chinese history, they are taking advantage Buddhist inspired options (Ter Haar 2001). The temple provides an inclusive and flexible space for individual practice whenever they might need them and, where on important days on the ritual calendar, the environment is specially prepared for their benefit.

As discussed in more detail in Ch.3, supplication to images at the temple in the hope for certain material benefits in this life is popular at temples throughout China and it is also the most

[146] Here *yuanfen* refers to the fateful connection that brought the opportunity to practice at the temple

popular activity for the *xiangke* at this temple. At any time, *xiangke* visitors are welcomed in to see blessings for their health, the health and peace of their families, business success, etc. Some may also, at times, seek guidance from the temple monastics. Many of these visitors express that visiting the temple to seek help has material and/or psychological benefits. Li Hong (李红), a 35-year-old female *xiangke* who visits the temple to ask for material support and also, at times, to venerate her ancestors, told me that she thinks her understanding of the benefits of her practice for her ancestors are like many other "normal people (*pingchangderen* 平常的人)" who come seeking psychological if not material benefits. She says, "In reality [one] can't know for certain if this kind of thing can or can't really help those who have passed, but because they have done this type of thing […] the feeling is that they can make this situation change for the better[147]."

As it does for Li Hong, the temple also offers services and space that allows the wider community to fulfill their cultural duties to their ancestors. This happens both through offering formal rituals available to the community run in Buddhist fashion by the Buddhist monks, selling memorial tablets, and offering a flexible space for performing traditional practices like burning paper money[148]. The most formal practice oriented towards ancestors that the *xiangke* participate in are funerary rituals. Xiaol Li (萧莉), the staff member who is responsible for scheduling the rituals, noted that nearly all the people taking advantage of the service are not formal Buddhists, but instead part of the wider community of *xiangke*. In fact, she told me it was *xiangke* who came to the nuns and requested that they offer these rituals after the temple was renovated. She said

[147] Interview 10/9/2017 "其实他并不知道他这样是否真的能够帮助到已故的人，但是因为他做了这样的事，他做了这样一件事情，作为他个人而言，他自己是感觉，他会让这件事情变好"

[148] Certainly, as discussed in Ch. 3, these activities related to ancestors are not totally unrelated to supplication. Many traditional practices toward ancestors are also meant to yield positive results for the family, living and deceased.

some families that take part in these rituals do it from a place of deep filial piety and others merely for face, but that they are all pleased to have access to this ritual at the temple because it allows them to fulfill their traditional responsibilities without having to leave the neighborhood.

Beyond these formal rituals, the *xiangke* also take advantage of other, less formal opportunities at the temple to perform their cultural responsibilities to their ancestors. *Xiangke* are welcome to participate in donation activities (*huodong* 活动) related to ancestors. This can be through long-term memorial tablets purchased on a 1 or 5 year basis or by donating some money and writing the names of one's family members on paper tablets to be used ritual assemblies dedicated to ancestors held in the temple 3 times per year and attended by the temple's *jushi*. They may have limited understanding of the ritual and will not attend, but they are offered the chance to participate through their donation and its dedication to their ancestors. Additionally, the incense furnaces at the temple are kept hot not just by the burning of incense, but also paper money. While the temple, in partnership with the local gov't and neighbors, does place some limits on when paper money can be burned, it is an activity that is made available to all temple participants. This is true even though, as we have seen, the temple nuns and *jushi* do not associate the practice with formal Buddhism and it is rejected by most of them.

There are some similarities between the aims of the *xiangke* and the *jushi* just mentioned, however, the *xiangke* do not generally seek to combine the traditional practices with more concerted cultivation, though, certainly, this exists on a spectrum as well. Some have a closer relationship to Buddhism and the specifics of Buddhist doctrine like Ma Xiu (马珍) who does not meet our definition for a lay Buddhist but comes regularly to the temple to supplicate before the Buddhist images and feels particularly close to Guanyin. Others, like an elderly couple I met on Dongzhi 2017, come to the temple for specific traditional practices like burning paper money.

Their neighborhood no longer allowed the burning of paper money, so they decided to take advantage of the temple providing a good environment to do so. The performance of these traditional activities on the temple grounds offers an important convenience to the mostly local *xiangke* and allows them to show their filial piety (or give face to idea that they should show filial piety). Sometimes the temple, as described in Ch. 4, becomes the most appropriate site for their popular religious practices.

## THE TEMPLE'S PRACTICAL AND FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

We have seen how all the various groups benefit from their participation at the temple. However, obviously, there are practical and economic considerations that the temple needs to address in order to operate successfully. Only when the temple is on stable economic footing and fulfills its obligations to the state and Buddhist association can it provide the opportunities for the participants we have mentioned.

The temple is an "official" Buddhist producer and is part of the Shanghai Buddhist Association. As such, they have an obligation to function in a way that is appropriate for an official producer to act, and the nuns work closely with the leaders of the association to ensure that the temple in operating within its structure and in accordance with the laws of the state. Additionally, the temple must fulfill their obligations to the local government and the community. They must be sure to comply with local regulations governing religious and public sites. The abbess handles communication with the higher-up local officials while other nuns have responsibilities to work with other outside officials on issues such as fire and safety.

The Shanghai Buddhist Association and local officials have been important supporters of the temple. As mentioned in Ch.2, the local government was instrumental in paving the way for

the temple's renovation into its current form by working to secure the land around the temple for redevelopment. I was told that the local government believed that the expanded temple would be a benefit to the local community. Additionally, other Buddhists entities connected to the Buddhist association made the renovation possible through extensive loans. The loans from the renovation are still on the temple's books and the temple accountant, Zhang Gui (张贵), reports that repayment of those loans is the temple's most crucial financial consideration today.

The temple is only able to function for its participants if it can support itself financially. Zhang Gui told me with a chuckle that they are "poor" in the sense that they have very little excess money available for discretionary projects. The temple, he says though, is not the poorest, but is also not the richest. He says, "We are now able to get by. Our food, clothing, and other needed items are not too big of a burden[149]." The temple also operates quite frugally. The staff stipends are very low, and the nuns take only 1000RMB per month for personal expenses. The temple, however, is not wealthy because they are a relatively small and they still carry the large loans. The outstanding loan remains in the millions USD[150], but, luckily for the temple, the loans are held by sympathetic lenders. Most of the loans were given interest free and the terms of the loan repayment have already been amended once to allow for extra time. As the finances go today, the Zhang Gui says that they can operate and pay off the loans as they are able. He remains confident that the temple will be able to meet their debt obligations over the next 10 years if the creditors don't come to collect early.

[149] Interview 11/8/2017 "我们现在，日子还是过得去啊，我们现在吃，穿，用，还是没有什么大的负担的."
[150] Several thousand *wan* (10,000) RMB (几千万) remaining debt according to Zhang Gui

The ability to fill both the practical needs of the temple and the aims of the participants is the foundation of the temple community and it is dependent on what each of the different groups of participants bring to the table. They all have a role to play in the support of the tenuous whole.

## RELYING ON EACH OTHER

### *Monastic Roles*

The temple's nuns provide administrative and ritual leadership for the participants. The nuns administer the temple by overseeing their various work units which include managing daily affairs like scheduling funerary rituals, collecting donations, daily rituals, the temple shop, etc. The temple staff reports that the temple is well managed by the nuns. Each of the work units headed by a nun has dedicated staff members who offer their support. Many of the tasks are behind the scenes, but the temple works because the monastics and their staff both diligently perform their work and deftly utilize volunteer resources to help with temple operations.

The nuns and the visiting monks also provide critical ritual leadership to the temples' participants. First, perhaps even more visible than the temple's own nuns, the visiting monks from the outskirts of Shanghai are at the temple daily to lead families in funerary ritual. These monastics have the most contact with the wider community of *xiangke* who are most likely to take advantage of those services. In performing these rituals, they must teach and guide the families in the proper ritual procedures and there is a lot of teaching to do because most families will not have familiarity with the ritual or its religious elements. The visiting monks also provide the ritual leadership for some of the more important rituals attended by the temple's *jushi*. Once the relationship with the monastery was established, the monks took over for the nuns in leadings the most important ritual assemblies (*fahui* 法会), including the 3 main rituals for ancestors.

According to many *jushi* I spoke with, their gender added an air of formality and sacredness to the rituals[151].

The temple nuns, however, also provide important ritual leadership at the temple on a day to day basis, especially to the *jushi*. Ven. Lu (*lushifu* 卢师父) who handles the morning and evening devotions (*zaowanke* 早晚课) and the midday offering (*shanggong* 上供), has primary duties over daily rituals, but all the other nuns, save the head nun, usually attend. The nuns will also lead the *pufo* (普佛) and ritual assemblies[152] that they do not hand over to the visiting monks. Further, Ven. Shi, as part of her responsibility over external affairs, manages and guides the sutra chanting small groups, mostly from behind the scenes. The nuns set the schedule, rules, and the primary texts to be chanted. They also are available to answer questions posed to them by the group leaders[153]. Ven. Shi also told me that the chanters may not always be aware, but they are paying close attention. When a nun notices something amiss with a sutra chanting group or the volunteers, they will go to the group leader and have them address the issue. Several times, Ven. Shi herself came to address one of the chanting groups about an ongoing issue, for example a problem with the sound of the chanting (e.g. the tune of a particular chant) or behavior during chanting (e.g. using cell phones).

If members of the sutra chanting groups or other regular *jushi* have a direct relationship with a monastic at the temple, it is usually one of the nuns. However, most of the *jushi* had very little engagement with monastics directly. The nuns are available, however, to answer the

[151] Certainly, a deeper analysis of the gender dynamics at the temple would be a tremendous contribution, but will need to be pursued in future projects
[152] For a more detailed description of ritual services, refer back to Ch.3
[153] As mentioned in Ch.3, the Sunday group leader especially takes advantage of the guidance of the nun for leading his chanting group

questions of the *jushi* or the wider community of *xiangke*. But, as mentioned, by their own admission they are not the type of people to go out seeking conversation and thus do not seek to develop close relationships with participants. The abbess of the temple will also visit with and counsel members of the temple community when called upon. So, the nuns are available to offer limited personal guidance to the community, but they always serve as quiet role models and symbols of religious devotion. For the committed lay Buddhist *jushi*, they demonstrate a level of dedication, benevolence, and religious knowledge that they hope to aspire to. For the wider community of *xiangke*, while they may not have much point of reference for their religious commitment, I heard many stories of participants drawn into Buddhism owing to the cultural appeal and mystique of monastics.

*Jushi Roles*

The lay Buddhist *jushi* of the temple, including volunteers and the members of the sutra chanting groups, also have very important roles at the temple in support of the temple community. They provide critical administrative functions in support of the monastics and staff[154]. Volunteering and participating in the sutra chanting, as discussed, is about accumulating merit, but part and parcel of those activities is work that directly helps the temple operate. Nearly every time I came to the temple to chant sutra, we also took care of some additional temple tasks. For example, on Tuesdays after lunch we would always attend to the temple's flowers and mop the entire building before returning to chanting in the afternoon. The labor of the regular participants, both in the course of regular work as a volunteer with assigned responsibilities and

[154] In most cases the staff of the temple are much like more formalized *jushi*. The pay is really just a small stipend, and none said they were there for the money. Only 1 staff member I spoke with did not have a clear Buddhist self-identity. This is especially true of the staff responsible for the *ketang* and *xieyuan* who were both active temple *jushi* before joining the staff.

additional responsibilities as part of other groups, is indispensable to the temple's operations. As Xiao Li (萧莉) told me:

> If this temple had to rely on just the few monastics it would be very hard, right? Many *jushi* are definitely needed to help. Today [Puci Temple] is so good, its managed well and also the contributions of the sutra chanting small groups can't be overlooked, the *jushi* from the small groups have contributed a lot[155].

Here she is referring to both the contribution of physical labor and also to the religious environment, including adding to the reputation of the temple and supporting its memorial tablets as previously discussed.

In assisting in the operation and maintenance of the temple, the *jushi* help the whole community including themselves, the nuns, and the wider community of *xiangke*. In these roles they provide direct support to the *xiangke* through volunteering on the incense days that draw in the *xiangke* in large numbers. Certainly, they are there in support of the nuns, but the entire work task on the temple's busiest and most important days is about creating a positive environment for the *xiangke*. They are there to make sure the rules of the temple are followed and do their best to create a positive and trouble-free environment for everyone. Further, the *jushi* support rituals at the temple through their attendance and chanting, including those like the one for the middle school exam[156] which is intended mainly for *xiangke* participants.

The practices of the *jushi* at the temple also contribute to the religious atmosphere and reputation of the temple and its community. As mentioned in Ch.3, one of the aims of the sutra chanting groups was to chant for the memorial tablets at the temple. Regardless of the doctrinal

[155] Interview 12/1/2017 "这个庙如果靠几个出家人，也很难的，你说是吧？肯定要很多居士帮助它，今天[普慈堂]这么好，他领导的好，而且我们诵经小组功不可没。诵经小组的居士们，奉献了很大的贡献."
[156] Described in Ch. 3

position held by the *jushi* regarding the potential for them to impact those that have been memorialized, it is clear that having the chanting groups there on site chanting *Dizang Jing*[157] (地藏经) boosts the reputation of the temple's memorial tablets which has an impact financially and on the temples overall reputation. The *jushi*, especially when dressed in their ritual robes (*haiqing* 海清) denoting themselves as dedicated lay Buddhists, also bring ambiance to the temple. At times, they also spur outsiders to inquire about their practices. On more than one occasion, I saw *xiangke* see chanting and then ask to join in for some time. They may or may not come back, but it raises the possibility of the environment produced by the temple's *jushi* creating opportunity for the spread of the Buddha Dharma (*hongfa* 弘法) to the temple's *xiangke* (a point we will return to in the next chapter).

*Xiangke Roles*

Too often, research on lay Buddhism renders invisible the important role that *xiangke* play in temple Buddhism and the associated community. Understandably, the eye of religious scholars has been focused on religious writings, the roles of monastics, and the practices of dedicated lay Buddhist individuals and groups. However, when we look at the ecology of a single local temple like this one, we find that these *xiangke* are the most critical participants to its success. It is not enough to discount them as not meeting some standard for formal Buddhist practice and thus not important to our study. In fact, they are the lifeblood of the temple and, as we have seen, their religious practices are important to consider as we think more deeply about the relationship between popular religious practices inspired with Buddhism and a more concerted form of practicing lay Buddhism. The wider community of *xiangke* who make up *the*

[157] This sutra is focused on life and death, and thus is most closely associated with ancestors. It is said that chanting this sutra accumulates merit for both the chanter and the ancestors.

*overwhelming majority* of the total participants at the temple bring two very important resources to the temple community – economic resources and energy.

The wider community of *xiangke* are the primary financial engine of the temple and without them the temple would not be able to operate. Zhang Gui made it clear that the incense days that draw in large crowds of mostly *xiangke* participants were the most important days for the temple financially, and that the participation of the temple's *xiangke* was the most important factor in the temple's financial security. It is on these days that the donations in the merit boxes (*gongdexiang* 功德箱) and from the entrance tickets are the highest. These two sources of income are the bedrock of the temple economy and make up more than half of the total donations to the temple in a given year. Of these, he says that the merit boxes are the most important because entrance tickets may not be permanent, but the temple will always have merit boxes. Beyond these 2 basic sources, individual donations through the various donation programs (*huodong* 活动) and toward rituals make up the remainder of the funds. Certainly, *jushi* also contribute financially to the temple at times, but the x*iangke* participants contribute the majority through all these methods. Most important is the regularity in support because, while the numbers go up and down throughout the year depending on the holiday, the ritual calendar is sure to bring in *xiangke* regularly and their contributions provide the foundation for the temple's operations. While the literature does not seem to discuss this directly in research on modern Buddhism, it is not a surprise to the average person at the temple that *xiangke* are most numerous and make the most monetary donations. As the temple's Zhang Gui said to me, "Our traditional Chinese temples rely on the money from the incense fire to survive[158]." It has always been those

[158] Interview 11/8/2017 "我们中国传统的寺庙的话，他是靠香火钱生活的."

coming to burn incense that have provided for the temple, and, in the case of this temple and many other local urban Buddhist temples, the *xiangke* participants are the key to keeping the fires burning.

Other temples in rural areas or with different specialties may rely on other participants to keep the fires burning, but Puci Temple is not a tourist draw that brings in many outsiders from far beyond the surrounding neighborhoods. It also does not have large rituals or important monastics that attract lay Buddhist *jushi* from afar to support the temple. Even the temple's core *jushi* often tend not to prioritize monetary donations (*bushi* 布施) at the temple and, further, their cultivation practices are free of charge and they are exempt from entrance tickets. They were certainly important contributors during the renovation, and they will donate money to participate in rituals or when they see a need, but many of the regular *jushi* told me they preferred to donate money at poorer temples where there is more perceived need[159]. As such, the temple relies heavily on the constant flow of *xiangke* through the temple and the donations they make; both small monies donated in the merit boxes or some other donation activity (活动) and, also, the more occasional large donor from the local business community.

The temple that the visiting monks come from is an instructive counterexample that demonstrates the critical role played by the *xiangke* at Puci Temple. On the outskirts of Shanghai, their temple does not have an active community of *xiangke* because it is a less populated area and they do not offer cultivation opportunities to draw lay Buddhists from the city. The financial situation at the temple is very difficult and they support themselves largely

[159] There was debate about this among the respondents as to whether donating money at a poorer temple resulted in additional merit. Even if they thought it did not, they still preferred to donate at poorer temples because of perceived need.

through the rituals they perform in the city at Puci Temple. As Xiao Li said eloquently about the wider community at the temple, "the resource of the *xiangke* is never ending[160]," however, as she points out, it is not just financial resources that the *xiangke* bring to the temple.

Xiao Li emphasized to me that there is something even more important than money that the *xiangke* bring to the temple: an irreplaceable type of popularity (*renqi* 人气). Big donors can, in an instant, donate more money to the temple than hundreds of other *xiangke* who are donating one bit at a time[161], but *xiangke* are not only important financial contributors as they also bring with them a special feeling to the temple. With the participation of the *xiangke*, busy days at the temple have the fiery environment (*honghuo* 红火) that has provided a special character to religious life at Chinese temples historically (Chau 2006). In discussing the temple environment during interviews with *jushi*, several people brought up the energy (*zhengnengliang* 正能量) of the temple. Much like Xiao Li, they see the energy as being related to the coming together of the entirety of temple participants, including *xiangke* and *jushi*, with good intentions and pious hearts. That results in an energy that animates the temple environment itself and, according to some, spills out into the surrounding neighborhood encouraging others to join and, even, making the neighborhood safer. The source of the feeling and atmosphere at the temple at regular intervals relies on its wider community of *xiangke* who support the temple throughout the year.

[160] Interview 12/1/2017 "香客来源是源源不断的."

[161] This was an important point that I continued to discuss with key figures. As I am making an argument for the economic important of the *xiangke* as a group. I needed to be sure that it was not actually a small number of larger donors supporting the temple. From everything I can tell, large donations are few and far between. The accountant told me that the collections from ticket sales and merit boxes make up more than half of the temple's total funding.

| | Benefits of Participation | Role in the Temple |
|---|---|---|
| **Monastics** | - Stable culture with adequate support allows the temple nuns to pursue their own cultivation and interests<br>- Monks from outside the temple are provided a source of income through access to temple *xiangke* | - Provide ritual leadership to the *xiangke* and the *jushi* through formal ritual activities like funerary rituals and ritual assemblies<br>- Provide spiritual leadership and an excellent religious example for community<br>- Manage the temple administration and group activities |
| **Jushi** | - Opportunity for cultivation and accumulation of merit at a location that houses the three jewels<br>- Location where they can combine their lay Buddhist practice with traditional practices oriented towards one's family in the city | - Contribute critical labor to the administration and operations of the temple<br>- Provide atmosphere and religious significance to the temple's memorial tablets and overall reputation |
| **Xiangke** | - Utilize formal ritual services close to their homes in a good environment and led by monastics<br>- Provided a flexible environment for supplication and other practices which bring material and/or psychological benefits | - Financial foundation of the entire temple community. Primary benefactors of the temple<br>- Bring energy to the temple at regular interviews that are critical to the maintenance of the temple community |

**Figure 6.1: Group Benefits and Roles at Puci Temple**

## MAKING IT WORK TOGETHER – THE TEMPLE AS A GENERALIST ORGANIZATION

Puci Temple is a producer of "official" Buddhism but there is such difference in terms of religious beliefs and practice, so how does everything hang together? How is it that the status quo is maintained without conflict and where there is very little movement toward greater uniformity in belief and practice? We find that the temple is a generalist organization and that allows it to accommodate its diverse participants. Scholars have pointed at Buddhist temples as

generalist before, but exactly what is meant by this has not been detailed. It seems, as in Jones (2010), that scholars are mostly referring to the temple as generalist in a strictly Buddhist sense by offering a range of activities like volunteering, chanting, and ritual services to *jushi*, usually without any strict denominational emphasis. Considering the temple as this kind of generalist places it in direct contrast with some non-temple-based lay Buddhist groups that offer a stronger package of practice, belief, and identity.

We find, though, that this local temple is a generalist organization in an even broader way. It allows for a wide range of engagement with formal Buddhism while at the same time accommodating, and relying upon, participants whose beliefs and practices are rooted in popular religious culture. It is setup in such a way to allow each group to play their role and get what they need. This generalized environment that is so important to the functioning of the temple is maintained in both structural and cultural ways. Activities and groups at the temple are separated structurally in how their practices are planned and arranged, and we also find religious and narrative justifications that undergird the practical necessity for cooperation. While it is not fair to say that the cultural justifications used are not "real" in any sense, we can see clearly see how other approaches would risk upsetting the status quo that allows the temple to continue working for all. It seems that while this form of temple organization relies on the cooperation and integration of its varied participants, it is importantly a *lack of relations* between the groups, especially the *xiangke* and the regular *jushi*, that is responsible, at least in large part, for maintaining the temple community\.

*Generalization and Accommodation through Structure – Together, but Separate*

*1) Structural separation between the jushi and xiangke.*

Regularly organized temple activities like sutra chanting and rituals, attended almost exclusively by the temple *jushi,* are separated from the wider community of *xiangke* structurally in terms of how they are advertised and executed. Importantly, no organized group activities involve planned togetherness of *xiangke* and the *jushi* where they are encouraged to exchange religious ideas. All organized activities at the temple are, however, open to all, at least in theory. It is also the expressed hope of the monastics and the *jushi* that all who visit the temple could pursue practice oriented toward formal Buddhism together. However, no one sees that as a practical aim and the temple, in fact, maintains separation between the groups and that separation that serves to promote the healthy functioning of the temple.

*Jushi* activites, like the sutra chanting groups, are open to inquiry from the wider community and do occasionally draw in curious *xiangke,* but they are not widely advertised or suggested to visitors to the temple[162]. As discussed in Ch. 3, these groups do have some requirements for continued participation, but anyone is welcome to try it out. We also never witnessed, or were told of, anyone who joined a sutra chanting group and then was asked to leave involuntarily. These groups are given space and priority. Chanting usually takes place in public spaces, including the Guanyin and Ksitigarbha Halls and the canteen, and thus open to the eyes and interest of visitors, but the doors are often closed during chanting to control the climate. As such, these groups are often practicing behind closed and thus create a separation between the activity and any members of the wider community that may be present. We witnessed many times *xiangke* come and press their face against the glass of the hall doors and choose not to enter the hall to pray because they believed the room to be closed and off-limits to them, even

[162] It does happen, though, that *xiangke* are invited to participate by the nuns or some other *jushi*, but this situation is quite rare.

though that was not the case. They still provide atmosphere which has the potential to draw people in, but the physical barrier also marks it off from the wider community as something distant from their own purpose visiting the temple. Even when an incense day falls on a weekday, the weekday chanting groups are given priority to practice at their usual table in the Guanyin Hall while the multitudes of *xiangke* work around them as they make the ritual circuit to supplicate before the images in the hall.

Participation in rituals, including *pufo* (普佛) and ritual assemblies (*fahui* 法会), another important activity for the temple *jushi*, are also open to the public if they were to show up at the correct time and place or, in the case of some more important assemblies, have signed up in advance. The rituals, however, are not widely advertised to the wider community for their participation.[163] Most are only attended by the regular *jushi* and are promoted informally through the sutra chanting groups and the regular participant social networks. As mentioned earlier, Smaller *pufo* may take place before the temple is even open and are only available to be attended for *jushi* in the know. Other *pufo* and ritual assemblies, including the 3 for days, are also attended almost exclusively by the temple's *jushi*. One exception being that for important *pufo* dedicated to key Buddha and Bodhisattva which draw additional interest, the monastics invite *xiangtou* (香头 head incense lighters), often from among large donors or other prominent members of the *xiangke* community, to come and participate at the front of the room as representatives of the wider community. Another way that the wider community of *xiangke* are involved in these rituals, but still separated structurally is that they are welcomed to participate via donations to the

[163] In the final month of my time at the temple, they posted a simple semi-permanent (thick) poster board with the important dates on the following year's calendar and some activity information. This was new and my feeling is it may serve to improve attendance at events. It remains an open question to what extent it may change participation.

rituals in honor of people (most commonly the deceased in rituals for ancestors). These calls for participation through dedicating a paper tablet (through a donation) usually take place on the incense days leading up to important ritual assemblies and many *xiangke* contribute. A table is setup to accept donations and it becomes another way for the *xiangke* to donate to as part of their supplication practices. They will donate money and write names, but, when they do so, they are not actively informed about the ritual so that they might attend, nor encouraged to sign up if that is required.

Many of the ritual assemblies also take place in the ritual space that is in the sub-level of the temple's Main Hall. The ritual space below the Main Hall is one of the most beautiful spaces in the temple, with images in the Tibetan Buddhist style, but many of the temple's *xiangke* do not even know it is there. In utilizing that space for rituals, there becomes a stark physical separation between the formal Buddhist ritual downstairs and the activities taking place in the public areas of the temple which speaks to the structural separation between the *jushi* and *xianke*. The separation is especially stark on days when rituals take place on incense days that also draw in large numbers of *xiangke*. If they had not been told, most *xiangke* visiting the temple on the day of a ritual may will have no idea that there are monks downstairs leading a solemn ritual flanked by 50 or more lay Buddhist *jushi*. This is the situation we found in the opening vignette of this dissertation where two very different forms of religious practice that are often separated come face to face. Many of the rituals attended by the *jushi* are physically separated from the wider community in space and/or time.

As discussed in Ch. 3, there are two main rituals during the year that are also well-attended by the wider community *xiangke* and take place in public in the Main Hall (大雄宝殿), the middles school exam *pufo* and the *muyu* ritual that marks the birth of Shakyamuni Buddha.

However, the structural separation between the groups is also clearly on display during these rituals. In both of these rituals, the *jushi* arrive early to the main hall as discussed in advance during sutra chanting or where they have been informed through *jushi* networking and are dressed in their *haiqing*[164] which make clear that they are different than those *xiangke* in attendance. The *jushi* participate actively in the rituals by following along with the ritual procedures and chanting with the monastics.

In the case of the middle school exam *pufo*, the *xiangke* participants come to the temple at the assigned time and are directed where to stand, when to bow, etc. They are truly visitors who understand the aims of their own practice but have little understanding of the content and procedures of the ritual itself. The *muyu* ritual also draws interest from the *xiangke*, but it is not advertised in advance to the *xiangke.* In fact, before the ritual formally begins, the hall is cleared of visitors other than the *jushi*– who are many because it is a popular incense day – and the ritual begins with the nuns entering via procession with the abbess leading the way (a very rare sight). The *xiangke*, some of which had been recently removed from the hall so the ritual could start, begin to gather around the doors to the main hall to peer inside at the sacred spectacle. Only after the chanting portion of the ritual is completed and the *jushi* had taken their turns to bathe the Buddha, are the wider community invited back into the hall to take their turn. Here you can see a structural separation between the groups. Earlier in the research process, I believed the *jushi* were "helping" in the sense that they were offering something to the nuns to help make the ritual more successful, perhaps for the benefit of the *xiangke*. But, while they are adding important energy and ambiance, they are still, according to themselves, simply taking advantage of the

[164] Ritual clothing that is worn by formal lay Buddhists. You will see them wear these for sutra chanting or any other formal ritual gathering.

opportunity for practice. Instead, what is on display here is 2 different kinds of opportunities on offer to two different segments of the community at the same time.

Volunteering is another structured group activity. It, too, is open to the public and can be an entry point for *xiangke* who want to get more involved in the temple, but it also requires one to take the initiative to inquire and then submit to additional evaluation from the monastics and lead volunteers to be able to join the group. The evaluation part is more about reliability than devoutness, but certainly most people who are dedicated volunteers are considered practicing lay Buddhists based on our definition. They are often introduced to volunteering by other *jushi* and nearly all that I met had an explicit lay Buddhist identity. Participation in the volunteering group is a form of cultivation where one can collect merit, so most of the people are seeking to help for those reasons. However, volunteering at temples has long been something that everyday people, including *xiangke*, have seen as a source of merit. Merit, at least in its simplest form, is a concept widely shared across Buddhist and non-Buddhists in China. This can lead *xiangke* who are just beginning to show deeper interest in Buddhism to start with volunteering at the temple as a first step toward a more concerted practice as we saw in the case of Yuan Xiu (袁秀)[165]. So, as discussed in Ch. 5, we see a wider spectrum of practice among members of the temple volunteering group as some are just beginning to practice more deeply and others are incorporating temple volunteering as just one part of their personal package of Buddhism that extends beyond the temple.

[165] You will recall this volunteer from Ch.3. She is retired and had long come to the temple as a *xiangke.* She recently has begun a deeper dedication to Buddhist practice, but still has a limited knowledge of Buddhism. She comes to the temple to volunteer without fail, but the details of Buddhist doctrine, as she will tell you, are still hazy.

We have mentioned each of the group activities and the separation between the groups that they encourage, but it should also be noted that there are times that *xiangke* and *jushi* do practice side by side individually. There are not, though, organized activities where both groups have a defined vision for time, place, and religious detail. However, members of either group may kneel before image of a buddha or bodhisattva, perhaps even one after another, and their practices may look nearly identical. However, as we have seen, the meaning and motivations behind them may be very different. They are unlikely to share these different understandings with each other for cultural reasons that we will explore below.

*2) Structures that maintain a generalist orientation among the jushi*.

The structural separation between the *xiangke* and *jushi* is very important to detail, but we must also describe how the generalist environment is maintained structurally in such while sea way that different types of *jushi,* who fall along various places on the spectrum of lay Buddhism we have detailed, are able to practice together as group despite their own differences. This, too, is important for the functioning of the temple community. The way the various activities available for the *jushi* to participate in are structured serves to maintain a general environment.

The temple monastics do not promote a certain path of study through a denomination or any individual spiritual leader (*fashi* 法师). The temple itself does draw a limited influence from its own tradition as a Tiantai Temple (天台宗). This history at least partly contributes to selection of sutra for the chanting groups and influenced the training of the abbess. However, the emphasis does not extend in a significant way to the *jushi* and many of them did not even know

the denomination of the temple[166]. The nuns I spoke with also told me that the Tiantai tradition was not an emphasis in their own cultivation.

Certainly, in speaking with them, they have their own opinions about how they and the *jushi* should study, but they do not believe it is their place to push those ideas onto the groups (something we will return to below). In the sutra chanting groups, there is a focus on the sutra themselves and what is said in them. When the *jushi* do speak to each other about religious matters, it is likely they will talk about concepts in the sutra, but less often about paths people should take in order to understand them. Also, they will not generally push specific interpretations as superior to others. Two nuns on separate occasions expressed some concerns to me about the study paths of the *jushi*: one told me she was concerned that many of the participants of the chanting groups seemed content not to develop their knowledge, and another told me of her concern about how strict interpretations of a famous monk that may lead some *jushi* to get some wrong-headed ideas. However, both made clear that they could do nothing but try to provide them a foundation for their own learning through the temple activities.

The temple, in fact, offers no explicit religious training in terms of activities dedicated to study of Buddhist doctrine (sutra chanting aside). Ven. Shi did tell me that they hope one day to be able to offer of these opportunities, but that right now they do not. They say they have been focused on establishing a foundation with *jushi* first, and then they may start offering some basic opportunities to study the sutra that are chanted at the temple. In our observations, the only knowledge that was visible being passed down from the monastic leadership to the *jushi* was through the Sunday chanting group leader who has been sharing some very general information

[166] There are several examples in interviews where core participants did not know the denomination of the temple and incorrectly identified it as a Pure Land temple.

through the official sutra chanting group WeChat. We can expect that when they do begin offering formal classes about Buddhist doctrine, however, that it will emphasize an open and inclusive format with a focus on interpretation of the texts that they chant at the temple and that puts very little pressure on the participants. The lack of discussion of "right" interpretation and specific directives for "right" action seems important here. Everyone is encouraged to seek to develop their knowledge in a general sense and continue to cultivate themselves, but there is very little discussion of that knowledge that is structured by the temple in such a way that it appears to be something that all the *jushi* should believe and act upon. This is tied to important cultural understandings shared by the monastics and *jushi* at the temple.

*Generalized Environment and Accommodation through Culture – Ambivalence and Inclusion*

We have seen above how activities are structured at the temple, physically or otherwise, contribute to a generalist temple environment that accommodates its varieties of participants. However, there are important cultural understandings anchored by Buddhist justifications that help to maintain the inclusive, and often ambivalent, status quo between and among the groups. As we have said, from the point of view of most of the regular *jushi* and the nuns, the *xiangke* are not practicing Buddhism. Worst case these practices are superstitious, and, at best, they are well-meaning misinterpretations of how Buddhism should be practiced. This allowed the *jushi* to distance these practices from their own and handwave them as unimportant from a Buddhist perspective and making them, in their minds, not important for a researcher interested in Buddhism. For these *jushi*, many of whom once counted themselves among the ranks of the *xiangke*, these people are just not Buddhists like them. Instead, these *xiangke*, who are so numerous and visible in their practice, are considered outsiders (*menwaihan* 门外汉) or hobbyists (*aihaozhe* 爱好者). As one *jushi* told me about the difference between them, "[they]

also go on the 1st of the lunar month and also on the 15th, but [they] do not have a master […] they don't know Buddhist things, [they] haven't come closer to taking refuge, so [they] are still on the outside of Buddhism, [they] are outsiders[167]."

For the *jushi* and also the monastics, the *xiangke* are clearly an important part of temple life, but they have a distinct group "otherness" and fall short of being considered one of them. We might expect that this situation where the monastics and the most dedicated minority participants are practicing what they understand as a different religion (or no religion at all), there would be attempts to teach, correct, and/or recruit. We might also expect it to lead to some tension as the groups encounter each other. However, the temple *jushi* and the nuns do not push these people toward practicing differently, stopping certain practices, or becoming formal Buddhists through formally taking refuge in the three jewels (like them). What reasons do the volunteers and other *jushi* give for why they do not regularly engage with the *xiangke* about their practices even though, from their own religious point of view, they are doing it "wrong"? The ambivalent relationship between the *jushi* and the *xiangke* is rooted in beliefs about how people come into studying the dharma, understandings about their own karma, and the hope for a shared ethical spirituality. These same justifications also promote inclusivity among the *jushi* themselves which allow lay Buddhists at different points on the spectrum to practice together.

The *jushi* explain that each person has a Buddhist foundation (*genji* 根基) and Buddhist affinity (*foyuan* 佛缘) that is built upon karma accumulated in this and past lives, and this unique foundation dictates when, if, and how an individual will study Buddhism. This is their karmic

[167] Interview 11/17/2017 "你初一也去十五也去，你没有师父 […] 佛教里的东西你也不知道, 你没有接近？皈依，那你还是在佛门外面。是门外汉."

reward (*fubao* 福报). There is moment when they are meant to hear Buddha dharma and that moment can't be forced. This understanding is important for the dynamics in the temple because the *jushi* see this as justification for maintaining an ambivalent distance from the *xiangke.* The *jushi* relayed to me that if they try to teach or correct a *xiangke* whose fateful relation with the Buddha is not mature (*yinyuan meichengshu* 因缘没成熟) it can bring about distress (*fannao* 烦恼) which leads to a negative experience for the *xiangke* that pushes them further away from the Dharma. Han Zhi (韩芝) put it this way, "[…] they are future Buddha. Also including you...ants, mice, and all the like things, they are all future Buddha. […] Everyone's predestined relationship (with Buddhism) will mature earlier or later, so all must be respected.[168]" Further, as Cheng Lei (程磊) said, "If you discuss right and wrong with them, and [they] think [their practice] is right, but you say it is not right, then [they] will not be happy[169]." It is related to the more general concept of *yuanfen* (缘分 fateful coincidence) which is salient both the *jushi* and *xiangke.* The *jushi* see *yuanfen* through their Buddhist understandings of karma in a way that the *xiangke* do not, but some *xiangke* did explain why they haven't learned more about Buddhism by saying their "fate has not yet arrived" (*yuanfen meidao* 缘分没到). The *jushi* believe that the *xiangke* coming to the temple already shows they have some karmic reward (*fubao* 福报)[170] and it is in the best interest of the *xiangke* that they be allowed to practice in the way they see fit without interference, so the *jushi* tend not to engage deeply with the visitors at all.

[168] Interview 11/23/2017 "他们就是未来的佛啊，包括你也，你以后也是未来的佛啊, 都要恭敬你们, 包括蚂蚁, 老鼠, 任何一样东西，都是未来佛啊 […] 每个人的因缘成熟早晚， 所以都要恭敬他们，不可以不恭敬的."

[169] Interview 12/18/2017 "你跟他谈对错，他觉得他那个东西是对的，你说错了，他就不高兴了."

[170] The idea here is that the fact that they walked through the front gate of the temple, regardless of purpose or understanding, shows that this person is closer to being able to accept the Buddha Dharma than someone who does not come in.

In addition to this cultural justification that explained lack of interaction with the *xiangke* in terms of benefitting them though protecting their karmic relationship with Buddhism, the *jushi* and monastics also explained that the *jushi* must be careful of their own fateful relations (*yuanfen* 缘分) with the visiting *xiangke*. Speaking with them about religious matters when you don't have the proper connection can have consequences for both people. In the practice of Buddhism, everyone is in a constant state of learning. No person, especially a lay Buddhist, has all answers, and there is a widely held understanding that sharing incorrect information about Buddhism with others can have serious negative impacts on one's own karma. This is something the *jushi* commonly spoke about when I would ask in interviews about their interaction (or lack thereof) with the *xiangke* at the temple. Xie Hui (谢辉), 68-years-old, is a practicing Buddhist who encounters *xiangke* every day in his position as temple groundskeeper. He noted, "So many things you can't explain clearly. Only the Buddha knows, but we don't know, so predestined relationships (*yinyuan* 因缘) really matter[171]." One must be careful because, as Ven. Shi put it:

> "[…] they may cause people to go astray, before they were on this track, but I am afraid they will be led astray. After they have been led astray, it is very hard to change their way of thinking. In this situation of being led astray, originally a person had a karmic reward, they had this, but if you lead them astray, that good foundation is broken.[172]

As such, the potential karmic repercussions for the volunteers or other temple *jushi* engaging with the *xiangke* about religious matters are very serious and serve to maintain an ambivalent distance between the groups. Not only is there a risk of pushing the *xiangke* further away from

[171] Interview 11/21/2017 "很多事就讲不清楚了。只有佛力知道，我们也不知道，所以因缘啊，这个特别(有)关系"

[172] Interview 1/5/2018 "我怕他们把人给带偏了，本来是这一条轨道的，我怕他把人带偏了。这个 带偏了以后 人的观念很难转变的。一旦带偏了话，本来这个人有这个福报，有这个这个的，你如果一旦给他带偏了的话，他这个善根就断了."

the true Buddha Dharma, but, additionally, the potential for the *jushi* to convey a misunderstanding (of the Dharma) (*shuopian* 说骗). The karmic consequences for causing another person to go astray, the respondents tell me, are very serious. Certainly, the temple's *jushi*, so interested in their own cultivation and collection of merit, do not want to bear the karmic responsibility of pushing someone away from the true Buddha Dharma (*zhengfa* 正法).

We have been talking thus far mostly about the relationship between the *jushi* and the wider community of *xiangke* because the juxtaposition between these groups is so stark. The dynamic between these two groups is most on display on the busy days at the temple where the lay Buddhist volunteers are there to help the temple serve the wider community as they practice. However, the generalist and inclusive environment is also present amongst the *jushi* who themselves inhabit various places on the spectrum of lay Buddhism and have different ideas about Buddhist practices and doctrine. This generalist culture among the *jushi* is also maintained through cultural understandings related to those introduced above. While these formal Buddhists are more likely to teach each other and discuss the details of Buddhist doctrine and practice, they generally to not denigrate or belittle the choices other make. They often share Buddhist information with each other via WeChat or other means, but we did not observe them commonly having discussions about interpretation or implications of the information. Ven. Shi spoke about this situation in the same breath as speaking about the relationship between the *jushi* and *xiangke* and with the same justification – risk of negatively impacting one's own karma and leading someone else astray. She said that it is certainly more appropriate for the *jushi* to speak to each other about Buddhist doctrine, but that they too should be careful about how they do so and, where possible, keep it at a very general level like encouraging them to keep up the studies or to join you in a cultivation activity.

When *jushi* were asked about differences among them, they spoke about it in similar ways to how they spoke about the *xiangke*, in terms of fate and foundation. Each *jushi* must approach their cultivation in a way that is uniquely appropriate to them and their karmic foundation. These foundations might be different owing to past lives or to one's reality in this life, like age and education. Instead of skepticism or critique, they applaud each other outwardly for their commitment and encourage them to proceed in their study in a *suiyuan* (随缘) manner. *Suiyuan*, as it is used at the temple, roughly translates to "as fate would have it." It is a key cultural understanding that helps to maintain inclusivity among *jushi* who demonstrate significant difference (as detailed in Ch. 5). Its usage at the temple has a casual and inclusive feeling. For example, if one *jushi* asks another if they eat vegetarian and the other replies sheepishly that they are not fully vegetarian, the other may reply, "*suiyuana!* (随缘啊!)." Or if they invite someone to attend some cultivation activity (*suixi gongde* 随喜功德) but they can't (or don't want to), then this would also be a common response. They may not agree with what the others are doing, but they encourage them to pursue cultivation in a way that is most comfortable for them. These understandings reflect the belief that access to the Buddha Dharma can be gained through any of 84,000 gates and there is no one correct path[173]. Therefore, even disagreements are glossed over to promote inclusion and the generalist environment at the temple.

These cultural attitudes about other peoples' practice has the practical benefit of creating an inclusive environment where many different religious approaches and personal packages of

[173] This does not mean that there is no judgement at all among any of these people. Certainly, there is a difference between believing that any path is equally correct, but how you go about that path does matter. Some people recognized and expressed that, but the general culture promotes this generalized encouragement.

practice have space to operate and where one's practice is not likely to be critiqued or challenged. Instead, however you practice is seen in a positive light and speaks to one's personal progress on their Buddhist journey. It is also not only these understandings about the potential for karmic consequences promoting ambivalence between *jushi* and *xiangke* that help to maintain the status quo at the temple. The *jushi* (and the temple's nuns) also see something quite positive in the presence of the *xiangke* and their decidedly non-Buddhist practices which also contributes to the temple's generalist and inclusive culture. By extension, they also see it as positive that other *jushi* come to practice alongside them even if they share very different understandings and approaches to Buddhism.

The *jushi* and nuns I spoke with see the practices of the *xiangke* at the temple as rooted in Chinese tradition and believe that their participation often shows a desire to be filial and be more virtuous. There is even the hope among many regular participating *jushi* that the practices of the *xiangke* lead to an ethical spirituality that is shared across the temple community between all groups. At minimum there is the belief that coming to the temple to practice shows a self-reflection and humility as well as respect for the Buddha and Bodhisattva. Zhou Juan 周娟, a 58-year-old sutra chanter, told me, that even if it is just in the moment when one kneels before the Buddha with their head on ground people this can be impactful. She says when she or a *xiangke* prostrates themselves before the Buddha they will both have similar feelings in that moment saying, "When I kneel down and bow my head, Buddha is above me and I am under. The Buddha envelops me, so it is impossible that I do bad things, have bad thoughts, odd thoughts, or lazy thoughts. At that moment, I do not have any mental afflictions.[174]" Zhou Juan is not certain

[174] Interview 10/26/2017 "我首先拜下去了，五体投地，我在下面，佛在上面，佛罩着，我不可能做坏事，也不可能起坏想，古怪的东西不可以有，懒惰的东西不可以有，这一刹那的时候，我的烦恼是没有的."

that they will allow this moment of placing oneself under the Buddha will lead to positive action outside the temple, but there is hope.

Many other *jushi* expressed a similar sentiment in describing to why they are comfortable with, and even supportive, of *xiangke* practices. Guo Mei, a long time *xiangke* herself, was more positive about the prospects of practices in the temple leading *xiangke* to act more virtuously outside the temple. She said, "at least they smell the Buddha Dharma, so when they do bad things, they will think, oh, will Buddha punish me? right? Then, when they do bad things, they may later repent[175]." While most of the *jushi* would not agree with the idea of potential punishment as a motivation, there is a widespread hope that many of these people, though of course not all of them, will parlay their practices, whatever form they may take, into being a better person outside of the temple and thus contributing to a better, more harmonious, society.

The *jushi* also understand the psychological benefits of different forms of practice given many of them have seen significant change in their own practice over time. Many of the *jushi* used to have very different beliefs and practices which were like the *xiangke* or *jushi* at other stages in their Buddhist development, and they understand that those forms of practice also have important benefits in those moments. Lin Hui 林慧, a 48-year-old teacher who chants on Sundays, first began practicing at the temple as a *xiangke* looking for help with her son's health and education. She recalls that her practices as a *xiangke* brought her much comfort and personal benefit. While she knows from her current point of view that her understanding of Buddhism was severely limited at the time, but the practices she did before were still valuable in their own way

[175] Interview 11/16/2017 "至少他们闻到了佛法，他们做坏事的时候就想到了，哦哟，佛菩萨会不会惩罚我，对吧，然后他们做坏事的时候就，他们也可能有忏悔了."

and helped her get to where she is now. Ven. He (*heshifu* 贺师父) also spoke about the positive benefits of practice for the *xiangke*. She said:

> It is stabilizing, it helps the common people be steadied. The common people come to light incense and they come to supplicate for something, they come to ask for peace in the family, ask for taking care of family issues, it's about maintaining stability. It's that they want the Buddha and Bodhisattva to protect them. It brings them spiritual comfort, their spirit will be at ease, you know?[176]

Here too, giving the *xiangke* space to operate is seen as best for all involved.

Further, while the *jushi* won't press the issue for the cultural reasons we have described, there is a hope that all participants at the temple, including the *xiangke* and their fellow *jushi*, will continue to move closer to Buddhism with an understanding rooted in the sutra. However, the extent to which the interaction between the various participants results in the spread of the Buddha Dharma (*hongfa* 弘法) is a matter of some debate. The nuns certainly see spreading Buddhism as part of their job and recognize that part of that is involves embracing the wider community of *xiangke*. However as mentioned in Ch.2, the nuns also understand that their ability to spread the word in the contemporary city is different and an aggressive style would not suit the environment nor be most effective for the spread of Buddhism. The *jushi*, themselves, are split as to whether their practices that directly or indirectly support the wider community of *xiangke* amounts to spreading the Buddha Dharma (*hongfa* 弘法). Some say that is just not possible for them spread Buddhism since that is something that can only be done by monastics. Others see themselves in those practitioners and recognize that it just takes one moment or positive encounter to put someone on the path toward practicing Buddhism. What they all agree on is that it is best to focus on their own practices and behaviors, and that this allow them to be

[176] Interview 1/4/2018 "就是平稳。让百姓平稳。百姓来烧香，他会来有求什么，求家里平安啊，求家里什么什么事情，就是维稳。就是他们会想佛菩萨保佑，给他们心灵上的，他们心灵上会有安慰，知道么."

examples to others through their own efforts which may help to draw people to Buddhism. Ye Feng's (叶峰) words echoed many others when he said, "If [a Buddhist] is always setting an example by doing all kinds of good deeds and people admire them, then more and more people will move toward to the Buddha. […] Do good things require advertising? No. Right? Does Buddhism need advertising? No.[177]"

This emphasis on actions for oneself as opposed to toward others as a source of benefit for the temple and for the future of Buddhism is deeply engrained in the culture of the temple. In fact, much of the culture of the temple's *jushi* can be better understood through explanation of phrase "*zili lita* (自利利他)" which means "benefit for me and a benefit for others", a concept I commonly encountered in interviews and in the field (and mentioned briefly in Ch.3). Respondents used this phrase to state that the best thing they can do to help others is to help themselves. "*Zili lita"* was used to explain to me a variety of situations at the temple. When I wondered if the most dedicated of the *jushi* came to the early morning rituals to support the nuns because there weren't enough to play all the ritual instruments, the response from Tang Zhen (唐贞) was "*zili lita*". When I asked my fellow sutra chanting members if we were practicing the chanting for the middle school exam ritual for the benefit of the *xiangke* that will attend and their supplication, the response was "*zili lita*". It is not that there is not recognition that one's practice might help others, but, instead, an understanding that the most effective way to help was through a focus on helping oneself. Another situation where this understanding is reinforced is in how the nuns direct the volunteers to act toward the *xiangke* when they are working on incense days. In

[177] Interview 12/18/2017 "如果他一直在以身作则，做各种各样的善事，人家敬佩了，那么越来越多的人向佛[…] 好的东西需要广告吗？不需要，对不对？佛法他需要广告吗？不需要."

fact, according to the nuns, the very merit that volunteers want to build is built on how they act toward and care for the *xiangke*. They appeal to the volunteers' own search for karmic benefit in order to promote responsibility and commitment to their volunteering at the temple. In a meeting for all the volunteers Ven. Shi declared:

> It doesn't matter which post you are at, the people you are facing are *xiangke*. Why do you come to volunteer (*hufa* 护法)? First, you need to be clear, when you come to volunteer, the first thing is to create positive karmic connections (*jieshanyuan* 结善缘). Your positive connection is to give the *xiangke* an opportunity to create positive connections themselves. Your merit...the *xiangke* are the cornerstone of you cultivating merit and cultivating merit rewards. In reality, *xiangke* are the foundational source of your merit reward. So, you must create positive karmic connections with the *xiangke*, and it's your merit this day that will be a true merit reward. So, it is to say, your attitude must be good.[178]

Her emphasis is the same -- don't worry about other people, but instead focus on your own cultivation and your own right action. In this case right action is to maintain a positive attitude and do your volunteering job to the best of your ability. This importantly involves making sure you don't have any negative interactions with the *xiangke* which also serves to promote the ambivalence and separation between the groups. In following the culture of the temple by focusing on their own practice, they will bring benefit to themselves, the *xiangke*, and the temple -- "*zili lita.*"

## CONCLUSION

We have shown that the *xiangke* and the *jushi* at Puci Temple represent two distinct groups with different religious aims and understandings. While we have described areas of

[178] Volunteer meeting 1/1/2018 "不管在哪个岗位，你们面对的是香客。你为什么来护法？你首先要搞清楚，来护法的话，首先一个，结善缘。你的善缘就是给香客结善缘，你的功德，香客其实就是你们培养功德，培养福报的基石。其实香客才是你们福报来源的基础。所以你们要跟香客之间结好善缘，你们这一天的功德，才是真正福报的。所以态度，态度一定要好."

similarity and connection, their identity, practices, and beliefs are so different that we can say that they are practicing based on two different religious foundations. The *jushi* and the temple monastics certainly recognize that the *xiangke* that practice at the temple are not practicing Buddhism in the same way as they are. However, we find that both groups have critical roles to play to ensure the temple community as a whole works for everyone. Each has aims and interest in the temples functioning, and we found that, in fact, the difference between the groups and the maintenance of an ambivalence and distance between them is necessary for the functioning of the temple.

A close look at the religious ecology of the temple finds a mutual reliance between the groups where maintaining status quo is critical. This status quo is maintained in both structural and cultural ways. There are both direct and indirect ways in which the practices of the groups are separated from each other, sometimes physically, which limits the exchange of religious ideas and practices. Beyond that, the is a culture rooted in Buddhism among the *jushi* and promoted by the monastics where an abundance of caution is taken in terms of interacting with the wider community of *xiangke*, especially as it relates to discussion of religious ideas and practices. There are potential negative karmic consequences for an interaction with a *xiangke*, or even another *jushi,* which brings about a negative experience for them or, worse yet, causes them to have a misunderstanding of the Buddha Dharma. Instead, the *jushi* at the temple focus on their themselves and their own practices. It is only through dedicated action with a full heart that one can bring benefit to themselves, the temple, and also potentially to the *xiangke* and society beyond the temple walls.

Here we have highlighted the way difference and the maintenance of a status quo that limits directed exchange of religious ideas and practices, but there is community at the temple.

Among the temple *jushi* there is a strong feeling of community belonging, and there are important ways that the temple serves community functions that extend across all the participants at the temple. We have also highlighted at times that the participants do all share a common Chinese spiritual heritage and general set of traditional values. In the concluding chapter we will explore the types of community found at the temple. We will also discuss the implications of the findings for understanding the spread of Buddhism both at the macro level of organization and the ground level at the temple.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion - *The Temple Community and Buddhism in China Today*

In the preceding chapters, we have allowed a single local temple, Puci Temple (*pucitang* 普慈堂), and the practices of its participants guide us on a journey to better understand lay practice at Buddhist temples and the lay Buddhist practice in China more broadly. The temple itself is interesting in its everyday character. It is not a particularly important Buddhist temple that draws in lay practitioners from afar, and it is not famous as a tourist or pilgrimage site. Instead, we find a vibrant but local community of practitioners, and a temple that has developed over the past 30 years since reform right along with the city. This community of practitioners can be understood as consisting of 2 main groups, the temple's regularly participating lay Buddhist *jushi* (居士) and a wider community of *xiangke* (香客).

We have worked to define these two groups in a way that reflects the use of the terms on the ground among the participants and connect that to discussion of these groups in the literature. Lay Buddhist *jushi* have generally taken on a Buddhist self-identity, and many have taken refuge in the 3 treasures which formally denotes lay participation. The regularly participating *jushi* at the temple take part in a variety of cultivation activities including sutra chanting, ritual assemblies, and volunteering. The temple's *xiangke* make up a far larger portion of the overall attendance at the temple, but their visits are most often clustered around important days on the ritual calendar. *Xiangke* at the temple most often come to take part in organized rituals related to family events, to venerate their ancestors, or to supplicate before image for support in their material lives. They are practicing at the temple based on the influence of popular religious culture. We found that the temple provides opportunity for participants whose aims and benefits

of participation at the temple quite different. However, we also showed they share connections to each other through shared cultural traditions and values.

A close view of the practices of the lay Buddhist *jushi* at the temple and the relationship between those practices and that of the *xiangke* provided a foundation for looking more broadly at the shape of formal lay Buddhism in China. Where is the line between someone who is practicing Buddhism and someone like a *xiangke* whose practices are more appropriately associated with popular religious culture? We utilized Chau's modalities of "doing" Chinese religion to propose a defining feature of lay Buddhist practice centered around the application of a personal-cultivation approaches inspired by Buddhism. Further, how the participants combine and practice within the various modalities help us to better conceptualize a spectrum of lay Buddhist practice in China. I argue that there is a spectrum which finds on one side Buddhists more comfortable with popular religious practice and feel less need to purify their beliefs or popular elements, and on the other side a more modern, rational Buddhism which emphasizes textual and intellectual approaches and a distance from traditional, and other, practices.

Having pointed out that the temple is able to support the practices and participation of two very different groups of participants, we explored the religious ecology of the temple itself and the relations between the participants in order to understand how the temple is able to provide for both these groups simultaneously without tension or conflict. We found that the temple's functioning was built upon the maintenance of a status quo which emphasized ambivalence and separation between the groups. Each group has a critical role to play to ensure that the temple can fulfill the aims of all. This separation, or maintenance of the status quo, was supported in both structural ways in terms of the organization of practices and through cultural

logics rooted in Buddhist doctrine. In many ways, it was a *lack* of direct religious exchange between the participants that is key to temple's success.

In this concluding chapter we will take what we have learned so far and think about the type of religious community that is found at the temple. We will also think about the consequences of what we have found at the temple for the spread of Buddhism and Buddhist organization at micro and macro levels. Additionally, we will connect our findings to existing work on the religious ecology of Buddhism today and point to ways a view from the ground tends to challenge the neat lines scholar like to draw between religious actors. Finally, we discuss the implications for the study of religion in China more broadly and point out some avenues for future research that would build upon the direction of this research.

## COMMUNITY AT PUCI TEMPLE

In Ch. 6 we focused on the ecology of Puci Temple in terms of the relations between participants and how they come together to fulfill diverse aims at the temple. They accomplish their aims and make the temple work through reliance on each other. We have described how separation and a distinct lack of relations and group cohesion, supported both structurally and culturally, supports and maintains the cooperation between main groups of practitioners at the temple. In a sense, it is *a lack of overarching cohesive community* in terms of identity, practice, or doctrine that is a hallmark of religious life at the temple. However, the temple certainly works as an integrated whole in the ways we have described, and we have also demonstrated connections and shared traditions and values among the groups. Further, there is a strong feeling of community among certain groups at the temple, and there are also subtler ways that shared community extends across groups and connects the entirety of participants. We find community amongst the small groupings of regularly participating lay Buddhists, amidst the palpable energy

felt on festival days as participants practicing in ways oriented to their individual or family rub up close to each other, and in an imagined ethical community that transcends individual groups of participants. However, barriers to the furthering of group cohesion in the direction of shared religious identity and practice are strong. Movement in that direction mitigated at the micro level through the cultural logic we see at the temple and these micro processes interact with state regulation of religion on the macro level.

*Strong Community Feel among Regular Participants*

There are strong feelings of community at the temple despite the lack of cohesion in terms of specific religious belief and practice. These feelings are strongest among the temples regularly participating *jushi*. This could be observed in several ways at the temple and was expressed clearly in interviews. The temple *jushi* may not have everything in common when it comes to religious belief and practice, but share a lay Buddhist identity as *jushi*, fellows in the study of Buddhism (*shixiong* 师兄), and describe a feeling of belonging in the supportive environment of the temple. We have detailed some of the religious aims and benefits that the *jushi* get from their participation, but they also feel a closeness and sense of belonging to this specific temple community. Lay Buddhists can really cultivate anywhere[179], but the *jushi* at the temple feel they belong at this temple. It is an anchor for them in their practice. Many of the interviewees spoke about it in familial terms. Qian Ying (钱英) primarily attends the Sunday chanting group, she said, "After you start coming here, they will look after you like a family member, treat you like family, like a group. Like with family, you will feel it is very intimate and

[179] Respondents mentioned Buddhist ideas about not having a discerning heart and seeing things as equal encourage the idea of all temples being the same. Further, Jones (2010) noted that many lay Buddhists she met did not feel the need to go to any temple at all in order to cultivate.

very relaxed[180].” She, like many others, described the temple as a place where they knew what was expected of them. It was a place and a community they could rely upon. Since they feel part of this community that supports them, they also feel a sense a responsibility to attend. Yao Fei (姚飞), a regular volunteer who also attended sutra chanting for several years, also described a similar sense of home and belonging. When work or other circumstances keep him away for too long, he says, “I will feel, ah, I am missing something and will need to find some time to go for a visit. I will have this feeling[181].”

In addition to the specific feelings of closeness with their fellow *jushi* at the temple, they certainly also felt a strong sense of identity as formal lay Buddhists who had taken refuge in the 3 treasures. They are disciples of the Buddha (*fodizi* 佛弟子), an identity that extends to all lay initiates worldwide. Certainly, the *jushi* shared an overwhelming positive impression of formal lay Buddhists in general, and overwhelmingly at the temple. Despite differences in practice, understanding, and levels of dedication (and where in private some sense of judgement could be felt), they believed that their fellow community of *jushi* at the temple were ethically and morally upright in a way the outside world may not be. They would often ask me, almost in a rhetorical way meant to reinforce it for themselves, some form of “the *jushi* are all really good people, right?” They all seemed to draw great personal strength from the perceived strength and positive attributes of their fellow community of formally dedicated lay Buddhist *jushi.*

However, in thinking about the community at the temple, the *jushi* were clear in making a distinction between their feelings of community belonging at the temple and the feeling of

[180] Interview 10/9/2017 “进去以后他会把你当成他那里的人那样看的，像家里人看待一样，像集体一样，像家里人一样，就会感觉很亲切，很放松.”
[181] Interview 1/4/2018 “我会觉得，哎呀，我少做了一件什么事情。要找个时间过来一趟。会有这种观念.”

friendship or an emphasis on the purely social aspects of the connections. Instead the belonging was focused on cultivating together and the benefits that brings. There were social groupings that began in the temple and extended into the social lives of the participants, but these were scattered and often came to intersect with lay Buddhist networks beyond the temple. Xu Jing (徐静) who, after a move, now commutes an hour to chant at the temple, wanted to be clear that coming the temple isn't about social relations. She said that from a Buddhist perspective "It's a happiness in the Dharma [...] It's not like being with your friends[182]." Yao Fei agreed, he spoke glowingly of the people and relationships he had at the temple, but, he says, "I wouldn't say it's about social relations. It's that people will slowly come to make this place a thing like a home, or that their relatives are here, so I will come at regular intervals. I will go see it. It's that kind[183]." We can see in these descriptions of community belonging a deep sense of connection to the temple and its participants, but, as we have seen elsewhere, it is maintained in such a way that still allows for generality in terms of specifics of religious beliefs and practices.

*Community among All Participants and Renewal of a Shared Moral Universe*

In addition to this explicit sense of temple community belonging among the regular *jushi*, there are forms of community that rely on and serve all the participants at the temple. We talked in Ch. 4 about what the groups had in common and described how they shared certain values and symbols. Chinese religion can be understood as diffused in society in that it is not delimited to the religious sphere and did not require allegiance to any discrete religion (Yang 1961). Instead Chinese religious life for the average person relied on a mix of popular practice and the other

[182] Interview 11/11/2017 "用佛教的讲，就是法喜 […] 不是跟朋友在一起那样."
[183] Interview 1/4/2018 "不是说社会交往，就是说人家会慢慢把这里当成家一样的东西，或者是亲戚在这边，我会过来，过一段时间去看他，类似这种吧."

traditional Chinese religions, and some scholars have argued that this amounts to a shared spiritual heritage. Fan Lizhu and her collaborators (Fan, Lizhu 2011; Fan et al. 2005) have noted what is shared across widely in Chinese culture is an emphasis on relationships, centered on the family and including ancestors, and a the widely shared understanding that the universe is moral. While much discussion of this foundation has focused on rural areas, their work also demonstrates that this heritage is also on display as we look at religious practices in the city. Our observation and data at the temple point to this shared spiritual heritage at work among both main groups of participants.

We have mentioned already the energy and vibrant atmosphere of the temple on the busy days when all the participants come together to practice. Here, from a Durkheimian perspective, a religious community in formed and reinforced through communal activities imbued with collective effervescence (Durkheim 1995), and this characteristic of religious life is very clearly on display in the fiery environment of the temple on important occasions. Remember that the major dates on the lunar calendar are relevant for both the *jushi* and *xiangke*, but the specific practices or the meaning behind those practices may be different. The temple creates an environment where everyone can share in the collective effervescence produced and direct that energy toward their individual activities and towards reinforcing the whole.

The motivations for being there and the religious understandings of practice are different, but all of them are rooted in a shared cultural history. They are practicing together on the same holidays and with shared traditions and meanings both related and unrelated to formal Buddhism. As such, the coming together and creating an energized environment at the temple has overarching community benefits for all the participants. The temple is a place for the neighborhood to come together to renew their bonds and shared values. It promotes community

feeling among the *xiangke* that serves to maintain practices rooted in popular religious culture, especially traditional practices like burning paper money for ancestors and ritual supplication. It also reinforces the community for the *jushi* whose efforts in the community and religious life are tied to its success. Further, as Ven. Lu (*lushifu* 卢师父) told me, and we will discuss below, sometimes these moments of coming together at the temple for disparate reasons may lead people on a path toward more concerted lay Buddhist practice.

The temple becomes a place where the entire community of participants comes together and renew what is shared among them. As we have mentioned, perhaps the most important thing that is renewed is belief in a moral universe. This notion has been called "…a belief that has been a fundamental, at times *the* fundamental, belief of Chinese religion since the beginning of recorded history" (Cynthia Brokaw as cited in Fan and Whitehead 2011:18). This understanding that actions, good and bad, have consequences "has the moral result of making a person more responsible for his or her actions" (19). Fan et al., in their study of lay practice in Shenzhen, argue that the spiritual resources drawn from a common spiritual heritage were a source of 'moral capital' that people can turn to in difficult times. At Puci temple, the shared cultural heritage is renewed as people rub up against each other in the temple courtyard. All the participants are then able to take advantage of the moral capital made available to them.

This renewal of a moral universe is not just a theoretical point. At least in the eyes of the temple *jushi* and some of the *xiangke* I spoke with, an imagined ethical community built upon this shared Chinese tradition and set of values is renewed along with it. The temple and the community become a symbol of these shared values in the neighborhood and there is an emphasis on ethical behavior and fulfilling family duties in a filial manner. An emphasis on family, and filial piety, was a common theme among all participants at the temple. We have seen

how this is a motivating factor for the *xiangke* and is an important factor in the study of Buddhism for the *jushi.* Further, many *jushi* continue some traditional practices even as they dedicate themselves to Buddhist practice because they continue to view them as valuable and do not see them in conflict with their lay Buddhism. Still, there are many *jushi* who criticize the methods *xiangke* use to show filial piety and they some even suggest it to be an empty show of filial piety, but everyone sees the filial piety as an important shared value. Ven. He (*heshifu* 贺师父) saw this as a fundamental role of the temple in the local community. She said the temple aimed to "encourage the common people to be more virtuous, first of all being filial to their parents and not doing bad things.[184]" The temple brings the local community together, including *jushi* and *xiangke,* at regular intervals to practice and, in doing so, reinforces forms of shared community values that encompass all the temples participants and extends into the neighborhood. Multiple interviewees who have lived in the neighborhood a long time insist that the renovation of the temple and the renewal of the community there have had a positive impact of the safety and status of the neighborhood.

*Barriers to Community at the Temple and Beyond*

We have shown some important ways that community is formed at the temple. These forms of community are particularly strong among the regularly participating *jushi,* but also extend in other ways across all the temple participants. However, we have also demonstrated that there is very little movement towards cohesive religious identity and practice at the temple. In fact, we found this fundamental to the temple's success. We have also detailed some of the important cultural reasoning for this by showing how certain doctrinal understandings about the

[184] Interview 1/4/2018 "为了安抚百姓向善，首先对自己的父母要孝顺，不要做坏事."

way the spread of Buddhism limits interaction and teaching between *jushi* and *xiangke*, and also among *jushi* at different places on the spectrum of lay Buddhist practice. This serves to limit strong community formation around specific sets of ideas and practices. This was clearly seen in how the various smaller grouping of *jushi* interact with each other (e.g. the different chanting groups) and how very different individual *jushi* can practice side-by-side in the same groups.

This helps us to understand the situation at the temple, but we must also connect this understanding to the wider discussion of the spread of Buddhism, especially through organizations, in China. The study of Buddhism in other regions, for example Taiwan, has detailed the massive growth of lay Buddhist organizations like Tzuchi which have offered a comprehensive package of lay Buddhism for *jushi* to follow. As Poceski stated of Buddhism in Taiwan, "As a part of that development, there has been a noteworthy increase in the formation of distinctly Buddhist identities, in contrast to the syncretic tendencies, multireligious engagements, and open-ended religious identities that tend to characterize traditional modes of Chinese religiosity" (Poceski 2016:17–18). This form of organization and identity for lay Buddhist has not seen the same level of success in mainland China. There has been much discussion about the role of the state in preventing horizontal organization formation and more protestant forms of religious identity. Research has mainly focused explicit and implicit state control over religious groups. Remember that from the point of market theory, without state regulation religious life will tend toward institutionalized religious organization (Yang 2006). Given the regulatory environment, we would expect that this local temple, as an official producer of Buddhism in China and without any sort of affiliation with any other prominent temples or masters, has a strong motivation to maintain a general stance in line with the Buddhist Association and we have seen how the temple's financial lives are tied to the association. Scholars have emphasized that

the state, in association with the Buddhist association and others, have worked to shape official Buddhism in places like Puci Temple. So, we might expect the temple to move in the direction of cohesion in religious belief and practice in order to align itself with 'official Buddhism,' but that is not what we find on the ground at the temple.

The influence of the state may be most powerful through limiting the ability of successful organizational formats and leaders to replicate their success elsewhere. Certainly, organizations that have already shown a willingness to proselytize and spread a more cohesive lay Buddhist organizational form are limited in China by implicit and explicit state control and they have shown their potential for success elsewhere. However, there are limits to this explanation for understanding the spread of Buddhism on the ground in China. In our research we encountered no firm barrier, or even a sense of an implied barrier, which prevented people from implementing additional organizational structure at the local level. What we have shown here in this chapter are the cultural justifications given by individual lay Buddhist actors for why lay Buddhist groups aren't developing in the direction researchers, and evidence of organizational development in other regions, might indicate. People offer other reasons for not recruiting or advertising that go beyond the state. In fact, all the interviewees viewed the state as the friend of Buddhism today.

An instructive example can be drawn from the Pure Land (*jingtu* 净土) lay group that utilizes the temple space for their group's practice. This group is far more cohesive in terms of community identity than the *jushi* that participate in only organized Puci Temple activities. They are openly affiliated with a prominent temple in southern China and they have a comparatively more defined set of doctrine and practice. I interviewed 2 group organizers and a variety of other members. What I found was a very fluid organizational structure that drew upon the very same

cultural scripts we found utilized by other *jushi* at the temple. They said they do not have a formal organizational leadership hierarchy and they do not actively recruit new members. For this group, like for the other *jushi* at the temple, they say you do not seek out new members because in Buddhism, as Cheng Lei (程磊) said echoing the cultural justifications discussed in the last chapter, they rely on predestined relationships (*yinyuan* 因缘) and good foundations (*shangen* 善根) to draw people in[185]. In discussions about the group and its spread, no where did they mention any discussion of the role of the state, regulations requiring them to downplay their relationship with the home temple, or any sense that there would be any limits on group recruitment if they chose to do so. In fact, a current informal leader of the group and long-time temple volunteer is a party member and he insisted the state now viewed Buddhism as a partner maintaining a harmonious society. While this evidence in no way challenges the notion that state regulation is a critical macro level factor in the spread or Buddhist organization and its shape, it does contribute to the discussion by demonstrating that there are additional factors on the individual level that are in play. Further, we have demonstrated at the level of a single temple that maintaining this generalist environment is necessary.

It is worth noting, however, that, over the course of the research, there is evidence that offers preliminary indication that additional organizational structure leads to organizational success in terms of growth and dedication of its participants. The Pure Land group just mentioned was very intense in their practice which generally involved 6-8 hours of chanting, required more dedication, and provided more direction than the temple's own *jushi* groups. The success of this structure was indicated by the fact that their events brought in more people than

[185] From interview 12/18/2017

the temple chanting groups that met at similar times. Also, among the temple's sutra chanting group, the Sunday group, where the leader had recently implemented additional structure and requirements, has seen the most growth among the temple's group. Outside lay groups I observed that offered structured programs also seemed to draw in new people more frequently and their new members seemed more likely to stay committed.

While the evidence here is anecdotal, it seems to line up with understandings that we find in the literature on modern religion, even in line with the basics of market theory, that find some of the most successful religious organizations are the ones that offer a defined package of belief, practice, and belonging and who are also willing to spread that vision to others. However, we also must ask ourselves why we are looking for religion by looking for the markings of organizational success? We have demonstrated here that there are non-market reasons for maintaining a form a religious life that is less focused on cohesive identity and belief. More research will be required to further investigate the interplay between these micro and macro level factors that have prevented additional horizontal organization development of lay Buddhist groups in China.

*An Ad-hoc Community built on a Cultural Foundation*

So then, what kind of religious community is this? Previous research has described Buddhist temples in China as being more like catholic parishes than protestant congregations (Jones 2010). Our data from the temple provides an opportunity to further contribute to an understanding of urban Buddhist temple communities. We can take this comparison to catholic and protestant congregations and extend it further using observations from this temple in combination with the classical sociology of religion framework of church and sect. The church-sect dichotomy rooted in the work of Max Weber and generally attributed to Ernst Troeltsch has

been said to be one of the most important theoretical frameworks in the study of religion (Swatos). Certainly, this is not a perfect analogy because it falls victim to our tendency to compare all religious life to Christianity, however the debate offers some clarity to the way the temple amounts to a community made up of diverse participants.

The distinction between church and sect is a way of comparing religious congregations utilizing the poles of the dichotomy as Weberian ideal types. Perhaps most important to the distinction is the "mode of membership" where in a church people belong to the temple by birth and in a sect they make a decision to join (Swatos). The usefulness of the dichotomy has been debated over the years given its peculiarity to Christianity (see e.g. Johnson 1963), but scholars continue to return to it because of its analytical usefulness. In Church-Sect theory a catholic parish and a protestant denominational congregation are the ideal typical cases. This brings us back to Jones' comparing Buddhist temples in Nanjing to protestant and catholic congregations. In comparing Buddhist temples to catholic parishes, she emphasizes that membership or participation are place-based as opposed "specialized by denomination of other 'brand'" (Jones 2010:78). The temple does serve the local community in a way that extends to both the major groups of participants. It provides important local functions that bring people in for practices which they would otherwise have to travel to another location to perform. Why do come to this temple as opposed to another? While many people in China, especially *xiangke*, will seek out prominent temples in times of need, but according to Buddhist logic all temples should be the same in practice and that makes having a local temple very important the local community. All the participants of the temple appreciate the temple for its convenient location in the neighborhood. Additionally, all the data indicates that the varieties of participants do not share religious share the same religious ideas and motivations that we see in protestant churches.

The church-sect dichotomy points in a similar direction of Jones' comparison. Sects, like protestant churches, require a decision to join and conform to a given way of practice and religious understanding, while a church is more generalized and can accommodate more diversity. Varenne's (1978) work *Americans Together*, builds on church and sect theory where they find that, at least where they studied, catholic churches are able to accommodate much more diversity in belief and practice than protestant congregations. In their research they found that in catholic parishes there were assumed overarching shared religious and/or political values. Despite the reality of difference among the participants, the catholic church as a religious organization was able to accommodate much more diversity. This understanding of the ability of a "church" to accommodate a diverse congregation of participants despite difference tracks with what we find at the temple where an overarching Chinese spiritual heritage and set of shared values binds together a community that otherwise demonstrates a dizzying diversity of religious thought and practice.

So, while it is not appropriate to take the discussion of church and sect and apply it wholesale to the Chinese case, we can use it is an analogy for what we find at this local Buddhist temple. We can see quite a few ways in which the temple functions like a catholic church, but there are some important differences. First, the assumed shared overarching religious background that is shared by the "parish" is not as distinct. Unlike the catholic church that brings people from the local community with shared texts, sacraments, beliefs, etc., albeit with quite a bit of flexibility, the temple supports practices of 2 groups with quite distinct religious foundations. Here at the temple, in fact, while it is a producer of official Buddhism and its more ardent participants are formal Buddhists, in fact, the what is assumed to be shared in terms of the religious and political is the generalized practices and values of popular religious culture that

have interacted with the institutions of Buddhism and have since its introduction to China more than 1500 years ago.

Its generalist and inclusive environment rooted in this general shared culture draws in a wide range of local community members – those interested in formal Buddhism and those with more traditional aims. The temple is a religious community that promotes inclusivity through a generalist orientation that is open to its community of participants regardless of if they view those practices as religious, cultural, or otherwise. It is structured to provide a place for people of different backgrounds and create a positive environment for the participants at different places on their journey to know the Buddha Dharma. Further, while the temple is like a catholic parish in that most of the participants are locally ascribed to the place as opposed to being voluntary members, we have mentioned that some *jushi* come to the temple from afar or continue to come after they move away. They seek out the voluntary membership in the temple in a way more like protestant congregations, but the described generality and inclusiveness on display limits the comparison to a protestant church style voluntary membership.

We can think of the temple and the unique environment it produces as a center of cultural gravity in the neighborhood. It draws participants in who are seeking spiritual support with a force rooted in shared Chinese traditional values and spiritual heritage. If a local person in the neighborhood, previously exposed to Buddhism or not, encounters family or personal difficulty, where are they going to turn? Our observations indicate that they will turn to a Buddhist temple, perhaps a prominent temple in the city, but it may also be a local temple like Puci Temple that offers them an inclusive and non-judgmental space to address their personal or family troubles or to fulfill, or at least give face to, their filial or other cultural duties. The temple environment and

culture are shaped in such a way that the temple functions as a center of cultural gravity for the entire neighborhood.

## THE SPREAD OF BUDDHISM AT PUCI TEMPLE AND BEYOND

This project has continually emphasized the difference between the main groups of participants at the temple. We have pointed out that the *jushi* and the *xiangke* operate at the temple with different beliefs, practices, and religious understandings. We have also pointed out how both groups see and maintain the difference between them and that, in fact, this ambivalent status quo is necessary for the temple to function for everyone. We have, however, also noted that there are important points of connection between the groups and there are shared traditional values rooted in Chinese culture. Those values are renewed at the temple as they come together as a community with a shared Chinese culture and values despite their individual difference in terms of belief and practice. We have also noted that many of the temple's *jushi* once practiced in ways similar to the *xiangke*, many at Puci Temple itself. Further, in Ch. 5 we argued that Buddhism is a process, and, in terms of lay Buddhism, people tend to move from left to right on a spectrum of lay Buddhist practice -- from more traditional and syncretic to more modern and confessional.

This movement from left to right can also encompasses movement from *xiangke* toward becoming a practicing lay Buddhist *jushi*. While, as we have shown, it is not a very active process, we know from talking with the *jushi* that is common for *xiangke* to become practicing lay Buddhists, and they often end up on the traditional side of the spectrum where they maintain a strong connection to their previous practices. To understand the pathways into lay Buddhist practice, we can also build on Jones' (2010) work. Jones conceptualized two pathways toward lay Buddhist practice…adoption and conversion. For Jones, conversion requires an abrupt break

from current beliefs and is marked by Buddhists who are "defined by the fact that their pre-existing worldview was highly influenced by the state-supported narrative of militant atheism" (127). There is also strong correlation between these types of people and status as cultural and intellectual elites. The adopters, according to Jones, make less of a break, and instead build on cultural tradition in a move towards practicing Buddhism. While I am not totally convinced these categories are not idiosyncratic to her data, understanding how *xiangke* move toward becoming practicing *jushi* at a local Buddhist temple *jushi*'s experiences and an understanding can add depth to her discussion of the adoption pathway by making the connection to popular religious practice and the *xiangke* status clear.

As we have discussed, we do not commonly find direct and explicit attempts to convert or recruit *xiangke* participants to become practicing Buddhists at the temple. The *jushi,* as described in Ch. 6, do not feel they are in a position to encourage people to become Buddhists. Further, the nuns themselves, understand the spread of Buddhism as part of their job, but they do so according to an understanding of Buddhism in the city and their own personalities. As Ven. Shi said:

> Like us few, we don't have outgoing personalities, so we won't take the initiative to [engage with people], but, also, if we see people doing things wrong we can go and instruct, or if people have questions about studying Buddhism, or if people have some foundational knowledge about Buddhism, when they have questions about the Buddha Dharma or how to apply it in one's life, they can come and ask.[186]

Despite a lack of emphasis from the nuns and *jushi* on proactively spreading Buddhism, the generalist structure and inclusive environment at the temple creates favorable conditions for the

[186] Interview 1/5/2018 "像我们几个的话，像我们几个信徒的话，不会，不是这种外向的性格，不会去主动去跟人那个，但是就是说，看到人家做的什么不对的，会去教导，或者人家学佛有疑问的, 学佛有一定的基础了，如果她对佛法产生疑问，或者在生活当中，在佛法运用当中，可以来问."

spread of lay Buddhist practice to the wider community of participants. Interviews with the temple *jushi* about how they began to practice formal Buddhism reveals two important ways the temple environment can contribute to someone adopting a lay Buddhist identity and set of concerted practices.

First, the temple draws people in from outside because it offers a flexible and inclusive space where they can come and practice in whatever way they see fit. Often, they are turning to the temple in times of great personal or familial distress. They are not turning to Buddhism for intellectual or philosophical reasons, but because, when all else fails, Chinese people know, or will be told, that the Bodhisattva (*pusa* 菩萨) are benevolent and that they should seek out a temple and beseech them for help. Relatedly, owing to the general cultural history and traditions of Chinese family practice, people may be drawn into the temple for some to deal with certain critical situation related to the family like, for example, the death of a family member. The temple becomes both a ritual service provider and source of comfort and meaning.

One such example of a current *jushi* at the temple who began formally practicing Buddhism at the temple in this way is Lin Hui (林慧), the sutra chanting schoolteacher introduced in Ch.6. When she was growing up, she remembers her parents lighting incense saying "may the Bodhisattva protect us" (*pusa baoyou* 菩萨保佑), but says they were simply traditional practitioners like the *xiangke*. As a young adult she did not practice at all, and notes that her education contributed a personal skepticism toward religious belief. It was only when her young son was facing health problems that things changed. When trips to doctors and a host of medicines couldn't stem the tide of repeated illness, her mother suggested they visit the Big Buddha in Wuxi (*wuxidafo* 无锡大佛) to ask for help. This trip was successful enough in her

eyes that she committed to going to temple on the 1st and 15th to keep supplicating for assistance with her son. When she moved into the neighborhood near Puci Temple, she started going there. She told me she began more formal practice after a particularly powerful incident in which she asked the Bodhisattva of Wisdom (*wenshu pusa* 文殊菩萨) for help with an exam for her son. Her son outperformed all expectations on the exam, and this led her to dedicate herself to a more concerted form of lay practice, including joining the sutra chanting group and reading more books about formal Buddhism.

Pan Lin (潘琳), a 38-year-old who worked as an accountant but not is now the primary caregiver for her son, came to the temple and began her own concerted lay Buddhist practice under difficult circumstances when her husband fell ill and passed away suddenly. At the time she did not consider herself religious, and, in fact, her only religious exposure was to Catholicism through her grandmother as a child. She and her husband had occasionally visited the temple to light incense since his family had this tradition, but she said she always felt like an "outsider." Upon her husband's death, in line with his families wishes, they attended the temple for a funerary ritual. She had little knowledge of Buddhism or the procedures, but she felt like it was the right thing to do. While at temple for the ritual, she also noticed the sutra chanting group and asked one of the nuns about it. The nun suggested that she could attend if she would like in order to continue the releasing of her husband's soul (*chaudu* 超度) that she began at the funerary ritual. She decided to attend the Sunday group and, while her understanding of Buddhism came along only slowly, she found great comfort and community at the temple which set her on her current path of study. She said:

> I think the small group *shixiong*[187] are really good people and are good at offering guidance. When I first went, they of course knew a bit about my situation, and they were able to offer some guidance. Anyway, they helped me not to be too grief stricken, right? And then, they would often talk with me, and also when you are chanting sutra your mind is at peace, right? You don't think too much, right? and so I slowly came to be a regular attendee, it's like that.[188]

In both examples, participants came to the temple seeking solutions to critical problems in their life, may not have otherwise had any exposure to formal Buddhist practice, and became more involved in Buddhism because of its positive benefits on their lives.

Another way the temple contributes to the adoption of formal Buddhism is more low-key (*didiao* 低调) and relies on *xiangke* attending the temple for their own purposes either to address individual concerns or problems or around major events on the ritual calendar. These situations can create opportunities for the formation of Buddhic Bonds[189] (*jieyuan* 结缘) and exposure to the Buddha Dharma that may lead people toward lay Buddhist practice. It is said that the fact that these people choose to enter the temple at all is already an expression of their karmic rewards (*fubao* 福报) in that they are already closer to the Buddha Dharma than those who have never entered. While many people may maintain their own personal practices over time with not movement toward formal Buddhism, there is also room for some exchange where the *xiangke* move toward more formal Buddhist practice like the *jushi*. This exchange can happen in a variety of ways owing to the right moment or the right feeling. Ven. Lu (*lushifu* 卢师父) sees is that way and told me that on a big holiday, like those for ancestors that draw in many *xiangke*, it is

[187] Remember here that *shixiong* is an informal term used among the *jushi* that implies fellowship in the Dharma
[188] Interview 12/13/2017 "我觉得诵经组的师兄们都很好，然后也很会开导人，我刚去的时候，他们肯定也会知道一些情况，然后就会开导我么，反正就是不要太过悲痛，对吧，然后就是经常跟我说说呀，反正就是你在诵经的时候你的心态也是非常平和的嘛，对吧。你不会想太多的，对吧，然后慢慢的，我就参加了。就这样子."
[189] See (Fisher 2014), Ch. 3

important to offer space and services that support a variety of practices, including ones firmly rooted in popular religious culture like burning of paper money. “If nobody comes in,” she said, “then Buddhism is very unpopular, right? But, if you have people come in on Hungry Ghost Festival (*Qiyueban*), then the incense fire will be vigorous, that is each these individuals predestined relationship (with the Dharma) (*yinyuan* 因缘)[190]. The implication here is that if the incense fires are hot and the temple is full of energy, it creates the chance for individual *xiangke’s* predestined relationship with Buddhism to mature, and also this has the potential to spread the influence of the temple and the Buddha Dharma. This understanding also matches Ven. Shi’s (*shishifu* 石师父) contention that spreading Buddhism in an urban setting like the temple relies on casual encounters and taking advantage of the right moments to spread Buddhism[191].

The temple’s energetic and inclusive environment gives people a chance to smell the Buddha Dharma (*wendao fofa* 闻到佛法). For most people, they may never take further steps toward to practice and understanding of Buddhism. However, there are moments when peoples predestined relationship (*yinyuan* 因缘) with Buddhism will mature, and it is the job of the temple and its *jushi* participants to ensure that the conditions are just right for that to happen. Interviews with the temple’s *jushi* reveal several examples where this happened at Puci Temple. Guo Mei (郭梅), a 56-year-old who used to work in accounting but now works part-time for the city handling neighborhood disputes, had her moment arrive in 2012. She says she always had a positive feeling about temples and had visited them much like many other *xiangke* beginning in

[190] Interview 1/9/2018 “ […] 没有人进来的话，那佛门就是很冷清的呀，对吧？那如果有人，像七月半，有人进来，那香火就很旺，那是各个人的因缘.”
[191] As discussed in Ch. 2

her 20s. She says she was like many people who "[…] don't necessarily understand the Buddha Dharma, but they know if they can bow their heads to supplicate to the Buddha and Bodhisattva.[192]" Over the years, she would visit temples a few times of year to supplicate before the images to seek support for herself and her family. She even went to temple outside of Shanghai to take refuge in the 3 jewels when her mother fell ill in the late 90's, but her form of practice didn't change and remained irregular. Her mother's death in 2012, however, led her back to the temple and her moment to hear the Buddha Dharma arrived. She describes feeling vulnerable when she walked into temple and saw the Sunday chanting group there practicing. She said, "I was just staring at them, in my heart I felt, what is it, it was that I felt such admiration for them […] And so, after I asked them if I could join…they said could, and so after that, the next week I started coming.[193]" Guo Mei had maintained the same *xiangke*-type of practices at the temple for many years, but a combination of circumstances led to her to begin practicing Buddhism at the temple, and she shifted into a new mode of lay practice that she maintains to this day.

While this example is from Puci Temple, this is something that repeats itself in Buddhist temples all over China. Perhaps the most powerful example of this type of moment I heard in the field at the temple came from Ven. Lu herself. Ven. Lu, now 53 years old, became a nun when her moment arrived as an adult. She was once a petty businessperson selling beverages and she would visit temples, sometimes with her husband and young daughter. However, she says, "At that time, we didn't believe in the Buddha, we only believed in deities, we went to temple to kneel in worship and ask the Bodhisattva for protection and for wealth [...] we went with an

[192] Interview 11/16/2017 "[…] 不一定懂佛法，但是他们知道磕头，是求佛菩萨的."
[193] Interview 11/16/2017 "后来我就看着他们念经，心里就觉得，怎么样，就觉得很羡慕他们的 […] 后来我问他们，我能参加吗，说能参加的，后来我就，下个星期我就来了."

attitude of supplication.[194]" Everything changed, however, on Bodhisattva Guanyin's birthday 20 years ago on one visit to a temple to supplicate. An old monk walked right up to her and told her that she had the predestined fate[195] to leave home and become a monastic. She had such a positive feeling from this encounter that she would take refuge in the three jewels there and start coming more often. Before long, she began discussing with plans to leave home and become a monastic (*chujia* 出家) with her husband. In the end, not only did she become a nun, but her husband and daughter became monastics as well. Certainly, this case is an extreme example and most visitors to the temple never take the next step, but this pathway makes clear how one moment in time at a temple can lead someone on a very different path of practice.

In these examples of how current practicing Buddhists moved from a *xiangke* position toward more concerted practice through visiting temples, we have seen how these two different religious foundations can fit together and how the temple can provide an environment for religious exchange between them. The way this happens is often low key (*didiao* 低调), which was a term used by both lay group leaders and monastics with whom I spoke. While certainly direct proselytization or the spread of strong horizontal lay Buddhist organizations with developmental goals are approaches which have proved effective in other areas and could lead to the spread of lay Buddhism in China, they are not the only options. Given the state interference in the development of horizontal lay organizations, this ground level process for its spread is important to study. It turns out Puci Temple and others like it are critical nodes in the low-key spread of lay Buddhism by way of promoting connections between Buddhism and popular

[194] Interview 1/9/2018 "我们那时候就是不是信佛，就是信那种神的，就是到寺院里去拜拜，求菩萨保佑，发财 […] 有求的心态去的."
[195] Here is also a translation of *yinyuan* (因缘)

religious culture. These centers of cultural gravity provide services that accommodate both generalized popular religious practices with little relationship to Buddhist doctrine and formal Buddhist cultivation practices intended for the most devout lay Buddhists. At the same time as they provide these diverse services and maintain a status quo of ambivalent separation between the *jushi* and *xiangke*, the temple is a place where there is low-key interaction between these different ways of performing religiosity, and movement is encouraged to flow naturally from generalized popular culture to more formal lay Buddhist practice.

## URBAN BUDDHIST ECOLOGY – THE REALITIES OF EVERYDAY PRACTICE

We have been looking at temple Buddhism from the point of view of a single temple and the lay practices and participation that can be found there. In looking at the religious ecology of the local temple itself and utilizing the perspectives of the temple's *jushi* to look at the ecology of lay Buddhism in urban China, we have been able to shine important light on the relationship between Buddhism and popular religious culture at the temple and how the influence of popular religious culture continues to influence the contours of lay Buddhism in China. These new findings are a useful contribution to other attempts the look at the religious ecology of Buddhism in China today more broadly.

Sun Yanfei's (2011) article entitled *The Chinese Buddhist Ecology in Post-Mao China: Contours, Types, and Dynamics* is, until now, the most thorough English language attempt to describe the religious ecology of Buddhism in China. She focuses on 3 major types of religious actors that she labels: 1) State-recognized Buddhist Establishments, 2) Buddhist Groups Having Ambiguous Relations with the State, and 3) Religious Forms Opposed by Both the State and Institutional Buddhism. Type I includes temples like Puci Temple and she notes that Type I organizations get the distinct advantages of state support, but are also being "hollowed-out"

through strict controls (502). Type 2 Buddhist organizations that are not part of the Buddhist association, but may have tacit approval for operating in the mainland and be operating in the open. This category includes many of the lay Buddhist groups outside of the temple described in Ch. 5 that offer opportunities for cultivation. Finally Type 3, according to Sun, includes "syncretic sects" like the Falun Gong as well as "religious forms that are a mixture of Buddhism and popular religion…" (506). Overall, her focus is on the influence of the state on various forms of Buddhism and the impact on development of the various types of actors she describes.

This research has focused on one of these types of actors, an official Type 1 temple, but instead of coming at the ecology from the top down, we approach it from the bottom up, from the point of view of the participants as opposed to the organization. Our findings reveal that these neat categories break down when looking at the everyday realities of practices at a type 1 temple like Puci Temple in urban Shanghai. Sun states that these organizations seek "to be committed to build[ing] a cohesive and disciplined *sangha*, to educate the laity or to spread Buddhist teachings," but that they struggle against state control to do so. Further, in discussing type 3 actors meant to be at odds with the type 1 actors, she states that "Today, the border zone between popular religion and Buddhism is shrinking. Actors in institutional Buddhism guard the boundary of Buddhism more attentively, setting Buddhism apart from popular religion" (2011:506). She argues that popular religious actors are seeking to be more Buddhist to gain advantage in the eyes of the state but argues that institutional Buddhism seeks to do boundary work between them. This would seem to be supported by some of Jones' findings in Nanjing that describes boundary work being done by certain Buddhists and Buddhist organizations.

However, a close look at the realities of the totality of practices at Puci Temple reveals something quite different. Instead of the official temple working against the state and other

forces to develop a cohesive and distinct Buddhism, we find that the temple supports an inclusive and generalized environment that welcomes the mixture of Buddhism and popular religious practice. This mixture, in fact, is the source of its success and the mode through which is spreads its influence and religious ideas. While many of the temples Sun mentions have plenty of money for stability from tourism or other support and thus may be able to spend more time focusing on boundary work or a more cohesive Buddhist identity, Puci Temple relies on its participants, and many of these participants come to the temple to practice in a way distinctly rooted in popular religious culture. Additionally, the temple, as an official producer, contains and supports practices that are influenced by all 3 types of Buddhist actor Sun mentions. This finding also matches up with the recent findings from Leamaster and Hu (2014). They were surprised to find that popular religion is very much alive in the cities and has a strong correlation with Buddhist practice, but our research offers strong qualitative support to their conclusions.

Certainly, the temple supports the "official Buddhism" that is promoted by the state sanctioned associations. Some of the temple's *jushi*, those who fall further to the right on the spectrum of lay practice (meaning they purify their practices of syncretic elements) may engage with mostly type 1 actors and associated practices. However, we have seen in Ch. 5 that many of the temple's lay Buddhist *jushi* also participate in several type 2 groups including releasing life groups, lay study groups, and others. In some cases, as is with the Pure Land group that meets at the temple, these groups operate under the very same roof. Finally, type 3 actors also have influence at the temple through its participants. We have already said that the mixture of Buddhism and popular religion is not only a feature of the temple but is *fundamental* to its operations. This fact alone challenges our understanding of what a Type 1 organization looks like. The other type 3 actor that Sun focuses on, those labeled syncretic sects, can also be found

having some influence on the *jushi* and others at the temple. The most common of these groups I heard mentioned at the temple is Guan Yin Citta Dharma Door (*xinling famen* 心灵法门), a group with the government evil cult designation whose leader is believed to be "living Buddha" and a reincarnation of the Bodhisattva Guanyin (Lu 2012). We did witness attempts to limit the influence of this group by barring them from distributing materials in the temple (they distribute materials outside the temple on incense days) and destroying materials for the group found on the temples public shelf for distributing Buddhist materials donated by participants (*jieyuan gui* 结缘柜). However, this organization still came up in interviews with some temple *jushi* who still saw value in learning about it despite their knowledge of its reputation as an evil cult (*xiejiao* 邪教). The generalist environment, despite its advantages, also makes it difficult to control how participants may engage with these kinds of groups and ideas.

A look at the religious ecology of the temple and of lay Buddhist participation reveals that participants move flexibly through these various types of actors and utilize them to realize their own religious aims. In order to fully detail the religious ecology of Buddhism in China today including the ecology of lay practice and Buddhist organizations, more focus on the everyday practices of practitioners who utilize these Buddhist actors will be required.

## SEEKING RELIGION: FUTURE RESEARCH AND STUDY LIMITATIONS

This discussion of the religious ecology of Buddhism and the way in which a view from the ground can complicate our understanding of contemporary lay practice also speaks to a much larger question about the study of religion in contemporary China. In Ch. 1, I argued that too much of the focus on Chinese religions, including Buddhism, was on institutional forms and the most devout and visible of their participants. We can use the complexity at the local level and the

reality of the practices of everyday people to complicate our understanding about the spread of religion and the shape that religion can take. Utilizing lived religion approaches, and a framework like religious ecology that emphasizes relations between various elements, we can challenge dominant frameworks and narratives about religion in China today

Our research on this local Buddhist temple is a great example of how looking at the totality of everyday practices of one community of participants can challenge our understandings of contemporary Buddhism. Focusing only on certain practices that are oriented to the most devout of its participants while ignoring the majority would lead to a very narrow understanding of temple Buddhism and the shape of lay practice rooted in Buddhism today. Relatedly, ignoring people like the *xiangke* means ignoring, at least in the case of this temple, 70-90% of its participants and can lead to a complete misunderstanding of who the temple must cater too in order to survive.

This research complicates or directly challenges several narratives about contemporary Buddhism. First, it challenges the narrative that the power of the State is the most dominant force in the control of the spread of formal Buddhism. Next, it challenges the dominant narrative about how temples' and practicing Buddhist are working harder than evet to police the boundary of what it means to be Buddhist and separate itself from forms of popular religious practice. Finally, it offers a very different view of lay practice that de-emphasizes the most intellectual and modern forms of lay Buddhist practice by putting them into dialogue with more traditional forms that remain very much embedded in a Chinese spiritual heritage that is shared by practicing lay Buddhist *jushi* and popular religious practitioners like the *xiangke*.

I contend that this deep qualitative look at the religious ecology of a single local temple and its participants makes significant contributions to our understanding of contemporary lay

Buddhism, but it is also limited in its scope and the generalizability of its findings. While this temple is "normal" in that it caters to a local population of participants but does not draw in tourists or pilgrims, this is also a type of uniqueness. The results here cannot be generalized even to other temples in Shanghai like the big 3 or larger monasteries on the outskirts of town. It is also unclear the extent to which this Shanghai temple reflects the situation at local Buddhist temples in other urban areas around China. Further, this study has taken an important step in the study of contemporary temple Buddhism by trying to understand temple participation as a whole including a focus on the *xiangke* who have often been secondary or ignored altogether in research on Buddhism. However, this research relied heavily on interviews with lay Buddhist *jushi* about the *xiangke* and their own lives when they were in a similar situation. As such, it is unclear how generalizable the findings about the temple *xiangke* may be as it is applied to other temples and other cities.

Given the success of this study in challenging narratives about contemporary Buddhism despite its limitations and narrow focus, there is much opportunity for future research to test and expand on its findings. In order to better understand the shape of temple Buddhism in China today additional studies focused on the lived practices of participants is needed at a variety of temples in a variety of locations. Importantly, these studies need to be open to the relationship between Buddhism and popular religion and the ways in which participants draw on both foundations. Additionally, much more work on the lived practices of *xiangke* in China's major cities is needed at Buddhist temples, but also other locations like Daoist temples, Christian Churches, gravesites, etc. These common popular practices seem to be persistent, and in some cases growing, but very little is known about them and the role they play in the lives of contemporary people. All too often these practices are seen as something different from religion,

but I argue that the findings here rooted in this one local temple speak to the fact that leaving these practices out of the conversation leads not only to a underappreciation of those practices but an underappreciation of the ways they influence and are influenced by the 5 official religions in China.

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