One House, Two Paths
Popular Religion and Protestant Christianity in Contemporary Chinese Households

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Summary

In post-Mao China, forms of popular religion have been revitalized while in the same period millions of people have converted to Protestant Christianity. My doctoral research in the region of Southern Fujian explores how practitioners in these different ritual systems live together as spouses; as parents and children; as grandparents and grandchildren. I focus on the enactment of communal rituals (weddings, funerals, Christmas celebrations, Spring Festival rituals) by such "pluriprax" households, because considering Chinese religious history I expected practices (ways of doing) to be more contested on a grassroots level than scriptures or doctrines (believing). How do people in contemporary Southern Fujian form and maintain pluriprax households, despite their conflicting ritual obligations? In the context of the individualization of modern Chinese society —individual empowerment in the domestic sphere and in relation to socio-economic institutions— my interlocutors in Southern Fujian generally value personal emotional, romantic, and religious fulfillment over adherence to communal ritual obligations (e.g. obligation to venerate ancestors, obligation to abstain from superstition). This creates a field of tension, because as members of ancestral lineages practicing forms of popular religion and as members of churches practicing Protestant Christianity, individuals still have certain obligations to fulfill. Communal rituals thus signal moments of tension and division among my research population. Yet pluriprax households in Southern Fujian have been able to thrive in the context of individualization. Due to the disempowerment of Chinese ritual communities (ancestral lineages, Protestant churches, socialist production brigades) in the course of the twentieth century, individual household members are able to abstain from, simplify, or integrate various rituals through polytropy. These ways to change, evade, or "harmonize" ritual obligations accommodate the participation of practitioners in different ritual systems, allowing them to form and maintain pluriprax households.

My thesis contributes to (inter)religious studies by theorizing the central importance of practice (what to do, when, where, and how) in settings of religious diversity. Most studies of "mixed" or "interfaith" families in Western societies still have an inherent bias toward mentalist beliefs and worldviews, but the boundary-transcending ritual practices of pluriprax households in Southern Fujian harbor important theoretical insights for the study of interreligious relations. My thesis also enriches the study of religion in Chinese societies by shedding light on the largely unexplored topic of pluriprax households, and by bringing
in a new debate (from the discursive field of individualization) to the field of religion and ritual in Chinese societies. Finally, the thesis contributes to theorizing about modern mainland Chinese society by providing ethnographic examples of the challenges and problems that arise on a grassroots level in the context of individualization (e.g. conflicting ritual obligations), and the creative responses of people facing such challenges.
Preface

The fieldwork for this thesis brought me to the homes and lives of people in Southern Fujian. The countless conversations, meals, leisurely trips, daily swims in the sea, temple visits, weddings, funerals, Christmas celebrations, and Spring Festivals they shared with me from June 2014 - February 2016 form the unique data set on which this thesis is based. Especially heartwarming was the support of Abiao and Aman in one of Xiamen island's former villages. They took me into their home for the last six months of my fieldwork after my wife and baby returned to the Netherlands. Their son Xiao'en became a dear friend who generously let me stay in his room to watch over his exotic collection of rare toys when he himself left to study abroad. Although they must remain largely anonymous here, I am deeply grateful to my Xiamenese friends and interlocutors for their warmth, patience, kindness, and hospitality.

I am also indebted to a host of people in my academic and personal circles for their enthusiasm and support throughout my studies. While on my way to Schiphol airport to study Mandarin in Guangzhou, a chance meeting with dr. Peter Peverelli eventually led to a PhD trajectory at the Vrije Universiteit. After receiving my project proposal from dr. Peverelli, prof. dr. Wim Janse, then dean of the Faculty of Theology, worked tirelessly to get NWO funding from the Dutch government's Sustainable Humanities program. For his efforts on behalf of me and this project I am deeply grateful. Once accepted as a PhD student at the Faculty of Theology, prof. dr. Marianne Moyaert took me under her wings. Her energy and devotion to quality have been contagious. Prof. Moyaert was a consistent motivator committed to both the quality of my work and my future academic prospects. She was the main supervisor (promotor) of my PhD project together with prof. dr. Pál Nyíri at the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Faculty of Humanities. Prof. Nyíri has been an inspiring and devoted mentor throughout the trajectory. During fieldwork and writing I continuously benefitted from his insights as an ethnographer and China specialist. He often encouraged me to situate my work on a grassroots level in broader developments in modern Chinese society, which had a great impact on my reading and writing choices.

Dr. Adam Yuet Chau at Cambridge has acted as a co-promotor (co-supervisor) in this project. I especially benefitted from his sharp insights for the development of an academic vocabulary to write about my findings in China. For example, I am indebted to
dr. Chau for suggesting the term "pluriprax household" to me during a heated exchange of e-mails in which we were debating the least harmful concept to attach to households shared by practitioners of popular religion and Protestant Christianity in China. It has been a privilege to learn from dr. Chau and his expertise in the study of Chinese religiousities. Dr. Peverelli, after having put me in touch with the Faculty of Theology, also continued to support and advise me as a co-supervisor. As a China expert trained in organization theory and interested in the topic of religion, dr. Peverelli's profuse comments and suggestions on my work were always thought-provoking and helpful.

In terms of funding, my journey started in 2012 with a joint grant from the China Programme of the Dutch Organisation for Internationalisation in Education (NUFFIC) and the China Scholarship Council. This grant allowed me to study Mandarin at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou in 2012-2013. A joint grant from the International Institute for Asian Studies in Leiden (IIAS) and the Moving Matters group at the University of Amsterdam (MoMat) in 2013 subsequently provided me with the opportunity to conduct fieldwork on Chinese marriages with my newly acquired language skills. For funding my PhD studies in China and at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, I gratefully acknowledge the university's Faculty of Theology and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO).

A special thank you is due to people who supported my research and my family's life in Xiamen. Dr. Lu Yunfang at Xiamen University first acted as my local supervisor during my master studies in 2011. She later put me in touch with prof. dr. Yi Lin to act as a local supervisor during my PhD studies in 2014-2016. Both dr. Lu and prof. Yi have been extremely kind and supportive during our stay in Xiamen. I have fond memories of the culinary get-togethers with prof. Yi's doctoral students and the personal as well as academic exchanges facilitated by these gatherings. Dr. Chris White and dr. Liu Jifeng, fellow researchers working on the topic of Protestant Christianity in Xiamen, were both generous in terms of academic advice and connecting me to local informants, in particular Protestant ministers. Other people who have kindly helped me get in touch with interlocutors in Xiamen are Song Yu, dr. Stefania Travagnin at Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, dr. Brian Nichols at Mount Royal University, and prof. dr. André van der Braak at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

I want to thank dr. Barak Kalir, dr. Rosanne Rutten, and dr. Leo Douw at the University of Amsterdam (UvA) for their academic support before I got a PhD position and
for writing a string of recommendation letters. I also want to thank participants in the monthly NOSTER seminar on empirical research in religious studies for the collegial atmosphere and their comments and suggestions on early versions of this thesis. The TransAsia monthly cultural studies reading group at the University of Amsterdam, headed by prof. dr. Jeroen de Kloet has likewise provided this thesis with critical comments, useful suggestions, and pleasant interactions, for which I want to thank all participants. At the Faculty of Theology of the Vrije Universiteit I am indebted to colleagues and staff who took the time to read and comment on my work. A special thanks to all members of our PhD reading group: Miriam Adan Jones, Daan Oostveen, Anke Liefbroer, Fulco van Hulst, Elza Kuijk, and Iris Speckmann.

Many of our friends and family members have personally supported Lotte, Coosje, and me during the past years. My brother Chris kindly provided me with books from the Leiden University library on numerous occasions. My parents and parents-in-law have supported us in countless ways over the past years, taking great burdens off our shoulders. My grandfather Simon Colijn, who passed away on 22 November 2016, was fascinated with China and specifically with my research among Chinese Christians. He used to e-mail me with all kinds of information about Chinese culture and history that he retrieved from his extensive book collection, ending one enthusiastic message with "What a country!" [Wat een land!].

Ironically, the most special evening of my fieldwork in China had nothing to do with fieldwork. It was Chinese New Year's Eve 2015, Lotte and I had finished wrapping presents for the Xiamenese family who had invited us to their home to celebrate the occasion. This particular family's situation was so interesting for my research that I had invested much time and energy in making their acquaintance and winning their confidence to participate in my research. As we made our way to the side of the road with our presents to flag down a taxi, Lotte's belly started hurting. We looked at each other and decided that, just to be safe, we would drop by the maternity hospital for a quick check-up before heading to the home of my hard-fought research participants. A mere four hours later we were the proud parents of a beautiful baby daughter, Coosje. Lotte has made big personal sacrifices to support my research. Without her patience and devotion I would have been unable to complete this work. I am deeply grateful for the love and happiness in my life thanks to Lotte and Coosje.
Introduction

Chapter contents
- A wedding
- The problem
- Pluriprax households in China
- The question
- The setting
- Theoretical framework
- Research methods

A wedding
On a February afternoon in Mashan village, rural Zhangzhou in 2014, Yuxian¹ stood in front of the table on which rested the inscribed spirit tablets of his ancestors. It was a cold day, Yuxian was shaking. Lined up on the left and right sides of the table were the colorful statues of the temple Gods that had been ceremonially installed in the courtyard that morning. Yuxian's right hand tightly clutched that of Lilan, his bride, whose belly was already showing signs of the new life growing inside. The ceremony master proclaimed loudly that it was time for the newlyweds to kneel down before the groom's ancestors. But Yuxian and Lilan remained standing, as if frozen to the ground. "Kneel down, you have to kneel down," Yuxian's uncles and cousins hissed closely behind them. A crowd of some four hundred people was seated in the courtyard, drinking, smoking, and watching the ceremony.

In the background, nearly visible from the courtyard, lay the modern cityscape of Xiamen, where Yuxian lived and worked as a telecommunications expert. In the 1980s, Xiamen had become the economic powerhouse of the region called Southern Fujian, which also includes mountainous Zhangzhou and coastal Quanzhou. Xiamen was the city where Yuxian and Lilan had gotten baptized as Protestant Christians three and five years earlier. As he was about to introduce Lilan to his ancestors in Zhangzhou by kneeling down and burning incense, something held Yuxian back. He tried again to kneel down, but Lilan squeezed his hand, pulling upward in an effort to stop him.

¹ All surnames and personal names have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect the identities of my research participants.
His father, Lao Chen, had long managed to delay Yuxian's plans to marry another Protestant convert. Lilan's pregnancy had made Lao Chen change his mind, but only on condition that the proper rites be observed during the wedding. As village head he had, after all, personally presided over the reconstruction of the local temple. "[Yuxian] believes in Christianity, but he has to venerate his ancestors (bai zuxian). If you don't venerate your ancestors, then where do you come from? It's disrespectful. (...) It's as if one house walks two roads (yi jia zou liang tiao lu)," Lao Chen said to me more than a year after the wedding (Interview October 10, 2015).

As Yuxian and Lilan stood in deadlock before the village Gods and the spirit tablets, Lao Chen realized that he had to fix a lantern in the bridal room. He quickly left the courtyard, leaving patriarchal authority over the ritual proceedings in the hands of Yuxian's eldest maternal uncle (jiujiu). Not a member of Yuxian's Chen lineage, this uncle was unwilling to exert more pressure on the couple to kneel down. During an interview at his home in Xiamen, Yuxian declared his father's sudden departure a miracle engineered by the Protestant God: "My father was gone just as we were doing the wedding ceremony, otherwise we would have had to kneel down in front of this many people. If we had really done this, we would have offended God. So on that day God removed our greatest, greatest difficulty" (Interview 16 January, 2015).

With eyes closed, hands sweaty and shaking, Yuxian finally did not kneel down but he bowed once. Lilan defiantly remained upright until the ceremony master directed them to toast with the guests. Yuxian: "In a non-Christian family, you cannot undermine the traditional wedding. [At the same time] you have to safeguard the core of our faith, and this is a very big conflict. You may think this only lasts a few minutes, but it felt like years (duri runian)" (Interview January 16, 2015).

**The problem**

What is the nature of the problem that occurred during this wedding? I discern an immediate problem of conflicting obligations for the bride and groom; a broader societal problem; and a scholarly problem. To begin with, the reader will have noted that the couple had to fulfill important ritual obligations toward the groom's native place community. This community was made up of ancestral lineage members on the paternal side and relatives on the maternal side. At the same time, the couple had to fulfill obligations toward their church community in Xiamen. Protestant converts in Southern Fujian are instructed by
their religious peers only to consult and kneel down to one transcendent God, and to avoid all forms of "superstition" and "idol worship." For the bride and groom, the problem that occurred during their wedding in Zhangzhou in 2014 can be framed as the immediate problem of their conflicting ritual obligations.

Households in which members have incurred conflicting ritual obligations are referred to in this thesis as pluriprax households. "Pluriprax" is a compound word with the word-forming element "pluri," which means many or several. The element "prax" simply means practice, as in orthoprax or heteroprax. "Pluriprax households" thus refers to households where a plurality of ritual practices can be observed. This underscores my focus on the ritual practices of my research participants instead of their beliefs in certain doctrines or cosmologies. A recommendation from my supervisor Adam Yuet Chau, I deploy this concept instead of more common anglophone terms such as "multi-religious" or "interfaith" households. For neither "faith" nor "religion" necessarily do justice to the practice-oriented, non-institutionalized character of popular religion in China (explained below).

The societal problem I discern, is that conflicting ritual obligations give rise to a sense of internal division among members of pluriprax households in Southern Fujian. Rituals have long been viewed by scholars as fundamental socializing practices in Chinese society (Stafford 2000; Dean 2003; Chau 2006; Johnson 2009; Oakes and Sutton 2010; Puett 2015). They often mark important changes and continuities in communal life, drawing more or less sharp boundaries between insiders and outsiders. If one son wants to hire Buddhist monks to chant at his father's funeral, but his brother wants a church choir to sing, then how do they hold a funeral together? If a wife is expected by her husband and village community to prepare offerings for the Gods carried from house to house in a procession during Spring Festival, but she refuses due to her commitment to a Protestant church, then how can the household members celebrate together? Their conflicting ritual obligations necessitate household members to enact important communal rituals separately or to make certain concessions.

Separate ritual enactment posed a problem because my research participants almost uniformly exhibited a strong preference to enact rituals together, in accordance with a particular community's standards. Protestants, for example, were eager to bring their non-Protestant household members along to Christmas celebrations in churches, while practitioners of popular religion were eager to bring their Protestant household members
along to lineage celebrations. In the case described above, the groom's father said it was as if his household walks two different roads. Another interlocutor jokingly referred to the situation in her household as "one country, two systems," in reference to mainland China's well-known political slogan with regard to Hong Kong and Taiwan, to underscore the sense of division despite unity among household members.

Communal rituals have been framed by scholars as spaces of "negotiation" (Hüsken and Neubert 2012) or "shared arena's" (Seligman et al 2008) where conflicts between individual and collective needs and between different ritualists are acted out through symbolic behaviors. Rituals thus facilitate acknowledgement of differences between the ritualists (e.g. bride and groom; the living and the dead; North and South Korea during the Winter Olympics of 2018; representatives of different communities; the accused and the judge; Gods and humans) through more or less agreed-upon behaviors in order to prevent or to regulate conflicts, grief, violence, coercion, and punishments. But the problem faced by pluriprax households is members' obligations toward different communities. Conflicting ritual obligations prevent the "normal" acting out of differences already inherent to communal rituals because ritualists cannot agree on the proper behaviors. In theory, at least, conflicting ritual obligations set the stage for violence and conflict because ritualists do not act in synchrony and thus they have no means to channel their differences.

But with the available scholarly knowledge it is difficult to explain the absence of violence in Southern Fujian's pluriprax households, and indeed their success at forming and maintaining such households. The scholarly problem I discern is that virtually no comprehensive studies are yet available on pluriprax households in China. Tens of millions of Chinese people have converted to Protestant Christianity since the end of Maoism (Hunter and Chan 1993; Aikman 2003; F. Yang 2005; Liao 2011; Xi 2011; Cao 2010; Bays 2012; Sun 2017), while countless bigger and smaller spaces and rituals for popular Gods, ghosts, and ancestors have been revived since 1978 (Dean 1993; Feuchtwang 2001; Overmyer 2003; Chau 2006; Tan 2006; Lagerwey 2010; Oakes and Sutton 2010; Dean and Zheng 2009, 2010; Goossaert and Palmer 2011). The geographic, cultural, and linguistic area of Southern Fujian is emblematic for this dual trend, as both church and temple communities have flourished greatly in the area. My research is the first to explore how practitioners of popular religion and Protestant Christianity in contemporary Southern Fujian live together as spouses; as parents and children; as grandparents and grandchildren.
The growing number of international conferences, academic workshops, and edited volumes dedicated to the theme of religious diversity indicates an increasing awareness on the part of scholars in China and Europe, that in the contemporary world individuals adopt religious practices and identities in dissonance with their externally ascribed national identity (e.g. an old trope in China holds that one more Christian is one fewer Chinese person, although examples to the contrary abound), ethnicity (e.g. a current trope in China holds that one cannot be both Han and a Muslim, but again examples abound), or social class (e.g. Chinese Communist Party elites are officially atheists, but many are known to visit temples for divinatory or veneratory practices). The often messy and seemingly erratic practices on the level of apparently individualistic grassroots practitioners in China is heavily understudied and little understood by scholars. My thesis addresses this theoretical lacuna by situating ethnographic findings in the discursive field of individualization.

Sociologists and anthropologists of China have recently generated new and highly stimulating insights about contemporary Chinese society by situating their work in the discursive field of individualization (Yan 2003, 2009, 2010; Zhang and Ong 2008; Halskov Hansen and Svarverud 2010; Kipnis 2012), which was originally developed to capture societal trends associated with modernization in Western societies. But the work of these China scholars rarely draws insights from ritual and religious life. This is surprising because numerous kinds of ritual and religious communities have long been a key feature of, and perhaps even synonymous with, Chinese society (Goossaert and Palmer 2011). Likewise, scholars working on Chinese religiosities rarely seem to engage with discourses on individualization, despite that field's obvious potential to enrich scholarly understanding of contemporary religious life.

Indeed, individualization strikes a nervous chord in communities in Southern Fujian that have revived communal rituals for God(s), ghosts, and ancestors after years of repression under Mao. At stake is the social integrity of such communities. Rituals in general have been theorized by scholars as fundamental behaviors for forming and maintaining relationships between people (Goffman 1955; Geertz 1957; Rappaport 1979; Bloch and Parry 1982; Bell 1992) and scholars working on Chinese rituals in various historical periods have confirmed this socializing aspect of rituals. Chinese people are often stereotypically depicted as "collectivist" or "communitarian" by Western observers. This view is only useful in the sense that Chinese individuals have long been embedded in kinship collectives (later in socialist production teams), existing for the sake of
perpetuating the biological community or the socialist state. According to Yan Yunxiang (2009), however, Chinese individuals no longer exist for the sake of some collective, instead pursuing individual needs, careers, and happiness. I found that ritualists in my research population in Southern Fujian positioned themselves in this society-wide trend of individualization by asserting their individual needs to comply with another community's ritual obligations (e.g. Protestant obligation to abstain from superstition) during communal rituals. This exposes an important gap in our understanding of the challenges to communal life posed by individualization. Pluriprax households form an interesting microcosm for exploring these challenges.

Another gap in scholarly understanding is how pluriprax households, as "units of religious engagement" (Chau 2015), engage with different rituals systems at the same time. Most recent social science studies on religion in China focus on state policies to regulate the population's religious activities. In so doing, scholars tend to stay neatly within imaginary boundaries between "Buddhism," "Daoism," "Protestantism," "Islam," "popular religion," and so on. Few scholars have yet attempted to look beyond such boundaries by looking at pluriprax households' conflicting religious engagements on a grassroots level. Lilan and Yuxian's contentious wedding in Zhangzhou in 2014 thus depicts the immediate problem of conflicting ritual obligations; a broader societal problem posed by individualization and a sense of division among pluriprax households; as well as a scholarly problem in the sense that we lack basic scholarly understanding of pluriprax households in the context of individualization in China, and in particular Southern Fujian people's unlikely success at maintaining such households.

**Pluriprax households in China**

Pluriprax households are not a new phenomenon in China. The so-called Chinese rites controversy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries revolved around the issue of ancestor veneration by Catholic converts in China (Minamiki 1987; Mungello 1994; Standaert 2011). Jesuits following in the tradition of the famous missionary Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) pursued a policy of accommodating converts in their veneration of Chinese ancestors. Dominicans and Franciscans who set up missions in China in the course of the seventeenth century reported the Jesuits' "heresies" to Pope Clement XI. A decree and a papal bull were issued to outlaw ancestral rites for Chinese Catholics. Enacting communal
rituals with and for non-Christian relatives thus seems to have become problematic even before the arrival of Protestant missionaries in the nineteenth century.²

Another issue was Catholic (and later also Protestant) converts' refusal to contribute to communal festivals featuring sacrifices for the Gods. According to Chau,

[i]n the nineteenth and early twentieth century, both Catholic and Protestant missionaries in many parts of rural China were engaged in aggressive proselytizing. Villagers who became converts invariably came into conflict with those who did not, especially over temple festival dues. The converts were instructed by the missionaries to perceive the village deities as pagan idols and to refuse to pay their share of the dues. The rest of the village argued that as long as these converts were still part of the village they were still responsible for their dues, especially because the entire community, including the Christian converts, benefited from, say, the rain brought by the village dragon god (Litzinger 1996). The same kind of conflicts also happened in Shaanbei."
— Chau 2006, 68.

As Western missionary efforts intensified in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, more and more Christian converts came into conflict with their non-Christian household members and villagers over rituals. Social historian Chris White (2011) has demonstrated that due to their refusal to participate in communal rituals, converts in late imperial Southern Fujian (around 1900) often became disembedded from their households and lineage communities. White states that

[i]n addition to the verbal and physical persecution that often accompanied joining the church, many Chinese converts were cut off from their family or clan upon admission into the church. (...) [C]onverts were required to desist from activities connected to ancestor worship, which often essentially cut them off from their relatives. In some cases it was common for the break to be even more formal through a parent or elder making a public declaration that the convert was no longer a member of the family. This obviously had major implications for it meant the convert no longer had a share in the inheritance. One missionary reported that renunciation of ancestral tablets, “in nine cases out of ten, causes the loss of all inherited property.” Similarly, another author notes, “No native

² I leave out households shared by Muslims and non-Muslims in China because that is beyond the scope of this thesis.
Chinese can become a Christian without suffering persecution at the first, and without sacrificing all his patrimonial rights."
— White 2011, 88.

This source cited by White may have been present in China around the time of the so-called Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901), which specifically targeted Christian converts and foreign missionaries. In the course of three years, over 30,000 Christians were killed by so-called Boxers who had risen up to vent their anger over the privileges bestowed on converts by Western imperialist powers (Silbey 2012). These historical examples provide a fleeting glimpse of the problems faced by members of pluriprax households in late imperial China. They suggest that as recently as the early twentieth century, conversion to Protestantism and Catholicism in China was accompanied by violent conflicts, social marginalization, special privileges, and financial punishments. Unfortunately, however, few detailed ethnographic examples of pluriprax households and their communal rituals in the late imperial era seem to have been recorded and even fewer have survived.

This scarcity of available historical examples is matched only by the all but complete absence of contemporary studies on Chinese pluriprax households and their rituals. A reason for this blind spot may be the academic penchant for studying "religions" as more or less coherent entities with clearly identifiable prophets, saints, scriptures, doctrines, and so on. A religious studies scholar embarking on a fieldwork trip may be expected by colleagues, supervisors, and funding agencies to define a particular "religion," "cult," or "denomination" on which they are going to collect data. This is how specialists in "Daoist studies," "Buddhist studies," "Chinese Protestantism," and so on are able to self-identify as such, preferably with expertise in one particular sect, organization, or school of thought (e.g. Mahayana, Zhengyi, True Jesus Church). The reality of people on a grassroots level, however, is not confined by such categories and pluriprax households are but one example of the often "messy" and "irrational" religious endeavors of living and breathing practitioners.

An early, famous example of such messiness is Clifford Geertz' (1957) study of a Javanese funeral gone wrong. Originally intended as a critique of "functionalism" in the scientific study of religion, Geertz analyzed this problematic funeral in the context of broader changes in Javanese society. Urbanization and political divisions between people of different ethno-religious backgrounds in Indonesia had been cause for a local bureaucrat
to forbid traditional Muslim ritual service providers (referred to by Geertz as Modins) from enacting death rituals for non-Muslims. The goal of this policy was allegedly to ease tensions between people in a rapidly growing and pluralizing Javanese kampong. But the non-Muslim relatives and neighbors of the deceased knew of no other way to enact a funeral than to invite a Muslim Modin, who refused to go. The bereaved did not know how to part with the young deceased without the Modin, thus worsening an already tragic situation. According to Geertz,

This disrupted funeral was in fact but a microcosmic example of the broader conflicts, structural dissolutions, and attempted reintegrations which, in one form or another, are characteristic of contemporary Indonesian society.
— Geertz 1957, 35.

Geertz' approach is helpful for generating a research question because it demonstrates how minute, "thick descriptions" (Geertz 1994) of contentious rituals can be used to illustrate broader societal conflicts. More recent studies conducted in Western societies have followed this general approach of linking "mixed" or "interfaith" households to broader developments in society, although rarely through ethnography and even more rarely through a focus on rituals (Bangstad 2004; Fishman 2004; Al-Yousuf 2006; Froese 2008; De Hart 2014; Cerchiaro, Aupers, and Houtman 2015; Collet 2015). These studies generally feature discourse analysis based on interviews, often with the ultimate aim of elucidating the "complex identities" of household members. This is somewhat surprising because practices, and in particular ritual practices often form the greatest challenge for members of plurirax households. In the context of China, where different "modalities of doing religion" (Chau 2006) have long been more pertinent to ordinary practitioners than certain "belief systems," we may expect ritual enactment to be of particular concern for members of plurirax households (explained in more detail below, in the section titled "theorizing Chinese rituals"). Following Geertz' (1957) ethnographic approach, then, I explore broader changes in modern Chinese society through intensive study of the messiness of the communal rituals of plurirax households in Southern Fujian.

A helpful and much more recent study is anthropologist Tam Ngo's (2016) *The New Way: Protestantism and the Hmong in Vietnam*. Ngo demonstrates in both microscopic detail and broad sociohistorical analysis the difficulties of maintaining communal integrity
amidst large-scale Protestant conversion in a contemporary Asian society. She interprets conversion to Protestantism and the ensuing conflicts among Vietnamese Hmong people not in terms of "social change," but somewhat differently in terms of "modernization." According to Ngo, religious conversion has "ripped many families, clans, and communities apart" (13). What makes this study helpful is that it shows how the social integrity of households in Vietnam, and indeed the very fabric of society, is at stake when household members follow different "ways." It questions whether such households can continue existing at all. Although she brings conflicts around communal rituals in part-Protestant Hmong families conspicuously to the foreground in her ethnographic descriptions, Ngo does not conduct a close analysis of these rituals, their histories, and their potential to unite and to divide her research population. Thus she seems to miss an opportunity to nuance her position by exploring ways in which Protestant and non-Protestant Hmong are able to enact communal rituals together in spite of modernization. In spite of its brilliance, then, Geertz' study remains exceptional in the sense that few ethnographers have explored "mixed" (Geertz 1957, 42) or pluriprax communities with a view to extracting theoretical insights from the intensive study of their shared ritual practices.

The question
I have chosen to structure this exploratory study in accordance with two of pluriprax households' most basic aspects: the ways people form and maintain them. It is not difficult to discern two ways in which this happens: religious conversion and religious heterogamy (marrying somebody with a different religious orientation). Practicing popular religion, quite revealingly, does not involve a formal conversion, but how and why do people in Southern Fujian convert to Protestant Christianity? Why and how do they marry a spouse with different ritual obligations from their own? The first two chapters of the thesis address these questions through ethnographic descriptions of religious conversion and religious heterogamy, shedding light on how pluriprax households are formed. Scholars working on religion in contemporary China tend to explain rapid religious conversion and revival in terms of people's need for new (or pre-Maoist) forms of belonging or *communitas* in an era when traditional social structures such as collective labor units have been dismantled (Dean 2003; Yang 2005; Fan, Whitehead, and Whitehead 2005; Cao 2005; Johnson 2009). Religious conversion in Southern Fujian, however, does not simply mean joining a new community, in many cases it also entails a more complicated relationship with the
household and ancestral lineage. How people form pluriprax households in Southern Fujian is thus a question of both societal and scholarly concern.

Having formed pluriprax households, the second question I raise is how people in Southern Fujian *maintain* them. Studies conducted in Southeast Asia (Jones, Leng, and Mohamad 2009, Ngo 2016), the United States (Bumpass 1970; Petersen 1986; Schaefer Riley 2013) and the United Kingdom (Arweck and Nesbitt 2010) suggest that maintaining "interfaith" or otherwise "mixed" marriages with practitioners in different religious traditions can be challenging. Divorce rates are generally high and conflicts rife in such households.

Yet in daily life, members of pluriprax households in contemporary Southern Fujian seemed to get along much as any Chinese household. Contrary to my initial expectations, I found that my research participants did not live in a state of perpetual discord with their fellow household members or lineage members, as one may expect from available comparative and historical examples. Health, career, migration, money, and leisure were major concerns for members of pluriprax households in Southern; religious beliefs and ritual practices were not. In fact, the pluriprax households I studied were surprisingly "secularized" and stripped of religious symbols and rituals, allegedly to preserve peace among the household members. Religious symbols and individual rituals were often kept away from shared living spaces and given a place in private bedrooms or drawers. But this changed when the time came to participate in communal rituals together. At lifecycle events such as weddings and funerals, and annual events such as Christmas and Spring Festival, the household's pluripraxy surfaced and members struggled to find ways to participate in the rituals together. They had to fulfill certain ritual obligations; a crowd was present to observe the proceedings; a liturgy had to be followed; ancestors and conventions had to be honored. Practitioners of popular religion and Protestant Christianity both attach great value to enacting rituals in accordance with their own community's conventions (either a church or a native place community such as the ancestral lineage). Hence they were often unable to enact communal rituals together, as a household.

But very few of the pluriprax households I studied in Southern Fujian were under threat of divorce or of being ripped apart, challenging common understandings about religious diversity in the domestic sphere. Apparently, people in Southern Fujian are able to maintain their pluriprax households due to specific circumstances or modes of behavior.
How people maintain such households is thus also a question of both societal and academic concern. Therefore, in this thesis I pose the question:

How do people in contemporary Southern Fujian form and maintain pluriprax households, despite their conflicting ritual obligations?

This central question informs the structure of the thesis. The first two chapters (constituting Part I) explore how people form pluriprax households in Southern Fujian. Chapter 1 looks at conversion to Protestantism as a moment when a new pluriprax household is unintentionally formed, and Chapter 2 looks at religious heterogamy, when the bride and groom knowingly and willingly form a household marked by conflicting ritual obligations. The last two chapters (constituting Part II) explore how people maintain pluriprax households in Southern Fujian. Chapter 3 focuses on the ways people "harmonize" their conflicting ritual obligations during funerals, and Chapter 4 questions focuses on ways pluriprax households maintain a sense of unity despite abstaining from each other's important annual rituals (Christmas, ancestral lineage processions). To unpack my central question into smaller questions that can be answered empirically, I ask:

Which rules and traditions problematize the shared enactment of rituals by members of pluriprax households in Southern Fujian? Which creative solutions do they deploy to tackle the problem of conflicting ritual obligations? How do Protestant ministers and ancestral lineage elders respond to illicit ritual behaviors by their members during weddings, funerals, and Spring Festival? Does successful enactment of communal rituals by pluriprax households mean that they are able to maintain the unity of their households? Vice versa, does inability to enact communal rituals as a household mean that its members are going their separate ways socially, financially, and sexually?

To place these questions in a broader socio-historical context, I further ask:

Considering the important changes Chinese society has undergone in the course of the twentieth century, conveyed in the so-called "individualization of Chinese society" (explained below), how much power and influence do ancestral lineages,
Protestant churches, and socialist production brigades still have over the ritual lives of their (former) members? To what extent are individuals in Southern Fujian empowered to disobey their household heads and the leaders of their ritual communities, and to forsake their ritual obligations toward these communities? Have processes associated with "individualization" in modern China facilitated or discouraged the formation of pluriprax households? In other words, how do the ritual practices of pluriprax households in Southern Fujian illuminate broader changes in modern Chinese society?

The setting

The island city of Xiamen was the place where I lived from June 2014-February 2016 and from where I established a network of research participants across Southern Fujian. Xiamen has been named variously throughout history as Jiahe, Emui, and Amoy. For
centuries after the establishment of the island’s first fortress in the fourteenth century, it was only a minor city located on the southwestern corner of the island, dwarfed by the port city of nearby Quanzhou (see Chapter 3), which the thirteenth century Venetian merchant-explorer Marco Polo described as one of the greatest port cities in the world. Quanzhou’s port declined during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), and under the Qing (1644-1911) Xiamen became the cultural and economic center of Southern Fujian (White 2011, 5). Merchants from the city and the surrounding areas settled across Southeast Asia but maintained the Hokkien language and cultural ties to Southern Fujian (Ng 1983, Cook 1998).

After the signing of the humiliating Nanjing Treaty in 1842, Xiamen was among a handful of port cities opened to European trade and missionaries. This established the city as an international hub through which people, goods, and ideas travelled between China and the rest of the world. It is thus no coincidence that the first Protestant church in mainland China was built in Xiamen in 1848. The city's influential Protestant community became known for its Hokkien-speaking missionaries, early independence from foreign missionary organizations, and Southeast Asian linkages (Cheung 2004; White 2011). But this came to a full stop for three decades, when Mao Zedong banned capitalist practices, religion, and friendly exchanges with Western powers.

When Deng Xiaoping designated Xiamen a Special Economic Zone in 1980 and ended artillery exchanges with Taiwan, a process was set in motion that would not only restore Xiamen as a port city with an extensive overseas trade network, but that would also expand the urban territory to cover all of the island as well as extensive mainland areas formerly under the administration of Zhangzhou and Quanzhou. Nevertheless, local authorities managed to build Xiamen's reputation as a clean and cultural city, attracting mainland tourists year-round. Most of contemporary Xiamen is post-rural area, with people inhabiting more or less comfortable urban apartments on the locations where farming villages were until recently located.

In the Reform Era, the construction of several Protestant mega churches has signified a considerable conversion rate to Christianity. Contemporary Xiamen is known as one of the most liberal cities in China in terms of religious policy. Since 1980, a wave of migrant converts has come to dominate discourse and practice in Xiamen’s churches. Most Protestants in Xiamen today do not speak Hokkien but Mandarin, and they have family, business, and church ties in mainland China rather than in Southeast Asia. I met several key
interlocutors, including Lilan and Yuxian whose wedding in Zhangzhou I described above, in a church to which I refer as Bailu Church. It is a so-called family church (jiating jiaohui) on Xiamen island. Under China's religious laws, venues for group religious activities have to be registered with the local Religious Affairs Bureau and their clergy have to attain a certificate from a national association (in the case of Protestantism the national association is called the Three Self Patriotic Movement). As a family church, Bailu Church was not registered and its minister and deputy ministers (referred to as evangelists, chuandaoren) did not have certificates that would legally allow them to conduct religious activities. In Xiamen, as in other places in China, family churches are often allowed by the authorities to operate as long as their leaders do not express critical views of them. Nevertheless, police often put pressure on landlords to refuse extending rental contracts to family churches, thus creating a situation where they cannot take root in a certain building or neighborhood, but are forced to move around and that way lose both money (investment in interior decoration) and members, in particular elderly members (some people who can conveniently reach the current location may have a hard time reaching the church's next location). Like many family churches in Xiamen, Bailu Church was located in a former office space (for further details about the church community, see the vignette in Chapter 1).

Why did I choose this cultural setting to explore answers to my research questions? Xiamen was attractive for me as a research location because it is both the site of a sizeable, historic Protestant community, as well as a host of smaller and larger temple complexes. At the same time, as a Special Economic Zone it is on the forefront of China's development into a regional and global superpower. The city has attracted more than two million migrants since 1980, although it retains a sizeable population of "old locals" (lao Xiamenren). In the wider region Xiamen represents the comforts of middle class life and the wealth created by international trade and technology.

Local authorities in Xiamen have adopted an exceptionally tolerant attitude toward both the local "superstitions" of popular religion and the "foreign teaching" of Protestant Christianity. The first possible explanation for that is the proximity to Taiwan. Mainland China has for decades pursued a policy of appeasing Taiwanese concerns about

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3 The term "family church" is consciously used by practitioners to distinguish themselves from state-sanctioned churches of the Three Self Patriotic Movement, usually referred to simply as Three Self churches. I prefer this literal translation over the more common "house church" in English-language sources, which is misleading because most family churches in Xiamen do not meet in houses but in office spaces, factory spaces, and hotel rooms.
authoritarian rule. Places like Xiamen, where many Taiwanese people have relatives and business connections, serve as positive examples for the future of a unified China, at least from the perspective of mainland authorities (Oakes and Sutton 2010). Another reason is the city's age-old economic ties with Hokkien people across Southeast Asia. Incense from temples in Fujian has been used to establish temples across Southeast Asian (Xu 1993, Chang 1995; Ye 2008). After the Cultural Revolution, overseas relatives often supported the reconstruction of churches and temples in Fujian, demonstrating their commitment to local religious life (Dean 2010). For authorities to place tight restrictions on religious activities in Xiamen would jeopardize officials' good relations with overseas investors.

My initial plan was to conduct research only in the city of Xiamen, including some of its "peri-urban," rural or post-rural neighborhoods. Most of my initial interlocutors were Protestants aged between twenty and forty, with college degrees, working in middle class sectors such as education, IT, finance, and medicine. At least five were Communist Party members, but there could be more as Party membership is not necessarily discussed openly. Most of my interlocutors rented apartments in so-called gated communities (xiaoqu), either on Xiamen island or in one of the city's mainland suburbs. Such housing projects have popped up across the city to accommodate the hundreds of thousands of highly skilled people who have moved to Xiamen since the 1980s for long-term work in the city's finance, IT, industrial, education, or transport sectors. Providing security, privacy, and parking space, these are the places where "private life" (Yan 2003; Zhang 2008) flourishes in Xiamen, where people can spend their days away from the gaze of the extended family of the native place; away from controlling company leaders; and away from an intrusive government. Gated communities in Xiamen often consist of a group of apartment buildings with shared (underground) parking space, shared lawns, and in some cases grocery stores, schools, and sports facilities. They have gates for exit and entry, sometimes manned by elderly guards with a seemingly infinite supply of cigarettes.

Whenever I had the chance, I met and spent time with my interlocutors' non-Protestant relatives and friends. Many research participants I met in Xiamen were part of households and ancestral lineages based in rural Southern Fujian. Since my aim was to study the communal rituals of pluriprax households, I needed to accompany my interlocutors from Xiamen to their ancestral hometowns to observe enactments of their most important annual and lifecycle rituals (weddings, funerals, Chinese New Year), which
they would not or only partly enact in the city. Therefore mine became a regional study in Southern Fujian instead of an urban study.

Apart from middle class urbanites, then, another segment of my interlocutors consisted of poor (former) peasants. They were the parents and other relatives of younger, more highly educated people I met in Xiamen. Chinese youths educated in the city may be considered as "modern," perhaps even "unfilial" by their rural relatives (Kipnis 1992, Oxfeld 2010). Nevertheless, those who earn a good salary in the city are a source of financial security for their parents and a source of pride for other lineage members. In the context of China's One Child Policy and Household Responsibility System, poor rural parents greatly depend on their one or two successful children in the city. As we will see in Chapter 4, this dependence empowers Protestant youths in Southern Fujian and facilitates their abstention from communal rituals associated with popular religion.

As elsewhere in China, the parents of prospective husbands in Southern Fujian are expected to provide urban apartments for their sons and daughters-in-law to live in. In Xiamen, prices for a 50m² apartment on the island start at 2 million RMB (300,000 euro's). Apartment prices in the mainland suburbs start at half that amount. But parents from Xiamen's rural surroundings often could not afford to buy apartments or to get a mortgage (mortgages in Xiamen generally require a substantial deposit of between ten and thirty per cent of the price), either on the island or its mainland suburbs. Therefore most of my interlocutors rented their apartments. Monthly rent of a one-bedroom apartment on the island started at 2,500 RMB (350 euro's) in 2016 for the smallest and most modest apartments in the more run-down buildings, while more comfortable and luxurious apartments could cost anything from 5,000 RMB up. On the mainland prices started at 1,800 RMB per month. Considering that a typical two-income household in Xiamen earns 10,000-15,000 RMB per month, housing was a major expense, along with such expenses as a car, schooling for children, and medical bills for parents or grandparents. While most of my interlocutors could make a living and travel to scenic areas such as Guilin or Northern Fujian's Wuyi Mountains during the "golden week" around the National Day on October 1, few had access to the symbols of wealth such as luxury cars or multiple apartments.

Village life often had few attractions for my interlocutors in Xiamen because it stood for hard, manual labor in an environment where elderly clan members controlled many aspects of life. Some had slowly become detached from their native place communities, as they entered boarding schools in the city or in nearby towns, only to return
home on the weekends or for holidays. Having found middle class jobs, few of my
interlocutors had ambitions to return to farming or to establish a career in their hometowns.
In general, my interlocutors were preoccupied with their own circle of friends or fellow
believers in Xiamen, with their own careers, hobbies, and with their own households.

I came into contact with my interlocutors in various ways. The first and most
fruitful way was to go to Protestant churches to meet people. Although non-Chinese
residents, foreign students, or tourists usually frequent international churches, I
encountered no obstacles (except once on Christmas Eve 2015, as described in Chapter 1)
to visit "indigenous" churches. In the course of my fieldwork I gradually built up a network
of participants in two "Three Self" and two "family" churches. Whenever possible I met
their non-Protestant household members during rituals or at their homes to talk about
rituals, local culture, and their household's history. Some research participants helped me to
get acquainted with yet more people. The second way to meet participants was through
academic gatekeepers (as mentioned in the preface), which helped me to get in touch with
non-Protestants whose household members had converted. That way I was able to enter
pluriprax households from "both sides," which provided me with a more balanced
perspective than if I had only entered households through Protestant gatekeepers. Xiamen's
so-called BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) system, a network of bus lanes elevated over major
roads, afforded me with a quick connection to interlocutors' homes or neighborhoods,
despite a sometimes significant geographical distance (the island was previously
considered unsuitable for a subway system, but work has begun in the 2010s to solve the
city's rampant traffic problems).

My research ended up involving hundreds of individuals whom I observed during
rituals, met in temples, churches, and at banquets, or sat down with for more or less formal
interviews. I got to know six households particularly well in the sense that I interacted
multiple times with multiple members in the course of my fieldwork. Key interlocutors
from these households are recognizable throughout the thesis by their pseudonyms:

- Guo Lilan and her husband Chen Yuxian (Introduction and Chapter 4 about a
  wedding and Spring Festival rituals in Zhangzhou, respectively)
- Zhang Mimi (Chapter 1 about Protestant conversion in Xiamen)
• Tang Mei and her husband Liang Yu (Chapter 2 about religious heterogamy in Quanzhou and Xiamen)
• Yan Liping and her husband Chen Xiaolong (Chapter 2 about religious heterogamy)
• Zhu Enlin and her husband Ma Yilong (Chapter 3 about funerals in Xiamen)
• Lu Huifei (Chapter 3 about funerals)

With them and their household members I took leisure trips; visited their hometowns; took part in whatever rituals I could; and had extensive conversations with about issues ranging from religion to money to marital problems. These six "core" households will be discussed extensively throughout the chapters, along with examples from other households. The upshot of focusing my energies on close relationships with a limited number of interlocutors was that they eventually trusted me enough to share with me details about illicit ritual behavior during weddings, funerals, and Chinese New Year. These valuable data provide a lucid portrayal of contemporary people's individual empowerment vis-à-vis ritual communities. They shed light on how contemporary pluriprax households are formed and maintained.

Another of my closest acquaintances was Wei Haiteng, a Xiamen local in his mid-fifties who became my sports buddy and a valuable informant. I met Haiteng early in my fieldwork through an academic gatekeeper, and he promptly invited me to join his group of friends that went swimming in the sea every morning at around 06:30. The seafood restaurant on the beach where they met was not far from where I lived, Haiteng had assured me, so he could pick me up every morning by car on his way there. On the morning of my first swim with them, Haiteng's group (he referred to them as xiongdimen, brothers) wasted no time enjoying the morning sun in the water, as they sped off ahead at a pace I could not possibly keep up with. I realized that these men had grown up by the shores of a subtropical island, and that they had probably learned to swim in the sea as children. Haiteng himself had grown up as a peasant in one of the island's former villages, at a time when—almost impossible to imagine now—it was still mostly rice paddies and palm trees. They were always near the sea, although large sections of the beach were once restricted due to military exchanges with Taiwan, and in particular due to the close proximity of the Jinmen islands under Taiwanese control. In fact, the swimmers claimed they had once been confronted by a Taiwanese military patrol boat when they had swam too close to one of the
Jinmen islands.

As the group sped off ahead, Haiteng stayed behind with me to teach me the best way to swim in the sea. My arms being long even for Dutch standards, in only a few weeks' time I was able to keep up with the group, and occasionally to spearhead it. After a while I started to enjoy these swimming sessions, and to appreciate the sea that had for centuries carried Hokkien people from the Chinese mainland to Taiwan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Malaysia (Ng 1983, Cook 1998). Through the regular activity of swimming with this group of locals I felt that I was gaining a deeper understanding of the place, its history, and the people who had lived through its strange transformation from a beleaguered paradise to a concrete jungle.

For selecting the kinds of pluriprax households to study for this project, I decided not to distinguish between "pluriprax couples" (where husband and wife are practitioners in different ritual systems) and "pluriprax generations" (where parents and children are practitioners in different ritual systems). Although Yan (2009) and others have argued that the conjugal relationship is now central to the contemporary Chinese household and not the father-son relationship, I still found interesting insights from both pluriprax couples and generations (an example of the latter marks the problematic wedding described above). I have chosen to study both, because all household members have certain ritual obligations, whether they are sons, daughters, wives, or husbands. All Protestants have the same obligations toward the church community, and all household members may at some point be called on to prepare sacrifices for the ancestors or to represent their household at a funeral or wedding (in particular daughters). The central idiom here is conflicting ritual obligations (see for a more in-depth explanation Chapter 3), and these can be discerned in both pluriprax couples and pluriprax generations.

Members of pluriprax households faced some risks participating in my research. Those previously embroiled in conflicts with their household members over religious conversion risked raking up animosities through participation in the research. In order to avoid that from happening, I never provided participants with any sensitive details shared with me by their household members. Other than raking up conflicts, explaining religious conversion and ritual enactment to an impartial "outsider" may have led some research participants to look at the issue from a different angle than they were used to. My interactions with participants were based on mutual trust, and I informed them abundantly that my inquiries into their personal situations were borne out of scholarly interest in the
context of my doctoral research. With the approval of my supervisors, I consciously
avoided so-called Informed Consent Forms requiring signatures from research participants,
because of the sensitivity of the topic and because of the association with Chinese
government and bureaucracy of such forms.

Theoretical framework
The contextualization of my findings in Southern Fujian is indebted to recent scholarship
on "individualization" in Chinese society (Yan 2003 and 2009; Zhang and Ong 2008;
Halskov Hansen and Svarverud 2010; Kipnis 2012; Qi 2014; Steele and Lynch 2013).
These authors draw on theories of individualization constructed in modernizing Western
societies, centering in particular on the work of Anthony Giddens (1991), Zygmunt
Bauman (2000), and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim and Ulrich Beck (2002). Although this
thesis engages primarily with authors working on individualization in China because of its
markedly different character and trajectory from individualization in Western societies
(Yan 2010), it is worth reflecting briefly on some general debates within this discursive
field.

Sociologist Cosmo Howard (2007) has identified four key areas of contestation
among scholars working in Western settings. First is the question to what extent
individualization has objectively "liberated" individuals from institutional obligations and
provided them with freedom and personal agency. While scholars arguing from a neoliberal
perspective tend to hail individualization as the individual's salvation from the shackles of
tradition and paternalistic authority, others claim that modern individuals have become
more vulnerable to exploitation or marginalization due to their loss of traditional communal
identification and increased dependence on different, modern, and constraining institutions
such as the workplace, the nation-state, or consumer groups. The second area of
contestation identified by Howard is the definition of "the individual." While for some
authors "the individual" stands for a single person as an irreducible unit of society, others
deploy this concept to illustrate the modern ideals of individuality ascribed to the self-
reliant, autonomous, authentic, and rational "heroes of modernity." The third area of
contestation in the discursive field of individualization is the question to what extent
various institutions govern individual lives, and what types of behaviors or behavioral
obligations individuals incur from participation in modern institutions. The advent of new
types of communities and institutions, for example online or consumption-based
communities, raises the question how pervasive their influence is on the behaviors of allegedly autonomous and independent individuals. The fourth and final area of contestation identified by Howard (2007) is if and how traditional labels of identification such as gender and class have diminished in importance due to individualization. The supposed empowerment of women and the rise of the so-called self-made man seem to suggest a diminishing importance of gender and class, while at the same time critics point to the persistence of glass ceilings and cronyism in Western societies.

These debates, which have taken shape in specific socio-historical contexts, have also been fruitful for me to theorize pluriprax households and their conflicting ritual obligations in contemporary China. In particular, in this thesis I am interested in 1) the extent to which various Chinese ritual communities (ancestral lineages, Protestant churches, former socialist production brigades) control individual ritual behaviors, and 2) how people assert individual preferences and needs in the face of communal ritual obligations. In other words, I am interested in the frictions or fault lines between individual agency and communal obligations in contemporary China. Communal rituals provide an excellent lens on this field of tension because individuals have to respond to them with observable behaviors, whether it is by abstaining, by changing the rituals, or by conforming to communal standards.

To explore these issues I build on scholarly explorations of individualization in Chinese society produced in the course of the last decade. Key in this field is the work of anthropologist Yan Yunxiang, who mainly conducted research in rural Northern China. In particular, I engage with two aspects of Chinese individualization as theorized by Yan in his collection of essays aptly titled The individualization of Chinese society (2009): 1) the individual's empowerment in the domestic sphere, and 2) the individual's empowerment in relation to socio-economic institutions.

**Individual empowerment in the domestic sphere**

Yan argues that empowerment of the Chinese individual in the domestic sphere began in the 1950s after the Communist "liberation." The new authorities seized all land and assets of people variously labeled as capitalists, rich peasants, landlords, or other "bad classes," reallocating wealth to rural collective farms and urban work units. Socialist collectives were to provide for all individual needs, replacing kinship as the central provider of all basic necessities and life chances. Strict or abusive patriarchs were sometimes publicly
beaten and humiliated, along with other authoritative figures from before Communism, including landlords and capitalists. Chinese youths were taught devotion to socialism instead of to their ancestral lineages.

Collective labor would not prevail after Mao's death in 1976. When Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1978 with an agenda of far-reaching economic reforms, workers were gradually "untied" (songbang) from collective labor units. Instead of a return to familism, however, Yan argues that large-scale rural-to-urban migration meant that Chinese people came to rely more on their own abilities to create professional and friendship-based networks (guanxi) in the cities. Higher education and career opportunities in the cities broadened the horizons of young migrants and inspired them to adopt lifestyles similar to that of the "modern" urban youths. During Deng's so-called Reform Era, extensive kinship ties perhaps became a key resource again for those already in the cities or for those staying behind in the villages. But according to Yan the new, competitive system in which the state no longer provides basic necessities but encourages individual entrepreneurship, requires people to form diverse social networks that may reach beyond kinship.

In this context, most Chinese people still form conjugal bonds and procreate. The jia (家) or hu (户), referred to here as household (similar to the European "nuclear family"), has become an important economic and socializing unit in society. It denotes a group of people who share a living matriarch or patriarch. This definition is derived from anthropologist Arthur Wolf 's (1984) work on kinship in Taiwan in 1845-1945, which shared many cultural, historical, and linguistic traits with Southern Fujian. From Wolf's extensive survey data, collected with Huang Chieh-shan (1980), it emerges that Taiwanese households continuously expanded and contracted as sons got married and had children, until the patriarch and matriarch passed away and each son with children became his own patriarch and each daughter-in-law a matriarch. In Southern Fujian the patriarch and matriarch are central figures who tie the sons, unmarried daughters, and grandchildren (previously also concubines) together in a household.

The administrative designation for "household" in Chinese is hu (jia in contemporary Xiamen is the more affective designation deployed in everyday life, for example to speak of one's own domestic situation). An age-old concept in Chinese society for registering marriages and conducting population censuses, according to historian Liu Zhiwei 刘志伟 (1997) the hu became a unit of tax collection in late imperial China, taxing
land rather than livestock (see also Szonyi 2002, 72-73). After 1949, the Communist authorities adopted the *hu* designation for various policy and propaganda purposes. While in rural Southern Fujian the household can still be composed of several brothers, their parents, wives, and children, in the cities the more modest size of housing facilities usually necessitates brothers to live separately, each with his own wife and children. In the city of Xiamen, this latter household form has become a salient feature of the social, economic, legal, and religious landscapes.

The 1958 *hukou* system, often translated as China's household registration system, legally pins down who belong in a household together, and in which municipality each household is based. Two types of household designations exist: agrarian and non-agrarian. Under Mao, the *hukou* system was used to restrict people's movements across China, to keep them tied to their collective farms and work units. Without a special waiver, one had no access to food, work, and basic healthcare services outside one's designated *hukou* region. Today, the much coveted urban public services such as schooling and healthcare, as well as the better paid jobs, are still limited to people with a non-agrarian *hukou*. Considering the role of hundreds of millions of rural-urban migrants who have built up the Chinese economy on tiny wages, the *hukou* system is considered a highly discriminatory policy by many intellectuals (Cheng and Selden 1994; Wang 2005).

The state-led revolt against patriarchal authority set the stage for what Yan calls the "nuclearization" of the Chinese family. Family nuclearization means reduction in size of the intimate family circle that once included aunts and uncles, cousins, great aunts and great uncles, as well as sometimes concubines and servants (Fei 1947). Modern housing facilities in the cities have been designed for two parents, one or two children (the effects of the so-called One Child Policy), and tentatively a set of grandparents. Members of this nuclear family are responsible for the household's stable income, child care, education, and elderly care. In pre-Communist China, extensive kinship bonds created a host of obligations for individuals toward their descent groups. But Yan argues that today individuals, including wives and children, make kinship work for themselves based on their personal needs and desires. Chinese individuals can make important life choices by themselves, instead of being subordinated to the interests of venerable family elders.

At the same time, Yan notes that close kinship ties between husbands and wives, parents and children, have become of high emotional value to people among his research population in Northeast China. Traditional Chinese outlooks on the family revolved around
the division of labor, wealth and ritual obligations; the proper channeling of biological desires; and the continuity of the ancestral line. The central relationship was the parent-child relationship, marked by dominance of the former over the latter. But popular music and drama series in China since the 1980s and 1990s have exalted affection and emotional bonding among household members. This resonates with the findings of Halskov Hansen and Pang (2010) that the household is where many contemporary Chinese people's most intimate relationships are formed and maintained. As they observed among their research populations in contemporary Shaanxi and Fujian,

family was crucial as it was usually the sole source of social security for the individual in case of disease, the need for care, loss of property or unemployment, and it constituted a collective of indisputable social, emotional and psychological importance for the young people.
— Halskov Hansen and Pang 2010, 47.

Yan (2009) argues that the central relationship in the Chinese household has become that between wife and husband. He calls this the rise of conjugality (58), which is based on mutual affection, though not necessarily on equality. Chinese women are still expected to perform domestic and child raising duties on top of their obligation to co-provide income for the household. Nevertheless, in the new and modern understanding of family in China since the 1980s, the individual can find emotional fulfillment and happiness through affective ties with fellow household members. The nuclearization of the Chinese family thus became not merely a socio-economic phenomenon, but a matter of psychological well-being and a potential source of comfort for the modern individual. Yan summarizes:

The modernity of the contemporary family lies in the rising importance of individual desires, emotions and agencies in family life, on the one hand, and the centrality of the individual in family relations, on the other hand. In other words, no longer willing to sacrifice oneself for the collective interests and for the perpetuation of the extended family, the individual in modern society seeks her or his interest and happiness through the working of the family. In the language of the Xiajia villagers, they are seeking shunxin (satisfaction / happiness) and fangbian (convenience / freedom) in family life, both of which are defined from a personal perspective.
— Yan 2009, xxiii-xxiv.
No coherent response to these developments has emerged from the older generations of Chinese people (those with adult children). Many grew up learning about the "backwardness" of traditional Chinese patriarchy. Filial obligations toward family and ancestors have not been widely revived in the Reform Era, despite the untying of collective labor and the retreat of the Communist Party from people's everyday lives. Instead of a return to patriarchal authority, the lack of state-provisioned elderly care means that Chinese pensioners depend on their one or two children to provide for them in their old age.

Dependence of the old on the young instead of the other way around, has had a profound impact on Chinese family life. Yan states that "the older generation's tolerance of youth and youth culture has increased greatly" (Yan 2009, xxix). For the current thesis this is an important issue because among my research population in Southern Fujian, (grand-)parents' tolerance also often extends to young people's religious conversion to Protestant Christianity. (Grand)parents often adopted a flexible attitude to converts' abstention from communal rituals of the lineage, village, or household. They were aware that youths had been imbued with radically different and new cultural ideals, and they tended to respond with tolerance if these ideals did not involve illegal or otherwise harmful behavior. This flexibility and tolerance, however, are not self-evident but must be seen as a result of different factors described above, namely the overall reduction of the power and influence of kinship institutions over individuals; the demise of patriarchal authority; the financial dependence of elderly parents on their working children; and the nuclearization of the Chinese family, which reshaped the household as a place of affection, privacy, and a source of individual comfort and happiness. Lack of patriarchal authority over ritual participation is a theme to which I will return in Chapter 4.

*Individual empowerment in relation to socio-economic institutions*

After individual empowerment in the domestic sphere, the second relevant aspect of individualization as theorized by Yan Yunxiang is the Chinese individual's empowerment in relation to socio-economic institutions. He states:

[W]ith variations across regional, class, gender, and age lines, most Chinese individuals obtained more rights, choices and freedom in their personal lives from the collective
Beginning in the 1980s, Communist Party cadres' authority and power over individual citizens has steeply declined. Under Mao's rule, local cadres had exclusive control over life chances such as education, career opportunities, migration, and even partner choice. Yan cites sociologist Andrew Walder's (1983) concept of "organized dependency" in socialist states to explain the extraordinary power of public servants over ordinary people. But starting in the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping's decollectivization policies and the restructuring of government reduced individual dependence on cadres. By the 1990s their power had declined to the extent that villagers in Yan's field site dared to challenge cadres to a fistfight in the case of conflicts - and win. Although one may argue that some Chinese cadres became more empowered in the Reform Era due to their participation in corruption schemes involving the privatization of previously state-owned enterprises, in general local cadres seem to have lost their absolute monopoly over resources. While some cadres used their power to become richer than others, they did not retain control over the lives of individual citizens to the same degree as under Mao.

De-collectivization after Maoism entailed far-reaching changes in Chinese law, economy, and social life. Collectivized labor and production were abolished, and the individual became responsible for finding work. The individual was also designated to receive (small) pensions and welfare money. Laws came to apply to individuals rather than collectivities, safeguarding certain freedoms, while popular culture and the media aggressively promoted individual desires and consumption.

Under Deng, land was leased out by the state to private households for profit. This resulted in the rise of a new class of wealthy peasants who could afford luxury goods and send their children to study in the cities. Deng's later vow to "let some people get rich first" by sanctioning private ownership of companies and factories (as opposed to state-owned or "joint venture" enterprises) marked the rise of a still wealthier class of the super rich. Today, many Chinese people are engaged in a pursuit of wealth and its symbols, including the latest smartphones; urban apartments; Western cars; top-ranking schools for their children; or a life in the United States. Accumulating personal wealth through entrepreneurship has become more attractive than to serve the party state. In this context,
Yan argues, the role of cadres has changed from "ruling" local society to "mediating" between the state and local interests. Nevertheless, Yan argues, the individualization process in China is managed top-down by the Communist Party and not, as happened in post-Reformation Europe, by grassroots movements. The party-state promotes institutional changes to promote consumerism for economic benefits, but obstructs democratic reforms that would give the individual a voice in political matters.

**Nuancing Yan's theory of individualization**

A critique of Yan's work has been put forward by anthropologist Andrew Kipnis (2012, 3). By focusing too much on individual _disembedding_ from traditional collectives during and after Maoism, he argues, Yan loses sight of the modern structures in which Chinese individuals are _re-embedded_. As examples he names collectives associated with industrialization, urbanization, nation-building, and religious tradition. This harks back to one of the central debates in the discursive field of individualization as identified by Howard (2007), namely the question to what extent various new types of institutions govern individual lives. Kipnis' nuance is important for my thesis because it sketches the limits of Chinese individualization. While indeed individual success, individual happiness, and private family life are important goals for Chinese youths today, this does not mean that they are not also embedded in Protestant churches, ancestral lineages, the Communist Party, and capitalist enterprises. Although Kipnis touches on this issue only briefly in his introductory chapter to his edited volume, I find this an important debate on which I expand in this thesis.

Through ethnographic descriptions of communal rituals I question to what extent these collectivities can be said to wield power over the individual in the post-Mao era. I do not suggest that Chinese individualization is total and boundless, but rather I am interested in the fault lines, in the areas where individuals and their encompassing communities "negotiate" (metaphorically, not literally) the limits of authority and individual choice. Rituals are highly insightful in this regard, because they pose the concrete problem of group solidarity through individual practices that can be observed and judged by an audience. Abstention from or participation in a communal ritual seems to carry certain consequences for an individual's place within that community. While before the Communist Liberation ancestral lineages in Southern Fujian had tremendous power over the ritual lives of individual members (as did powerful foreign missionaries, and later
Mao's production brigades), today individuals have a large say in if and how they are willing to participate in communal rituals. Thus my thesis takes into account Kipnis' caveat regarding the limits to individualization in China as theorized by Yan, by looking at individual fulfillment (or rejection) of communal ritual obligations. At stake is my interlocutors' ability to form and maintain pluriprax households.

My examples of communal rituals in Southern Fujian demonstrate that while on the one hand ancestral lineages and Protestant churches have been revived in the area, and individuals have been "re-embedded" (Kipnis 2012) in these collectivities, on the other hand they cannot assert control over individual members' ritual lives as they once did. This seems to be part of a broader process of Chinese modernization, during which ritual communities were disempowered by the totalizing party-state before that state itself rolled back its grip on people's everyday lives. What is left of the control and power of such communities is scattered, local, and by no means inescapable. Disempowerment of Chinese ritual communities allows individuals to deploy creative strategies (abstention, simplification, polytropy, explained below) in order to form and maintain pluriprax households.

A central theme in this thesis is therefore individual empowerment vis-à-vis the ritual communities in which they are embedded. With a "ritual community" I mean a group of people that enacts rituals together, reiterating their mutual solidarity and shared purpose. The amount and intensity of shared rituals differs per group, and moreover, while some communities enact rituals as a goal in itself (e.g. Protestant church communities with their Sunday services), for others rituals take place more in the margins as part of achieving different aims (e.g. Chinese enterprises with their rituals to stand guard in the morning before starting work). Therefore not all discernible communities in Southern Fujian are usefully understood as ritual communities. Casual friend circles, for example, often have few shared rituals, which may also be a sign of their ephemerality.

Critics may note that Mao's urban work units and rural collectives functioned as production brigades in the service of the socialist state. Their purpose was clearly economic and not ritualistic, although they once presided over all human, financial, and legal resources for the enactment of weddings and funerals (Chau 2015). Production brigades have been dismantled after Maoism and have all but disappeared from the Chinese social and economic landscape. What concerns me in Chapter 3, however, is that despite their dismantling today they still have important ritual functions. As anthropologists Huwy-Min
Lucia Liu (2015) and Martin K. Whyte (1988) have previously noted, former workmates in production brigades attend each other's funerals and they may pool resources for flowers and gifts to the bereaved family (cash gifts in particular have long been a feature of Chinese funerals). So while their original economic function has been abandoned, their ritual function has remained partly intact. This is unique and interesting because contemporary employers do not necessarily provide funeral services to their employees, let alone organize volunteer groups to take charge of memorial services. Although "dying" (Liu 2015) in the sense that with every deceased brigade member their number steadily dwindles until at some point none will be left, in contemporary Xiamen's main funeral parlor (located in the mainland suburb of Jimei) one can routinely observe volunteer groups attend the funerals of their former workmates.

Besides, critics may note that the functions of ancestral lineages before the Communist Liberation were primarily economic and social (Zheng 1987), and that these functions were sometimes continued under the label of a production brigade. The very survival of the phenomenon of the ancestral lineage under Maoism, in particular in Fujian and Guangdong, without conspicuous ancestral rituals, would suggest that rituals are more or less dispensable for these communities. Nevertheless, in the contemporary context of large-scale migration, a preoccupation with individual pursuits of happiness and wealth, and revived freedoms to enact communal rituals outside the party-state's organizing bodies, the primary function of ancestral lineages in Southern Fujian seems to have shifted to enacting communal rituals (Ma 2000). Among my research population, members of ancestral lineages have generally built up their own personal networks (guanxi), for example among fellow migrants, colleagues, former classmates, or Protestant churches in the cities where they live. But around the time of important annual festivals, most notably Spring Festival, lineage members in Southern Fujian get together in their hometowns for communal rituals involving Gods and the shared ancestors (Chapter 4 features an ethnographic example of lineage-based Spring Festival rituals in a single-surname village). Like socialist work units, ancestral lineages in Southern Fujian today seem to have mostly a ritual function and fewer economic or socializing functions. Therefore I refer to these different communities as ritual communities.

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4 Chapter 3 features a more comprehensive description of Maoist production brigades, as well as an ethnographic example of a funeral attended by the deceased's work unit members.
Theorizing Chinese rituals

Although since Yan's provocative writings several edited volumes have taken up the task to further explore individualization in the context of China's unique trajectory of modernization, a comprehensive investigation of communal rituals is remarkably absent from these studies. This is surprising because rituals have long been, and apparently continue to be, considered by scholars as fundamental to social life in Chinese societies. Since "individualization" suggests changes in communal life, it is striking that scholars of individualization have so far not explored changes in Chinese ritual or religious life. Non-scholars, including senior political figures, often consider religion as a solution to Chinese society's so-called "moral void" that arose due to individualization (Lim and Blanchard 2013; Johnson 2017; Yang 2017).

It is not difficult to argue that historically, and until this very day, Chinese communities are formed and maintained with rituals. If twentieth century Chinese communal life has undergone such dramatic changes as argued by proponents of individualization in Chinese society, then rituals as key socializing practices can be expected to harbor a potential to illuminate those changes. In this research, I specifically chose ritual practices as a lens for studying pluriprax households, in favor of one of the many other fields of tension in such households. After all, differences between popular religion and Protestant Christianity in Southern Fujian include their different communities of practitioners; different places of worship; different clergy or ritual service providers; different Gods; different texts (if practitioners of popular religion use texts at all); different ideas about efficacy and the blessings bestowed on humans by Gods and ancestors; different cosmologies (origins and ultimate goal of the universe); different ritual calendars; different ideas about morality, self-improvement, and piety; different sets of beliefs about human nature, divine nature, and the relationship between Gods and humans; different symbols; different ways to finance rituals and clergy; different histories; different status in society ("traditional" versus "foreign"); and so on.

In the context of China, according to anthropologist Adam Chau, religious life on a grassroots level has long been marked by different modalities of "doing religion" (Chau 2006, 2011, 2012). This "doing," in Chau's field site of Shaanbei (Northern Shaanxi province), revolves around triggering an "efficacious response" (ling) from a deity in a situation of need. This kind of religiosity is distinctly not about the individual's internal "faith." What exactly one believes inside one's head, whatever "truths" one holds to be
"self-evident," the response of deities in popular religion can only be triggered through practice involving certain movements, utterances, sacrifices, and objects. The responses typically sought by practitioners in Shaanbei were the curing of a family member; advice for professional choices and personal dilemma's; and triggering rain for a good harvest. "Therefore," Chau adds, "we can characterize Shaanbei popular religion as essentially a religion of efficacious response (lingying)" (Chau 2006, 64). Ritual practices have thus been and continue to be at the center of Chinese religious life.

Talal Asad (1993, 55-79) has argued that the Latin ritualis, which became the anglophone "rituals," reflects Christian thought and organization of power, and is therefore not universally applicable to categorize specific forms of human behavior, in particular outside the Christian world. According to Asad, early editions of the Encyclopedia Britannica, published between 1771 and 1852, defined ritual as a “book directing the order and manner to be observed in performing divine service in a particular church, diocese, or the like.” Ritual then ceased to appear in the Encyclopedia until 1910, when it became defined as a kind of practice present in all religions. The term "ritual" as used today is thus rather new, which is ironic considering the primordiality often ascribed to rituals. It should come as no surprise that Chinese languages have different words with different meanings that do not neatly correspond with "ritual." While I retain usage of the English terms "ritual" and "ceremony" throughout this thesis, I must point out that differences exist between the Chinese 礼 (li) and the English ritual (Meyer 2012). Li, according to Fei Xiaotong, refers to "an act performed in accordance with ceremonial forms" (Fei 1992 / 1947, 98). A related concept, yishi (仪式), denotes a ritual sequence or ceremony (Standaert 2008, 140). Scholars such as James L. Watson (1988a), Stephan Feuchtwang (2001), and Michael Puett (2015) have all emphasized that it is inherent to (neo-)Confucian understandings of 礼 li that correct practice reproduces and strengthens order and harmony among people. Although one may argue that rituals change (Bell 2009) and that rituals may also serve to disrupt the existing social order (Schröder 2012), it is important to note that the proper enactment of li has long been considered as essential to peace and stability in Chinese societies.

Placing rituals at the center of difference and inequality in human societies more generally, Adam Seligman, Robert Weller, Michael Puett, and Bennett Simon (2008) in their co-authored book Ritual and its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity,
argue that ritual's "very recognition of boundaries may also provide a way of negotiating them with a minimum of violence" (29). In their view, ritual has the potential to bring people together and to create a shared world that acknowledges and mediates boundaries between different (religious) communities. Therefore, they claim, rituals are essential for peace and continuity in pluralistic societies.

More than ten years earlier, renowned ritual theorist Catherine Bell (2009) explained rituals in a similar way through the example of the Olympic Games. Bell states that

in the case of the Olympics, its competitive and ceremonial dimensions are examples of very self-consciously invented rituals for very explicit purposes. At the same time, however, appeals to an ancient tradition, like the model of the Greek games, provide a more faceless, external, and neutral sort of authority. It suggests a type of canonicity, to return to Roy Rappaport’s terms, that can downplay the indexical nature of the activities; in other words, the authority of “ancient tradition” can reassure potential but uneasy participants that their coming together is equally empowering.

— Bell 2009, 235.

Rituals, according to Bell, are formative acts for communities because they are a means to channel conflicts and past grievances, and they socialize the ritualists in shared symbolic behaviors. Rituals can thus help participants to think of themselves as a community, or, in Bell's words, an "embracing unity" (235). At the same time, Bell recognizes that rituals are not a magical solution to human conflicts, and they cannot single-handedly establish peaceful cooperation. The power of rituals, she argues, lies in their physical and symbolic language which can help ritualists with conflicting viewpoints or interests to recognize and act out real-life contradictions while still focusing them on shared goals and ideals.

Following this line of theorizing rituals, Seligman and colleagues (2008) warn against "sincerity," which allegedly drives people to eliminate shared rituals or deny their socializing importance. Fundamentalist or totalitarian regimes, for example, have eliminated shared rituals to solidify boundaries between classes, races, and religions. "Sincerity" emerges in various guises as an extreme desire for individual authenticity, piety, discursivity, and utopianism. Seligman and colleagues discern a tension between "ritual" and "sincerity," although they admit that both co-exist in various configurations.
I share anthropologist Ronald Grimes' (2014, 546) concern that this dual framework of ritual versus sincerity results in an "either / or" perspective of the world. Why do people abstain from rituals? Apart from "too much sincerity," it is not difficult to think of a number of reasons to abstain, including practical, financial, physical, psychological, linguistic, or historical motivations. "Abstention," a concept I explore in this thesis (Chapter 4), may be an interesting antipole to "ritual," were it not that people in Southern Fujian (and probably elsewhere as well) tend to find ways to partially abstain or to send a representative to the ritual in their place. Dichotomies simply do not seem to work well in the study of human behavior.

Nevertheless, the perspective of Seligman and colleagues on rituals as socially cohesive behaviors provides an important point of departure for the analysis I develop in this thesis. I share with them the basic assumption that rituals are crucial to forming and maintaining social relations, including households. The fact that members of pluriprax households have conflicting ritual obligations problematizes their ability to stay together. To refer back to the societal problem I defined at the start of this Introduction, members of pluriprax households are part of conflicting ritual systems, and are thus in basic disagreement over communal rituals that normally bring together people with all their incongruities and differences. Rituality, in the words of Seligman and colleagues, is a terrain where boundaries are encountered, problematized, but also potentially crossed. Due to their conflicting ritual obligations, members of pluriprax households in Southern Fujian have to discuss and make changes to their communal rituals if they want to form or maintain a household together.

The issue of discussing and changing rituals in the context of pluralism has been explored by contributors to a volume edited by Ute Hüsken and Frank Neubert (2012), titled Negotiating Rites. A common thread in the chapters of their book is that rituals have to be "negotiated" by people who enact them. Hüsken and Neubert argue:

Not only are rituals frequently disputed; they also constitute a field in which vital and sometimes even violent negotiations take place. Negotiations - understood here as processes of interaction during which differing positions are debated and/or acted out - are ubiquitous in ritual contexts, either in relation to the ritual itself or in relation to the realm beyond any given ritual performance. We argue in this volume that a central
feature of ritual is its embeddedness in negotiation processes, and that life beyond the ritual frame often is negotiated in the field of rituals.


By standard dictionary definitions, negotiation involves *discussion* between two or more people. Negotiating is an inherently verbal act involving clearly distinguishable actors. In my understanding, people negotiate in order to *avoid* violence. But a recent trend in the social sciences has seen an increasingly broad and confusing usage of "negotiation," to the point that scholars regularly speak of "negotiating life" to describe any situation in which a person encounters a challenge. In this vein, "violent negotiation" is taken by Hüsken and Neubert as something self-evident, although it seems like a *contradictio in terminis* that needs explaining.

Among my research population in Southern Fujian the common phrase to speak about discussions one had with household members over rituals is *taolun* (讨论), which is rarely translated as "to negotiate" but rather as "to discuss." To use a term more closely resembling "negotiation" (*shangliang* 商量) would probably be considered as too formalistic, distant, and cold. Therefore, when it comes to discussions household members in Southern Fujian had over rituals, I will not be using the concept of negotiation.

Nevertheless, I consider the approach of Hüsken and Neubert valuable because of their insistence that ritualists are reflexive about their actions. Rituals, in their approach, are all but precooked events during which participants "switch off" their brains and automatically do what they have always done. To the contrary, constantly arising challenges in the context of individualization compel ritualists to confront differences and to find solutions. With Hüsken, Neubert, and other authors cited here I share a view of rituals as manipulable, unstable forms of behavior that socialize people and whose changes are linked to changes in the broader society.

I apply three concepts in order to theorize and distinguish between different ways pluriprax households in Southern Fujian changed their communal rituals or ritual obligations: polytropy (e.g. participating in a ritual of the religious Other, or forms of shared ritual enactment with elements from different ritual systems, see Chapter 1 and Chapter 3); simplification (e.g. reducing ritual obligations by adjusting the degree of ritualization of an event, see Chapter 2); and abstention (e.g. partial or complete neglect of obligations during a communal ritual, see Chapter 4).
If both practitioners of popular religion and Protestant Christianity would adhere to strict rules of orthopraxy, then Protestants would always abstain from "superstition" conducted by their household members, who in turn would always take offense at such insults toward their Gods and ancestors. In that case they would not be able to marry, to celebrate annual festivals or to hold funerals together. Indeed, if it were not for Southern Fujian people's abstention, simplification, and polytropy to make communal rituals more flexible, then it would be much harder to form and to maintain pluriprax households.

During the enactment of communal rituals, abstention, simplification, and polytropy are rarely observable as three distinct modes of ritual enactment. During his contentious wedding in Zhangzhou, for example, Yuxian's bow to his ancestors can be interpreted as a unilateral attempt to simplify the ritual in order to facilitate polytropy of himself and Lilan as Protestants in the non-Protestant ritual. What stood out for the wedding guests, of course, was the bride and groom's abstention from properly venerating local Gods and ancestors. In other words, these three concepts are theoretical constructs that are contingent on one's perspective and place in the ritual proceedings. For analytical purposes, however, I found it fruitful to separate the three concepts and to theorize them each on their own.

Conflicting ritual obligations
According to my findings in Southern Fujian, the key issue that sets pluriprax households apart from others is what I call conflicting ritual obligations. In households shared by
practitioners of popular religion and Protestant Christianity, the heart of the problem is how
to enact rituals together or, put in resonance with Chau's (2006) work, how to "do religion"
together. During an interview in 2014, one of my research participants called Datai
formulated the issue as follows:

Bram: You mentioned that some families oppose Christianity, that they don't want their
child to marry a Christian. Why are they against it?
Datai: Some families revere Buddhism [a common way to refer to popular religion in
Southern Fujian], and some families revere Christianity. They think that the two religions
are incompatible (gege buru). That the two religions contradict. For example,
Christianity salutes [deceased ancestors] with bowing, right? Buddhism burns incense
and kneels down. So there is a big contradiction here. Christianity lays flowers, for
example when we sweep the [ancestral] grave, we lay flowers, and Buddhism buys some
offerings (gongpin) to sacrifice, fruit, cake, and other things to place [by the grave]. So
there is contradiction in these two faiths (...) and this is not good for the couple's marital
life.
— Interview, 12 November 2014

Note that the reasons Datai listed for animosity toward Protestantism among the population
refer to conflicting ritual practices and not differences in sacred scriptures, doctrinal beliefs,
nor any other differences. Conflicting ritual obligations in pluriprax households in Southern
Fujian are, in short, not merely by-products of friction elsewhere (e.g. opposing beliefs,
different texts).

Why are rituals so contested in the household, and not, for example, personal
beliefs or sacred texts? While Chinese literati have long engaged with literary "classics"
that later became known as "religious texts" or as "sacred books of the East" (after
Friedrich Max Müller's designation), the idea that laypersons must live in accordance with
one or another sacred text has not gained widespread acceptance in Chinese society.
Protestants' claim of adherence to the bible (shengjing) is considered outlandish by many
non-Protestants in my research population. However, since no equivalent or oppositional
"sacred book of popular religion" exists in Southern Fujian or elsewhere in China,
Protestants' claim of adherence to the bible was rarely contested by their household
members. Quite to the contrary, to study a sacred, "Western" text was perceived by some
non-Christians as a noble and cultivating enterprise, however outlandish. Religious texts were, in short, rarely the focus of conflict in pluriprax households.

"Religious belief" - in the sense of accepting certain doctrines as true over others - was a somewhat more problematic issue. For Protestants often proselytized to their household members by trying to convince them of Christian doctrines concerning human sin, divine love, and heaven or hell as the only two possible destinations for the soul. They often managed to entice their household members' curiosity with such discussions, and to convince them to visit church with them. Indeed, pluriprax households may be one of the most fertile grounds for Protestant conversion in contemporary China (see Chapter 1). But in some cases I also noted an antipathy toward Protestants' unceasing proselytizing efforts. Having to adopt a more or less coherent belief system may be considered by people in Southern Fujian as a form of brainwashing. Due, however, to an absence of "popular religion doctrines," belief was not an area where pluriprax households members' views were necessarily diametrically opposed. Some non-Christians even found that having a "religious belief" (zongjiao xinyang) had a positive impact on the behavior and character of a spouse or a (grand-)child. Oppositional beliefs were thus not necessarily a trigger for conflict.

Previous studies of "multi-religious," "mixed-faith," or "interfaith" households in Asia, Europe, or the United States have rarely adopted an explicit focus on rituality. Perhaps the focus on "faith" or "religion" dictates that existing studies take religious beliefs as their central idiom and not differences in ritual practice. Most studies simply note that shared ritual enactment in such households is "also" deeply problematic, before moving on to address topics supposedly linked to the problem of conflicting beliefs, such as raising children; the need for (pre-)marital counseling; or state regulations for intermarriage between people from different religions (Arweck and Nesbitt 2010; Jones, Leng, and Mohamad 2009; De Hart 2017). Since both practitioners of popular religion and Protestant Christianity in Southern Fujian, however, had important ritual obligations, rituals were a frequent source of tension and animosity in their shared households. Differences in ritual practice cut to the heart of the problem in pluriprax households.

Renaissance and the concept of religion
Communal rituals of all kinds have been revived in the context of far-reaching social and economic reforms promulgated by Mao's successor Deng Xiaoping starting in 1978.
Reform Era China has undergone a religious revival or, in the words of sociologist Richard Madsen (2011) a "religious renaissance." Southern Fujian is emblematic of this religious renaissance. When the Chinese Communist Party took power in 1949, they inherited a nation-state that was not only battle-scarred and impoverished, but also marked by a long history of interaction and exchange between Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian texts, clergy, beliefs, and rituals. According to cultural historian Vincent Goossaert (2011), in the century preceding Maoism,

the Three Teachings did not function as separate institutions each with their own believers; rather, they all served the entire society, either through the teaching of individual spiritual techniques—such as Buddhist Chan meditation (known as Zen in the West), devotional Pure Land spiritual exercises (invoking the savior Amitābha), Daoist psychophysical techniques to transform the body and make it immortal, or Confucian moral self-cultivation (like counting one’s good and bad deeds and keeping ledgers of merit)—or through the providing of ritual services to associations and communities. Buddhists, Daoists, and Confucians were all routinely invited by village and neighborhood communities to officiate at their festivals, offering sacrifices and submitting prayers to the gods on their behalf.

— Goossaert 2011, 467-469.

The concept of zongjiao (religion) is a neologism in China, introduced from Meiji-era Japan by political reformers in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century (Nedostup 2009). Before zongjiao Chinese people had other concepts to refer to paths (dao), teachings (jiao), laws/methods (fa), or their founders (Campany 2003), concepts which I noticed common people in Southern Fujian may still use today. In the course of a "century of humiliations" (roughly referring to the period from Qing imperial defeat at the hands of the British Royal Navy in 1842 to the Communist Liberation of 1949), however, political elites sought to modernize the Chinese army, economy, government, education, and religious system in order to strengthen the nation against hostile forces. In this context, a host of "superstitious" venues, practices, objects, and people became subject to elimination (Duara 1991).

The categories of "religion" and "superstition" were deployed by government officials to aid in deciding which practices and sites could be destroyed and which could be preserved (Goossaert 2005). The emergence of these categories was above all an attempt to
model allegedly backward China after Western societies, which were widely seen as superior. In the course of the twentieth century, five "religions" (zongjiao) became officially recognized by the state: Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. What is studied by scholars as "popular religion" has no official recognition, but is often referred to by Chinese people as "traditional culture," "heritage," or "superstition" depending on the context and the intentions of the speaker.

Scholars of "religion" in China generally warn against reifying this concept, that is not to limit its usage to official definitions of the state or to attribute agency to "religions" such as the ability to "grow," "adapt itself," or "intertwine." Goossaert argues that around the year 1900, when the concept of religion was introduced,

the whole of China’s religious organization may be seen as a coherent system, which I call Chinese religion: it is all-encompassing, not exclusive. It embraces all forms of religious practice, whether personal (meditation, salvation techniques, body techniques including martial arts, access to knowledge and revelation through possession and spirit-writing) or group (worship of local saints or ancestors, death rituals), which are all grounded in Chinese cosmology. It includes ancient sacrificial religion, Confucianism which continued it, Taoism and Buddhism, as well as the sectarian movements that were formed later. The most common form was the worshipping community with a temple, dedicated to a local saint: this kind of community was not Confucian, Buddhist or Taoist but linked to all three. Chinese religion existed but did not have a name because it did not have an overarching church structure or dogmatic authority.


Following this line of reasoning, while I reproduce the term "religion" (for example when writing about "popular religion") in this study, I do so without wanting to reproduce that term's association with modern governing strategies and the exclusive privileges it bestows over "superstition."

During the so-called Cultural Revolution, temples and deity cults associated with popular religion were destroyed on a grand scale and the communal rituals of ancestral lineages outlawed. Under Maoist collectivism, in particular during the so-called Cultural Revolution (1966-1978), for a peasant like Lao Chen to host four hundred people at his son's wedding banquet would have been not only impossible financially, but also a crime against socialism (Chau 2015). Public ancestor veneration with incense and kneeling was
anathema due to the ban on "feudal superstition," and spirit tablets were either hidden or destroyed (Oxfeld 2010).

Since the 1980s, however, popular religion in Southern Fujian has made a swift and widespread revival. Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian ritual practices, as well as worshipping communities around local saints have been revived on a grand scale, coinciding with rapid and large-scale conversion to Protestant Christianity. Chinese people have clearly defied the so-called secularization paradigm that has long guided Maoist policies.

Thanks to the work of scholars like Kenneth Dean (1986, 1993, 2003, 2010), Maurice Freedman (1971, 1980) and Jan Jakob Maria de Groot (1886 / 1977) forms of popular religion in Southern Fujian became known to the wider academic community. This is not an institutionalized religion. It has no fixed doctrines, no members, and no representation in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), as do other "religions." Yet anthropologist Adam Yuet Chau (2006, 2011, 2012) has convincingly argued that popular religion has clearly discernible ritual practices that are replicated and recognizable throughout the Chinese world and throughout history. These include engagement with the "Great Texts" of Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism; cultivational practices such as qigong and meditation; liturgical practices such as sutra chanting and feeding hungry ghosts; "immediate-practical" or "magical" practices such as divination and consulting spirit mediums; and relational practices such as organizing communal festivals and building temples (Chau 2006, 75).

Parallel to the revival of popular religion and the Three Teachings, tens of millions of Chinese people have converted to Protestant Christianity since 1978. After a numerically limited success during the first century of missionary activities in China, Protestant churches were closed and clergy "re-educated" during the Cultural Revolution. But when restrictions on religious activities were eased under Deng Xiaoping in 1978, churches were swiftly rebuilt and the training of clergy resumed. Because religious conversion and membership are important features of Chinese Protestantism, scholars such as social historian Ying Fuk-tsang (2009) have attempted to generate statistics for the number of converts. Most estimates suggest that the number of Protestants in China has skyrocketed from about three million in 1980 to between sixty and one hundred million by the 2010s (Ying 2009; Bays 2012; Cao 2010; F. Yang 2011).
In Protestant churches, converts receive new instructions regarding ritual enactment, including the elimination of "superstition" from their lives. In contrast with popular religion, Protestant Christianity is a known "world religion" with a focus on doctrine, membership, and boundaries. Southern Fujian's church communities are among the oldest in mainland China, having been planted by British and American missionaries shortly after the defeat of Qing imperial forces in the so-called First Opium War in 1839-1842 (Cheung 2004; Bays 2012). Protestant practices replicated throughout communal ceremonies include saying prayers; reading scriptures; singing hymns; and holding sermons. Members are confirmed through the ritual of baptism; sprinkling in most state-sanctioned churches and immersion in many non-sanctioned churches. Converts in Southern Fujian are instructed by their religious peers to enter into an "individual relationship" with their God, and to abstain from the "superstitious" rituals of popular religion.

Members of pluriprax households are thus not simply embedded in different "ritual communities," as described above, but in broader "ritual systems". Within a ritual system, certain ritualistic acts are replicated by practitioners during ceremonies (Bell 2009, 173-5). The two ritual systems I studied in Southern Fujian can be broadly categorized as popular religion and Protestant Christianity (I do not consider Chinese Communism as a ritual system, although I do consider production brigades as ritual communities). Both "systems" feature multiple sub-systems in Southern Fujian, as "popular religion" and "Protestant Christianity" are broad categories for labeling similar yet distinguishable practices. Chinese Protestantism includes groups like Eastern Lightning, the Three Self Patriotic Movement, the Shouters, and a range of evangelical "family" churches. Likewise, popular religion features cults for a great number of deified heroes and bodhisattva's, different local engagements with Buddhist and Daoist clergy and liturgy, and different configurations of ritual networks (Dean 1993). It would therefore be more correct to speak of popular religion and Protestant Christianity as "super-systems" with multiple "sub-systems." But instead I prefer to lay out through ethnographic description how pluriprax households enacted ceremonies in ways that did not neatly follow the conventions of these various ritual (sub-)systems and their associated communities.

For what counts as a "community" in Southern Fujian may be rather fluid and context-dependent (see also Baumann 1996). People in Southern Fujian are often part of various communities, such as a household; a company; a travel or hobby group; online
communities based on social media; a native place community and ancestral lineage; a friend circle of former classmates; the Communist Party; or a Protestant church community, members of which mix and merge in ways that are not always easy to explain. Due to Protestant exclusivism, people who are inevitably also part of other communities, cannot enact rituals of those communities when those rituals are defined as "superstition." In terms of community, Protestants deny its fluidity and contextual nature, deny its multiple facets for converts, as rituals enacted by their household and lineage members are off-limits for converts.

This struggle may be getting more intense, as authorities on all levels of China's government are granting more and more recognition to various forms of popular religion as the nation's "traditional culture." The reversal of Mao-era anti-superstition policies means that Chinese Protestants are on unfamiliar terrain as the struggle against superstition, one of the pillars of its existence, is no longer supported by the central state.

God and the Gods

Certain saints, deities, God or Gods may be venerated by practitioners of popular religion and Protestant Christianity in Southern Fujian. Small domestic statuettes are commonly venerated by practitioners of popular religion. To refer to the entities connected to the statuettes as "Gods" is slightly uncommon because they are more frequently referred to as "deities" or "saints" in the anglophone literature, and as shenming by Chinese practitioners. "Deities" is common because of the human origins of many of the figures in Chinese lore. Many are deceased heroes who later became "deified" and venerated as shenming.

For the present study, however, I chose to refer to the higher beings venerated in both popular religion and Protestant Christianity as "Gods." Protestants in Southern Fujian with whom I interacted, all claim to exclusively venerate only one God, usually called Shangdi or "upper emperor" in common parlance, addressed in prayers as Zhu, "Lord," and written in common biblical translations as Yehehua, "Jehovah" (Chinese bibles printed in the early twentieth century seem to use shen 神 in reference to God). Although mainstream Protestants in the area ascribe a trinitarian nature to their God (tianfu, yesu jidu, and shengling - Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit), they are monotheists in the sense that they build up a relationship with these various manifestations as one singular,
male "God" (Shen). Practitioners of popular religion, on the other hand, can build up relationships with various Gods.

I do not wish to imply that the Gods of popular religion and Protestant Christianity are essentially the same and interchangeable. From a religious studies perspective an important distinction can be made between the immanent Gods of popular religion (immanent through the direct presence of their statuettes) and the transcendent God of mainstream Chinese Protestantism (omnipresent and not directly present in statues). Moreover, the different historical and cultural roots of the God of Protestant Christianity and the Gods of popular religion necessitate that we distinguish between them. But they also share important similarities, such as their alleged supernatural powers to effect healings, protection amid danger, and solutions to difficult problems. Both ritual systems feature a supernatural God or Gods who can assist or punish depending on human actions. Because of this important similarity, I shall refer to the Gods of both traditions as "God" or "Gods" and not as "deities" or "saints."

Research methods

Initial questions and expectations
When my wife and I left for fieldwork in June 2014, I had prepared to study the rituals of households shared by practitioners of popular religion and Protestant Christianity in the city of Xiamen. I did not know that I would end up writing a thesis about the ways people in Southern Fujian form and maintain pluriprax households. The data I collected can therefore not answer all questions I pose in this thesis. I also did not expect that I would get several good opportunities to accompany my research participants from Xiamen to their rural hometowns. Instead of a strictly urban or peri-urban study, this has become a regional study that also builds on my ethnographic observations in three Southern Fujian villages.

The question that guided my fieldwork in 2014-2016 was: How do practitioners of popular religion and Protestant Christianity in Xiamen enact rituals together? The reason for this fixation with rituals and religious diversity lay in my previous research on Protestant funerals (see Colijn 2016). As a master student at the University of Amsterdam in 2011, it had struck me during fieldwork in Xiamen that Protestants often had trouble enacting funerals together with people practicing forms of popular religion. In several cases I studied, Protestants had attempted a so-called deathbed conversion with a household
member who normally practiced forms of popular religion. After the bereavement, a Protestant would claim the funeral for her or his church. In the eyes of non-Protestants not present during the alleged conversion, this was confusing and aggravating. If the deceased was known to venerate ancestors, Guanyin, and Buddha, and to participate in lineage processions featuring various Gods and burnt sacrifices, then why would they want a Protestant funeral? Not only was this an insult to common sense, it was also believed that an improper funeral could interfere with the deceased's happiness in the afterlife and raise the potential of the family being haunted by the ghost demanding proper sacrifices to be made. Nevertheless, the household members had to come to an agreement regarding the funeral, simply because funerals (as well as several other kinds of rituals I will describe) are inevitable. Because of the inevitability of grassroots religious diversity in contemporary Xiamen on the one hand, and ritual enactment on the other, it made sense to sink my teeth into the theme of shared ritual enactment involving practitioners of popular religion and Protestant Christianity.

In search of answers to my research question, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork from June 2014 - February 2016, with a one-month break in November - December 2015. During the entire research period I lived in the city of Xiamen, from where I took trips to participants' hometowns in other parts of Southern Fujian. For exactly one year I rented an apartment with my wife, and when she returned to the Netherlands with our baby I moved in with a local Protestant household for another six months. My expectation was to find conflicts between practitioners of popular religion and Protestant Christianity not only around funerals, but around other types of rituals as well. This expectation was partly fulfilled, as wedding rites like those during Lilan and Yuxian's wedding, were often contested and ritualists had to look for ways to manage their conflicting obligations.
Participant observation during rituals

I approached my research question as an anthropologist, giving precedence to anecdotal evidence and close observation of research participants over statistical and survey-based evidence. I witnessed six weddings; twelve funerals; six Spring Festival rituals; and seven Protestant Christmas celebrations. Juxtaposing these four different ritual events allowed me to distinguish between aspects that are specific to each ritual and those that are general features of Southern Fujian rituality. Each ritual had its own specific history in a given community; its own financial logic; its own audience. Each ritual also entailed different obligations for the ritualists. For example, the bride and groom on their wedding day had different obligations from the sons and daughters of a deceased during a funeral, and a household participating in a lineage procession during Spring Festival had different responsibilities from a household participating in a Protestant Christmas celebration.

The reasons for focusing on four kinds of rituals and not one or ten, are straightforward. Pluriprax households in Southern Fujian do not face conflicting obligations for only one kind of ritual, but for many rituals which they have to enact together, in particular when an audience of relatives, colleagues, neighbors, or fellow church members is present. A complete list of rituals enacted by members of pluriprax households, depending on how far I would stretch the definition of "ritual," would have included at least the Tomb Sweeping festival (qingmingjie); any church or temple visits; "sitting the month" (zuo yuezi) after giving birth; political and professional rituals such as trips to national memorial sites; forms of ancestor veneration; and festivities for the Mid Autumn Festival which in Xiamen is connected to remembering the late Ming dynasty hero
Zheng Chenggong who evicted the Dutch from Taiwan in 1661. A discussion of all these rituals would take up several books.

The four kinds of rituals that made it into my thesis, did so because I had a chance to participate in multiple enactments of these rituals as a researcher. So this was in part a choice based on access. Another reason is that weddings and funerals are the two most important lifecycle rituals, while Christmas and Spring Festival are two of the most important annual rituals for Chinese Protestants and Chinese people more generally. They are the most costly and thus have the most impact on people's lives. Their enactment was not private but public in the sense that the presence of an audience, the larger the better, was crucial for each ritual. This public character of the rituals implied that the social status of the households enacting or participating in the ceremonies was at stake. Pluriprax households had to come to a more or less unified enactment of each of these four kinds of rituals in order to salvage their social status in their church or native place communities.

The rituals under scrutiny here are thus (trans)formative for households in Southern Fujian - they mark the formation of marital bonds; the dissolution of a "grand family" (Wolf 1984) when the matriarch or patriarch passes away; they mark a new household as part of the larger lineage community during Spring Festival; they transform a pluriprax household into a Protestant household when people convert during Protestant Christmas celebrations. Although most of the rituals I observed did not involve pluriprax households, my observations of these rituals were key in shaping my understanding of ritual enactment in Southern Fujian. I documented all my observations as field notes, sometimes accompanied by photographs (I used a camera whenever my research participants gave their consent and the occasion seemed to allow it).

*Interviews*

Not every pluriprax household I got to know, had a wedding or a funeral during my fieldwork that I could observe, and it was physically impossible to spend Christmas and Spring Festival with everyone I got to know. For this reason I conducted seventy-seven semi-structured interviews with fifty-eight different participants. Interviews mostly focused on communal rituals people had held in the past. I tried to get several perspectives on each ritual, as showcased above with Lilan and Yuxian's wedding. Interviews were key in exploring the discussions that members of pluriprax households had had over ritual
enactment, and the discursive strategies they used to speak about conflicting ritual obligations.

With the consent of research participants I made audio recordings of all interviews. Recordings were transcribed (in Chinese) by a local bachelor student of sociology. All direct citations of participants in this thesis were translated into English by me. In my translations I took care to provide the pinyin (the standard romanization system for Mandarin) of important phrases and of so-called chengyu or four-character idioms that are common in both written and spoken Chinese. In the introductory example of Lilan and Yuxian's wedding, for example, I cite Yuxian as saying: "You may think this only lasts a few minutes, but it felt like years (duri runian)." Literally translated, this chengyu goes "passing day like year." But in order to make it legible for an anglophone audience I chose to translate the meaning rather than the idiom. In that context, Yuxian was clearly referring to the contentious wedding ceremony, which lasted only ten minutes but was marked by great internal strife between filial obligation and religious piety. My translation being rather "far" from the original chengyu, I provide the pinyin as a reference for sinophone audiences. Chengyu are particularly challenging in this regard - most other English translations I provide in this thesis are in fact quite "close" to the original quotes while still legible for an anglophone audience.

The setting of by far most interviews I conducted with research participants was American-style coffee houses where I treated them to a drink and a small gift such as a Dutch souvenir from the Xenos franchise or a box of chocolates I purchased locally. My interlocutors often spent several hours of their time talking to me and travelling to our place of meeting (although I usually attempted to meet in a café near their place of residence). The two types of small gifts (drinks and souvenirs) I offered in exchange were an important show of gratitude on my part of people's willingness to share sensitive details from their personal lives with me.

Language

It is necessary to reflect on my use of language in interaction with interlocutors during fieldwork. I am not a sinologist and I did not receive extensive Chinese language training as an undergraduate student. Nevertheless, I learned to speak and understand Mandarin during a one-year study period at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou (2012-2013). Beyond the regular course work at that university I invested heavily in face-to-face
conversations with "language buddies" who wanted to learn English or Dutch and who were willing to practice Mandarin with me. This provided me with the basic language skills to interact with my interlocutors in Mandarin in 2014 - 2016.5

Before I embarked on fieldwork, I was aware of the challenges posed by my not understanding Hokkien, the local language of intimacy. All three recognized Hokkien dialects in the region (Xiamenese, Zhangzhounese, Quanzhounese) are quite different from Mandarin dialects grammatically and phonetically. While most Mandarin dialects have four so-called "tones," Hokkien dialects have five to seven. Hokkien and Mandarin dialects are not mutually intelligible. Most people born into Minnan families, whether in Southern Fujian or in Southeast Asia, can speak or understand a Hokkien dialect. For elderly locals it may be the only language they are able to actively speak, but most people schooled after the 1949 Liberation can speak Mandarin as well. Except for a handful of elderly people (the parents or grandparents of younger interlocutors) most of my interlocutors were perfectly capable of expressing themselves in Mandarin. This encouraged me to conduct the research without prior knowledge of Hokkien.

Nevertheless, my inability to speak or comprehend Hokkien dialects forms a shortcoming in the overall quality of my fieldwork. For when it came to naming rituals, Gods, foods, festivals, and other aspects of local culture, my interlocutors sometimes had to search for a Mandarin equivalent or ask somebody else to translate. This clearly indicated to me that the topics I studied are normally discussed by people in Hokkien, and perhaps more rarely in Mandarin. Moreover, within most local households the spoken language was a Hokkien dialect. Considering that one of my goals was to observe Protestants in interaction with their non-Protestant household members and vice versa, the language barrier formed a challenge to making sense of such interactions.

On a more positive note, my Mandarin skills were sufficient to have in-depth conversations with my interlocutors and to stimulate them to reflect on issues of religious diversity and rituals in their households. I was able to join several "small groups" in Protestant churches in Xiamen on a regular basis, such as bible study groups and a so-called funeral group (sangshizu, explained in Chapter 3). This way I continuously had good

5 My verbal and comprehensive abilities were admittedly still quite basic at the start of the fieldwork but improved substantially because of my intensive interactions with interlocutors. I am still deeply indebted to those people who had the patience to explain difficult concepts to me in the early stages of my fieldwork.
access to Protestants who were part of pluriprax households. I also joined a friend circle of Chinese men who went for a swim in the sea every morning at around 06:30. After some exhausting sessions I was able to keep up with the group, and to become a more or less regular member. Despite my inability to comprehend Hokkien phrases and interactions, in the course of my fieldwork I was able to build up relations with multiple pluriprax households; to spend time with them and their lineage members; to travel with them; participate in weddings, funerals, Christmas celebrations, and Chinese New Year celebrations with them in the intimacy of their domestic spaces or other ritual spaces; and to learn sensitive details about their private lives, family histories, and relationships.

Data analysis

Upon my return to the Netherlands I analyzed all seventy-seven interviews, along with the many field notes I had taken. Field notes covered the various funerals, weddings, Christmas celebrations, and Chinese New Year rituals I had participated in, as well as casual encounters, dinners, or trips with research participants when I was not "interviewing" them. I analyzed my interviews and field notes in light of my post-fieldwork focus on how people form and maintain pluriprax households.

Although I learned how to use the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti following a colleague's advice, I ended up analyzing my data in a more old-fashioned way. I went through my interviews and field notes making comments in the margins and listing key insights from each document. Coding with Atlas.ti assumes a more or less straightforward process from interviewing, analyzing, to writing. But I started my fieldwork with a different question (how Protestants and popular religion practitioners enact rituals together) from what my thesis would eventually be about. I tried out various frameworks until my supervisor Pál Nyíri advised me to take a closer look at the literature about individualization in China. The individualization of Chinese society proved to be a fruitful contextualization for my analysis of how people form and maintain pluriprax households. To do the data analysis over in Atlas.ti with a new set of codes for each framework I tried, would have cost too much time.

A more substantive reason for not using data analysis software was that having the software establish connections across interviews would have suggested that I got to know all research participants and their households equally well. This was not the case. In some households I got to know just one person and had limited context for interpreting the ritual
or the interview, whereas in other households I got to know all household members, their relatives, and friends and interacted with these people over a long period of time, so that I could interpret the data in light of the household's history and social network. Analysis of my data was highly dependent on how well I could link participants' remarks and rituals to other pieces of data I had collected about them. Coming back to the example of Lilan and Yuxian's wedding, having learned after many months of interactions that Lilan was pregnant during the wedding (they were loathe to reveal the pregnancy because it violated, among other things, Protestant principles of piety), and that it was actually arranged in a big hurry, changed my entire reading of the interviews I conducted with various household members about this particular wedding. I doubt that currently available software can bring out the subtle differences that emerge when one has intimate knowledge of research participants' lives, as compared to one-off interviews with participants one has had no further interaction with.

The following four chapters contribute to (inter)religious studies by theorizing the central importance of practice (what to do, when, where, and how) in settings of religious diversity. This is conveyed in my concept of pluripraxy. Most studies of "mixed" or "interfaith" families in Western societies still have an inherent bias toward mentalist beliefs and worldviews, but the boundary-transcending potential of Chinese ritual practices harbors important theoretical insights for the study of interreligious relations. These insights are conveyed in my theoretical discussions of the concepts of abstention, simplification, and polytropy. My thesis also enriches the study of religion in Chinese societies by shedding light on the previously unexplored topic of pluriprax households, and by bringing in a new debate (about individualization) from outside the familiar terrain of academic studies on Chinese religiosities (e.g. state-religion relations, transnational connections, gendered religiosities). Finally, the thesis contributes to theorizing about modern mainland Chinese society by providing ethnographic examples of the challenges (e.g. conflicting ritual obligations) and problems that arise on a grassroots level in the context of individualization, and the creative responses of people facing such challenges.
Part I. Forming pluriprax households
1. Conversion to Protestant Christianity

Brothers and sisters, peace in the Lord!

My Chinese name is [Mimi], and I adopted the English name Faith. Hebrews 11:1 says: "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." I chose this name because I want my faith in God to grow. I work for [an international computer manufacturer's] sales department. In this company, an atmosphere of the survival of the fittest prevails. It is very performance oriented and competitive. Everything is about contributing value to the company. Success at my work was my reason to exist.

But when I got to know God, I came to understand that each individual's worth is not dependent on material or financial success, but on obeying God's commandments, so that during work we can glorify the Lord and become a beautiful testimony to the Lord. (...) The first time I came to [Harbor Church] English Corner, the volunteers smiled so passionately and happily. They demonstrated their concern and care, and they were very friendly. I had never felt so attracted to strangers before. There were opportunities to practice verbal English, the songs were good, and I really liked the sermons. So I pledged to attend every week.

During Christmas 2013 I had gotten to know Amy [another female English Corner participant], who shared her testimony about the way she had come to believe. She also persuaded me to enter a course about believing. I prayed together with River and Ida [two other female English Corner participants] and then we joined the course in order to get to know God more deeply.

On June 8, 2014, while I was praying, I accepted Jesus as my savior. This has nothing to do with religion but with an individual relationship with God. All people are sinners, but God removes their sins as far as the West is from the East. On October 19, 2014, I decided to get baptized. (...) My life took an important turn when I became a child of light. In the one year since I have believed, I experienced God's love [ci'ai - a kind of love one has toward a child], mercy, and righteousness in times of difficulties.
The English corner activities have become my most joyous moments of the week. I am now hopeful about the future, and the lessons let me grow ever more intimately close to God.

The biggest emotional experience now is that God is love. For our sins he let his son be crucified. (...) Before believing in the Lord I was angry at my father [for being unfaithful] and I barely spoke to him. I often put myself in the middle. I had hatred in my heart, but the Holy Spirit taught me the correct values. Hatred cannot drive out hatred, only love can. Through prayer I learned to forgive and to love, to reflect on my own attitude and speech, and to become more gentle and humble like Jesus. Thanks to the prayers of Mandy [another female English corner participant] I became more aware of God's will to rely on his love in order to love my father, and to be liberated from all the dark shadows.

Thank the Lord for changing my way of thinking, my attitude, and my speech. I have learned to obey and show filial respect to my parents. Thank the Lord, because for the first time ever we had a month of few quarrels at home. Thanks also to [female English teacher from the United States] in the English corner and the students for their prayers. God has given me strength to live in his love, to feel peace and joy.

— Speech delivered at an "English Corner" in Xiamen's Harbor church in 2015, handed to me for analysis on November 8, 2015. Anonymized original document attached as appendix.
Introduction
Freedom to commit to ritual communities after Maoism has facilitated an explosive growth of Protestant churches in the city of Xiamen. While I was conducting fieldwork in 2014-2016, plans for a new mega-church were approved by the local authorities — a church for ten thousand people (seating up to three thousand at a time), as many as the city's other two mega churches combined. The number of Protestant churches had grown to over forty registered churches and so-called meeting points (juhuidian) administered by the state-endorsed Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Unregistered "family" churches were smaller yet more numerous and allegedly spreading even faster.

An individual's conversion to Protestant Christianity often marks the formation of a new plurirax household. Therefore this chapter explores the historical and theoretical dimensions of Protestant conversion, both locally in Xiamen and more broadly in contemporary Chinese society. It argues that in the context of post-Mao China's "turn to intimacy" (Evans 2012), Protestant churches have successfully positioned themselves as affectionate communities where individuals can find refuge from a male-dominated, materialistic society. Protestants actively deploy Christmas celebrations and other communal rituals to draw new converts to their church communities in a context where traditional sources of intimacy (ancestral lineages, production brigades) have been disempowered by the state. Christmas celebrations play an important role in religious conversion, and thus in the formation of plurirax households. The final section provides ethnographic examples of how Protestant churches open their doors to newcomers during Christmas in a show of "love."

A brief history of Protestant conversion in China
Conversion to Protestant Christianity in China has a history that dates back to approximately 1807, that is the year when Robert Morrison of the London Missionary Society arrived in Macau. The first decades of Protestant missions were not very fruitful, as the Qing emperors and their local governors resisted foreign "infiltration" through missionaries. But in 1842 the Qing armies were defeated by the British in the so-called First Opium War. The humiliating treaty of Nanjing stipulated that certain port cities be opened to foreign trade and, indeed, foreign missionaries. Southern Fujian was among the first areas in mainland China to be targeted by British and American missionaries after the treaty of Nanjing. According to social historian Ying (2009), by 1918, more than a century
after the start of Morrison's missionary work in Macau, 600,000 Chinese had become Protestant "communicants," a term used by Ying to denote regular participants in communion ceremonies. This constituted 0.14% of the 1918 population of the Republic of China.

Despite the relatively small number of initial converts compared with the zealous missionary efforts, some high-profile Protestants in late imperial and early Republican Fujian became part of movements promoting social change and charity. Ryan Dunch (2001) has demonstrated that Protestant leaders in Fuzhou were involved in "modernizing" China by setting up schools, hospitals, churches, and by participating in political movements which contributed to overthrowing the Qing dynasty and the construction of the Republican state in 1911. Historian Chris White (2011) has conducted extensive historical research into the lives of ordinary Southern Fujianese converts in roughly the same period. It is worth making a few historicizing remarks here based on that work, in order to elucidate how crucial today's context of individualization is to the phenomenon of large-scale conversion to Protestantism in China.

According to White an important source of tension for early converts in Southern Fujian was the question of whether they were still loyal to family and country after having converted to a "foreign teaching." He quotes the influential Protestant Xu Chuncao, who in the second quarter of the twentieth century is alleged to have said: "My faith is in Christianity, (...) and it's definitely not trusting in foreigners" (White 2011, 1). The British and American missionary sources on which White (2011) primarily relies, seem to indicate that conversion to Protestantism was highly stigmatized as a form of betrayal toward one's kin and country.

In late imperial China, the ancestral lineage was by all accounts a central locus of identification and socializing for people in Southern Fujian. The loss of inheritance, noted by Western missionaries (undoubtedly frustrated by the difficulties of funding church building projects with local money due to converts' disinherance), may well have been less painful for Protestant converts in Southern Fujian than being socially disowned by their lineage members. Despite these hardships, historian R.G. Tiedemann (2008) argues that people in nineteenth century China had three incentives to convert to Protestantism: material incentives, sociopolitical incentives, and spiritual incentives. The former two were generated from participation in missionary-run enterprises such as schools and hospitals, while the latter was the result of biblical education and church attendance.
Apparently, then, a small segment of the late imperial and Republican Chinese population gained sufficient benefits or satisfaction from joining a Protestant church to risk disinherition and enter a more or less lengthy process of "religious conversion" (discussed below). By 1949, the year when the People's Republic of China was established under the auspices of the Chinese Communist Party, the number of Protestants in China may have risen to between 700,000 and 1,000,000 communicants in twenty-two Protestant denominations (Ying 2009). This constituted between 0.13% and 0.18% of the Chinese population at that time, roughly the same share of the population as in 1918.

Although Protestant churches kept growing secretly under Maoism (Kao 2009; Yang 2011), it remained a numerically marginal movement until the start of the Reform and Opening Up policies initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978. From no more than three million in 1982 (Ying 2009), the number of Protestant baptized may have jumped to sixty million by the 2000s (Cao 2010). According to historian Daniel Bays,

There is uncertainty even on the part of the best-informed analysts as to how many Protestants there are in China. Major reasons for this, and for the resulting widely varying claims of numbers, are: much Church growth in the last two decades has been in the countryside, where it is difficult to count any group with accuracy; and a certain number, perhaps more than half, of Protestant believers are in autonomous Christian communities (“house churches,” as opposed to congregations registered with the TSPM). Some of these communities are quite large, numbering in the hundreds or thousands. The “numbers game” is important because the social and political importance of a group of 15 million nation-wide is very different from that of a group numbering 75 million or more (these are the approximate parameters for the debate).

— Bays 2003, 491

A quantitative survey published in 2011, found that 2.9% of the Chinese population practiced forms of Protestantism (Yuan 2011), although one much cited estimate exceeds 5% (Aikman 2003). According to Ying (2009), "the rapid growth of Christianity in China basically happened only during the Reform and Opening Up", and Protestantism grew from a numerically negligible movement to a sizeable one.

What happened in Chinese society that lowered the threshold for religious conversion and heightened the attraction of Protestantism for people from all walks of life? In Reform Era China, far-reaching changes were made by the Communist party-state to its
ways of governing society. These changes seem to have facilitated conversion to Protestantism, although this may not have been the intention of the central authorities, who still officially hold an atheist worldview. An important early sociological study of Chinese Protestantism after 1978 was conducted by Hunter and Chan (1993). They provide an extensive list of more or less likely explanations for the phenomenon of large-scale religious conversion which they had observed in the course of the previous decade (Hunter and Chan 1993, 168-175). Fundamental to their approach is the search for multiple and heterogeneous explanations. While Communist modernization challenged "traditional beliefs" (Daoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and popular religion) and kinship networks, they argue, people also gradually lost faith in Communist ideology as countless tragedies and atrocities unfolded under Mao's reign. This formed what Hunter and Chan call the "preconditions for relatively extensive conversion" (170).

What Protestantism, according to Hunter and Chan, had to offer to the disillusioned was supernatural "signs and wonders" in the form of healings and miracles; the prestige of having arrived from the wealthy, powerful, and democratic "West;" a moral and philosophical message of restraint and forgiveness in an era when traditional morals were eroded away first by communism and later by consumerism; a return to Christian ancestors' beliefs for those who were descended from earlier converts; a platform for orally sharing miracle stories and hardships; celebrations which are not wasteful like China's traditional religions in the sense of demanding burnt sacrifices and lavish ceremonies (although this no longer seems true, as will be clear from my accounts of contemporary Protestant ceremonies); attractive forms of worship with communal singing and music making to facilitate emotional release or "spiritual enrichment;" and a tradition of diversity due to which Protestantism can offer different things to different audiences, allowing individuals from all backgrounds, in particular the more marginalized, to gain a sense of self-worth as "children of God." Unfortunately, Hunter and Chan's (1993) broad survey does not delve deeper into most of these explanations, leaving it to others to conduct research into their viability.

At the forefront of more recent studies on Reform Era conversion to Protestantism is the work of Chinese-American sociologist Yang Fenggang, who has conducted research on religious conversion in both China and the United States. In an early explanatory attempt, Yang (1998) argued that the Tiananmen crackdown of 1989 led to a rapid rise in Protestant conversion in the 1990s (see also Buruma 1999). The expectations of thousands
of students and literati for a more democratic society were dashed in the evening of June 3, 1989, as army units violently crushed protests on the square, reportedly massacring thousands (BBC, 23 December 2017). The ensuing disillusionment with politics in general, and socialism in particular, lead to a wave of religious conversion, this explanation goes.

Although an interesting link with an historical event, this explanation does not take into account rapid conversion before Tiananmen, as noted by Hunter and Chan (1993). Moreover, it seems questionable that a relatively short-lived historical event, however politically and emotionally traumatic at the time, could give a sustained and society-wide impulse to Protestant conversion. While it is quite possible that a small group of former demonstrators, as well as their families and friends, sought spiritual and emotional refuge in Protestant churches both in China and the United States after the crackdown in Beijing, to claim that the millions of Protestant converts in the 1990s across the entire vastness of China were so affected by what they saw on television about a disturbance in Beijing, that they "somehow" decided to convert to Protestantism because of this, is still for the most part unfounded.

In a later explanatory attempt, Yang (2005) drew explicitly on the work of Max Weber (1920 / 2002) and implicitly on that of the contributors to Van der Veer's (1996) volume on "conversion to modernities" by arguing that

[f]or the Western-oriented Chinese, Christianity is not something traditional, conservative, or restrictive. Rather, it is perceived as progressive, liberating, modern, and universal. For Chinese converts, Christianity is a faith that provides peace, certainty, and liberation amid bewildering market forces and a stifling political atmosphere. (...) Young and educated Chinese (...) are consciously seeking modernity and integration with the rest of the world.

My main critique of this approach, which Paul Brodwin (2003) labels "neo-Weberian," is that Protestantism in contemporary Xiamen is decidedly un-modern in that it promotes "traditional" family values; heterosexual normativity; and a clear and rigid social hierarchy in a system of ministers, deputy-ministers, church elders, worship leaders, baptized members, "seekers," and "non-believers" (see also Cao 2010). Moreover, Protestant churches in China still attract more lower educated than highly educated people (Yao and
Badham 2007), the latter of which are by no means predisposed to believe that Protestantism is "progressive and liberating," but often shun away from it due to its reputation for advancing "superstition" and being a tool of "Western cultural infiltration."

Finally, in contemporary China, those who seek connection with "the rest of the world" have countless options for doing so, for example by joining programs for overseas studies, overseas work, or simply by browsing the internet through a so-called Virtual Private Network, other than joining a Protestant church. A neo-Weberian approach as adopted by Yang (2005) seems less and less able to explain the continuing conversion to Protestantism among Chinese people.

Yang's (2006, 2011) subsequent theory of "supply and demand" in a religious market model following Iannacconne, Stark and Finke (1997) focuses more on the role of the state in sanctioning and persecuting religious movements. Strict control of Chinese religious lives has given rise to what Yang labels a legal (red), illegal (black), and semi-legal (grey) market for religion. This theory proposes that the Communist authorities in Beijing created a "shortage economy" of religious clergy and venues by restricting permission to build churches and train leaders. The grassroots demand for religion, however, Yang claims, did not diminish, and therefore Chinese people became creative at organizing their own, extra-legal religious communities, giving rise to "black" and "grey" markets for religious activities.

The anthropologist Adam Yuet Chau (2011) among others, has critically examined Yang's (2006, 2011) market approach. Chau asserts that competition between church-like religious organizations, the basis of Iannacconne, Stark and Finke's theory, is absent from Chinese religious history. While China has long had a "market for rituals" in which ritual service providers compete over clients, Chau argues, the kind of "religious economy" model generated in the specific context of the United States cannot capture the complexities of Chinese religious life, where people were almost never members of church-like organizations. My own critique of Yang (2006, 2011) adds that although Yang is quite clear about what drives the central authorities to restrict the "supply" side of religion in China, it is much less clear about the "demand" side. Although an insightful study of religion policies in post-Mao China, the market model seems unable to explain why people choose to convert in large numbers to Protestant Christianity in Reform Era China.

Many small-scale ethnographic studies have attempted to explain Protestant conversion in specific villages or cities or among a more or less specific group (e.g.
Chinese university students). Studies by Du Xiaotian (2011) and Li Huawei (2012), both conducted in Henan, suggest that church communities offer the kind of social security to peasants that the state withholds. In the spirit of Yang's religious economy model, Li and Du argue that peasants in Henan have a "demand" (需求 xuqiu) for a safety net in case of financial or medical "suffering" (苦难 kunan). While this may be true, both studies' ultimate conclusion that Protestant conversion can be abated by the Chinese state through improvement of peasants' social security and financial situation, does not resonate well with findings regarding conversion among the wealthy and middle classes elsewhere in China (Cao 2010; Yang 2005; Colijn 2017). In short, although many sophisticated explanatory attempts have been made by scholars of religion in China, it seems that we still do not fully understand what drives large-scale conversion to Protestantism in contemporary China.

**Theorizing Chinese conversion processes**

Before contributing to the debate on the factors behind Protestant conversion by drawing from my own data, I want to take a closer look at the concept of "conversion" or "religious conversion." What exactly do I mean with these terms in the context of Xiamen? Mandarin has no word that can be directly translated as conversion, exposing its European origins (Young and Seitz 2013, 14). Few studies have dealt with the question of how this concept can be fruitfully deployed in a Chinese context. Despite its imperialistic baggage, I find conversion a useful concept for describing three kinds of processes (Rambo 1993) which a "convert" in Xiamen may go through, ultimately leading to a new set of ritual obligations (e.g. to pray, to avoid superstition, to attend church meetings) on top of any existing obligations (e.g. to participate in lineage rituals, to venerate ancestors). In the Chinese world, people have long engaged with different "modalities of doing religion" (Chau 2006), and in Southern Fujian little emphasis is placed on the individual's mental acceptance of doctrinal formulae. This shifts our attention from religious conversion in China as an "inner" process of a changing mental state to processes of engagement with a different ritual system.

The first possible process is that a convert starts attending activities of Protestant church communities, for example Sunday services or prayer meetings. This phase is marked by experimentation with "new" rituals offered by the community to the potential
convert. A second process is that the convert starts self-identifying as a "believer" (xintu). As Hefner (1993, 17) notes, a change in self-identification is often the basis of what we call religious conversion. This process may be marked by a more or less gradual abandonment of existing ritual obligations toward ancestors and the lineage community. Thirdly, church attendance and a change in self-identification may bring a convert in a process toward getting baptized, and thus becoming an initiated member of a church community (the "testimony" in the introduction offers a good example of these processes). Protestants in Southern Fujian generally regard their day of baptism as the start of their spiritual path with God. But as anthropologist Peter van der Veer (1996, 19) notes, "by abandoning the religion of the ancestors, one does not want to cut loose one's family ties." Therefore, although the phases of religious conversion often result in a thorough commitment to the religious community and re-routing of existing, "superstitious" ritual obligations (toward ancestors and the lineage) toward this community, former ritual obligations do not simply dissolve. Protestants in Southern Fujian often remain embedded in their households and ancestral lineages in spite of their religious conversion.

Conversion as a re-routing of one's ritual obligations toward a religious community is not a straightforward process in Xiamen. Liang Yu, a 32-year old Protestant convert whose wedding and conversion will be discussed in the next chapter, expressed an ambiguity of how to deal with his pre-existing ritual obligations after conversion.

Bram: Lao Liang, previously you said that you have some doubts about getting baptized, because you have to take responsibility in your hometown. What made you change your mind?
Liang: Because getting baptized is... how to say... an individual choice. It doesn't involve my family. (...) It came forth from my personal wish. The considerations I previously had, like taking responsibility in the family, obligations toward the family, these things I can still do all the same. But perhaps in the outer forms there are some changes. I can still do these things, and I will not change. My original responsibilities and duties toward them, these ideas will basically not change. So they will not be affected by this change. But it's possible that some outer forms will change, for example when my parents have gone, in accordance with our customs, perhaps I would need to perform some sacrifices. And perhaps after getting baptized, after believing in Christianity, perhaps, this will be reduced some. But my father and mother are also pretty enlightened, they can accept such a transformation. So this is OK... So this is an individual choice.
Sacrifices for ancestors and non-Christian Gods have long been pejoratively referred to by Chinese Protestants as "superstition." Anthropologist Birgit Meyer (1999) describes how Protestant missionaries redefined Ghana's Ewe ancestral cult as devil worship. Protestant conversion in Ghana, according to Meyer, entailed new forms of (dis)enchantment with the world, and local people's development of new perspectives on old customs and ideas. Gods and the rituals of worship associated with them, instead of being simply replaced by the new religion, were redefined by missionaries as the Devil and as witchcraft. In similar fashion, Protestant missionaries to China reinvented the past lives of converts as sinful and evil. Forms of popular religion continue to be practiced around Protestant converts, serving as examples of Chinese culture's superstition and their relatives' entrapment in idol worship (bai ouxiang). When I asked Liang Yu whether he still venerates his ancestors in his hometown, his wife Tang Mei (see also in the next chapter) weighed in.

Liang: I am now baptized, that means that I follow [my wife]
Mei: Right, he also doesn't [venerate ancestors], but at his home, my mother-in-law will perhaps not let him do this kind of thing [anymore]. Previously, during Chinese New Year, he would go to the temple near their house to light fireworks, and participate in the rituals there. But now my mother-in-law will not call on him to go. Everybody is very tolerant (baorong).
Bram: Now that you are baptized...
Liang: [I am] slowly changing.
(...)
Bram: Lao Liang, when did you communicate to your parents that you wouldn't venerate [Gods and ancestors] anymore?
Liang: Communicate? I don't think it's necessary to communicate, just doing it bit by bit (yidian yidi) is fine.
Mei: Actually, when I met him I already believed in Christianity, and I told him that if he would venerate (baibai) I would take offence (you jieyi). Since I didn't want him to venerate, and his parents thought this was OK, he stopped going.
— Interview, 29 January 2015.

Apart from "conversion" as a noun, I also use "convert" as a verb to indicate that somebody "is converted" by another person through proselytizing. Among theologians and some
highly educated Protestants, conversion may be couched in terms of being acted upon by the Holy Spirit (one of the Trinitarian God's manifestations in mainstream Protestant theology). But I rarely, almost never, heard Protestants in Xiamen speak about their belief as being influenced by the Holy Spirit (except in a handful of sermons). Instead, people consider it an act of charity to convert others, indeed to "act upon them" and turn them into believers. On numerous occasions I observed ministers and lay leaders saying that Christians must evangelize to other people, or else they cannot be called "disciples." In this vain, Protestants in Xiamen often talk about who "brought whom to the faith." Although they often "thank God" (ganxie zhu) for their conversion, they usually identify one or more human actors who had set their conversion process in motion. "Ta dai wo xin" (she brought me to the faith) is a typical phrase used in response to the equally common question "shei dai ni xin?" (who brought you to the faith?). "Wo xianzai shi jidutu" (I am now a Protestant) and "wo xianzai xin jidujiao" (I now believe in Protestant Christianity) are ways to announce one's own conversion to family, friends, or colleagues.

Proselytizing in Xiamen often takes place casually among interested neighbors, relatives, and colleagues. In resonance with the findings of anthropologist Xie Ming (2010), who studied conversion among university students in Beijing, converts in Xiamen were often first brought to church by household members, friends, or colleagues. Religion is a topic which can be and is discussed in various social settings, including the work floor. Once brought into the church space, visitors are encouraged to note down their name and contact details with church volunteers, who invite them to join a "small group" for a weekly introductory course on Christianity. Xiamen's Protestants thus engage in a range of practices and strategies deemed highly important by church leaders, practices which can be labeled as "proselytizing," "evangelizing," or chuan fuyin.

The household is a primary target for Protestant proselytizing. Subjective relationships between parents and children, husbands and wives, are of great concern to churches in Xiamen. Ministers frequently quote Ephesians 5:22-24, claiming that the husband is the head of the household, and wives need to obey their husbands. But obedience to a non-Christian husband or father can be problematic, especially if he wants his wife to venerate his ancestors, or to work on Sundays instead of going to church. Therefore, the idea of the "Christian household" has great appeal among Protestants in Xiamen. The stereotypical Christian household comes to church every Sunday; donates what it can to further the work of the church; and educates children in biblical principles.
Religious conversion of husbands is seen as the key to happy marriages, where husband and wife live in harmony knowing their shared fate; eternal life in heaven. Without their husbands, Protestant women are regarded as "ineffective disciples."

During a special prayer for husbands in Bailu church in December 2015 (partly transcribed below in a vignette), one "brother" remarked during his prayer that those women whose husbands were not "believers" (xintu), were "very weak" (hen ruanruo). In a separate conversation, a female participant who after many years had managed to convert her husband and mother-in-law to Protestantism by having them baptized, said to me about another "sister," whose husband was not baptized, that this was due to that sister's "weak Christian faith." Such discourse of weakness, valorizing women who successfully proselytize to and convert their husbands, puts pressure on Protestant wives in Xiamen. Christmas as the feast of conversion heightens this pressure each year as December approaches. Husbands and other household members are actively targeted during Christmas in order to stimulate the formation of Christian households.

Who, then, are the converts attracted to Protestant churches in Xiamen? Regardless of church leaders' efforts to convert more men, it is women, and in particular migrant women from outside the city, who constitute the major group of converts. While a "backbone" of urban Protestants descended from earlier, twentieth and even nineteenth century converts remains in Xiamen, a tidal wave of migrant converts from across China has overtaken the "old" Protestants of the city. Driven by a desire for prosperity, excitement, and a more interesting life, millions of rural youth from across China leave their native place communities to take up more or less temporary jobs in cities (Ngai 2005).

Regarding religious conversion and migration, Bays (2012: 200) states: “[China’s] economic boom was paralleled by an urban church boom. Many of the migrants were already Christians, and many others became Christians in their new surroundings.” Xiamen’s population rose from less than 1 million in 1980 to 3.5 million in 2010 (Chan 2007; Tang et al. 2012). Today, the city’s migrant population, its “new locals,” probably outnumbers the native population two to one.

While urbanites have lineage networks, long-time friends and neighbors, and sometimes a historical connection with an urban temple, the migrants who come to the city in search of a better life, are largely detached from those communities. Migrants often start their lives in Xiamen in a position of social and financial instability, and Protestant churches with their discourse of "love" (explained below) provide at least social relief, by
means of which financial relief can follow. This is not to suggest that Xiamenese "old locals" never convert to Protestantism - I have several more or less recent cases in my research population. But their number is far smaller than that of migrant converts, both in absolute and relative terms it seems, and their road to conversion is even rockier than that of migrant converts. For after conversion they continue to live throughout the year among their lineage members and neighbors, who may disagree with their conversion and persuade them to return to the ways of the local community and to abandon the "foreign teaching" of Christianity.

Apart from conversion among migrants, conversion is also far more salient among women than among men. This is surprising, because Protestant churches in both Europe and China have long assigned men a leading role over women, both in the church and in the family. Religious studies scholar Kao Chen-yang (2009) has argued that the highly emotional and feminine character of Chinese Protestantism was formed during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in the absence of traditional male-centered religious institutions. He draws some comparisons with pre-Communist Protestantism, which was allegedly male-dominated, arguing that Chinese churches truly became feminized due to the repressive policies of Maoism. Small groups of women continued to meet for Protestant ritual enactment while churches were closed and male ministers were being "re-educated." These groups also attracted new female converts who sought a miraculous blessing or healing but had no access to temples (which were closed or destroyed). Chinese Protestants' discursive focus and relatively low dependence on venues or objects like statues, sacrifices, and incense, allegedly allowed them to operate stealthily during the Cultural Revolution. When churches were allowed to reopen under Deng's rule, Kao argues, Protestant discourses and practices were dominated by these intimate, spiritual groups focused on healings and blessings. Kao reports churches in Eastern Fujian where over ninety percent of members are women. Xiamenese churches are likewise highly feminized, with a female-to-male ration of at least two-to-one in some gatherings, but mostly far more skewed still.
Protestant conversion in the context of post-Mao China's "turn to intimacy"

What factors have contributed to Chinese Protestants' success at making converts among migrants and women? In a search for answers, let us revisit Mimi's testimony from the beginning of this chapter. In this section I analyze Mimi's religious conversion at the English corner of a Xiamenese church, and link her testimony about having "experienced God's love" in light of important developments in post-Mao Chinese society, developments that have facilitated large-scale religious conversion and the formation of pluriprax households.

When I first met her in a registered Protestant church (to which I will refer as Harbor Church) in 2015, Mimi had been working at the sales department of the Xiamen branch of a large, multinational American computer manufacturer for over five years. She dreamt of building her career up in this company, and to this end she wanted to improve her English. Mimi was a financially successful woman, and because she found a good job in the city where she had grown up, she could live among her relatives, friends, and former classmates in Xiamen. In many ways Mimi embodied the intelligent, independent, and successful Chinese woman with an international career glorified in countless Chinese television commercials, billboards, and lifestyle magazines. I never visited the apartment owned by her parents, with whom she lived, but both her father and mother had middle class jobs and it was clear from our talks that the household lacked little in financial terms. But household members lived together in acrimony which was due, from Mimi's...
perspective, to her father's selfishness (he allegedly expected his wife and daughter to pay for household expenses while spending his own salary on various forms of entertainment and leisure) and sexual immorality.

Before converting to Protestant Christianity, Mimi was a practitioner of popular religion who took more or less regular trips with her mother and two aunts to Xiamen's famous Nanputuo temple to sacrifice to Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, known in the Chinese world as Guanyin Pusa, who embodies among other things compassion and fertility. Mimi and her mother participated in ancestral rites for Mimi's grandfather on her mother's side, but not her ancestors on her father's side because he was from a Protestant household. Mimi's mother also consulted a trusted spirit medium in their neighborhood in times of need. For example, some years earlier she had felt haunted by the ghost of a fetus she had aborted as a teenager (see Moskowitz 2001 about haunting fetuses in Taiwan). For a sum Mimi was unable to recall, the spirit medium had advised her mother on rituals and sacrifices to appease the angry ghost, so that it would not harm Mimi out of jealousy for having been allowed to live. The idea of an angry ghost and the costly rituals to pacify it had left Mimi thoroughly terrified, she told me during one of our talks. It had made her doubt the moral integrity of the spirit medium (for another example from Taiwan, see Lin (2011) about spirit mediums and "human greed").

The grandparents of Mimi's father converted to Protestantism sometime in the early twentieth century. He traced his Christian ancestry back several generations (in Xiamen it is not difficult to find people who trace their Protestant heritage back even further, up to five or six generations). Raised during the Cultural Revolution, Mimi's father had abandoned nearly all forms of Protestant practice. But he had recently picked up the habit of attending the annual Christmas celebrations of his grandparents' former church, Harbor Church. In 2013, he brought his then twenty-seven year old daughter with him to observe the spectacle of dance and choral performances in Harbor Church. Although Mimi had a habit of practicing popular religion, she joined her father for this ritual. This is important because like Mimi, Protestant converts in Xiamen usually already have a ritual life before their conversion. In order to attend church ceremonies such as Christmas celebrations, they have to be willing to try something new, something different. In the words of Michael Carrithers (2000) they display an openness to receive sustenance from various sources, something Carrithers calls polytropy (the chapter discussion will take this point up further). Celebrating Christmas in church was a strange, new ritual for Mimi.
On Christmas Eve, 2013, Mimi was introduced to a young female Protestant who invited her to join the church's so-called English Corner. Mimi depicts her conversion as a process in several stages: a first acquaintance with Protestantism, joining an English corner, joining a special course for those who want to be baptized, a prayer during which she "accepted Christ as my savior," and baptism. As can be deduced from her testimony, Mimi remembered or had written down the dates for the start of the consecutive stages, which illustrates both the theory of conversion as different phases or processes (Rambo 1993) and how important her conversion had been for her personally. In her testimony she recounted people who had played an important role at each stage: her father, Amy, River, Ida, Mandy [the names by which they were known in the English corner], and the female American missionary in charge of the English Corner.

I met Mimi at Harbor Church's English corner in 2015. English Corners are weekly gatherings, usually on Saturday mornings or evenings, where attendants can practice English. All regular participants in the English Corner receive or adopt English names, like Mimi, who adopted the name Faith for herself. They publically address each other by these new names. In the course of my fieldwork in Xiamen I often attended English corners to get to know people who would be willing to speak to a foreign researcher, or to keep in touch with people I already knew. The agenda of those running English Corners in Xiamen went well beyond teaching English. For the texts and songs they used "didactically," were in fact bible verses and hymns. Their aim was to convert the participants attracted by the prospect of learning English. This proselytizing strategy seems to have been rather successful in Xiamen, where many young people dream of going abroad or working for an international company.

The group in which Mimi participated when I got acquainted with her, had taken the established concept of the English Corner to a whole new level. Self-sponsored American missionaries were running the show, and the group became more like a church within a church. Participants of Harbor Church's English Corner could convert and be baptized in the framework of the English Corner, and they did not necessarily have a connection with Harbor Church, nor attend its Sunday sermons or other activities. It was a highly Evangelical group growing rapidly under the pretext of studying English at Harbor Church. By the time I met her, Mimi had taken on some organizational responsibilities in the English corner, got baptized, and had adopted the English name Faith.
Mimi's conversion had important implications for her household, which was in a sense already pluriprax but became more clearly so after her conversion to Protestantism. After converting, Mimi decided that if she was to marry, it would have to be to a Protestant man who would support her ritual and religious activities. But as we will see in the next chapter, it is difficult for single, highly educated and successful women like Mimi to find an equally successful husband in Xiamen's female-dominated churches. Considering the fact that Mimi was approaching the age of thirty, her mother became increasingly concerned about her chances for a successful marriage. Having an unmarried daughter past the age of thirty, and in particular past the age of fertility, is for many Chinese parents a source of shame and torment. Therefore Mimi's mother sought the advice of a wise old lady (not a Protestant) in their neighborhood. This lady suggested that since Mimi's father was of Protestant heritage, and since Mimi was now a convert, Mimi's mother should follow suit and also convert to Protestantism. It seemed unlikely to the old lady that Guanyin would bless Mimi with a suitable husband after her conversion to Protestantism. If on the other hand Mimi's mother converted to Christianity, at least the Protestant God would be pleased with their household and the chances of being blessed with a successful husband would be somewhat greater. Following this highly practical advice, Mimi's mother entered a path toward religious conversion by enrolling in a course at Harbor Church to be eligible for baptism. She pledged to abandon her former "superstitious" practices and to devote herself to the Protestant God. Christmas Eve 2013 at Harbor Church was thus also consequential for the ritual life of Mimi's mother.

The most striking feature of Mimi's testimony is the recurrence of the themes of love and affection. She first felt what she experienced as the "love" of church members when she started attending the English Corner, and remembered the deep impression this had made on her. Through her conversion, she claims to have become more affectionate, loving, and filial toward her parents. With Mimi and her mother brought into the folds of the church of her father's ancestors, Mimi claims they argued less than before and the acrimony subsided considerably. This resonates with what other Protestant converts had told me during fieldwork, namely that after converting to Protestantism, children learned to love and respect their parents, and spouses learned to quarrel less. So much love, they claim, is the result of experiencing "God's love" during prayers and church activities. I believe it is helpful to situate such claims about love in a broader societal context. For important changes in post-Mao policies have contributed to making the concept of love,
however defined, a highly appealing one for certain segments in Chinese society. Love, I argue, is both central to the rapid rise of Protestantism in Reform Era China, as well as curiously understudied by scholars of religion.

Historian and cultural studies scholar Harriet Evans (2012) has discerned a society-wide trend she calls "the intimate turn" in Chinese society. In line with Yan (2009), she argues that in the course of Chinese modernization, people's ideals with regard to domestic life have shifted from the proper channeling of wealth and biological desires along the male ancestral line to nurturing intimate relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children. China's turn to neoliberalism has made the consumer the ideal citizen-subject, while under Maoism this was the producer, that is the factory worker and the peasant (Rofel 2007, 43-44). At the heart of being a consumer lies desire, the desire for a product, the desire for sex, the desire for recognition, status, and, in my understanding of Protestant conversion in China, the desire for intimacy and "love." This shift from the producer to the consumer as the ideal Chinese citizen leads people to ask "what do I want?," expressing the individual's self-interest. This new and powerful emphasis on individual consumption and self-interest was fostered by the state as part of its drive for a more competitive market economy. In Reform Era China, happiness and emotional fulfillment are to a large extent things to be pursued individually, to be desired individually (Rofel 2007, 3). Part of this development is the rise of so-called guanxi networks, more or less intimate connections (often outside the biological community of the lineage or family) established by individuals for the purpose of achieving their personal aspirations (Bian and Ang 1997; Kipnis 1997).

In the context of the rollback of the socialist state from people's everyday lives after 1978, one is no longer obliged to love chairman Mao, although loyalty to the nation, to the Party, and to "Uncle Xi" (referring to Xi Jinping, the current general secretary of the CCP and president of the People's Republic of China) is still instilled in school-aged children through patriotic ceremonies in which they salute to the national flag, and in grown-ups through relentless ad campaigns on buses, construction sites, and television adverts (see photographs). But in citizens' private lives, no longer controlled by urban work units or collective farms, love and intimacy in the individual's private sphere have become desirable through the influence of popular culture and education.

Evans (2012), who has worked mainly on femininity and sexuality, has attributed at least two characteristics to the turn to intimacy she discerns in post-Mao Chinese society. First, she has noted an increased emphasis on the need for communication between
household members -spouses, parents, and children- to build up trust and to draw Chinese husbands and fathers (often attributed with an authoritarian and emotionally detached attitude, see for example the work of Hong Kong sociologist Chan Kwok-bun 2012) emotionally into the household's everyday life (123). Apart from the household, sharing emotional "feelings" in smaller or larger group settings (colleagues, fellow church members), in particular to express one's love and appreciation toward others, has become a popular group activity in urban China (for an interesting example of therapeutic group sessions among civil servants, see political scientist Li Zhang 2017 about "therapeutic governing in post-socialist China").

I have personally attended numerous group counseling sessions for married and unmarried couples in both registered Protestant churches and unregistered family churches in the city of Xiamen, which centered on the question of how to express emotions and give shape to feelings of intimacy. They took the form of counseling courses lasting up to ten weeks, and I attended sessions in three separate churches in Xiamen in the course of my fieldwork. The sessions often centered around the books and educational video's of a Taiwanese-American "Christian psychologist" named Dr. Huang Wei-jen (黄维位博士). Apart from screenings of his many semi-public, emotion-laden lectures in Taipei, Beijing, and the United States, the meetings consisted of completing exercises from his recent book, aptly titled The journey to intimacy: A self-help course to develop emotional maturity in a loving household and marriage [casual translation] (original title 亲密之旅：爱家婚恋情商自我成长课程培训, Huang 2014).

The stereotypical Han Chinese person rarely expresses personal emotions or feelings of intimacy. Engaging with this stereotype, Huang's exercises teach participants how to give compliments to a spouse; how to greet a spouse in the morning and bid a spouse goodnight in the evening; how to pray with a spouse; and how to solve conflicts with a spouse. According to my interlocutors at these sessions, many Protestant churches in Xiamen today offer such courses. The "teachers" were untrained or barely trained women, some just out of college, who all started their course in the last five or ten years, due to a sudden and overwhelming demand for churches to help members in their emotional and marital lives. The attendants, sometimes numbering over fifty per session, were also mostly women, although some had managed to bring a male partner along. One could clearly observe, however, that most male partners sat through these sessions with much more
reservation and reticence than the women, a point to which I will return below. In short, Evans' observation that the "intimate turn" in Chinese society revolves partly around "communication" between household members, resonates closely with my own observations in Protestant churches in Xiamen.

The second characteristic of the Chinese turn to intimacy, following Evans (2012) is the feminization of emotions and emotional language. She notes a tendency among Chinese women to conform to gender stereotypes about female care and female longing for intimacy, widely distributed in the media landscape, and in particular in women's magazines. Evans argues that

young women who have been born and brought up in China's globalized market economy have been subjected to a media avalanche of reminders about their innate capacity for empathy and emotional understanding. (...) I argue that the gender inflections of this “intimate turn” highlight some of the constitutive features shaping China’s new individual psyche. — Evans 2012, 123-124.

This resonates with anthropologist Sara Friedman's (2006) argument that Chinese women's intimacy has been subject to state planning and interference. Her ethnographic example from Hui'an county, rural Southern Fujian, details how local women traditionally did not live with their husbands until the birth of their first child. Loathe to abandon their natal homes and families, Hui'an women would postpone sexual intercourse with their husbands as long as possible, usually at least four to six years after their marriage. The Maoist state, however, sought to break such "remnants of feudal culture," promoting the idea of the intimate, nuclear family where future generations of socialist citizens would be raised. The official registration of marriages became strictly enforced (Diamant 2001), and the labor assignments of brides were transferred to their grooms' production brigades. In short, the "turn to intimacy" in modern Chinese society has its roots in Maoist policies stimulating reproduction and conjugality. Evans (2012) argues that

The feminization of intimacy thus appears as a complex and contradictory effect both of a market and state-supported naturalization of women’s attributes, and of generalized attention to emotional self-fulfillment as a legitimating component constituting the contemporary individuated subject. It draws on long-embedded assumptions about
women’s emotional capacities, but constitutes the individual feminine subject within a particular relationship to market and state. — Evans 2012, 140-1.

These observations are important for my present analysis because Protestant conversion in Southern Fujian is taking place primarily among women, under a discourse of faith in "God's love" for the individual believer and the moral community of the church. In imagining the female psyche in China as prone to emotions and affectionate behavior, as described by Evans, it is not surprising that the Protestant movement of "love" has attracted women as converts much more so than men.

Yet according to Chau,

> There has been a long-held misconception about Chinese religious life, that since women seem to participate more in religious activities they must be more religious (or superstitious, depending on one’s attitude towards such activities). But the truth is that most women participate in religious activities on behalf of all members of their households; they are simply representatives of the household as a unit of religious engagement. The same is true when only the names of heads of households are written on the memorials to be sent (through burning) to the celestial court in communal rituals; on these occasions the heads of households do not act as individuals but rather as representatives of their respective households.
> — Chau 2015, 228.

In other words, it is important not to suppose that Chinese women, despite converting to Protestant Christianity in higher numbers, are innately more religious than Chinese men. Protestant churches in Xiamen seem to offer a range of activities and discourses that resonate more closely with female ideals than with male ones.

What Protestantism offers to people in Xiamen, then, is quite succinctly phrased in a single character: 爱 (ài), love. The centrality of this character in Protestant churches is immediately clear to visitors; it often features prominently directly beside the symbol of the cross above the central stage, either on its own or in a sentence capturing some "essence" of Protestantism, for example "God is love" (see photographs). According to anthropologist Jennifer Connolly (2009, 497), Dayak people in East Kalimantan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were taught by Protestant missionaries that "love" is the core
value of Christianity, that all Christians are equal and part of one family, members of which are obliged to "love" each other. She argues:

Christian Dayaks’ conversion narratives stress how Christianity has transformed them and emphasize that the primary change has been in regard to love. Converts claim that, after conversion, they became like little children, full of love for others. This discourse of Christian kinship and equality has been important in overcoming sub-ethnic differences and building both a pan-Dayak ethnic identity and a sense of Christian community.

— Connolly 2009, 497.

This discourse concerning the centrality of love to Christianity is quite similar to that found among Chinese Protestants today.

It seems that the Xiamenese Protestant usage of the concept of love is different from its usage in a household context, if only because love among spouses implies a sexual relationship which is not implied in Protestant love. Protestant love is not the kind of romantic love that is today's favorite theme in popular music, literature, and cinema. Similarly, love between (grand)parents and (grand)children implies biological, financial, and legal ties which also don't apply to Protestantism. So Protestant and household love are different kinds of love, which cannot be interchanged. The kind of love propagated by Protestant churches in Xiamen is equated with a love between siblings. The understanding that they are "sons and daughters of God" (shangdì de ernü), the "heavenly father" (tianfu), makes all church members "brothers and sisters" (dixiong zimei). Endless discursive reiteration of this bond reminds Protestants of the fact that this is a non-biological kinship, which nevertheless affords them the same affectionate privileges as between biological siblings. Friction often occurs between these different types of love; those seeking love in church may find conflict at home over ritual enactment. For Protestant love, like love between spouses, is an exclusivist love originating in a "jealous" God; church membership means forsaking the rituals of the household or the native place community.

How, then, is "love" put into action by Protestants in Xiamen? As Abel (2006) and Chao (2006) have demonstrated, Chinese Protestants engage in many forms of social and material support, both toward fellow church members and non-Christians. In Xiamen's churches, social support is arranged through so-called small groups (xiaozu) each with a specific supportive task. Large churches may have as many as twenty small groups, each
consisting of up to forty members, for visiting the elderly and the sick in their homes; cooking food for churchgoers on specific dates or times; poverty relief; cleaning the church property; arranging weddings and funerals; and organizing a host of activities from so-called English corners to prayer services on weekday evenings.

Abel's (2006) research in a Chinese Protestant church in the United States has focused on gift giving and helping behaviors which did not have a direct bearing on the relationship between the giver and recipient. Gifts, according to Abel, were not given to improve the bond between them; to increase chances of promotion; or future favors from the recipient. Instead, Abel concludes that gift giving and helping behaviors are rituals enacted in the context of a community that seeks global integration. I add here that such behaviors, which one may observe in mainland Chinese churches as well, are part of the ways Protestants enact love.

Love, however, is most saliently practiced by Protestants when they proselytize to colleagues, fellow students, neighbors, and relatives. "Bringing people to the faith" is considered both an obligation and an act of charity by Protestants in Xiamen. They routinely encourage each other during worship services and small group meetings to proselytize by bringing non-Christians to church gatherings. Such invitations are most commonly extended to acquaintances who are experiencing a period of psychological, financial, physical, or relational hardship. As Yang Fenggang (2005) also noted, many of his interviewees were young people who were converted to Protestantism in difficult times. Churches in Xiamen offer a social and religious environment in which people can participate in those practices which they consider most liberating, entertaining, or edifying.

In short, what a century of tireless Western missionary activity, backed by powerful foreign military forces, could not achieve in China, occurred ironically at the hands of the atheist Communist Party. For only after the power of lineage bonds was shattered in favor of socialism, and after state power itself was reigned in to accommodate economic growth, were the gates to mass religious conversion opened. This happened suddenly and unexpectedly after 1978, as Chinese individuals became responsible for their own careers.

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6 Material support by Protestants in Xiamen is particularly clear in the case of weddings and funerals, at which church choirs sing virtually for free and designated small groups festoon the church, the restaurant, and the funeral parlor with the church's available standard decorations (flower wreaths, colored paper, confetti). Material support can also take the form of donating educational books and DVDs to rural churches and donating or lending money without interest to church members in financial difficulties.
their own pensions and healthcare, their own social and ritual lives, their own emotional fulfillment, and their own happiness. Key among these individual endeavors is the search for love and intimacy, both in the household and in the church.

The following vignette details how Protestants in Xiamen conspicuously display love during an annual Christmas celebration, as part of a proselytizing effort among non-Christian visitors. Although I attended six Protestant Christmas celebrations in 2015 alone, I selected this particular vignette because it takes place on Christmas Eve proper (other Christmas celebrations were held on different dates shortly before and after Christmas). The "collective effervescence" (Durkheim 1912 / 1976) or "red-hot sociality" (Chau 2006) generated by Christmas in Xiamen's churches is at its peak on Christmas Eve. The vignette covers celebrations in both an unregistered family church and a registered Three Self church in Xiamen because due to police restrictions I was unexpectedly forced to switch and travel from the family church I regularly attended for fieldwork, to a large Three Self Church where police were actually helping to regulate the busy traffic around the premises on the festival eve. The vignette demonstrates how Protestant conversion processes among non-Christian visitors are set in motion on Christmas Eve, shedding light on the (trans)formation of pluriprax households in Xiamen.

Christmas shows of Xiamenese Protestants in "ethnic" costumes resemble the famed CCTV New Year's Gala.
Vignette: Christmas and the (trans)formation of pluriprax households

"Sister Yu Weiping's husband, Bo Xiaolong," read a middle-aged woman out loud. "Amen," the congregation of some ninety people responded.


"Sister Jiang Yulan's husband, Fang Yiwen," was the next one, followed again by the community's "amen." In this fashion, a list of twenty-one husbands of "sisters" was read out three times to the small group of practitioners. Each time the list was alternated with a prayer.

It was Wednesday evening, December 9, 2015 in the city of Xiamen, a little more than two weeks before Christmas. Like on every Wednesday evening, a group of practitioners convened at Bailu "family church" (explained in the Introduction) met for a prayer service. It is a community of some four hundred practitioners, set up only twenty years prior. The founder and chief minister is a retired businessman who decided to start a prayer group at his home, which gradually grew into a church as he abandoned his business to devote himself entirely to pastoral work. By 2015 it was one of the bigger family churches in Xiamen. I started attending its Wednesday evening prayer sessions in late 2014, going once or twice per month throughout 2015. My aim was to learn more about discourse and sociality in this community of around four hundred people.

That particular Wednesday evening was different from other prayer sessions. Common prayer topics were personal hardships, illnesses, and praise whenever a church member or relative was healed or converted to Christianity. This prayer session, however,
had just one aim; to pray for the religious conversion of non-Christian husbands during Christmas 2015. The "sisters" whose names were listed and read out, had all agreed to persuade their husbands to come with them to church on Christmas Eve, so that they may be converted there on the spot. “If everyone brings one family member to church, our church may double in size over Christmas,” the chief minister declared during a regular Sunday service a few weeks before Christmas.

For months preceding December 2015, members of Bailu church had been preparing for that year's Christmas celebration. Its three church choirs - a youth, elderly women's, and semi-professional choir - had all tirelessly prepared for their performances at the two-day festival. Members of the youth choir had asked me if I would be willing to sing “Amazing Grace” with them, an invitation which was later withdrawn for reasons I would only learn on Christmas Eve itself. A group of middle-aged and a group of elderly women had both prepared a synchronized dance performance in special costumes. Some forty children were also preparing to perform a play on the Sunday afternoon before Christmas, supervised by teachers from a local public school. Clearly, this was by far the busiest time of the year for the Bailu church community, which I observed for nineteen months during my fieldwork from July 2014 - February 2016.

As in the Western world, Christmas in China is celebrated by Protestants on December 24-26 of the Gregorian calendar. Chinese companies have picked up on Christmas as an opportunity to sell more products, but in the general population it is still perceived as a foreign holiday. In 2014, for example, university campuses in Xi'an and Wenzhou closed their gates on Christmas day, preventing students from going out to celebrate a “kitsch Western holiday” (Blanchard 2014, South China Morning Post 2014).

According to the Dutch-American missionary Abbe Livingston Warnshuis in 1918, Christmas was not commonly celebrated in Amoy church settings in the area because church leaders feared that it would be confused by lay believers with the birthdays of "pagan" Gods ( Warnshuis 1918). So it is a relatively new festival that became widely celebrated by Protestants in Xiamen more than a century after the start of Western missionary efforts.

The transformation of Christmas from an obscure, potentially harmful festival to the annual zenith of church festivities in Xiamen appears to be connected to the nation-state's modernizing efforts. First, the initial introduction of the Gregorian calendar to China on January 1, 1912, meant that after more than sixty years of Protestant missionary activity in
Southern Fujian, Christmas finally acquired a fixed date on the standard national calendar: the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth Gregorian month. Although the Gregorian calendar initially failed to take a foothold outside major urban centers in China (Goossaert and Palmer 2011, 128), it eventually replaced the Chinese calendar as the standard temporal device for professional life.

On the pre-1912 Chinese calendar, the date of Christmas "changes" each year between the eleventh and twelfth lunar months. In similar fashion, the date of Chinese New Year "changes" each year to another date sometime in January or February on the Gregorian calendar, maintaining its status in parts of the Western world as an exotic "foreign" festival. I suspect that having a fixed festival date after the domestication of the Gregorian calendar, helped to de-exoticize Christmas as a festival in China. Thus it may have become more common for church communities to celebrate it.

Second, according to Goossaert and Palmer (2011), the goal of abolishing the Chinese calendar by the Nationalist state in 1912 was to eliminate the numerous festivals and deity birthday rituals punctuating the traditional calendar with countless local and regional variations and cycles—all of which were occasions for “hot and noisy” crowds and unbridled “superstition”—and replace them with a new set of civic rituals.

— Goossaert and Palmer 2011, 57.

In other words, a change in the calendrical system meant a change in the legitimacy of existing festivals and their dates. In order to retain the legitimacy of certain traditional festivals, lunar festival dates were converted to dates on the Gregorian calendar, as happened with the Dragon Boat festival (May 5) (Goossaert and Palmer 2011, 128-9). Although this date was later converted back to a lunar date under Communist rule, it seems that in modern China, festivals could acquire legitimacy by having a date on the Gregorian calendar, like Christmas.

Moreover, in 1949 the new revolutionary, atheist government headed by chairman Mao Zedong adopted the supposed birth year of Jesus Christ as the benchmark of national time (the Nationalist calendar had taken 1912, the year of the founding of the Republic of China, as the year 1). Christmas as the festival of the birth of Jesus Christ was now both tied to the year 1 in the calendrical system used by the People's Republic of China, and to a
fixed annual date. This may have furthered the development of Christmas from an obscure Western custom in 1912 to the most highly anticipated annual Protestant festival in Xiamen today.

But this did not happen immediately, nor gradually, but started suddenly after 1978, when years of total repression of religious activities during the Cultural Revolution came to an end, and a new consumerist trend propelled Christmas to the status of a fun, glittery, Western festival. According to Goossaert and Palmer,

[By the 2000s], Christmas was aggressively promoted by department stores and shopping malls, turning Santa Claus into a figure more familiar to children than any character in Chinese lore—and among teenagers and youth, the holiday rivaled in popularity with the Lunar New Year, precisely because it had no traditional significance: lacking the customs and family reunions of the Spring Festival—or of Christmas as practiced in Western societies—it was an entirely secularized celebration without community or prescribed forms. Groups of friends would go for a night on the town—perhaps to listen to Christmas carols in overpacked churches, or to go dancing at nightclubs, or to invent playful new rituals, such as chasing and hitting each other with inflatable hammers and plastic baseball bats.

—Goossaert and Palmer 2011, 273

It is unlikely that Christmas was gradually domesticated as a religious festival in China. Few historical sources appear to mention Christmas as a noteworthy event in China before the 1980s. I do not rule out the possibility that it was celebrated in some urban churches during the Republican period (1911 - 1949), but few Chinese Protestants seemed to celebrate it in a grand fashion comparable to today. For as mentioned above, the Gregorian calendar did not take a foothold outside urban centers under Republican rule, maintaining Christmas' status as an exotic, foreign festival until the socialist era. Under Maoism (1949 - 1976), even if Chinese Protestants had wanted to celebrate Christmas opulently as they do today, they did not have the freedom to organize themselves, nor the necessary financial means (labor and resources were collectivized). Protestant Christmas celebrations in Xiamen today require months of preparation by song and dance performers, and enough money to pay for decorations and food. This only became possible after 1976, a period marked by the rise of capitalism in China and the abandonment of radical anti-Western and
anti-religious policies. Across China, stores decorate their windows for Christmas in a bid to boost sales, familiarizing the public with this Western festival. With the rapid increase in church membership since the 1980s, churches in Xiamen had enough skilled people with enough time, freedom, and money to celebrate Christmas as the biggest annual Protestant festival. Therefore, I do not believe that the celebration of Christmas by Chinese Protestants went gradually, but instead started suddenly as the new festival erupted to popularity after 1978.\(^7\)

On December 24, 2015, I had an early dinner so I could be at Bailu Church an hour before the start of the celebration. When I arrived, I was greeted by the church's caretaker, Ms. Lin, whom I had gotten to know well. She directed me to sit down in the church. But immediately after I entered the main church hall, one of the deputy ministers took me by the arm and whispered that police were monitoring the church and that I should sit in a back room, out of sight. He took me to one of the rooms, where four people were having dinner, apparently because it was a Thursday and they had come straight from work in order to be on time for the celebration.

I sat down with these four people, two of whom I knew personally from a bible study group we were attending together. I did not know the other diners, two men in their forties, and they looked at me curiously. The conversation we had, rather than being about Christmas, was about public transportation. The diners were giving me much advice about which bus route is best for me to get to the church from my home. At some point the chief minister's wife came in. I walked up to her and whispered that I had heard about the police warning. She softly said that the police had particularly forbade them to allow foreigners to their service during Christmas. With that I left - it was the first time I had ever been confronted with a restriction on visiting a church during a total of twenty-two months of fieldwork in Xiamen.

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\(^7\) As a secular comparison, November 11 has recently become known as "Singles' Day" in China. Although its origin is contested, the mainstream explanation is that a small group of students (all singles) in Nanjing started engaging in fun activities in the 2000's on the (Gregorian) date marked by four times the number 1 (11-11). While locally gaining in popularity, Singles' Day suddenly rose to national prominence in 2011, when November 11 would have six 1's (11-11-11). Since then it is celebrated across China, mostly by young people who go shopping and partying. This example shows how the Gregorian calendar in China was a platform for the quick rise of a new nation-wide festival.
Christmas is a time of heightened government restrictions in China. One research participant, a civil servant from Xinjiang called Tang Mei, recalled her secret church visits while living in the provincial capital Urumqi in the late 2000s and early 2010s.

Tang: In Xinjiang, [as civil servants] we were not allowed to have a religious faith. Nobody could go [to a church or a mosque], in order to be fair. We as Christians also couldn't go. Such is the atmosphere there, and every time I went to church, I had to go secretly. Especially during Christmas. During Christmas they inspect closely. (...) If you went, you would be interrogated (tanhua), and warned not to go again. In serious cases you may be disciplined in the internal party organization (dangzuzhi neibu dechufen).

Bram: Have you ever been caught?
Tang: Yes, but I had a good relationship with my bosses, they knew of course. They did not expose me, because they know that Christianity is relatively good (bijiao haode), it's better than Islam, it's more approved (bijiao renke). So they told me to be a bit more careful not to be found out. But once in a more serious case, I had to cooperate in a written investigation (shumian de jiancha).

— Interview, 24 November 2014.

Christmas in Xiamen's churches is a festival packed with entertaining performances which are meant to showcase Protestant love and to attract as many potential converts as possible. This makes it a politically sensitive festival, because the Chinese state is not prepared to let any religious movement become so massive that it may threaten the position of the ruling party.8 Hunter and Chan provide a similar example from Guangdong province in 1990 and 1991.

In 1990, Jesus Church [in a southern Guangdong village] invited the same group of Hong Kong Christians to present a Christmas programme for local children: traditionally the church could expect to attract about a hundred children for the festivities. However in this period the government had tightened controls over religion, and many restrictions were imposed: all texts, songs and programmes had to be scrutinized by the church.

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8 The recent harsh crackdown on Falun Gong is a good example of the party-state's suspicion against large-scale, religiously motivated movements. This suspicion against subversive religious movements may stem from the nineteenth century's Taiping Rebellion, which was so destructive and long-lasting that it arguably heralded the fall of the Qing dynasty and China's imperial era.
authorities, and no preaching or open speech was allowed. During the performances, the atmosphere was tense, and the Hong Kong Christians had to keep strictly within prescribed boundaries.


By most accounts, Chinese policy makers want Christianity—both Protestant and Catholic—to decline in their country, not to grow. Christmas, a time of mass conversion, thwarts that vision. Festivals like Christmas are considered as public events more so than regular church services. Religion in the public sphere is highly problematic in China under Communist rule, especially when involving communities which are not registered with the authorities. The ban on foreign visitors who might increase Bailu church’s legitimacy and its Christmas celebration as a public spectacle, was a response to this perceived threat.

Over two decades ago, Hunter and Chan hinted that Christmas was becoming more and more popular as a religious festival, mentioning a church in Beijing which received 20,000 visitors on Christmas Eve in 1991 (Hunter and Chan 1993, 234). Local authorities in various parts of the country had already picked up on this trend and put restrictions in place (Hunter and Chan 1993, 182-3). Strangely, however, very few scholars seem to have noticed this trend, and even fewer made Christmas in China an object of serious inquiry. Key authors in historical, sociological, and anthropological studies such as Ryan Dunch (2001), Xi Lian (2010), Yang Fenggang (2011), and Daniel Bays (2012) provide as little as a single mention or footnote about Christmas. It seems that this major festival has been almost completely neglected by Western scholars of religion in China.

An important exception is Cao Nanlai (2010), who provides a highly insightful vignette of a Christmas celebration in the city of Wenzhou in 2006. Cao:

The Wenzhou churches’ Christmas celebrations combine grand feasting, performance watching, and evangelical preaching in a festival atmosphere. Most large Wenzhou churches hold Christmas celebrations for several consecutive days, with Christmas Eve being the most elaborate and splendid celebratory gathering. One church in the city center, for example, held an eight-day Christmas banquet and series of performances. People ate while watching a variety of artistic shows on the stage in the main church hall. Each day sixty-five tables of food were served. In all, more than five hundred banquet tables were prepared and five thousand people attended. (...) As a vital part of Christmas evangelization, a sermon is usually inserted in the middle of the eating and performances,
but it is always kept short. After banqueting one can overhear people enthusiastically commenting on the quality of food and performances and making comparisons with other churches’ banquets and the ones they held last year.


Through the example of a Christmas celebration, he illustrates how Protestantism could grow in Wenzhou, and how popular participation is a major feature of the local “brand” of Protestantism in Wenzhou. Let me return to Xiamen, where I had to remove myself from a family church on Christmas Eve.

After I left Bailu church, I took a bus and went to Siming church, a large government approved church of the Three Self Patriotic Movement. It was also built some twenty years prior, and its membership had grown even faster to over five thousand. I had participated in Siming church's youth group and English corner activities over the past year, from which I had drawn several research participants. As I approached the church building, I noticed seven or eight policemen by the road in front of the church property, which surprised me because I had never seen police by this church. Soon it became clear, however, that they were regulating the large amount of traffic arriving to participate in the Christmas Eve service. This struck me as ironic, since police at this "patriotic" church were helping the church and allowing foreigners to attend at will, while at Bailu church they had threatened with punitive measures. At the church's giant front door, an acquainted volunteer greeted me and took me up to the fifth floor of the building, where a few empty seats were still available. Other than that, the entire church seating 1,200 people was packed to the brink for this first service, and a second service would follow immediately afterwards.

In the room on the fifth floor, fifty of us watched the Christmas Eve service on a television screen. It lasted one hour and ten minutes, most of which consisted of the performance of two large choirs. Although I could not closely follow the lyrics (choral lyrics are notoriously difficult to hear), it was clear that the singers had trained extensively.

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9 Newly built churches registered with the authorities typically unite a number of previous "meeting points" (juhuidian). Such meeting points are administered by registered churches but based in office spaces or in Protestants' homes. They can become sizeable communities of several hundred practitioners. Meeting points thus occupy a kind of temporary grey zone utilized by the authorities to thwart unregistered ministers from taking over such communities and turning them into unregistered family churches.
They gave a splendid performance, which suggested to the audience that this was a church with extensive human resources; the church community had people with real skills and devotion.

When the choir performances were finished, pastor Yang, one of the church's three ministers, prayed. In his prayer, he thanked God for his "love" (ài) toward humanity and his "love" toward "the church," by which he apparently meant global Protestantism. He also thanked God for the birth of his son Jesus Christ. During his brief prayer, pastor Yang mentioned the word "love" several times, reiterating the centrality of this concept for Protestants in Xiamen.

He then called on those people to raise their hands “who did not believe in Christ yet” (hai mei xin jidu de). A small army of volunteers in purple sweaters set out to persuade those who had raised their hands, to ascend the main stage. About thirty-five people heeded the call. Soft piano music commenced, as pastor Yang prayed fervently for the Christian conversion of those on the stage. He begged God to demonstrate his "mercy" (endian) to those on stage, by opening their hearts to the Christian faith. When the prayer was finished, pastor Yang directed those on stage to the purple sweater volunteer group which stood ready to welcome them into the church community and to hand them each a bible. After the service, people were directed to leave floor by floor as the choirs were photographed with the church's three ministers and other workers. Outside there was already a crowd of perhaps three hundred people waiting to enter the next service. Many were taking group photographs in front of the church. One group of young women even invited a policeman on duty to pose with them in the photograph. It was an exciting scene as colorful bulbs lit up the entire front square which was bustling with church volunteers, police, people leaving, and people waiting to enter.

Christmas as a key moment for religious conversion in Xiamen is important for understanding how pluriprax households are formed or transformed into uniprax ones. For as in the case of Mimi, described earlier in this chapter, non-Christian visitors are often household members of people who had converted earlier. In such cases, if a visitor converts, a pluriprax household may transform into a uniprax household once all members have turned away from "superstition" and have accepted a new set of ritual obligations from the church. If on the other hand, a converted visitor is the first Protestant in their household, a new pluriprax may be formed, marked by a situation of conflicting ritual obligations.
I soon learned that churches in Xiamen compete over who can get the most people on stage on Christmas eve. One man I met at another service bragged to me that his church got one-hundred-twenty people this year, while another church "only" got seventy. When I later asked a deputy-minister of Siming church, what share of the Christmas "converts" typically end up getting baptized, he told me that last year one-third participated in a "religious seekers course" (mudaoban). In other words, most of those on stage in Siming church in 2014 did not enter into a process toward getting baptized, and it is unclear how many started self-identifying as "believers" after Christmas.

Nevertheless, I believe that the gesture of staged conversions is still powerful, because it displays to all participants that as opposed to rituals of the ancestral (see Chapter 4), the goal of Christmas is to lovingly open up the community boundaries to the public. The ritual draws strangers into the community as new members, instead of reiterating their outsider status. Anyone can join this community and become part of the intimate circle of believers (xintu) regardless of birthplace or status, which is probably Protestantism's main trump card in cities like Xiamen, where millions of people from all walks of life have moved since its designation as a Special Economic Zone in 1980. Besides, a staged conversion may create a long-lasting impression on the "converts," who later in life, when encountering personal difficulties, may end up getting baptized after all (see also Yang 2005).

Reflection
Protestants in the city of Xiamen enact "love" during their church's most important communal ritual: the annual Christmas celebration. Their song and dance performances project an image of community members' shared joy, innocence, and intimacy to the many spectators. Who would not want to be part of a community which anyone from anywhere can readily join? As the year's most important proselytizing event, Christmas seeks to bring spectators into the church community's intimate fold, forming and transforming pluriprax households in Xiamen.

But conversion to Protestantism in Xiamen is usually an individual's choice rather than a household's choice. This is due to Protestantism's inherent focus on individual piety, faith, and salvation that can be obtained regardless of what one's household members do. Protestant converts in Xiamen incur a new set of ritual obligations when joining a church community, most conspicuously the obligation to abstain from all forms of "superstition"
associated with popular religion. But converts are also frequently encouraged by their religious peers to proselytize to their household members. Proselytizing is regarded by Protestants in Xiamen as an act of charity, and a "Christian household" is thought to be less prone to conflict than a pluriprax household.

As described in this chapter, during Xiamen's Christmas celebrations unsuspecting visitors (often the non-Protestant friends, neighbors, colleagues, or household members of converts) are called to the stage and declared "brothers and sisters." Some join so-called religious seekers courses after Christmas and end up getting baptized. Christmas as a feast of religious conversion may thus start the transformation of pluriprax households into uniprax households when a Protestant's household members convert. Conversely, Christmas transforms uniprax households into pluriprax ones when a convert is the first Protestant in their household.

This has compelled me to understand Christmas in sharp contrast with pre-existing communal rituals in the region, such as the youxiang ancestral lineage procession I observed in rural Zhangzhou in February 2016 (described in Chapter 4). Such processions, in which all lineage members are supposed to participate and to contribute, mark off the boundaries of a village (in the case of single-surname villages) and to conspicuously display the lineage's wealth and strength as an exclusive community descended from a shared ancestor. Protestants in Xiamen, on the other hand, do not enact Christmas rituals in celebration of existing boundaries between insiders and outsiders, but instead they celebrate the dissolution of boundaries by warmly (one might say hotly) welcoming newcomers into their midst. Christmas in Xiamen does not mark the church community as is, but as could be - that is a community including the baptized members; religious "seekers" enrolled in various courses or groups; plus non-Christian visitors. Although Protestant church communities in Xiamen have boundaries in terms of restricting intermarriage with non-Christians and participation in non-Christian rituals (see chapter 2), Christmas opens up the community's boundaries like sluices to let in new flows of potential members.

Many factors can be singled out as explanatory for the large-scale conversion to Protestantism, such as mass migration (Cao 2005; F.G. Yang 2005); the desire for Western modernity (Goossaert and Palmer 2011); the destruction of communities engaged in popular religion (Duara 1991); the rapidly declining faith in Communist ideals (Hunter and Chan 1993), and so on. After years of ideological struggle and indoctrination during the Cultural Revolution, young Chinese migrants and women now search for friendship and
love as forms of personal fulfillment. I have observed that Protestant churches in Xiamen position themselves as communities where people can achieve such fulfillment by sharing stories of hardship; engaging in charitable behavior; enacting rituals together; and developing sibling-like bonds. For migrants, removed from their families and native place communities, and for Chinese women in general, Protestant churches fill an important gap by providing refuge in an otherwise highly competitive, male-dominated, and materialistic society (see also F.G. Yang 2005).

Therefore, in this chapter I have highlighted the centrality of a "turn to intimacy" in post-Mao Chinese society (Evans 2012). Protestant churches in Xiamen focus on constructing an affectionate, child-parent-like relationship between the convert and God. Ministers claim that by "opening their hearts to God's love" and "becoming children of God," converts can learn to love each other as "brothers and sisters." This resonates with new trends in Chinese popular culture and media, encouraging emotional expression and intimacy between wives and husbands, parents and children, friends and colleagues.

But non-Christians attending Protestant Christmas celebrations first have to be willing to engage in what we may call "polytropy," by physically participating in what is for them a new ritual on top of any rituals they were already accustomed to practicing. Polytropy is a term coined by Michael Carrithers (2000), denoting how people in India turn "towards many sources for their spiritual sustenance, hope, relief or defence" (Carrithers 2000, 834). Digambar Jains observed by Carrithers worship multiple Gods, consult different religious persons and attend various shrines, temples, and pilgrimage sites. These "sources" can contribute different things in different situations. To compare this to the church visits of practitioners of popular religion during Christmas in Southern Fujian, their participation in the ritual may be a one-off act borne out of curiosity and not a long-term commitment to two different ritual systems. But the act of participating in a Christmas celebration as a practitioner of popular religion, whether only once or every year, can be framed as an instance of polytropy. For being among the ritualists inside the church building on Christmas Eve makes them part of the Protestant community as could be, however ephemeral this is, and part of the feast of religious conversion that is Christmas in Xiamen. According to theologian Bagus Laksana (2015, 111), "the sensory experience of being near the other [during rituals] has the power to make us not only open but also vulnerable to their world, not primarily at the level of religious concepts, but rather at the
deeper affective, emotional and experiential level." In other words, polytropy on Christmas Eve in Xiamen can lead to religious conversion and the formation of pluriprax households.

In the context of Chinese society's turn to intimacy, then, polytropy is a key to understanding the rapid rise of Protestant Christianity in China. Due to restrictions on public proselytizing or broadcasting of Christian messages on mass media, churches depend on their members to bring potential converts along to communal rituals such as Christmas celebrations. Ironically, however, church ministers in Xiamen strongly condemn polytropy by lay Protestants. Once in a process toward conversion, Protestants in Xiamen are not allowed to participate in rituals involving non-Christian Gods, ghosts, or ancestors. Although clergy have few means of punishing offenders, they warn the congregation that participation in rituals for "idols" incites the anger of the Protestant God, who they claim is a "jealous God." The field of tension created by restrictions on Protestants' ritual lives, is further explored in the following chapters.
2. Religious heterogamy

Chapter contents:

- Introduction
- The ritual boundaries of Chinese Protestantism
- Case study 1: A romantic wedding in defiance of parents and church leaders
- Case study 2: A "traditional" Chinese wedding
- Reflection

A "fiery bowl" (huopen) awaiting the bride and groom at the doorstep of his home in rural Quanzhou, Southern Fujian. In the courtyard preparations for the banquet are in full swing.

Red baskets used to distribute gifts and wedding invitations in the groom's hometown in rural Quanzhou, Southern Fujian.

**Introduction**

Studying rituals in contemporary Xiamen, one inadvertently ends up visiting some of the many youth groups, English corners, and prayer sessions hosted by Protestant churches in
the city. "Hopping" from group to group in the course of my fieldwork in 2014-2016, I soon learned that I was not hopping alone. Several single women in their late twenties and early thirties had adopted the same strategy as me, attending activities on weekday evenings and observing the people there. My own motivations were clear to me; I wanted to meet research participants and to learn about the social, ritual, and discursive aspects of Protestantism in Xiamen. But what motivated these young women with busy jobs to spend evening after evening in various churches?

I first met Li (29) and Cai (30) at a bi-weekly course about romantic relationships, hosted by one of Xiamen's largest registered churches. Later I met Li again at a youth group meeting of the same church, and both of them at the English corner of another large church. After these 'chance meetings' we started chatting and the three of us arranged to have dinner on a Monday evening. It became clear that both Cai and Li were being pressured by their relatives to find a husband and to get married soon. A common understanding in Xiamen and elsewhere in China is that a woman has to be married before reaching the age of thirty. Neither of the two women had time left to waste.

But both had an important precondition: the prospective husband had to be a fellow Protestant believer. Upon my question of how they went about finding the right man, Cai answered that she prayed every day for God to provide a groom. Li said that her strategy was to go to as many Protestant activities as possible. To say that no marriageable men were available in these groups at all, would be an exaggeration. But Cai and Li both had a university degree and a successful career in international sales. Following the logic of "social and political assortative mating in urban China" (Xu et al 2000), often expressed colloquially in the 4-character idiom mendanghudui (being well-matched in terms of socio-economic status), neither woman could simply marry any Protestant man; it had to be a man whose educational or financial status was equal to or higher than hers.

Xiamen's Protestant churches, however, are highly unbalanced in terms of gender (see Chapter 1 about the attraction of Chinese Protestantism to women). It is difficult to find a Protestant group or meeting in which women do not outnumber men by at least two to one. Therefore young Protestant women have to rely on their other communities (of family, work, friends, hobby groups, travel groups) to find a suitable spouse. Church leaders in Xiamen generally regard intermarriage with non-Christians as a serious challenge to the integrity of the church and a violation of biblical principles. In terms of discourse, during sermons ministers and deputy-ministers [chuandaoren 传道人]
frequently warn the lay community not to get "unequally yoked" (II Corinthians 6:14), i.e. not to get married to a non-Christian. They allege that a husband may pull his Protestant wife away from the church, persuade her to enact non-Protestant rituals, and he (or his parents) may not allow the child or children to attend Sunday school activities. This leaves millions of young Protestant women like Cai and Li three options: to stay single, to marry a less desirable Protestant husband in compliance with church instructions, or to illicitly marry a non-Protestant husband.

Marriage is a very sensitive and important issue for people in contemporary Xiamen. Apart from Protestant churches, young people in Xiamen are often deeply influenced by their parents when it comes to mate selection. In Fujian and Shaanxi, anthropologists Halskov Hansen and Pang (2010) found that

individualism among the young people we studied – reflected in their life choices, behaviour and personal narratives of freedom, free love and independence – remains entangled with their perceptions of the family as a collective of indisputable economic, social and emotional importance. The individualism they exhibited was to a large extent indistinguishable from their concern with collective family interests. Each person needed to find an appropriate partner, but the process involved negotiations with family, and broader family interests were taken seriously into account. Much was done on both sides – parents and children – to avoid conflict, and young people were often willing to abandon a partner if the relationship could not fulfill the common interests of the family.


Now that many One Child Policy children have come of age, parents have only one child (in urban areas) or two children (in rural areas) to provide them with grandchildren and elderly care. They are very concerned about the issue of a "proper" match for their child, since much depends on the reliability, fertility, and financial success of the spouse.\(^\text{10}\) The question posed by Protestant marriage rules is thus whose wishes to obey; the church's, the parents', or one's own. Those who want to stay within church-designed boundaries, it seems, must surrender their individual happiness as well as their parents' wishes in favor of the religious community's integrity. Cai and Li, looking to please both their families and the

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\(^{10}\) According to gender studies scholar Lucetta Kam (2012), heterosexual marriage is considered the only natural and acceptable form of marriage by the overwhelming share of the Chinese population, as well as a responsibility of filial children.
church, as well as to secure marital happiness for themselves, thus stood before a complex challenge as time was running out for both of them to find a spouse.

Their challenge is insightful for the current thesis because it illustrates the field of tension in which pluriprax households in contemporary China are embedded. This chapter illustrates that field of tension through an analysis of wedding rituals enacted by couples in which the bride has converted to Protestant Christianity and the husband is a practitioner of popular religion. I deploy the term "religious heterogamy" to speak about the formation of pluriprax households through marriage. Many Protestant women in contemporary Southern Fujian (have to) marry non-Christian men. Such weddings are inherently problematic because local church communities forbid, among other things, veneration of the bride and groom's ancestors, a key part of Southern Fujian weddings, while requiring church members to take an oath in front of the church community and God. Although a tension between individual and communal needs is inherent to rituals in order to channel differences and conflicts between ritualists (Hüsken and Neubert 2012; Seligman et al 2008), the conflicting ritual obligations of pluriprax households imply that ritualists cannot agree on the shared behaviors that would provide a shared arena to their differences. How do Protestant brides and non-Protestant grooms in Southern Fujian form households despite their conflicting ritual obligations?

Before turning to two extensive case studies that demonstrate how people enact such weddings in Southern Fujian, the chapter theorizes the concept of boundaries as deployed of late in the social sciences, and more specifically "ritual boundaries." After all, conflicting ritual obligations exist because of specific rules (e.g. to venerate ancestors on given days; to abstain from superstition; to fast on certain days; to wear certain clothing) that are understood by scholars to mark the "boundaries" of communities, whether kinship-based, caste-based, ethnicity-based, or religion-based. The concept of boundaries deserves specific attention in this chapter because it is both a metaphor that is rarely acknowledged as such by scholars, as well as central to theorizing the challenges people face with regard to forming pluriprax households in contemporary Southern Fujian.

Addressing ritual boundaries in the context of the individualization of contemporary Chinese society, the chapter asks to what extent Chinese individuals are confined in their partner choice and wedding rituals by household and community leaders. If individuals were strictly confined by such communal boundaries, then we might question to what extent they have been empowered, and ultimately question how relevant
"individualization" is in the context of Southern Fujian. The chapter provides ethnographic examples of how Protestant brides went about directly disobeying their church ministers by marrying non-Protestant men and venerating their ancestors. Their illicit ritual behavior (enacted with impunity) demonstrates the permeability of Protestant ritual boundaries in Southern Fujian and the empowerment of individual Protestants in relation to the ritual community of the church, adding a new dimension to the individualization thesis of Yan Yunxiang (2009) and subsequent authors.

**The ritual boundaries of Chinese Protestantism**

In Western sociology, it has long been commonplace to think about "religions" or "churches" as entities with more or less clear social, ritual, and theological boundaries. Émile Durkheim's (1912 / 1976) famous definition of religion sums up Western ideas about the boundaries of religious communities: "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (47). Although on a practice level a degree of flexibility may exist between Western-style religious communities, implicit or explicit rules mark off Catholics from Protestants, Jews, Muslims and people of different or no religious affiliation.

The success of the concept of "boundaries" in penetrating anthropological and sociological discourse seems to lie in Fredrik Barth’s (1969) seminal *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Barth not so much invented the concept of boundaries as he drew attention to the ways differences between groups were constructed (rather than being primordial). This approach proved hugely influential because it highlighted the flexibility and situationality of commonly accepted "differences" between groups of people. According to Peter Beyer (2003), "boundaries are the very stuff of social structures and human knowledge: We make distinctions and thereby create ordered worlds" (46).

What many scholars in the humanities and social sciences seem to have forgotten is that like the identity labels of Barth's *Ethnic Groups*, their own deployment of the concept of "boundaries" is also metaphoric. Metaphors are used to denote complex emotions, phenomena, or processes in a single word or phrase, often with a strong visual potential. "A storm in a teacup" and "the lion's share" are such obvious metaphors. Most metaphors we use in everyday speech are less obvious: to fire (someone), to block (an e-mail account), (a
machine) works, a landslide (victory). Some metaphors have become so entrenched in thought and speech that people do not recognize them as metaphors (Grimes 2014, 156).

One such "forgotten" metaphor is the concept of boundary or boundaries. I deploy this concept to theorize how communal rules in Southern Fujian churches "work" (to use that metaphor). These rules cannot be seen or touched, although they are sometimes written down (see the "funeral guidelines" in chapter 3). They are complex, historically contingent codes of conduct that may remind us of walls, fences, or other barriers that restrict movement. Protestants in Southern Fujian who ignore their church's code of conduct may be called on to "repent," "refrain" from sinning again, and "return" to the ways of the community. This emphasis on returning suggests that a line has been illicitly crossed or a distance illicitly created between the individual(s) and the community.

Michael Herzfeld (2005) treats identity labels, in particular national identity labels, as "an elaborate metaphor" (113). "I am Chinese" or "I am a Protestant," in Herzfeld's line of reasoning is a metaphor for saying I consider myself part of an "imagined community" which calls itself "the Chinese" or "the Christians." According to Herzfeld it is hardly surprising that nationalist ideologies should resort frequently and inventively to metaphor, or, conversely, that they should be hostile to the idea that metaphor is central to their discourse. — Herzfeld 2005, 115.

The same argument can be made with regard to the metaphorical nature of religious identity labels and the imaginary boundaries such labels construct.

"Boundary" as a metaphor used by scholarly observers (rather than by non-scholarly practitioners), denotes the complex demarcation between proper and improper behavior for Protestants in Southern Fujian. The simplicity of this metaphor, however, is also its major weakness. Scholars often deploy it as apparently precise and self-explanatory, although it is far from being either. Seligman and colleagues (2008), for example, state:

Ritual both posits boundaries and allows the move between boundaries. By recognizing limits, ritual provides as well the vehicle for transcending them. (...) Ritual, then, seems a useful area to explore because its very recognition of boundaries may also provide a way of negotiating them with a minimum of violence.
Granted that theirs is a theoretical treatise that does not attempt to focus on one type of rituals among a specific group of people, their use of the boundary metaphor rather obscures than reveals the precise workings of ritual. For they depict "boundaries" as both permeable (suggesting metaphorical structures with holes or ladders that can aid in "transcending" or "moving between") and negotiable (suggesting an agreement or understanding of some sort).

For greater clarity, I analyze the rules and obligations pertinent to Protestants in Southern Fujian as a metaphorical boundary with three relevant parameters: 1) history (why and by whom was the boundary devised?), 2) function (what or whom does the boundary serve today?), and 3) permeability (can people cross the boundary, and if so at what cost?). In different socio-cultural contexts, boundaries can be radically different in terms of their history, function, and permeability. In this section I will identify these three parameters of the boundary of Chinese Protestantism in order to deploy this metaphor in a way that enhances a more precise understanding. Moreover, since metaphors are almost per definition tools for visualizing abstract ideas, the concluding section of the chapter will propose ways to visualize the ritual boundaries of two Protestant church communities in Xiamen.11

Following the three designated parameters, let us first turn to the history of Chinese Protestantism's ritual boundary. Chinese religious history offers a completely different take on what Western observers have come to understand as boundaries. Long before the invention of "religion" and "superstition" as useful categories, Chinese society has had more or less rigid social boundaries to mark different communities. Ancestral lineages in Southern Fujian, for example, have important social boundaries which can only be crossed through marriage or adoption (perhaps also through reincarnation). Yuxian's hometown in Zhangzhou (see Introduction and Chapter 4), for example, consisted of men from the same lineage, all surnamed Chen, and not only would it be difficult (or impossible) to "enter" the

11 In the following two chapters (in particular Chapter 4) I will also look at the rules and obligations pertinent to being a member of an ancestral lineage in Southern Fujian. But when it comes to forming plurirax households, which is the overarching theme of this chapter and this section of the thesis, Protestant boundaries against religious heterogamy and superstition were the most pertinent to my research participants.
lineage by any other way than marriage or adoption, it is also quite problematic to "exit" (unless as a bride).

In contrast to bounded social identities, the idea of a bounded religious identity has only recently become part of mainstream Chinese thought. Adam Yuet Chau (2011) has argued that the Chinese religious landscape has historically been marked by a condition he calls "ritual polytropy," where practitioners enlisted ritual service providers from different traditions, monasteries, or temples in order to heighten the "efficacy" of, in Chau's example, the funerary rites conducted for a deceased from a wealthy family. Highly salient local cults have long drawn from symbols and clergy of the so-called Three Teachings (Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism), and grassroots practitioners were unconcerned with theological arguments that would give precedence of one over the others. Chinese people generally do not think of their Gods, saints, or bodhisattva's as "jealous" or as having exclusive authority over practitioners' ritual lives.

Although communities of Muslims, Jews, and Catholics have existed in China for centuries, ritual boundaries have only recently become a truly widespread phenomenon in China, as late Qing and early Republican reformers sought to establish the categories of "religion" and "superstition" to sanction or outlaw certain practices for the benefit of the modern nation-state. The Republican and Communist states officially recognized five distinct "religions" (Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism) while all other types of practice risked receiving the label of "superstition" (Goossaert and Palmer 2011). This instilled in twentieth century Chinese people a sense that various teachings, traditions, and clergy can be mutually exclusive. It established that laypersons can choose to identify with one "religion" but not another by following an exclusive set of rules and obligations. In other words, modern China saw the birth of "religions" as entities with certain boundaries.

As Ryan Dunch (2001) demonstrates, late nineteenth and early twentieth century Protestants in Fujian's provincial capital of Fuzhou were fervent supporters of the idea of an exclusive religious identity. They were also closely involved in shaping modern China by supporting Western-style education, medicine, and political reforms. Thus they were able to frame their exclusivist ritual boundaries in terms of serving national interests and promoting civilized citizenship. It is no coincidence that Chinese ideas about "superstition," pertinent to this very day, resonate with Protestant understandings of "idolatry." People engaging in superstition in both mainland Republican and Communist China would go on
to be persecuted, penalized, and marginalized for many decades.

The history of Chinese Protestantism's ritual boundary is thus closely tied to the history of modern China. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Protestants were a small yet powerful, influential group in Chinese society, backed by foreign armies, diplomats, and missionaries. Ordained ministers and foreign missionaries were powerful figures who could delay a convert's baptism for years just to make sure that no trace of "superstition" remained in their lives and minds (Dunch 2001, White 2011). Thus they were able to lay the foundation for a highly exclusivist understanding of Protestantism among the population, with an all but impermeable ritual boundary. Abstention (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4) became a hallmark of Chinese Protestants, for whom bible study, prayer, and frequenting church services (standard ways of practicing Protestantism in Western societies) was often less important than refusing to participate in "superstitious" ancestral rites or eating foods with animal blood. Indeed, in the course of my fieldwork I met numerous people for whom abstention from superstition formed the only observable signifier of their Protestant religious identity.

But after the Communist Liberation of 1949, Protestants quickly lost their privileged position in Chinese society, becoming instead associated with imperialism and the oppression of the working classes. Church leaders were forced to sign confessions, drafted into the state-monitored Three Self Patriotic Movement, or sent to labor camps if they refused to cooperate. The virtual disappearance of Protestant leadership and the marginalization of church communities under Mao also led to their inability to enforce their strict social and ritual boundaries on individual members. In 1949-1976 the Communist Party with its militantly atheist ideology had completely disempowered Protestant churches in China. The vignette of a Quanzhounese research participant called Zhu Enlin, now in her seventies, illustrates this well as she was looking for a Protestant husband during the Cultural Revolution.12

Since we were a Christian family, our first principle was that a believer cannot marry a non-believer. That was before the [1949 Communist] Liberation. [During the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976] it was very difficult to find a believer, so I remained

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12 I will discuss Zhu Enlin's case study in more detail in the next chapter, as her wedding arrangements made during the Cultural Revolution had certain consequences for her husband's funeral during my stay in Xiamen.
unmarried for a long time. But I'm an only child, I couldn't stay unmarried. I couldn't find [a husband], everybody was afraid, afraid of us Christians, they didn't dare [to marry me]. (...) I had been matched with the son of a pastor in Hui'an, my mother was on very good terms with this pastor. My mother said that since we went to school together in Hui'An, the two of us were well matched. But after the start of the Cultural Revolution, everybody was scattered. The main problem was that they were scared, they didn't dare. At that time there were also good families, all believers, but they didn't dare. And many non-believers said that us Christians, we would be accused of many things, so they didn't dare, especially because of my father in Singapore, it was very difficult. (...) Our families have been neighbors for a long time. I live here, he lives there. His father's father's father and further back, the relationship has always been good, always good friends. (...) My husband's father, they didn't believe, and my mother was a believer. So she informed him, saying we are believers, and when he came to propose the marriage he said there was no need to refuse. At that time there were no churches, there was nothing, and he said, perhaps later we can join you in believing. When he said this, my mother became convinced because at that time it was impossible for a Christian to find another believer.

— Interview, November 1, 2014.

Religious heterogamy for Zhu Enlin was not desirable but unavoidable during the Cultural Revolution, as Protestant boundaries were temporarily dissolved under the pressures of militant atheism. After the Cultural Revolution, the power of Protestant ministers in Southern Fujian to enforce rules and obligations did not recover to their pre-Communist level. Although churches were once more allowed to operate after 1978, it seems they do so under a kind of self-imposed tolerance. Not only do they still face a powerful state opposed to "religious fanaticism," Protestant churches in China find themselves in a society where individuals empowered in the domestic sphere and empowered with regard to socio-economic institutions, do not necessarily conform to the rules and obligations propagated by religious leaders. Two case studies below will discuss the contemporary situation of Protestant ritual boundaries in Southern Fujian in more detail.

Having sketched a brief history of the Protestant ritual boundary in China, let us turn to its functions. Put simply, the function of various rules and obligations for Chinese Protestants is to make sure that converts live as good Christians, preserving purity and avoiding sin. Some rules are written down (e.g. see Appendix C. for a list of "Funeral
Guidelines of a Registered Church in Xiamen”), and some are transmitted orally during sermons or other church activities. Some rules are based on biblical passages (e.g. not to worship other Gods than Jehovah; not to curse; not to lie), while others are contemporary, more or less personalized interpretations of what good Christian behavior is (e.g. not to smoke or drink alcohol; not to disobey parents; to attend church every week; to read from the Bible at home). Many of the rules and obligations propagated by Protestant leaders in Southern Fujian center on the issue of purity — not to inter-marry with non-believers; not to join in their rituals; not to worship their Gods; not to engage in sexual activity before marriage or in homosexual activity; not to eat foods containing animal blood; not to smoke or to consume alcohol. Curiously, I rarely observed the so-called Ten Commandments from the bible book of Exodus being read out during church services to promote purity, and none of my research participants ever alluded directly to the Ten Commandments or other biblical instructions with regard to purity. But in the course of my fieldwork I sat through several sermons devoted entirely to the "problem" of legalizing homosexual marriage, as had recently happened in the United States (still an important point of reference as a "Christian country" for many Chinese Protestants). Homosexuality, although it is very much marginalized in contemporary Chinese society at large and virtually non-existent within Minnan church communities as far as I am aware, was a topic of great concern and indignation for my Protestants interlocutors, about which as a Western researcher I was asked many questions during fieldwork. In other words, Protestants in Southern Fujian were deeply concerned with purity and living a life without sin.

This also serves to distinguish "believers" (xintu) from "non-believers" (fei xintu) and is ritualized through baptism — sprinkling in registered churches and submersion in most mainstream non-registered churches. The baptized address each other quite consistently as "sister" (zimei) and "brother" (dixiong), which embeds the boundary between insiders and outsiders in everyday speech. Those who are good at obeying Protestant rules and obligations, and have the verbal skills to share about their trials and tribulations during communal gatherings, are considered as "good Christians" and good examples for other, "weaker" believers to follow. In other words, those who stay neatly within designated boundaries can count on attaining a higher status in the church community. On the other hand, those who trespass ritual boundaries, in particular with regard to enacting superstitious practices and venerating non-Christian Gods or ancestors
are said to face serious consequences, including divine punishment and possession by evil spirits.

Regarding permeability, what is at stake for Protestants who cross this boundary? In particular, what is at stake for young Protestant women who cross this boundary by marrying non-Protestant men? The example of Cai and Li, above, shows that finding a Christian spouse can be considered by young Protestants as a matter of 'trusting in the Lord Jesus' (xinkao zhuyesu) and 'begging for God's guidance' (kenqiu shangdide dailing) in the search. This spiritual component in mate selection solidifies the boundary. Those marrying non-Christians may be considered undevout, not trusting God enough, and not praying enough. One case study in this chapter demonstrates that a strategy of Protestant women in Xiamen is to avoid church temporarily before getting married to a non-Christian man, for fear of verbal denunciation from fellow believers. But I have not heard of women actually being marginalized in the church community for marrying a non-Christian husband, which is telling about the permeability of this boundary.

The rules for weddings are simple: only select couples can hold a wedding inside the church building (due to the focus on purity), and during ceremonies in their hometowns Protestants must adhere by the central principle of avoiding superstition and idol worship. Most churches in Xiamen reserve the privilege of conducting a wedding in the church building for couples who did not cohabit before marriage and have not engaged in premarital sex. But if the couple is pregnant or cohabits before the wedding, then a minister and other church members can go to the wedding banquet to hold a ceremony featuring a sermon, prayer, and singing for the couple, but their wedding ceremony cannot be held in the church. Moreover, several evangelical "family churches" I visited, only allow couples to get married in the church building if both the bride and groom have been baptized. Some registered churches in Xiamen are more lenient, conducting church weddings if either the bride or the groom has been baptized.

Several ministers in Xiamen have acknowledged to me during talks and interviews that while they think religious heterogamy is unbiblical, it is an opportunity to draw non-Christian spouses to church. Before conducting the ceremony, they invite the couple to participate in a pre-marital course about Christianity. Such courses are aimed in the first place at imbuing the non-Christian spouse with a positive view of Protestantism, and in the second place at bringing the non-Christian spouse into a trajectory toward Christian baptism. I believe that fears of losing members, and of members being too closely involved
with non-Christian social circles through their spouses, is the main reason ministers stigmatize religious heterogamy, and warn the congregation that it is unbiblical to get 'unequally yoked.'

Through the parameters of history, function, and permeability, we can thus analyze the ritual boundary established by Protestants in Southern Fujian with greater clarity. The following two case studies, however, demonstrate that Protestant women in Southern Fujian are not captives in a ritual system with rigid boundaries. They fall in love with non-Christian men regardless of the rules; they are empowered to marry when and where they please; and they can perfectly justify their own choices with regard to their illicit ritual behavior on their wedding days. Protestant community leaders, in turn, can do little to set them straight. Although I have several case studies of religious heterogamy among my research population, I selected these two because I had a chance to interact with both the Protestant and the non-Protestant spouse on multiple occasions. I had a chance to visit them in their homes and to take short trips with them in Southern Fujian, therefore these two case studies are both rich in ethnographic detail. They show how young female converts cross the ritual boundaries of a Three Self and a family church in Xiamen in the broader context of the individualization of Chinese society.
Case study 1: A romantic wedding in defiance of parents and church leaders

The protagonists
I met Ms Tang Mei and Mr Liang Yu in an unregistered Protestant "family church" I will call New Life Church in Xiamen in November 2014. New Life is a relatively small community of around eighty young people aged between twenty and forty, set up by their minister eight years prior. The character of the services is highly evangelical, without formal liturgies, and the content of the sermons and songs generally focus on Jesus' love for humanity. A band of two or more singers, guitar, drums, bass guitar, and piano accompanies the worship, during which attendants frequently clap and raise their hands in praise.

The church secretary introduced me to Mei and Yu after I had indicated to her that I would like to speak to young people who had recently gotten married or were planning to get married. Mei and I exchanged phone numbers and soon the three of us arranged to meet at a well-known American coffee franchise near their home in one of the modern high-rise areas of Xiamen Island. I made sure we sat down in a corner of the venue where we would not be easily overheard, in case they had sensitive details to share (which they did). Mei and Yu were both highly intelligent and sociable, understanding immediately what I was researching and why. After that first talk in November 2014, we met several more times at our respective homes; in cafe's; in New Life church; on a mountain hike; and a tea tasting of famous Fujian teas. We also took a trip to Yu's hometown in nearby Quanzhou during which we visited his parents; two temples; and the two homes in which he had grown up.

A busy day for wedding photographers on the beach in Xiamen
On these occasions I was able to observe their interactions as a couple, with family, friends, and fellow church members.

Mei and Yu rented an apartment in one of the city's fashionable, high-rise neighborhoods and did not own one. Yu's parents, whom I got to visit the month after our first talk, were poor peasants who spoke Quanzhou Hokkien but they barely spoke Mandarin. Having visited them in their hometown in rural Quanzhou, I was not surprised that Yu's parents could not afford to buy an urban apartment for their son. Our visit was brief, too brief perhaps, and it seemed to me that Yu was embarrassed by his parents' poverty and seeming inability to communicate with me in Mandarin. As promised, however, Yu showed me around in his hometown, partly deserted and very quiet throughout the year like many villages in Southern Fujian. I felt at the time that he had become somewhat estranged from his parents (which was partly confirmed during my later talks with Yu), although I was unable to find out exactly why. Yu explicitly and profusely prided himself to me on fully being his "own man," independent from traditional obligations and with an open view to discovering the world.

Despite his humble origins, in the context of Chinese market reforms Yu had been able to achieve a degree of financial security due to his personal skills as a sales expert. He had not been particularly successful in school (he held a degree from a low-profile local college) but he had managed to find middle class jobs (he switched jobs during my stay in Xiamen), both of which involved business-to-business and business-to-consumer sales. Far from the days of collective labor, the ideal Chinese citizen today is the entrepreneur able to build up a network of strategic personal connections (guanxi). Yu was good at this; he was both a pleasant conversationalist and an entertaining host. He was fond of cars and owned a red, American sports car himself. He had adorned the rear window with a sticker that read (in English, a language he had not mastered) "To annihilate and to destroy." He liked to play loud American metal music while driving, which gave him a sense of freedom and adventure. In short, Yu had been able to carve out a middle class lifestyle in Xiamen thanks to his hard work and personal charm.

This was emphasized all the more by his marriage to Tang Mei, who held a degree in Commercial Law, was a Communist Party member, and who had at a young age entered civil service in her native Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang some 4,300 kilometers northwest of Xiamen. Considering the key importance of socio-economic status for mate selection in contemporary China, Mei would normally be "out of his league," but she had
apparently fallen for Liang Yu's charms without regard for his status or peasant background.

*The wedding: part I.*

The romance between Mei and Yu started in the spring of 2012 in the restive northwestern province of Xinjiang, where they met through a mutual friend. Yu was there on a business trip for a kitchen utensils manufacturer. Mei was born and raised in Urumqi and working as a civil servant at a court house. Yu recalls:

> When we were deciding to get married, [the fact that I don't believe in Christianity] was something that could easily cause friction. I am not someone who necessarily wants to marry a Buddhist or a Christian, but for her to find a Christian counterpart was of great concern. In Christianity you cannot marry with non-believers, with outsiders.
> — Interview, 24 November 2014

Seven years earlier, Mei had started attending the Sunday services and youth activities of a Protestant church in Urumqi, registered with the state-endorsed Three Self Patriotic Movement. Her baptism had taken place in secret, because as a Communist Party member and civil servant she was not allowed to practice a religion. Having fallen in love with a non-Christian man, the community Mei had risked her job for, now placed constraints on her partner choice.

> Mei: In Christianity in Holland, if you are a Christian, and your wife is not, can you get married?
> Bram: Some pastors would oppose this, but not all.
> Yu: In China it's like this too, for example when we got married, we wanted to get married in a church, and some churches didn't allow us to hold the ceremony there.
> Mei: Actually there is a church near his home [in rural Quanzhou], and we went there to ask if we could hold a ceremony there. He is not a believer, but I am, still it was only possible if both of us were baptized.
> Yu: Xiamen is a more open-minded city. So this one church allowed it, under the condition that I would follow a pre-marriage course, meaning I would take a course about the most basic aspects of Christianity. And then we could [hold the wedding ceremony] in that church. — Interview, 24 November 2014
The regulation of Protestant marriages in Southern Fujian varies from church to church and from place to place, and Yu is correct that Xiamenese churches are more lenient than churches elsewhere in the region. Several ministers told me during private conversations that they always kept their eyes open for good matches among their flock (much like professional match makers), but in most cases they were unable to help young women with university degrees to find a suitable match. The existence and enforcement of rules to prevent religious heterogamy in many churches across the region resonates with what anthropologist Amporn Marddent (2009) found among Muslims in contemporary Thailand.

The religious authorities have made it obligatory for the non-Muslim partner, who plans to marry a Muslim and who must therefore convert, to have basic knowledge of Islam before marriage. (...) Muslim committee members will not conduct funeral or other merit-making ceremonies for the non-converts and their family members. Consequently, this makes it obligatory for the non-Muslim partner to have a basic knowledge of Islam before marriage.

— Marddent 2009, 195.

After Yu had completed the mandatory course, they got married in Xiamen in May 2013 in a big Three Self church numbering over five-thousand members. Several non-Christian relatives of Yu's had made the trip to Xiamen from nearby Quanzhou to attend the church ceremony, as well as some colleagues and fellow participants from the pre-marriage course about Christianity. The fact that non-Protestant relatives entered the church building to join the Christian ceremony featuring prayer and other Christian rituals, set the tone for the rest of the wedding, which would take place in Yu's hometown. Participants would show flexibility to successfully enact the ceremonies together despite their different ritual preferences.

Mei and Yu entered the church building wearing a white wedding dress and a three-piece suit respectively. A minister greeted them and directed a choir to sing several songs. After a brief sermon about the importance of Christian faith for a strong marriage, Yu and Mei exchanged rings, accepted a new bible from a church worker, and left the building again as confetti was shot in the air and the attendants, only around thirty people,
clapped for the newlywed couple. On that same day, Yu's father would host relatives and friends at a wedding banquet in their hometown, an occasion to which I will return shortly.

Strikingly, the couple did not hold any kind of ceremony or banquet in Tang Mei's hometown Urumqi. Despite the enormous geographical distance between the groom's and the bride's hometowns, a banquet customarily has to be held in honor of the bride in her hometown following the banquet in the groom's hometown (see description of standard Chinese wedding procedures below). How else do parents mark their daughter's successful marriage in their native place community? But Mei had run into an acrimonious conflict with her parents over the union with Liang Yu. Mei was a bright mind and an overachiever; she had been among just a handful of candidates who passed the extremely selective Chinese civil service examination in Urumqi out of several thousand examinees in 2010. She was also her parents' only child. From her parents' perspective, they had raised a highly intelligent, competent, and successful daughter. She was doing well in all respects, and had a bright future ahead of her, a future in which she would also have to care for her parents in their old age. But she had romantically, and from her parents' perspective quite selfishly, eloped with Liang Yu, a son of peasants living thousands of miles south in a completely different cultural setting.

Not only did Mei's father disapprove of this union, he was deeply enraged and had refused to speak a single word to Mei for a full six months after her departure to Xiamen. Clearly, he would not be hosting a wedding banquet for the couple, although he was unable to do much else (he would still depend on his daughter's financial care in his old age). Eventually, during Spring Festival 2016, Mei's parents made peace with the couple, who visited Urumqi together, loaded with presents. Mei confided in me that Yu, with his personal charm and customary confidence, had fully conquered her mother's heart, and had managed to put her father at ease as well — the salesman at work.

This illustrates how in the context of the individualization of contemporary Chinese society, daughters are empowered in the domestic sphere to make their own, sometimes deeply contested life choices. With their university degrees and successful careers they are able to make their own plans for life, to "go out and see the world" on their own terms. Family and parents are still important, and in this case Mei had been greatly relieved when a degree of peace had been restored with her parents. But the interests of parents are now

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13 This account of the wedding ceremony was shared verbally by Mei and Yu on 29 January, 2015. It closely resembles my own observation of Protestant wedding ceremonies in Southern Fujian.
generally second to one's own, and kinship is valued insofar as it can support the individual's aspirations and pursuit of happiness.

Changing wedding rituals in modern China

These changes, collectively referred to by Yan Yunxiang and subsequent authors as the individualization of Chinese society, are reflected in contemporary wedding rituals. With regard to Taiwanese marriage practices in 1845-1945, anthropologists Arthur Wolf and Chieh-shan Huang (1980) state:

[T]he authority for arranging marriages was vested exclusively in the hands of the senior generation. This was only one manifestation of a hierarchical kinship system in which seniors had the right to arrange the lives of juniors with reference to the best interests of the family. (...) In essence, the native view was that children existed for the sake of their parents. If a young man died before his father, the father was entitled to beat his son's coffin, the explanation being that the beating "punished the son for being so unfilial as to die and leave his parents alone." — Wolf and Huang 1980, 70-71.

Although the ultimate decision for a child's choice of spouse rested with the father, in practice it was the mother or another female of the older generation who arranged the match with another household (Wolf and Huang 1980, 71). A matchmaker was often hired to check whether the prospective bride and groom's "eight astrological birth characters" (shengchen bazi) matched well, and if not, what kind of rituals could alleviate the problem. The individual spouses had little say in the whole procedure, as marriage was not considered a romantic affair with the goal of becoming "happy," but a way for parents to manage the proper transfer of daughters and to safeguard their own ancestral lineage by bringing wives into their households for their sons.

Late imperial and Republican virilocal "major weddings" (not involving concubines or under-age minors) had the following elements:

- Betrothal ceremony at the bride's household, with gifts from the groom's household (dinghun)^14

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^14 I provided Chinese terms in Pinyin when I could find them from the sources I studied, which include Rawski (1991), Chun (1912), Wolf and Huang (1980), Ahern (1974), and Kipnis (1997).
• Sending back part of the betrothal gifts to the groom's household as a sign of gratitude
• Sending out wedding invitations to relatives and friends
• Three days before the wedding, sending the bride's dowry (mainly clothes and furniture) to her new household
• On the wedding day, arrival of the bridal procession at her household. Procession members were organized by the groom's family and treated to a banquet upon arrival at the bride's.
• After surrendering her customary resistance, the bride parts from her parents, household Gods, and ancestors (songding)
• The bride "exits the door" (chumen)
• The procession members carry the bride on a sedan chair or palanquin
• The bride enters the door of her new household (jinmen), which has been decorated with auspicious wedding couplets
• Ritual introduction of the bride to her groom's parents, his ancestors, and the groom himself
• The groom lifts his bride's veil and they toast wine in their nuptial chambers
• The bride changes into a different gown and serves tea to the guests during the banquet
• Village youths mock the bride throughout the evening and pressure her into giving sweets or other small gifts (naofang)
• After three days, the bride visits her old household and parents as a guest (zuoke).
• The bride's parents host a banquet in honor of their son-in-law

Chinese modernizers in the early twentieth century, however, derided such practices, which they deemed as discriminatory and humiliating toward brides. A young Mao Zedong, before becoming the most influential personality of modern China, dedicated no fewer than nine newspaper articles arguing for far-reaching changes to China's wedding customs. In one article titled "The Problem of Superstition in Marriage" (November 28, 1919), Mao gave his own overview of the structure of Chinese weddings in those days:

The theory that “marriage is determined by fate” is an overarching superstition, to which many other small superstitions are appended:

1) “Matching the Eight Characters.” When arranging for the marriages of their sons and daughters, it is not that Chinese parents are utterly unselective. On the contrary, they waste a lot of effort worrying about the selection of a mate for their sons and daughters. Their criteria for selecting, however, are not looks or disposition or health or learning or age, but rather only whether or not the "eight characters” match. (…)

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2) “Registering the Dates.” After the eight characters are matched, the second step in the marriage procedure is “Registering the Dates,” in which the eight characters of both the man and the woman are written down in the Book of Dates in the presence of “the illustrious spirits.” Incense is burned and prayers are invoked that the couple may “live together to a ripe old age.” (...) 

3) “Selecting an Auspicious Day.” After registering the dates, and the exchange of presents, it is necessary to select a lucky day. It must be a day of no “evil spirits” or “taboos.” The almanac is commonly consulted for “suitable” and “impropitious” days. Next, a fortune-teller is asked to calculate the position of the stars. Then the Buddha’s permission is asked. (...) 

4) “Sending the Sedan Chair.” This is even more stupid. There is some tale to the effect that when King Zhou of the Shang dynasty was receiving his concubine, Daji, a fox-spirit changed places with her during the journey. Ever since, whenever a bride is on the way to her groom’s house, it is feared that she might become a second Daji. First, therefore, a heavy closed sedan chair must be used; second, its door must be locked tightly; and third, the “god of good luck” is entreated to offer proper protection. (...) 

5) “Greeting the God of Good Luck.” Seated in the dark inside a sealed sedan chair, a bride is already depressed, but when she arrives at the bridegroom’s house and the sedan chair is set down, she must also calmly greet the “god of good luck,” requesting him to “ward off unlucky influences.” (...) 

6) “Worshiping Heaven and Earth.” Worshiping heaven and earth means being presented to the ancestors. It is said that when a new bride is added to a household it is necessary to ask the ancestors to protect and assist in “giving birth to many heirs,” so that “abundant descendants may glorify the ancestors.” In the West, they do not report to their ancestors, but they do thank some God, and say that the love of the bride and groom is a gift from God, and their marriage relationship has been put together by God. These superstitions are really just so many cheap tricks of marriage, and have no other purpose than to be the rope that tightly binds a man and woman together. — Mao 1992, 447-449.

As a primary school teacher and political commentator in his twenties, Mao wrote in the Changsha Daily Dagongbao in 1919 about the suicide of a young bride, who had been forced to marry an elderly widower. Mao could personally relate to this story, because as a young teenager he too had been forced to marry, although he quite characteristically resisted paternal authority, and with success. His article series details the force used by
Zhao's parents to set her straight, and her subsequent suicide in the wedding palanquin (often called a sedan chair in the anglophone literature). Miss Zhao had slit her own throat with a knife.

Mao's first article in this series, "Commentary on the Suicide of Miss Zhao," was published on November 16, 1919. Other articles in the series, carrying such titles as "The Question of Reforming the Marriage System" (November 19, 1919) and "Smash the Matchmaker System" (November 27, 1919) proposed changes to Chinese marital practices and called on readers to contribute articles with fresh ideas for reform. In "The Question of Miss Zhao's Personality" (November 18, 1919) Mao wrote:

In the West, the free will of children is not affected by the parents. In the Western family organization, father and mother recognize the free will of their sons and daughters. Not so in China. The commands of the parent and the will of the child are not at all on an equal footing. The parents of Miss Zhao very clearly forced her to love someone she did not want to love. No freedom of will was recognized at all. (...) This is called "direct rape." — Mao 1992, 423.

Important in these early articles is that Mao took "the West" and "Western family organization" as an example of how Chinese marriages should be conducted. Mao was clearly concerned with liberating the individual from the clutches of traditional collective life. In his later years, of course, Mao would utterly reject "the West" and the perceived evils of Western capitalism. His rule even oversaw the re-appropriation of weddings by a collective, although this time it was the state-run work units and collective farms that were in charge, rather than the family.

For example, Zhu Enlin, a research participant who got married during the Cultural Revolution and whom I cited in the introduction to this chapter, conducted her "wedding" all but completely stripped of rituals. Having received their marriage certificate from the local authorities in rural Quanzhou, Zhu Enlin and her groom sat down with their parents for a simple meal of rice, vegetables, and pork. Despite bride and groom's extensive lineage networks in their hometown, on their wedding day they could only host four guests. According to Zhu, good food was scarce and ritual behavior tightly controlled. She recalled:
We didn't have a wedding ceremony. … We were very poor. At that time we were very poor. We didn't get anything new, you have a blanket in the dormitory, I have a blanket here, we sowed them together and got married. We got nothing new, [we were] so poor. … We made our own cabinet with wood and nails, so we could put our books together [laughs]. At that time food was a problem, and it was impossible to buy new things like furniture. — Interview, November 1, 2014

Zhu's wedding featured no religious elements such as incense for ancestors, prayer to the Christian God, bows to Heaven and Earth, or any ritual service providers. Neither did they perform any 'traditional' customs such as a bridal procession, serving tea to the couple's parents, offering gifts of sweet foods and fruits to the bride's family, or holding a banquet for kin and neighbors. Such was the impact of Mao's reforms on the weddings of ordinary Chinese people. New policies initiated after Mao's death in 1976 and Deng Xiaoping's rise to power in 1978, however, increasingly granted Chinese individuals freedom from collective institutions, albeit in limited areas such as consumption, work, religion and ritual, as well as partner choice (not political or artistic self-expression, nor full freedom of movement).

In contemporary Xiamen, Protestant ceremonies mark but one stage of a broader structure of contemporary urban weddings. Here we can clearly see the far-reaching changes undergone by Chinese weddings in the modern era. The structure of contemporary urban weddings is roughly as follows:

- Marriage proposal (qiuhun)
- Choosing a wedding date (tiao rizi)
- Registering the marriage and obtaining a certificate from the civil authorities (dengji)
- Taking wedding photographs in various costumes (pai hunshazhao)
- Picking up the bride in her white gown on the wedding day (jieqin)
- Serving tea to the parents of the bride and groom (jingcha)
- Protestant church ceremony, if applicable15 (No fixed Chinese term. May take place weeks or months before the banquet, but always after registering the marriage with the authorities)
- The bride changes into a tight, red dress associated with Manchu men of Northeast China and adapted for women in Shanghai in the 1920s (qipao)

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15 A Protestant ceremony, as mentioned above, is only for (partly) Protestant couples.
• Hosting a banquet at a fancy restaurant (qingke)
• Performing a variation of the "three bows" (Heaven and Earth, parents, and each other) on a stage in the restaurant, if applicable\(^\text{16}\) (sanbai)
• Toasting with the guests (jingjiu)
• Honeymoon (miyue)

Marriage proposals in contemporary Xiamen may feature the prospective groom bending the knee for his prospective wife. It may be marked with a romantic dinner and an engagement ring. This proposal-based way of deciding to get married seems to have become commonplace in urban China since the Communist Liberation, and in particular after the dissolution of the work units and introduction of liberal reforms. Permission to get married had to be granted by work unit leaders under Mao, but after Mao this became principally an individual affair. Chinese parents continue to exercise a degree of control over their children's marriage choices, but this affects migrants to a far lesser degree because their parents often live far away. The proposal-based marriage is modeled after Western romantic ideals, where the decision to get married rests with the couple and not with their parents. Despite the emphasis on love and romance, professional match makers still exist in urban China, connecting single women and men deemed compatible in terms of their socio-economic status.

Less conventional in Xiamen today, hence omitted from the above list, is the betrothal ceremony (dinghun), which in rural areas has recently become more similar to what in Europe is known as "engagement." Engagements involve the parents and other venerable relatives of the prospective bride and groom. They feature monetary exchanges or negotiations about bride price, buying an apartment for the couple, or buying furniture. Traditionally, the betrothal ceremony was highly ritualized in terms of an auspicious date, veneration of each other's ancestors, and presents brought by the male side (in particular auspicious foods) (Chun 1912). Gradually, however, engagements and marriage itself became increasingly commoditized and monetized. In rural Southern Fujian, for example, a groom's parents may be required to pay a bride price of around 200,000 RMB (28,000 Euro). The bride's parents often use part of that money to buy a car and furniture for the

\(^{16}\) The "three bows" ritual (described in more detail in the next case study) is avoided by most Protestants in Southern Fujian.
newlyweds. But many parents in urban China consider the bride price an unnecessary relic due to the One Child Policy, as married couples are also obliged to support the wife's parents and not only the husband's. A bride's parents are compensated for the "loss" of their daughter later in life.

Still, a common requirement posed by young women and their parents in Xiamen is for the prospective groom to own an apartment. Divorced men have better chances of re-marrying than divorced women, and co-ownership of an apartment gives a daughter financial protection against being abandoned by her husband. It puts a severe financial penalty on the husband in case of a divorce. Needless to say, this requirement puts great strain on young men of modest socio-economic backgrounds, who are often simply unable to buy an urban apartment.

Aside from financial concerns, some "old locals" in Xiamen place particular emphasis on making sure that their daughter is "married off" to a proper household. Before sanctioning the match, they gather intelligence about their daughter's lover and his household. In Mandarin this is called *tan jiafeng* - to explore the customs of a household. *Tan jiafeng* may include a casual visit to the male's home before any talk of engagement, so that parents can meet and get a sense of each other's social status and personality.

The practice of picking up the bride at her parents' home (*jieqin*) on the wedding day is also reserved for residents of the nearby geographical area. Many brides in Xiamen hail from elsewhere in China, and few dare to travel to another province on their wedding day just to enact *jieqin*. Another location, for example the hotel room where her parents stay before the wedding day, is often used as an alternative. Such a location, however, lacks the presence of the household Gods and the older generation of (great-) aunts and uncles and, even more important to some, the bride's deceased ancestors. *Jieqin* is the occasion for the bride to announce to her venerable lineage members her departure to another household.
The wedding: part II.

Mei and Yu had also skipped *jieqin*, because her parents were in faraway Xinjiang province and did not attend the wedding in Fujian out of their anger over their daughter's elopement. The bride and groom arrived straight from the church in Xiamen, where Mei had changed from a white dress into a red gown (*qipao*) and had her make-up done again after the church ceremony. In the afternoon another ceremony was held in Yu's hometown in rural Quanzhou, as well as an elaborate wedding banquet to which all neighbors, relatives, and friends of the Liang family were invited.

Yu: China's wedding and funeral customs are derived from feudal religion. Since my family knew that my wife is a Christian, in order to accommodate her during the wedding, they cancelled as much content as possible.

Bram: What kind of content?

Yu: For example, if we were a traditional Southern Fujian family, basically there would be a specific period of day [*shichen*] to go out the door [*chumen*] and pick up the bride [*jieqin*]. It would be determined at what time we would have to be back at the male side's home, this time has to be decided. So you have to calculate the time, and to get a consensus on the time to come home. A fortune teller helps you to calculate this with your eight astrological birth signs [*shengchen bazi*]. (...) When entering the door, here in Southern Fujian you have to step over a fiery bowl [*kua huopen*] used for exorcism. (...)

Diners at a wedding banquet in rural Ningde, Eastern Fujian.
Mei: It means that after I step over this fiery bowl, all bad things from before are finished. When I enter the new home it has to be a good moment. Actually it's ridiculous (laughs). — Interview, 24 November 2014

Central in Yu's remark is the idea that certain "superstitious" ritual content could be "cancelled" from their wedding in rural Quanzhou. Yu and Mei had not employed a fortune teller or *fengshui* specialist to calculate how problematic or auspicious their eight astrological birth signs were. Neither did they use that data to structure the wedding in terms of temporality. Instead, they had used the now common 24-hour clock to structure the day and be on time for the wedding banquet in Quanzhou. To make such changes to traditional wedding procedures was considered by Yu and other research participants as "simplification" (*jiandanhua*) of their weddings.

*Theorizing the "simplification" of contemporary weddings*

Simplification (*jiandanhua / jianhua*) seems to be a key emic term for describing how the content of communal rituals is adjusted to accommodate both practitioners of popular religion and Protestant Christianity in Southern Fujian. To give another example, a research participant called Datai prided himself on being a "fifth-generation Christian" (meaning that one of his male ancestors converted to Protestantism in the late nineteenth century). His marriage to a "Buddhist" woman was atypical in the sense that I often found Protestant women marrying non-Protestant men, but rarely the other way around. When Datai went to pick up his bride at her parents' home, he was to enact several rituals for her living and deceased ancestors. First he was to greet his new parents-in-law by kneeling down before them and serving tea. Second, he was to eat symbolic foods with his bride — stuffed glutinous rice balls in a sweet soup (*yuanzi*), longan (*guiyuan*), and peanuts (*huasheng*) — to symbolize a satisfying marriage that would quickly produce a male heir. Third, Datai had to burn incense for his newlywed wife's deceased ancestors. While serving and consuming the symbolic tea and foods did not seem to pose a problem for Datai as a Protestant, incense has long been reviled by Chinese Protestants as a form of superstition. So his parents-in-law had to "simplify" the proceedings to accommodate Datai and ensure their daughter's marriage.

Bram: Did you burn incense for your wife's ancestors?
Datai: No, because I'm a Christian, and Christians do not burn incense. My mother-in-law (zhangmuniang) also considered this religious contradiction. If she had asked me to burn incense then I wouldn't have, right? Such a scene would have looked bad, "come burn incense," and me answering "I don't burn [incense]." That scene would have been very troubling, very ugly. So it was just her mother who spoke to their ancestors, and we didn't.

Bram: So your wife also didn't?
Datai: No, because that would have caused a difficult situation.

Bram: Before the wedding, did you discuss the issue of burning incense together?
Datai: No.

Bram: So this was something that your mother-in-law had thought of?
Datai: Yes. But burning incense is mandatory. Her mother... they must burn incense for their ancestors. They must talk to their ancestors and say that the daughter will marry out from the house (nü'er yao chujiale). They have to tell the ancestors. But she didn't ask me to burn incense together, and previously she also didn't discuss this with me.

(...)

Bram: Your father-in-law, did he also burn incense, or just your mother-in-law?
Datai: He also believes in Buddhism, but he didn't burn incense. That evening he didn't. Normally he would [burn incense], but that evening he didn't, he was represented by my mother-in-law (you wo zhangmuniang zuo daibiao).

(...)

Bram: So because you are a Christian, she burned incense by herself?
Datai: Right, she was the representative. With these religious things she made a compromise (tuoxiele). She made a compromise for me, made a concession (rangbu) for me. If she had made me burn incense despite me not wanting to, that would have been difficult. Because all of us we have our own religion, and doing away with other people's religion is not easy. If she would ask us in front of the family elders and we didn't do it, that would make her look bad (bu gei ta mianzi). It would become a very embarrassing situation, everyone would feel very awkward. (...) So she simplified these things, to avoid trouble, but without embarrassing me.

— Interview, 12 November 2014

Since his mother-in-law was aware of Datai's ritual obligations as a Protestant, she was able to anticipate and to provide a solution by "representing" the entire household, including the bride and the male family elders, before the deceased ancestors. Female "representatives"
enacting rituals for the entire household are in fact an established feature of communal rituals in China (Chau 2015), and apparently Datai's in-laws were able to deploy this notion to help "simplify" the wedding rituals.

According to sociologist Tong Chee Kiong and geographer Lily Kong (2000), in contemporary Singapore "traditional Chinese rituals are being modified, reinterpreted and invented to fit with modern living" (30). Although this argument seems highly generic (rituals have always been subject to change, long before the advent of "modernity"), a focus on the malleability of rituals is important specifically in the context of pluriprax households. Research participants' deployment of the concept of "simplification" shows how they explain their response to conflicting obligations in terms of a broader trend of changing rituals. As early as the "convert temples to schools" policy of 1898, Chinese modernizers have been taking far-reaching steps to reduce or transform ritual practices of the mainland Chinese population. This anti-ritual movement eventually culminated in the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), when all forms of traditional rituals were banned or converted into Mao-venerating rites. Chinese people's flexibility to "simplify" traditional rituals must be considered in that context.

The wedding, part 3

Returning to the ceremony in rural Quanzhou, Yu's hometown was in fact quite close to that of Zhu Enlin, whose wedding banquet in 1971 during the Cultural Revolution featured just four guests and a few bowls of rice, and no communal rituals. Traditional wedding rites such as the betrothal ceremony and the bride's procession have doubtless become popular again among the local population in Quanzhou, but crucially, people have also learned to make do without these rituals. Mao's radical anti-traditionalism crushed the authority of tradition and resulted in a high degree of flexibility with regard to wedding rites. Yu and Mei enacted those wedding rituals which they considered appropriate or entertaining, without the need to conform to certain traditional standards.

This, however, does not explain the striking difference between the wedding of Yu and Mei in coastal Quanzhou, where people were flexible about the omission of local traditions, and the wedding of Yuxian and Lilan in mountainous Zhangzhou, described briefly in this dissertation's introduction. The latter wedding was marked by confusion and conflict as Yuxian's relatives insisted on the couple's strict adherence to local customs,
including kneeling down before the ancestors and the local Gods. How come it was so easy to "cancel" wedding rituals in Quanzhou, when this caused problems in nearby Zhangzhou?

Although I do not want to exaggerate the cultural differences between coastal and inland Southern Fujian, it is worth looking at the local history of Quanzhou in search for answers. According to historian Hugh Clark (1991), Quanzhou developed into a key maritime hub between the ninth and eleventh centuries. Arab and Southeast Asian traders settled in Quanzhou in the eleventh century, and soon thereafter it became the largest and most prosperous port of the Song empire, overshadowing the other major port city of Guangzhou. The Venetian merchant Marco Polo allegedly visited Quanzhou in the late thirteenth century, writing:

At the end of a five day journey from Kan-giu [Hangzhou] you arrive at the noble and handsome city of Zaitun [Quanzhou], which has a port on the sea coast celebrated for the resort of shipping, loaded with merchandise, that is afterward distributed through every province of the land. The quantity of pepper imported there is so considerable that what is carried to Alexandria to supply the demand of the western part of the world is trifling by comparison, perhaps not more than a hundredth part! It is indeed impossible to convey an idea of the number of merchants and accumulation of goods in this place, which is held to be one of the largest ports of the world. — Polo 1982, 254-255.

According to Clark, however, by the time Polo visited Quanzhou, economic and demographic decline had already started to set in. Powerful families related to the Song imperial family had settled down in the area and demanded high tax rates from merchants for the upkeep of their lavish lifestyle. Piracy was also a rising problem, and land shortage had made the Quanzhou area dependent on other areas for food imports. These problems ate away at the local economy until in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Ming emperors began actively discouraging overseas trade. Several Ming emperors proclaimed so-called "sea bans," outlawing most naval activities including fishing and trade for years in a row in order to quench piracy and rebellions in the region. By the late fifteenth century Quanzhou had declined in terms of economic activity, its port fallen into disuse.

Only in the course of the twentieth century did several industries flourish again in the prefecture, making Quanzhou one of the wealthier regions in Fujian province along with
Xiamen. Kenneth Dean (2003) notes the importance of the region's connection with overseas and Taiwanese Chinese as a source of investment and economic growth, but also the revival of local cults and communal rites. Shoe factories and stone quarries have played a large part in Quanzhou's economic revival, as well as tea exports which include the famous Wulong and Tieguanyin teas. Quan et al (2015) have documented the urbanization of Quanzhou city between 1995-2010, noting that the urban territory has expanded greatly, although population growth is not nearly as high as in other rapidly urbanizing areas such as Shenzhen.

Throughout the centuries, a small but influential Muslim population has remained in the Quanzhou area until today. Apart from a large eleventh century mosque, the city prides itself on an equally old Hindu-Buddhist temple which was originally built by members of Quanzhou's Tamil community during its heydays as an international port city. Catholic and Protestant missions have also flourished in the city since the late nineteenth century. People in the Quanzhou region are thus well aware of Islamic, Christian and other ritual prescriptions such as refraining from pork and from participation in local cults, as well as fasting during Ramadan. Yu interpreted Quanzhou pluralism as a broader contemporary phenomenon:

Yu: Nowadays people are more and more open-minded about these kind of ceremonies, not as traditional as before, not as feudal. They can accept this pluralisation [duoyuanhua 多元化], this kind of religion, they can accept other methods. (...) All people in my village are already aware, they can accept these things. For example, they understand Christian ceremonies, so when I told them that my wife is a Christian, they understood these choices. No issues would arise from our conduct, no misgivings, because they know this is the way Christians do it. This is the first thing, and the second is that we also kept many customs of courtesy, for example hosting everybody, and toasting wine. So some traditional things and etiquettes [liyi] we had to fulfill, and they thought that as long as these etiquettes were upheld, it was fine. — Interview 24 November, 2014

Ever since the start of American and British Protestant missionary activities in Quanzhou in the mid-nineteenth century, converts are taught not to participate in "superstitious" and "idolatrous" behavior, such as burning incense for ancestors; participating in exorcisms and
deity festivals; bringing sacrifices to deities at home or in temples; and seeing fortune
tellers or spirit mediums. Mayfair Yang (2008, 1-2) has argued that denunciation of the
rites Protestants encountered in various parts of China set a precedent for later denunciation
by modernizing forces such as the Nationalist and Communist parties of twentieth century
China. For sure, to Yu's parents it did not come as a surprise that their Christian daughter-
in-law refused participation in certain wedding customs that had been dubbed "superstition," "backwardness," "feudal custom," or "traditional culture" at different times
by different elites.

When Mei and Yu stepped over the "fiery bowl" in the doorway (this was
apparently placed there by Yu's mother or an aunt, as I observed at another wedding in
Quanzhou), they went straight to a bedroom refurbished for the occasion, perhaps as a
reenactment of the ideal-typical situation in which the newlywed couple comes to share a
private room in the home of the groom's parents, where they quickly get to work to make a
baby. Yu's parents and other close relatives had hidden in another room until the couple
went to them to ritually greet them and display their filial piety by serving tea. This tea
ritual called gaikou cha [改口茶], which could be translated as "kin changing tea," has a
transformative power, because from that moment on the bride calls her groom's parents
"mother" and "father;" his siblings and cousins "sister" and "brother;" and she addresses his
uncles, aunts and other relatives as if they were her own relatives.

Yu: In traditional China, you had to burn incense and venerate. After you entered the
door, and after changing kin, all the family elders would venerate and tell the deceased
ancestors that a daughter-in-law has entered the door.

Mei: You probably know about China's ancestral halls? In his home there is an
ancestral hall, where the ancestors are lined up, that kind. He took me there, introduced
me, and then venerated. — Interview, 24 November 2014

I entered this ancestral hall with them during a visit to Yu's hometown in December 2014. It
was in fact the central room in the family's abandoned former home, within a stone's throw
of their current home. After moving out, members of the Liang family had left the
photographs of their ancestors hanging on the walls, facing a table with incense, several
placards with the fu [福] character, and cups to pour wine or tea for the ancestors. It struck
me how casually Yu walked about this seemingly sacred room, telling anecdotes about the
ancestors on display, and inviting me to take photographs of the place. Perhaps his casualness stemmed from his familiarity with the place and the faces on the walls, perhaps from his desire to show that he was not so 'traditional' as to require any formalities with regard to deceased ancestors.

Bram: What did you think about venerating his ancestors there?
Mei: Actually it was to comfort him, because he has never seen his paternal grandfather and grandmother, they passed away very young. He also has an uncle, his father's elder brother, who was very fond of him. But he also passed away very early, at sixty he passed away. It happened in an accident, and so he wanted to talk to his uncle, to tell him I am getting married. It's a kind of commemoration, I think that if he went to heaven, then I can tell him in this place that we are getting married, in order to comfort him. Actually I don't think it's necessary to burn paper money [shaozhi 烧纸], we didn't burn paper money, but we went there and used the method of prayer. Just like that, we didn't burn paper money and venerate. — Interview, 24 November 2014

The issue of how to honor one's ancestors after a Christian conversion, harks back to the much referenced Chinese Rites Controversy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Jesuit missionaries who had come to Ming (and later Qing) dynasty China to proselytize, came into conflict with Dominicans, Franciscans and eventually the Holy See over their lenience toward Confucian rituality. The Catholic missionaries were eventually expelled by Emperor Qianlong over their perceived interference into Chinese customs and affairs.

For most Chinese Protestants I have met, verbal prayer (spoken or sung) is the only acceptable interaction with the spirit world. The Protestant ritual repertoire, as opposed to China's popular religion, simply does not offer more options for believers to communicate with the divine. Bowing down as a symbol of respect to deceased ancestors may be acceptable among some Protestants in Southern Fujian, but it is not thought to achieve a response or effect in the spiritual realm, instead only depicting the persons who bow down as filial offspring in the world of the living.

On occasions like the Tomb Sweeping festival, funerals, or weddings as discussed here, when Chinese Protestants face their ancestral tablets in a moment of contemplation and remembrance, they often resort to prayer and singing as the only tools available to them. Yet among the Protestants I have spoken with, great uncertainty prevails about whether
addressing ancestors directly is a form of idolatry. Most seem to pray to the Christian God in front of their ancestral tablets, but are unsure what to pray for. After all, they believe that the fate of the deceased cannot be altered. Moreover, by far most Chinese ancestors were not Christians, and their Christian offspring have few clues about whether their ancestors are with God in heaven or in hell with the unbelievers. Fortunately for Mei, she seems rather confident that informing deceased ancestors about the marriage was something she could do as a way of acting properly toward her groom and her new in-laws.

Mei: But his mother did [burn paper money], she said she could go [by herself], but we thought if we go and tell his uncle and grandparents that we are getting married, then it's OK, those other things we didn't do.

Bram: What did his relatives think when you didn't do those things?

Mei: Nothing, they were accommodating me [qianjiu wo], they knew I couldn't do those things, and they didn't force me to. (...) There is this harmonizing [ronghe], for example if I don't want to venerate these things, [his relatives] think it's OK I don't venerate. But if they say I have to toast wine, then I think it's alright I can toast wine, I can do this and I went and did it. They think if we do it like this, then it doesn't hinder me [meiyou fang'aida wo]. If I don't resolutely oppose it, and you can also accept it, then it's OK, like that. Chinese people have a saying, preserve harmony in the family in order to prosper [jiahe wanshi xing]. (...) So it just takes some mutual understanding.

— Interview, 24 November 2014

The key to Mei and Yu's wedding, then, seems to be a mutual desire to "harmonize" and the agreement to "simplify" the wedding in a way that is satisfactory to all. Romantic love was doubtless a factor to advance a consensus, softening whatever principles or preferences the groom and bride had. Another lubricating factor may have been that Mei holds a degree in law, is a Communist Party member, and had passed the famous Chinese civil service exam. Her new in-laws had good reason to downplay the importance of ancestor veneration and local traditions in order to ensure the successful marriage of their son (who has a much more humble educational and professional background) to such a highly desirable daughter-in-law as Mei. Her participation in an ancestral rite in her groom's hometown, in turn, was a way to acknowledge the preferences of her new in-laws, with whom she established a long-term relationship on that day. Finding a "shared arena" (Seligman et al
2008, 49), or allowing a degree of "ritual polytropy" (Chau 2012) during the wedding was, in other words, in the interest of all people involved.

Soon after the wedding, Mei and Yu were invited by a colleague of Mei's to the unregistered church where I met them in November 2014. Although not fully convinced about getting baptized, Yu continued frequenting church services with Mei. One day in 2015 when they visited my wife and me for a casual dinner, Yu announced to me in private that he would get baptized on the following Sunday. "So my wife is very happy," he added with a smile. Not long after his baptism, he came to pick me up for a leisurely trip in his red sports car. To the car sticker on his rear window that read "To annihilate and to destroy" he had added a new sticker; a big white cross flanked by the word "Immanuel."

Case study II. A "traditional" Chinese wedding

The protagonists

Yan Liping was a very active member of New Life Church, the same small "family church" where I had met Yu and Mei. Liping performed on electric piano on Sundays and led one of the community's "small groups" (xiaozu) on Wednesday evenings. I met her and her husband, Chen Xiaolong, several times in various cafe's, restaurants, church, our respective homes, and we went to the shop of the ceremony master who had presided over their
wedding in Xiamen. This ceremony master, whom I shall call Mr. Huang, was particularly instrumental in the wedding because he was able to provide what the couple wanted: a traditional Chinese wedding.

Liping and Xiaolong met in Shanghai in 2010 at an event for enthusiasts of "traditional Chinese culture." They were both regular participants in activities of China's so-called Hanfu (Han clothing) movement. This movement, according to anthropologist Kevin Carrico (2017), is a racist and nationalist youth movement that promotes the idea of an ethnically pure China ruled exclusively by the Han. Some eight per cent of the current Chinese population has an official status as ethnic minority, and these peoples are excluded from leading positions in Chinese society as envisioned by more radical members of the Hanfu movement (Liping and Xiaolong shared a particular dislike of China's Muslim Hui and Uyghur minorities, which they expressed to me on several occasions). Hanfu seems to be a largely urban phenomenon supported by youths disconnected from village life, who share a sense of lost cultural identity. It can be understood as a propaganda-fuelled search for a collective identity in the context of a demise of traditional encompassing communities. In this context, the Communist authorities have increasingly supported efforts to rediscover and revive the "ancient roots of Chinese civilization" which had been subject to near-total destruction under Mao (although Mr. Huang ironically laid the blame for the destruction of traditional Chinese culture on foreign invaders, including the Manchu who established the Qing dynasty). These efforts are particularly clear in highly popular Chinese TV series set in "ancient times" that feature various mythical Han heroes and heroines. According to Carrico, Hanfu enthusiasts typically share a negative view of Western clothing, which they consider a Western invasion of Chinese bodies. Apart from membership in an online Hanfu community to exchange ideas in chat groups, Liping and Xiaolong met with their fellow Hanfu enthusiasts on certain "traditional" holidays such as the Mid-Autumn Festival (zhongqiujie) and the Dragon Boat Festival (duanwujie) in parks or on squares to dress up in clothes resembling those featured in ancient works of art, to take photographs together and to join in the occasional ritual for Confucius.

It is stunning that Liping was active both in the Hanfu movement and in a more or less persecuted Protestant church. Clearly, she was interested in all things "ancient;" the bible to her represented a work of ancient literature from which she could draw lessons for

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17 On a global level, China's Hanfu movement seems to share interesting characteristics with the US "alt-right" movement, the Indian Hindutva movement, the German Pegida movement, and so on.
her daily life, much as the idea of being part of an ancient civilization drew her to Hanfu activities. But Catholic and Protestant Christianity have long been considered "foreign teachings" (yangjiao) by people across China, and earlier radical nationalist movements such as the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901) were staunchly anti-Christian. In other words, Han ethno-nationalist chauvinism simply does not resonate well with a devotion to Christianity. This apparent friction, however, did not seem to bother Liping. She was by no means incapable of understanding the field of tension she had entered, as she had earned a master's degree in anthropology from one of China's better-ranking universities. But for herself she made a radical distinction between, on the one hand, her group of friends in church for whom she performed on the piano on Sundays, and her nationalist sentiments drawing her to Hanfu activities and online communities with her husband. She was, in a sense, a "pluriprax individual" who participated in apparently contradictory movements and practices.

Xiaolong, on the other hand, was staunchly anti-Christian and he had consistently refused to visit church with Liping. He worked as a patent agent, a middle class occupation typical for contemporary Xiamen. He had grown up in a poor village in rural Northern Fujian (Minbei) and he once told me that city life did not suit him well. He claimed to have no choice but to live in the city because in his hometown he would barely be able to make enough money to put food on the table. Like his wife, Xiaolong was deeply fascinated with the idea of an ancient, harmonious Han society. Apart from his participation in Hanfu activities, he attended various Xiamenese temples in times of personal hardship. In difficult times he would carry out hundreds of prostrations (ketou) in the bedroom by himself, a kind of ancestral-ritual-turned-therapeutic-exercise. But Liping ridiculed this practice, and during a private conversation she revealed that she had told Xiaolong:

You prostrate so much! You prostrate so much, do you think your God will come to help you? If you prostrate a bit fewer, your God will not be insulted. If your God is a real God, then he will also help you if you don't prostrate. You can just do it as a formality, no need to prostrate eight hundred times. Yes really that much. And his explanation was, well then I will just consider it a good physical exercise. So I think this is really strange. This kind of belief (xinyang), it's actually not belief. It's not belief. Right? Can you imagine prostrating eight hundred times? This consumes a lot of energy. He says that while
prostrating, he can understand what he worships, that his body and mind are united (shenxin heyi). And it has the effect of a physical exercise. I think this is not belief.
— Interview, October 25, 2014.

Liping had long accepted Xiaolong's refusal to join her in church on Sundays, except for Christmas. Since the summer of 2010 she had asked him every year to attend the Christmas show she painstakingly prepared with her music group for months, but he never went (I distinctly remember Xiaolong's complaints about Christmas-themed shopping malls in December 2014 and 2015). Liping likewise refused to participate in the lineage rituals of Xiaolong's hometown during Spring Festival (explained in more detail in Chapter 4). In brief, their household was a pluriprax household in which the members not only had conflicting ritual obligations, but were also highly sensitive to broader developments in Chinese society such as the rise of ethno-nationalism, new ritual practices and communities, and resistance against alleged Western cultural infiltration.

The wedding
Dressed in long, colorful robes at a Hanfu event in Shanghai in 2010, Liping and Xiaolong started chatting and fell in love. They got married in a restaurant in Xiamen the next year. On their wedding day they once more dressed in Han robes. For the occasion they had rented a section of a large restaurant which was popular as a wedding location among migrants with few relatives and neighbors in Xiamen. As they entered their section of the restaurant, Chen lead his bride by a red string to a small stage, her head covered under a red veil. Confetti was shot in the air while friends and family photographed and cheered the couple on. Liping recalls:

The other people who held a wedding ceremony there at the same time as us [in other sections of the restaurant], the women all wore white wedding dresses, and my husband was very proud. So we continued the Chinese traditional culture, we were very different. Look, they were all wearing white, all the same, all the brides were the same, all the grooms were the same, so we were very different. (...) My husband says he opposes Western wedding clothes. He thinks that Chinese people shouldn't wear a white

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18 The description of their wedding ceremony provided here, is derived partly from interviews and partly from film footage for which Liping and Xiaolong had hired a professional cameraman. They gave me a copy of this footage for analysis.
wedding dress, because in Chinese weddings, the traditional weddings, red is the most important color. The bride must wear red. The groom must also wear red. So he thinks that if the groom wears black and the bride wears white, then on the most important day in your life, you choose to follow a Western custom. That's a real pity, isn't it? So I really agree with him. — Interview, 25 October 2014

Once on the stage, the couple was welcomed by Mr. Huang, whom they had hired for his expertise on traditional Chinese culture. Huang asked Liping and Xiaolong to perform bows to different entities allegedly associated with Chinese culture: Heaven and Earth (bai tiandi); their ancestors (bai zuxian) represented by their parents; and each other (fuqi duibai). To these well-known "three bows" (sanbai) Huang added another bow that seems to have become popular in recent decades — a bow to family and good friends (qinpenghaoyou) who had come to attend the wedding. Liping commented:

Worshipping heaven and earth has no connection with religion, but with the continuity of traditional culture. For example, my husband and I did it like that. At that time I was already baptized. I was already a baptized Christian. But my husband, he believes in Buddhism, he has believed this for many years. — Interview, 25 October 2014.

Among the wedding guests were the parents of Liping, who had made the journey to Xiamen from faraway Anhui province; Xiaolong's father, from rural Northern Fujian; and several siblings, colleagues, and former classmates. Strangely absent from the wedding were Liping's fellow church members from New Life Church, the church where she had gotten baptized a year earlier. She participated in the music group of the church, where she had a rather important role because she is a college music teacher. Liping:

Before the wedding I was very stressed, because during that time before my wedding, I was very busy at work. We were making a Western opera, "The lady of the Camellias," it's an Italian opera. So for the wedding I invited the colleagues that I was working with at that time. At that time, after I got baptized, I was continually busy working on this opera, and didn't have time to go to church, I wasn't much of a Christian. Since I was busy working, I didn't have time to read the bible, didn't have time for church. But being

19 Liping and Xiaolong had decided not to hold banquets in their hometowns in order to spare their elderly parents of humble background, who would have hosted the event.
so busy was unnecessary, God knows. And then, after I was done being so busy, in 2012, I went back to the church. Afterwards I rather regretted this. You know that Chinese brides and grooms, when they get married they don't do a ceremony in church, they do not face a pastor, they do not take a vow in God's presence. This is not necessary, they just go to a restaurant, invite friends, it's not very earnest (yansu). To take an oath in front of the pastor is to take an oath in God's presence. This is very earnest, so I think that on my most important day I didn't take the vow in front of a pastor, and I regret this, but it's alright. It's over, and I cannot marry a second time. [laughs]

Bram: So now, do you think that your wedding was not earnest?

Liping: No. Our wedding was earnest, at least our attitude was earnest. But after I went back to the church, when I went back to my faith, after I left my busy work, I could finally reflect on this. And having come back to church I could understand the church's wedding ceremonies, meaning I finally understood Christian weddings. Only when my wedding was already over, I understood that this kind of Christian wedding means swearing an oath in front of God. This is very different, it's a completely different concept from traditional Chinese weddings. Of course my husband is not a Christian, so at that time I also raised this issue with him. But he felt that no, a Christian wedding is also Western, so we don't have to be so Western. — Interview, 25 October 2014

Through participation in Sunday and "small group" meetings I learned that intermarriage with non-Christians garners the disapproval of the leaders and lay members of New Life Church. Unlike many leaders of churches registered with the Three Self Patriotic Movement, Liping's minister requires both the groom and bride to be baptized Christians. So it seems that she avoided these people until after her wedding, to avoid an open conflict with and condemnation from her church community. Liping positioned herself in a discourse of being "too busy," which is in line with young Chinese people's work and career pressures in a highly competitive and materialist society. She did so at a time when she apparently had to choose between the church community and her non-Christian fiancé. Only after the wedding was finished, did she find time to return to church.

*Imagining Chinese secularism*

Liping presented her wedding to me, the Western researcher as a strictly secular event. She insisted on the non-religious nature of their wedding ceremony despite the fact that she and Xiaolong had bowed before heaven, earth, and the ancestors. Liping:
Traditional Chinese culture has nothing to do with religion, for example venerating heaven and earth, venerating parents, this is not related to religion, right? It has no connection with Buddhism, with Christianity. This is just a culture passed down from the Central Plains. — Interview, 8 November 2014

Her vignette echoes a claim of Chinese scholars and political elites since the early 20th century, that Chinese culture is essentially secular and without religion (M. Yang 2008, 1-2). This claim is based first on the false idea that Chinese language had no word for "religion" until the nineteenth century. Second, it is based on the true notion that Chinese religiosities were not organized in the same way as in the Western world. The conclusion that Chinese culture was without religion until practitioners of the Abrahamic faiths arrived, however, is utterly misguided and more indicative of modern, nationalist imaginations than empirical realities.

Regarding the term "religion" (zongjiao), it is true that this term was coined in Japan to denote Western-style religion (e.g. Protestantism and Catholicism) (Nedostup 2013, Goossaert 2005). Late imperial and Republican Chinese reformers such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao adopted the term in their writings to create a new standard for religious practices: institutionalized, moralizing, "rational" (perhaps meaning scripture-based or supported by scientific evidence), and non-wasteful (no elaborate sacrifices). They found it necessary to reform Chinese society in order to rid it of "backward traditions" and to make it competitive with Western societies. All practices and beliefs not corresponding to their standard for proper religions were labeled "superstition" (mixin).

A host of "superstitious" practices, however, make up what can rightly be termed Chinese religion (Goossaert 2005) or the Chinese religionscape (Chau 2015). The word zongjiao may be new to China (just as mixin, by the way), but as historian Robert Campany (2003) has pointed out, Chinese people have had various concepts and metaphors at their disposal to discuss what in the modern West has come to be known as "religion." He describes four concepts from early medieval Chinese sources (some of which are still commonly used today) which closely resemble "religion:" 1) a founder/paragon synecdoche, where the first character of a central figure becomes shorthand for a school of thought (kong, fo, dao, and mao can refer to Confucian, Buddhist, Daoist, and Maoist schools of thought, respectively); 2) a way/path (dao) metaphor, where a practitioner is
depicted as following a certain path (*shendao* is a divine or spiritual path, *fodao* is the path of the Buddha); 3) a law/method (*fa*) metaphor, similar to the way/path metaphor, which emphasizes rules and conventions to be followed and respected; and 4) an idiom translatable as "the teachings of X" ("X zhi jiao"), which is not to be confused with modern "-isms" such as Buddhism (*fojiao*) and Christianity (*jidujiao*). In short, the alleged lack of "religion" in China is a problem of translation rather than an empirical fact.

But Liping was able to turn the discourse of a non-religious Chinese culture to her advantage on her wedding day. By strategically denying that bowing down to Heaven, Earth and ancestors had anything to do with religion, she circumvented the ritual prohibitions of Protestant churches with regard to "idolatry." She could simply claim to follow some non-religious customs, the lore of the land. In this same vein, the Communist Party has been able to promote "traditional culture" and "socialism with Chinese characteristics" while denying that it was advancing religion. Revival of Daoist and Buddhist temples and the rehabilitation of clergy is thus framed as a "cultural" policy, not a "religious" one. "Chinese culture" is thus advanced as an authoritative moral force without advancing religion.

This broader discourse of a secular Chinese traditional culture provided a safe environment for Liping to hold her wedding in. Through this discourse she was able to avoid idolatry in Christian terms despite bowing down to non-Christian entities. At the same time, she and Xiaolong as a pluriprax couple were able to perform their wedding in a style and manner they considered culturally superior and more authentic than other available formats.

We just think that we don't want to be the same as the West. Because my husband thinks, (...) why do so many Chinese brides and grooms choose a Western-style wedding nowadays. Why? He finds this inconceivable. He disapproves of this Westernization. So he insists on using the Chinese traditions. — Interview, 25 October 2014

Liping positions herself as a loyal Chinese subject as well as a devout Protestant church member. The 'subjunctive world' (Seligman et al 2008) created by her wedding is that of a united, patriotic couple loyal to Chinese traditions and opposed to Western cultural
infiltration - a successful alternative to the image of a divided couple that is deeply divided over religious matters.

Romantic love and the mutual desire to get married, like in the case of Mei and Yu described above, was an important force for the successful enactment of Liping and Xiaolong's wedding. Although arranged and 'strategic' marriages still occur in China, the themes of love, romance, and "bumping into the (wo)man of your life" dominate much of contemporary Chinese popular culture, for example in music and cinema. For Liping, whose church community is made up almost entirely of young women, the Chinese Protestant ideal of religious homogamy could not keep her from marrying the love of her life. But conversely, she could bring in the Evangelical Christian discourse about love into her romantic relationship. Liping comments:

I say God is God. God is not man. In Buddhism, so many so-called Buddha's are all people, they are not Gods. [My husband and I] could also argue like this, but without influencing the feelings between us. Right. But my friends in church say no, you don't have to argue with your husband, this is Satan's deceit [chuckles]. You should act as his wife and be obedient to your husband. You should use love to reform him, to move him, and not to go and argue with him. (...)

If I just love him, then it's good. If I let him know that being a Christian is to love, then it's good, right? I think that one day, if I do very well, if I become a very good Christian wife, one day God will lead him to go to church with me together. — Interview, 25 October 2014

Reflection

Protestant women seeking a spouse in Southern Fujian are caught between their parents' financial and care-related concerns; their churches' social and ritual boundaries; and their individual wishes. Many choose romantic marriages with non-Protestant men, ignoring the admonitions of ministers, and sometimes those of their parents. This chapter has examined the wedding rituals of such "pluriprax" couples.

I started this chapter with a discussion of the concept of boundaries in the social sciences. It is a metaphor, I argued, used to visualize a complex emotion or phenomenon. How should we visualize the social and ritual boundaries created by Protestants in Southern Fujian? Should we think of them as barbed-wire fences, glass doors, legal constructions, or perhaps as lines drawn on streets, which are easily overstepped? Considering its function
and permeability, the social boundary of Chinese Protestantism can be visualized as the gate of a subway system. Subways are a distinctly modern phenomenon in China, just as bounded "religions" and religious identities (I am a Christian, you are a Buddhist) are part of modernizing efforts in Chinese society. To ritually enter the system of Protestantism, a card or coin has to be presented when passing through the gates (baptism). This ritual serves to distinguish those inside the system ("brothers" and "sisters") from those outside ("unbelievers"). One can enter and exit the system at a fairly low cost, for church communities in Xiamen are generally eager to expand and eager for runaway members to return. So one can easily re-enter the community (or subway system) after a temporary absence, say around the time of a wedding involving a non-Christian groom.

As for the ritual boundary of Chinese Protestantism, it is perhaps better visualized as the doors of an emergency exit in a shopping mall. Like subway systems, shopping malls are modern structures accommodating public tastes and desires. Considering the emergency exit's function and permeability, one is normally not allowed to use (like converts are disallowed to participate in non-Protestant rituality). The emergency exit has an explicit safety function, ensuring the well-being of the customers (ritual purity). But under special circumstances (like a pluriprax wedding), the door to the emergency exit can be opened. One temporarily steps into a space that is both attached to and separate from the shopping mall, both "inside" and "outside" the building (ritual polytropy). Illicit use of the emergency exit in a shopping mall may be punished more severely than illicit rituality in Xiamen’s Protestant community; one may be verbally rebuked by a minister and prayed for, but is unlikely to be expelled from the Protestant community. Such visualizations, without becoming full-fledged analogies, may bestow more clarity on boundaries as metaphors.

The case studies suggest that the functions of ritual boundaries of Southern Fujian churches have diminishing effect and their permeability becomes greater. Whereas in Xiamen in the early twentieth century would-be converts were denied baptism or severely chastised by powerful ministers of foreign missionaries for illicit ritual behavior (Dunch 2001, White 2011), contemporary ministers can do little but repeat the rules and hope the congregation will adhere. The fact that Protestant ministers in Southern Fujian cannot enforce the ritual boundaries they have created, supports the theory of Chinese individualization by demonstrating the disempowerment of Protestant church communities in Southern Fujian and the empowerment of young people, in particular women.
Young women on their wedding days consciously and confidently cross their churches' ritual boundaries, after which they re-enter their churches and continue interacting with fellow converts. In the case studies explored, two brides crossed Protestant ritual boundaries while being physically or spiritually away from their church communities. Reflecting on their own boundary crossing behavior during interviews, they referred to this as following a secular tradition of Chinese culture; as a social obligation; and as a show of solidarity with the groom and his relatives. In other words, they willfully set aside their religious "sincerity" (Seligman et al 2008) for a smooth enactment of their wedding. Having experienced the social and practical benefits of "polytropy" (Carrithers 2000, explained in Chapter 2 of this thesis) over staunch adherence to the rules, these young women may set an example for future brides to follow.

At least four factors can be distinguished that are contributing to the demise of Chinese Protestantism's ritual boundaries. The first is a great gender imbalance. The work of religious studies scholar Kao Chen-yang (2009, 2013) suggests that Southern Fujian is not the only area where women greatly outnumber men in Protestant churches (although he also conducted research in Fujian province). In another example, anthropologist Han Heng (2012) contends that out of the "three mores" (more women, more elderly, and more illiterates) in Henan's churches in the 1980s, only "more women" has remained a defining feature as conversion often takes place among younger, literate women. The formation of what I call pluriprax households seems inevitable due to this gender imbalance; Protestant women must find husbands outside the church community. Although the ideal-typical Protestant woman in Southern Fujian works hard her whole life to convert her husband and his family, in practice Protestant women have to find ways to co-exist peacefully with their new in-laws. Brides do not only "look back" (to their Protestant ritual obligations), but they also take into account how they want their relationship with their in-laws to develop in the future. Amid an ongoing revival of popular religious practices under the guise of "traditional Chinese culture," peaceful co-existence may mean finding ways to accept or participate in non-Protestant rituals, crossing church ritual boundaries.

The second factor contributing to the demise of Chinese Protestantism's ritual boundary is the importance attached to love and romance in contemporary society. Ironically, as explained in Chapter 2 of this thesis, this is also a key attraction of Protestant Christianity to Chinese people, as ministers speak of a great divine love through which converts can live a more emotionally fulfilling life with the people around them. Since
ministers are rarely able to provide their flock with a romantic relationship, however, they can do little to dissuade church members from following their romantic intuitions and marrying husbands of their individual liking. The desire for love that drew women to churches in Southern Fujian, also causes them to cross church-designed social and ritual boundaries.

Another factor heralding the demise of Chinese Protestantism's ritual boundaries is people's skills at "simplifying" traditional rituals. Strict adherence to authoritative ritual prescriptions is rare in Southern Fujian. Ritual scholar Catherine Bell (2009, 82) has argued that "among the most important strategies of ritualization is the inherent flexibility of the degree of ritualization invoked." Protestant women like Mei (case study 1) can enact "simplified" wedding rites with their husbands and new in-laws because they are not forced to, for example, kneel down and burn incense. Like Liping (case study 2) they can creatively choose their own wedding rituals. The flexibility and options to simplify traditional wedding rites means that the threshold for Protestant women is not too high to participate.

As a final factor, discourse on the secular nature of Chinese culture means that Protestants can enact "Chinese" rituals without engaging in "idol worship." As long as bowing down to Heaven and Earth is constructed as "culture" and not as "religion," it is safe for Protestant women to participate in such rituals on their wedding days. Important in this regard is that the Chinese Communist Party has actively stimulated this discourse because of its perceived need to position itself as the protector of Chinese "culture" (indeed a 180-degree reversal of Cultural Revolution policies) while officially maintaining an atheist worldview. The discourse on the "backwardness" and "superstition" of Chinese culture, dominant in the early days of modernization, has lost popular support within society. New generations of Protestant converts are raised with the idea that Chinese culture is ancient, unique, and to be cherished. Whereas patriotism used to be a denial of Chinese rituals in the early twentieth century, today patriotism can mean engaging with Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian practices. In this context it is more and more difficult for ministers to dissuade church members from following "Chinese customs" during their weddings and, ultimately perhaps, during other important rituals as well.

These factors work together to draw young women across Protestant ritual boundaries. Having crossed such ritual boundaries during their weddings with satisfaction and re-entering their churches afterward, these women may be the driving force behind a
more conciliatory Protestant discourse toward "Chinese culture" and its "superstitions." The rise of pluriprax households may thus signal the demise of Chinese Protestantism's ritual boundaries.
Part II. Maintaining pluriprax households
3. Harmonizing ritual conflicts

Introduction

Forming pluriprax households is one thing, maintaining them and keeping household members together is quite another. If many of my interlocutors had reported that their relationships with spouses, parents, siblings, and grandparents had collapsed because of their conflicting ritual obligations, I may have concluded that pluriprax households cannot be maintained as viable social units in contemporary Southern Fujian. Anthropologist Tam Ngo (2016), for example, found that conversion to Protestantism among the Hmong in contemporary Vietnam had "ripped many families, clans, and communities apart" (13). Likewise, a group of anthropologists working on "Muslim-non-Muslim marriages" in various parts of Southeast Asia found that a host of problems surrounded such marriages, including threats of physical violence, disinheritance, long-term family feuds, and legal...
barriers (Jones, Chee, and Mohamad 2009). In the United States, in turn, sociologists found higher divorce rates among "interfaith" couples (Schaefer Riley 2013).

Apparently, things are quite different in Southern Fujian because very few of the pluriprax households I studied were under threat of being "ripped apart." This raises the question of how my research participants maintained their households despite their conflicting ritual obligations. In this thesis I frame the tension of conflicting ritual obligations as a tension between the individual religious piety of Protestants and their communal obligations toward ancestral lineages and (to a lesser degree) socialist production brigades. Recall how the Introduction discerned a debate around the issue of individual disembedding from traditional social structures (Yan 2009) and re-embedding in modern social structures (Kipnis 2012) — a debate that also lies at the heart of the discursive field of individualization in Western societies (Howard 2007). The current chapter seeks to revisit that debate through the example of death rituals in pluriprax households in Southern Fujian. It demonstrates that the different and opposing ritual communities in which pluriprax households are embedded, have lost their totalizing grip on members' ritual lives in the context of China's unique trajectory of individualization (Yan 2010). The disempowerment of these ritual communities facilitates pluriprax households to deploy creative solutions to the problem of conflicting ritual obligations. These creative solutions allow members of pluriprax households to "harmonize" between conflicting obligations that have persisted despite individualization.

During fieldwork I found that funerals can be particularly problematic for pluriprax households in Southern Fujian. A long history of enduring relationships between the living and the dead has made mortuary rituals of great significance to Chinese people. In the previous chapter, Protestant and native place wedding ceremonies for Tang Mei and Liang Yu were held in different places and at different times, and the different communities involved in their enactment were not forced to share the same space and time slot. Rituals could be "simplified," lowering the threshold for the bride and groom to form a pluriprax household. But memorial services for the dead, the most important communal mortuary ritual in urban China today, are not held in different locations. Churches, lineages, and production brigades involved in the rituals have to share the same space, making funerals more prone to conflict than weddings. Moreover, despite the individual freedoms bestowed by the centralizing state on Chinese people in the Reform Era, funerals are marked by important obligations for individuals to conform to community standards by
providing lavishly for the dead. At the funerals of his parents, a son has to make particularly sure to follow relevant conventions, be they socialist work unit conventions, funerary traditions based on the late imperial Chinese funeral format, or Protestant church conventions. Neglecting his obligations toward a deceased parent can cast a long and dark shadow over a son's reputation in his social surroundings (Ahern 1973; Wolf 1974; R.S. Watson 1988; J. L. Watson 1988a).

But how to part with a parent in a pluriprax household? The chapter demonstrates that members of pluriprax households in Southern Fujian are embedded in multiple communities including ancestral lineages, the dismantled but still pertinent production brigades, and Protestant churches. These communities have different, often conflicting conventions with regard to correct funerals for their members. Moreover, each community in which the deceased and the chief mourner (the eldest son) are embedded, has to be acknowledged and satisfied. This leads to a situation of conflicting ritual obligations, testing the power of each community to claim ownership of the funerals of their members.

This chapter explores how members of pluriprax households in Southern Fujian "harmonize" their conflicting ritual obligations stemming from their membership in multiple communities. With the concept of harmony I consciously deploy a politically sensitive concept, sensitive because of its profuse usage under the Hu Jintao / Wen Jiabao administration (2003 - 2013) in its pursuit of a "harmonious society and harmonious world." Among Chinese netizens in particular, government "harmonization" of certain websites, social media profiles, or forum discussions became a euphemism for censorship. By looking at ways in which people "harmonize ritual conflicts" I do not intend to suggest that state actors are involved in censoring or otherwise pacifying critical citizens. I also do not intend to use "harmony" as a paradigmatic concept for describing the more or less "peaceful coexistence of religions" in China (or in Hong Kong, see Chan 2009). As explained in the Introduction, I want to be careful not to reify "religions" in China as distinct entities to be studied by scholars and regulated by state actors. "Harmonious coexistence" of "religions" is a metaphor based on what Chau (2015, 225-6) calls a "fallacy of imputed ontology" or "fallacy of misplaced circumscribedness," ascribing agency to the abstract concept of religion. My deployment of harmony or harmonizing instead seeks to capture how people in charge of funerals in Xiamen often looked for ways to satisfy the conflicting demands of various ritual communities taking part in the rituals. Harmonizing may involve any strategy or action to ensure the fulfillment of conflicting
ritual obligations and continuing peace among the various ritualists and ritual communities involved in a funeral. I demonstrate that people's ability to harmonize conflicting obligations is a key way to maintain a pluriprax household in contemporary Southern Fujian.

The ritual obligations of people in contemporary Southern Fujian also raise an important question with regard to the individualization of Chinese society. If individuals have such important obligations toward ritual communities, then how can we consider them as "empowered individuals?" If funerals in Southern Fujian revolve around satisfying communal demands, then surely "individualization" in this social context is partial and incomplete. To engage with this issue, the chapter draws on an ethnographic example of a funeral shared among the deceased's work unit, Protestant church, and ancestral lineage. Indeed, in contemporary Southern Fujian these communities must "split" funerals among themselves. All have been disempowered to claim total control over the proceedings, being instead forced to recognize the individual's unique and complex social life. Thus the chapter contributes to academic understanding of communal rituals in the context of the individualization of Chinese society.

Male mourners at a Protestant funeral in rural Zhangzhou. The chief mourner (center/left) was not a Protestant.
Ritual obligations as a challenge to the theory of Chinese individualization

Theorizing obligations in contemporary China

In the most general sense, "obligations" are actions that individuals have to undertake. Most people have obligations of some kind, and those who refuse all obligations may find themselves on the margins of social and economic life. Although "obligation" has a curiously negative ring to it, people with many weighty obligations tend to be more highly regarded in society, as well as better paid, than those with few obligations. Obligations usually exist between an individual and a larger community or society of people, and can also exist between a few individuals, for example between a husband and wife to stay monogamous. Obligations are a social phenomenon - without other people we would have no obligations.

The obligations of contemporary Chinese people, like those of people in the Western world, are to a large extent determined by dependence on modern institutions. Contracts signed with profit-seeking enterprises and employers create obligations to fulfill certain requirements in the future. According to sociologists Ulrich Beck's (1992) and Anthony Giddens' (1991) understanding of the consequences of "second" or "late" modernity for ordinary people are that the future is colonized by modern institutions and people's obligations toward them, shaping the future as an all-important but also unknowable realm marked by uncertainties and risks. Anthropologist Andrew Kipnis (2012) has argued that together with symptoms of "first" modernity (industrialization, nationalism, demise of tribalism), Chinese society has come to exhibit features of this new
or second modernity. For Chinese people's participation in modern life requires their investment in a risky future, incurring obligations toward a host of institutions such as banks, governmental institutions, employers, business partners, and so on. Many contemporary Chinese people spend a lifetime fulfilling various obligations.

In the context of contemporary Southern Fujian, I am interested in exploring a particular set of obligations, namely those incurred by individuals through their participation in ritual communities. First and foremost among the Southern Fujian ritual communities explored in this chapter, is the household, sometimes embedded in a greater patriarchal lineage community. Important for our present analysis is the question of what obligations Chinese people incur from being a member of a household. According to Fuligni and Zhang (2004, 180), Chinese understandings of "family obligations" include showing respect, providing assistance, and offering financial support to parents and grandparents. When making important decisions connected to migration, career, and marriage, young Chinese may feel obliged to take into account the needs of the household. Obligations are hierarchical, as the younger generations are expected to support the elder generations, once they are able to. Fuligni and Zhang (2004) link this to the concept of "filial piety" (xiao), rooted in Confucianism and sustained in a patriarchal clan system relying on agriculture for many centuries. Despite recent societal upheavals, they argue, the family obligations they discern continue to be important for the socialization of children by their parents and grandparents.

But Yan Yunxiang (2003, 2009) has provocatively argued that the age-old notion that younger Chinese are obliged to be obedient, respectful, considerate, and assisting toward their elders, has disintegrated in the contemporary era of individualization also Chapter 1). He argues that

[the] most significant change with regard to elderly support . . . is the disintegration and ultimate collapse of the notion of filial piety, the backbone of old-age security in Chinese culture.

— Yan 2003, 189.

Parents in contemporary China, Yan argues, are now entirely focused on the success of their only one or two children. They exist for the sake of their children, instead of the other way around. Once the children are married and produce grandchildren, Yan argues, the new
grandparents take on the role of caring for their grandchildren in order to alleviate the burden on their working children. The financial burden on the children with regard to their elderly parents, Yan argues, is entirely involuntary, as the government continues to deny adequate welfare services to the elderly. The idea that younger generations of Chinese people have any obligations to their parents outside the mandatory financial ones, has collapsed according to Yan, which he considers as evidence for his theory of individualization.

Sociologist Qi Xiaoying (2014) has challenged Yan's theory of individualization in China. Modern Chinese people, Yan (2003, 2009) argues, have become emotionally and socially disembedded from traditional social structures. But Qi counters that while Yan may be correct regarding the widespread collapse of the Confucian idea of filial piety under communism, financial obligations toward family have remained intact. To support this claim, Qi cites various types of evidence, such as government statistics and secondary sources. The Communist Party, she argues, has placed a continuing emphasis on the importance of family relationships for the happiness of Chinese people, even under Mao. Under the One Child Policy, Qi argues, family obligations became ever more strongly advocated by the Party as the "only child" had to provide for elderly parents in the absence of adequate social welfare. Daughters exerted themselves in particular to demonstrate that they could care for their parents as well as any man could (Fong 2002, cited in Qi 2014). This accounts for the small number of elderly care homes, according to statistics cited by Qi, which catered to only 0.8% of pensioners in 2000 (Wong 2008, cited in Qi 2014).

Qi concludes that although societal expectations toward young people have changed, filial piety in the form of obeying family obligations remains a salient feature of contemporary Chinese society. Yan's theory of individualization has thus apparently exaggerated the individual freedoms of young Chinese people from the obligations posed by kinship. Qi states:

> [t]he question which social commentators and researchers face concern not the end of family obligation but the changes it shall undergo and also the nature of the social and moral mechanisms through which it shall continue to operate.

— Qi 2014, 144.

*Ritual obligations and individualization*
My approach to this debate is to look not at financial obligations, as Qi does, but at what I will call the ritual obligations of people in Southern Fujian, both toward their own households and toward other communities in which they participate. Money flows allegedly existing between parents and their children are simply not adequate for exploring such a complex subject as changes in the obligations between people in Chinese society. Most people's financial obligations understandably remain limited to their own households, simply because of the limitations on their access to wealth. Ritual obligations, on the other hand, can shed light on people's wider social worlds, as they enter into communities that are not necessarily marked by financial obligations, such as lineages, churches, friend circles, and the Communist Party. If we want a more comprehensive understanding of the obligations people in contemporary Southern Fujian have toward others, then we must explore their membership in multiple communities. Do Chinese people place ritual obligations toward Protestant churches above their ritual obligations toward their households? If so, what does that suggest about Yan's (2003, 2009) claims regarding the individualization of Chinese society?

Let us take a closer look at the idiom of ritual obligations. "Obligation" contrasts somewhat with other anthropologists' findings in China. Adam Chau, for example, built his ideas about Chinese rituals around the concept of "efficacy." It is important to take into account the communal nature of the ceremonies I have studied. I do not deny that efficacy is a central theme when we look at people who visit various ritual service providers or temples to elicit a "miraculous response" (Chau lived in a temple during his fieldwork in Shaanxi). But weddings, funerals, and lineage processions are not necessarily staged for efficacy. Staging these ceremonies marks important moments in the domestic cycle of a household or the annual calendar of a community. I do not assert that "obligations" can replace "efficacy" as a central concept for studying rituals in China, but that it can supplement our vocabulary for speaking about the communal rituals which I studied.

The enactment of rituals that satisfy one's obligations toward living and deceased ancestors, in particular, is marked by a high degree of normativity. Fei (1992 / 1947, 96-99), for example, has described Chinese rural society as being "ruled by ritual" instead of legal or political authority. He argues:

Ritual is even more exacting than morality. If you act in violation of rituals, your action is not only immoral but incorrect, and it will not bring about a desired result. Rituals are
sustained by personal habits. It is as if there were ten eyes watching you and ten fingers pointing at you all the time. You cannot help but follow the ritual, even if you are all by yourself. Following rituals is the right way to act.

This does not mean that I rely on the much debated concept of "orthopraxy" in China (see Watson and Rawski 1988). From an anthropological perspective, orthopraxy as a concept can hardly be deployed fruitfully. Of course one may read certain Confucian classics and come to an analysis of "orthopraxy according to Confucian writings." Or one could interview a Protestant minister and come to an analysis of "orthopraxy according to pastor X." But as an anthropologist one cannot assume that interlocutors in Southern Fujian are per definition imbued with a sense of Confucian or Protestant orthopraxy. Quite to the contrary, pluriprax households I studied in Southern Fujian tended to improvise in order to find ways to enact ceremonies that are more or less satisfactory to the different actors involved (think of the example in the introduction, when the groom's father suddenly decided to fix a lantern during the ceremony). What mattered was not orthopraxy but the acceptability of the ritual to all or most ritualists. No "universal standards" for ritual exist on a grassroots level, as different lineages, different church communities, different households, and different native place communities have different histories and circumstances under which they enact rituals. The immediate, often complex circumstances determined ritual enactment, not a sense of orthopraxy.

Nevertheless, practitioners of popular religion and Protestant Christianity both have obligations toward their ritual communities, and these are conflicting ritual obligations. With minor exceptions, obligations toward religious communities in China have long been something for nuns and monks. One did not "belong" to a religion but to a lineage, a village, and a social class. That is where ritual obligations were assigned, and not in temples. As Michael Szonyi (2002) has argued,

[i]ssues of affiliation or disaffiliation with a given temple, of temple financing, and of ritual organization became matters determined not by individual preference, or by place of residence, but by the registered household to which one belonged, which over the course of the Ming [dynasty, 1368-1644] had become virtually synonymous with the lineage. Indeed, the organization and activities of local cults came to rest on a foundation of kinship ideas and institutions.
My research participants rarely spoke of rituals as "obligations." With only a few exceptions, they did not deploy the common Chinese terms yiwu or zeren for obligation, when speaking about funerary or other rituals. On an etic level, however, obligation is a useful term because it became clear to me that when enacting death rituals, research participants had to comply by certain standards. These standards were sometimes literally spelled out for them, as in the lists of "funeral guidelines" drawn up by a Protestant church and the Xiamen city authorities (appendix 1, 2, and 3, discussed below), or in the eighteenth century Chinese Catholic funeral guidelines detailed by Standaert (2008, 142-147) and the even earlier but not less important *Family Rituals* written by the Fujian-born neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi in the twelfth century CE.

Due to a lack of emic terms, we have to look at how scholars have defined "obligation" with regard to rituals in Southern Fujian. Most scholars seem to agree that Chinese people incur their ritual obligations in three ways: 1) a sense of having to repay (grand-)parents for the "gift of life" and the sacrifices they made to raise their (grand-)children (Wolf 1974, Ahern 1973); 2) honoring communal traditions with regard to annual and lifecycle rituals and "hosting" community members to a lavish banquet (Chau 2015); and 3) the understanding that reciprocal and emotional relationships between people continue after death (J.L. Watson 1988a).

Just how pressing are Chinese people's ritual obligations toward parents, grandparents, and deceased ancestors? In separate studies, anthropologists Arthur Wolf (1974) and Emily Ahern (1973) took up the issue of how far a Taiwanese son's obligations reached with regard to venerating his father after death. Is a disinherited son still obliged to venerate his deceased father? Wolf argued that

> [a]lthough the obligation a son owes his father is not absolute, (...) it is very nearly so. That a man could be disinherited and still be held accountable for "the gift of life" argues that the burden of obligation favors parents and gives them the right to demand unquestioning loyalty. — Wolf 1974, 161.
Moreover, parents also have ritual obligations toward their children. Anthropologist Adam Yuet Chau (2006) describes the act of hosting weddings and funerals as one of paramount importance in the lives of people in Shaanbei province, Northern China.

A man and his wife will not feel fulfilled and accomplished until they have buried both of the man’s parents, gotten wives for all their sons, and married off all their daughters. Each of these moments entails hosting an event production: a funeral or a wedding. (...) As mentioned earlier, the traditional ritual procedures for a funeral or a wedding have to be followed. Yet equally important, these are also occasions where the host household has to engage in largely prescribed social interactions with many guests who come to the events to pay respect to the dead or to congratulate the newly married couple. The zhujia has to host and feast the guests well.


In Southern Fujian, ritual obligations are rarely legally binding. They precede modern legal institutions by many centuries, but they have been deeply transformed by modernity as demonstrated by the fact that the ritual obligations of people in contemporary Southern Fujian differ in many ways from those of people a century or more ago. Ritual obligations are sometimes issued in written form. But for the most part they are tacitly understood, learned through practice rather than from texts. Ritual obligations are highly situational and subject to change in the course of one's life. They are rarely devised by individuals for themselves, but bestowed on people as members of communities. In other words, ritual obligations are a highly complex feature of life in Southern Fujian, that can nevertheless be explored with the qualitative methods of anthropology.

To add some diachronic depth to this observation, being a member of a household in Southern Fujian carries evolving ritual obligations throughout one's life. Wolf (1984) has studied the "family cycle" and lifecycle in early twentieth century Taiwan. Taiwanese families expanded in size, Wolf argued, when a son attracted a daughter-in-law to the household, who ideally started having babies. At this point Wolf called the household a "stem family." When more sons also attracted wives and started reproducing, the household could grow into what Wolf called a "grand family." When the older generation passed away and the brothers divided up the household's property, the units became smaller, which Wolf called "elementary families." He constructed multiple categories ("subelementary
family," "solitaire," "augmented elementary family," "fréreche"), to sketch the different stages of evolution of early twentieth-century Taiwanese households, marked by a continuous shift from elementary, stem, to grand families and back to elementary.

Although urbanization and the impact of the One Child Policy have severely cut down the phenomenon of the "grand family" in contemporary mainland China, Wolf's observations are still useful. As the household moves from stage to stage, household members' ritual obligations also shift. For example, a groom's father is obliged to hold a lavish wedding banquet in line with his social status and the local community's customs. A woman married into her groom's household, may incur the obligation to venerate her husband's ancestors on set dates, and to prepare sacrifices for the Gods venerated by her new household. When a male's parents pass away, he faces the obligation to provide a lavish funeral and funeral banquet in keeping with the community's customs. An obedient son may one day become a strict father, a respected grandfather, and a venerated ancestor. The arrival of each new phase requires members to ritually redefine their relationship with the lineage or village community, the Gods, and deceased ancestors.

Central to this cyclical representation of the Southern Fujian household is the enactment of so-called lifecycle rituals. The present chapter focuses on one type of lifecycle ritual: the funeral. Funerals are arguably among the most costly rituals people in Southern Fujian enact during their lives. They mark the moment when a patriarch or matriarch becomes an ancestor to be cared for and to be venerated. Funerals, as the next section will elucidate in more detail, are important both as rituals to prepare a suitable place for the deceased -whether in the afterlife or in heaven- and as rituals to mark a reshuffling of the household shared by the living.

A typology of ritualists
In order to give a broad overview of people's ritual obligations during funerals in Southern Fujian, I have devised a typology of the ritualists one can discern at these important events. The aim of this typology is to create a degree of familiarity and understanding which the reader may need in order to assess the validity of other arguments I shall be making in this chapter. Six types of ritualists can be discerned at Southern Fujian funerals (as well as certain weddings), each essential to establishing and fulfilling relevant ritual obligations:
1) Ritual community. A group of people which claims ownership of a ritual. Church, lineage, Communist Party, neighborhood, or village communities create ritual obligations for members to uphold during funerals and weddings.

2) Host. Person who takes charge of a ritual. His or her (the host is usually a male) primary obligation is to hire specialists and to pay for ritual expenses such as food and a proper venue. Examples include a father who hosts a wedding for his son, or a son who hosts the attendants at his parent's funeral as the "chief mourner."

3) Ritual specialist. Someone with special ritual tasks, knowledge, and/or skills. Examples include Daoist priests; cooks and camera crews at weddings; and musicians at funerals.

4) Recipient. Funerals and weddings revolve around brides, grooms, and deceased persons, which is confirmed by their reception of gifts and sacrifices.

5) Casual participant. Members of a ritual community who fulfill minor ritual obligations. Examples include neighbors and colleagues who come to a memorial service or to congratulate a newlywed couple, and people (often women) who represent their household at a funeral or wedding.

6) Spectator. A person from outside the community who observes a ritual. Spectators have no ritual obligations, but their presence heightens the stakes for ritualists to act in accordance with communal conventions.

Funerals and weddings in Southern Fujian can indeed be "owned" by specific ritual communities. They are not necessarily owned by those who enact them, and not even by those who host them, but by the lineage or church community (formerly also the production brigade) in which the household is embedded through inclusion in its boundary system and in the territorial efficacy range of its God(s). But different communities can claim ownership of the same wedding or funeral, and this was one of the most contentious issues in my research. If both a church and a lineage community claimed ownership of a ritual, a situation of conflicting ritual obligations arose, necessitating people to discuss and make concessions.

As an example of contested ownership of a wedding, my observations during the 2015 wedding of a Protestant man from a local Xiamen ancestral lineage is revealing. I was present at this wedding as a friend and a participant, and afterwards the groom, surnamed
Kang, provided some highly insightful remarks about the Protestant wedding and its aftermath. Kang and his bride were not allowed to marry inside the "family church" where they had been baptized because they had cohabited for nearly a year before the wedding ceremony. For the ceremony they had nevertheless invited the church's minister, elders, and choir to come and lead the wedding proceedings. Kang's lineage members, among whom he lived in the high rise neighborhood that had replaced their ancestral village, played no role during the ceremony. None of the lineage's ancestors or Gods were venerated.

The banquet and ceremony took place in a large restaurant on the lineage's former territory. It struck me that Kang's lineage members were seated in the back of the venue, while church members sat up front. No notable lineage members came by to customarily toast with the other attendants (the church members). Only church members did these rounds, only church members stood by the couple at the restaurant entrance to receive guests, and only church members gave speeches to congratulate the couple. Clearly, ownership of this wedding had gone to the church community instead of the ancestral lineage community.

This was not received with gratitude by lineage elders. After the wedding, Kang told me they were dissatisfied about the wedding, complaining and gossiping behind the back of Kang's household that they had been forced to be part of a Protestant ceremony while they are all practitioners of popular religion. This was part of their long-term frustration with Kang's household, all members of which had converted to Protestantism in the course of the previous years. Kang told me that often when they walked to the nearby family church on Sunday mornings, a cousin or uncle would tease or scold them, saying: are you going to get brainwashed again? Their complaints over the wedding procedures, it seems, stemmed not just from having had to endure Protestant prayers, songs, scripture readings, and a sermon, but from the fact that this household had pushed the lineage community aside in favor of the church community. There was no "harmony" between different communities during Kang's wedding, just simple church dominance.

Like weddings, Southern Fujian funerals can also be contested in terms of ownership. As an example of contested ownership of a funeral, the vignette of a minister whom I will call Pastor Zhang, is particularly striking.

Zhang: Four weeks ago, a church member invited me to come to the hospital to talk to her aunt, who was terminally ill. She wanted her aunt, who had attended a
Christian Sunday school as a child, to become a Christian before she should die. The rest of her family are all nonbelievers.

... I asked the aunt: “Do you want to accept Jesus into your heart?”
She answered: “No.”

Then I asked her: “Do you want Jesus to bless your niece?”
And she answered: “Yes!”

So I asked: “Have you heard the name ‘Jesus’ when you were young?”
“‘Yes.’

“So you want to receive him into your heart then?”
And finally she answered: “Yes.”

Unfortunately, the aunt’s family were not present when she converted. When I visited them after her death, they told me they did not want to hold a Christian funeral for her.

After some time, however, the deceased’s brother accepted my request for a Christian funeral. But the rest of the family was against the idea, which caused a big conflict. After a long discussion, we divided the funeral into a traditional and a Christian part. We chose a middle path. First, the family would bow and burn incense. They would put food beside the coffin and cry loudly. The Christian part of the funeral would consist of singing hymns, and of a sermon by me.

... I received criticism from other pastors for this arrangement: they want funerals to have only Christian content, and no traditional or superstitious elements. — Interview, March 5, 2011

This vignette sheds light on the importance of ritual service providers for funerals and weddings. Ministers and people like funeral group leaders (explained below) lay down rules for practitioners, telling them what they can and cannot do during ritual events. According to Adam Chau,

in Chinese religious life, the most common and most important activities are in the form of households hiring ritual specialists to conduct rituals on behalf of the household, especially at funerals. — Chau 2015, 229.
Pastor Zhang was important as a ritual service provider because the deceased seemed to have no children of her own, so a "host" or chief mourner was absent. The deceased's brother and a niece who regarded the deceased as a mother, seemed to be in a struggle over who would take on the role of the host. Pastor Zhang could thus step in to claim part of the funeral for Protestantism.

The apparently rigid role division of my typology, however, does not prevent a good deal of improvising during funerals. When ritual obligations have not been clearly established among the ritualists, they sometimes have to improvise. One female participant named Xinmei, in her early twenties, had intended to observe a ritual involving kneeling down to her deceased grandfather as a spectator, but she was pulled in by her aunt and physically forced to kneel down as a casual participant. She managed to keep one knee off the ground, however, fulfilling both her obligation as a filial granddaughter and a Protestant convert. Another participant called Ma recalled joining a similar ritual for his grandfather as a casual participant, but being quickly pulled out of the group of mourners by his Protestant mother to become a spectator. The ritual roles described in this typology must therefore be understood as flexible, situational, overlapping, and temporary, for they may change with each occasion (one can be a recipient/groom one day and a spectator at somebody else's wedding the next day) and in the course of an ongoing ritual. Moreover, as explained, people age and their responsibilities in their ritual communities change as their domestic cycle unfolds.

_Incuring new ritual obligations_

Protestant converts in Southern Fujian gain new ritual obligations that make the traditional death rituals in the region off limits for them. How do they incur these new ritual obligations? At the heart of Protestant ritual obligations is abstention from any "superstitious" rituals for non-Christian Gods, ghosts, and ancestors. This obligation to abstain, as argued in Chapter 1, has long been at the core of Chinese Protestantism, particularly as the modernizing imperial, Republican, and Communist states were more or less outspoken allies in the Protestant fight against "backward traditions." As White (2011) argues about early twentieth century Southern Fujian Protestantism:

> [E]ntrance into the Minnan church was conditioned upon a degree of denial of one’s previously held beliefs and practices. The institution of the church in Minnan,
especially in its earliest years, encouraged a clearly delineated dichotomy. Rites were implemented that necessarily required believers to make public breaks with past traditions, initiating them into a new system of beliefs. To name just a few of the restrictions, potential converts were no longer permitted to worship local deities, visit temples, offer sacrifices to ancestral tablets, conduct work or business on Sundays, or contribute towards local plays and festivals deemed idolatrous. Such strictures created a cleavage between those within the church and those without. There was no middle ground for baptized members.

— White 2011, 15.

Apart from the obligation to abstain from "traditional" or "superstitious" rituals, Protestants in Southern Fujian today are expected to participate in forms of volunteering. Church volunteers organize weddings, funerals, weekly and annual celebrations, and online prayer groups. Of specific interest in this chapter, during funerals, Protestants have the responsibility to sing hymns, pray, and avoid "superstition" (see funeral guidelines in the appendix), responsibilities taken up earnestly by members of so-called "funeral groups" (sangshizu, discussed in the next section). These groups are an illustration of how different the Protestant division of ritual obligations is from the household's. Although many converts are not highly active volunteers, it is a frequently heard hobby horse of church leaders that a reborn Christian must actively work for the church and proselytize among non-Christians. Moreover, individual converts are obliged to work on improving their "relationship with God" through bible reading and prayer.

While incurring this new set of ritual obligations, Protestant converts in Southern Fujian often retain their former ritual obligations to their households. Throughout the thesis I refer to this situation as conflicting ritual obligations. Conflicting ritual obligations are felt particularly strongly during funerals, when people have to find ways to satisfy obligations connected to being a household member embedded in an ancestral lineage, a former member of a socialist production brigade, as well as being a Protestant church member. The shared enactment of funerals is a point of conflict for many pluriprax households in Southern Fujian.

In speaking to the researcher, some people in Southern Fujian discursively framed conflicting ritual obligations in terms of conflict between "Chinese" and "Western" culture. Chinese people, apparently, should enact "Chinese" rituals and not "Western" rituals, which
are "foreign" and which Chinese people "don't understand" (budong). Protestants have responded to this by recasting their religion as "Asian;" as pre-dating Chinese Buddhism (in the form of Nestorianism); and even predating Daoism (as suggested first by the British missionary James Legge in the 19th century, a claim reproduced more recently by the popular Shenzhou documentary series). Moreover, Protestantism is discursively aligned with the Chinese nation-state by ministers during sermons, by proclaiming the Chinese people to be "predestined" by God to play a leading role in the world. But in contemporary Southern Fujian, Protestant rituals are not easily "interwoven" (Standaert 2008) with the more traditional rituals of the household.

Historian Nicolas Standaert (2008) has written a highly detailed study about "the interweaving of rituals" that took place when Catholic missionaries participated in funerals in seventeenth century China. He explores the "exchange and interaction" between two very different ritual systems before the era of European imperialism. Following the renowned scholar of Chinese Buddhism Erik Zürcher (1994), Standaert argues that

[in order to avoid being branded as "heterodox" or "heteroprax" (xie) and treated as a subversive sect, Christians had to prove they were on the side of the orthodox, or zheng- that part of Chinese culture that is imperative and unavoidable for any people who wish to function within it.

This meant not an incorporation of certain doctrinal beliefs into Catholicism, but enacting Catholic rituals within a locally accepted framework.

In modern China, however, such an "interweaving" of Protestant and Chinese death rituals seems to be much more problematic. For state-led destruction of "feudal" and "traditional" culture has delegitimized many Chinese practices in the eyes of urban Protestant converts. Ironically, the authorities have demanded for many decades that any Chinese Protestantism must be a sinicized Protestantism. But Chinese Protestants, obedient citizens as they are in shaking off all remnants of "feudal superstition," find few Chinese rituals or traditions which have maintained their credibility, that could be integrated into mainstream Chinese Protestantism. Communist authorities themselves have delegitimized "traditional culture" through countless violent campaigns in the course of the twentieth century.
In Hui'an, rural Southern Fujian, a tradition exists of building Protestant ancestral halls (Chris White, fc). But this seems to be a singularly unique phenomenon in China, and Xiamenese Protestants with whom I spoke about these ancestral halls, laughed and shrugged their shoulders as if to wave away the "silliness" of interweaving Protestantism with ancestral rites. Likewise, groups such as Eastern Lightning and the Shouters have managed to form highly energetic (and allegedly violent) movements combining various Chinese and Protestant elements. But these seem to elicit strong aversion among more mainstream Protestant and non-Protestant groups in society. Their aspiration to be "modern" has kept Protestants in Southern Fujian from interweaving Chinese and Protestant rituals.

Despite all that, the ancestors are shared, and they are a highly sensitive topic. To many practitioners of popular religion in Southern Fujian, ancestor veneration is more important than venerating Gods. One does not exist without ancestors, they reason, while the Gods are merely for "peace and health" (ping'an jiankang), perhaps also for entertainment. Those are luxury items compared to the existential significance of one's ancestors. One participant asked me: "If you do not venerate your ancestors, then where do you come from? What kind of person are you?" (Interview, 10 October 2015). Other non-Protestant participants expressed their amazement that the Netherlands do not have a national holiday to attend to ancestors' graves. To them, people who do not venerate or commemorate their ancestors are utterly lost and disconnected from history.

This important obligation to honor deceased ancestors makes Southern Fujian funerals especially challenging events for pluriprax households. The following vignette explores the tension between individual choice and communal obligations to enact death rituals in contemporary Southern Fujian. In doing so, it engages with a fundamental debate in the discursive field of individualization in China (Yan 2009; Kipnis 2012) and the West (Howard 2007). Although as a regular participant in the activities of a so-called funeral group (sanghshizu) I recorded numerous funerals in Southern Fujian during my fieldwork, I selected this particular vignette because it features a funeral bringing together a Protestant church community; a former socialist work unit; as well as the deceased's ancestral lineage. It is a highly complex funeral during which the deceased's son, the chief mourner, managed to harmonize his own and his father's conflicting ritual obligations toward these different communities. The vignette demonstrates how people are able to maintain pluriprax households in the context of the individualization of Chinese society.
Vignette: One funeral, two services

The protagonists

In 1970, Ma Yilong was desperate to find a wife. His father had been head of a local law enforcement unit (baojia) associated with the nationalist Kuomintang party until the Communist Liberation. Ma Yilong was consequentially marked for life as a reactionary and an enemy of the masses. Even in Ma's hometown in rural Quanzhou in Southern Fujian, where once his father was a respected man, parents were unwilling to marry their daughters off to a household that had been, and could at any moment become again, the target of punitive actions or raids by over-zealous communist youths. Ma Yilong's parents had to find a household with an even worse record than their own, in order to acquire a wife for him.

As it happened, such a household was just around the corner in their own village. Zhu Enlin had no recollections of her father. He was an army man fighting in Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist forces against Mao's. After the Communist Liberation he fled to Singapore with a mistress, ending all communication with Zhu Enlin and her mother, who had remained in rural Quanzhou. Zhu Enlin's maternal and paternal grandparents had converted to Protestant Christianity in the 1890s through the efforts of a British missionary.
in the area. Both her parents were from Protestant families, and three of her uncles were ordained ministers in churches across the region. The unfortunate combination of lacking a father to provide protection and basic income; being associated with "reactionary" resistance to Communism; having relatives abroad (overseas Chinese were seen as potential leaders of a military uprising against Mao's government); and being part of the local Protestant community (regarded with suspicion due to alleged ties to imperialist powers) made Zhu Enlin a particularly marginalized and vulnerable woman. Her high school exam was disqualified three years in a row in the 1960s, until a staff member of her school took pity and passed her. Zhu Enlin went on to become a teacher and later a linguist at Xiamen University. If even the relatively mundane task of passing a high school exam was nearly impossible for Zhu in Maoist China, finding a husband was even more so. Who would marry such a woman, and burden his children with these stigmas?

Indeed, the disgraced Ma Yilong was Zhu Enlin's only suitor. But Zhu and her mother resisted the advances of Ma and his family for years. For Ma's parents had long been involved with Gods and ritual service providers associated with popular religion.

Since we are a Christian family, our first principle was that a believer cannot marry a non-believer. That was before the [1949 Communist] Liberation. [During the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976] it was very difficult to find a believer, so I remained unmarried for a long time. But I'm an only child, I couldn't stay unmarried. I couldn't find [a husband], everybody was afraid, afraid of us Christians, they didn't dare [to marry me]. (...) I had been matched with the son of a pastor in Hui'an, my mother was on very good terms with this pastor. My mother said that since we went to school together in Hui'An, the two of us were well matched. But after the start of the Cultural Revolution, everybody was scattered. The main problem was that they were scared, they didn't dare. At that time there were also good families, all believers, but they didn't dare. And many non-believers said that us Christians, we would be accused of many things, so they didn't dare, especially because of my father in Singapore, it was very difficult. (...) Our families have been neighbors for a long time. I live here, he lives there. His father's father's father and further back, the relationship has always been good, always good friends. (...) My husband's father, they didn't believe, and my mother was a believer. So she informed him, saying we are believers, and when he came to propose the marriage he said there was no need to refuse. At that time there were no churches, there was nothing, and he said, perhaps later we can join you in believing.
When he said this, my mother became convinced because at that time it was impossible for a Christian to find another believer.

— Interview, November 1, 2014

As they were desperate for their son to get married, Ma Yilong's lineage elders expressed their sympathy for Protestantism, making a vague pledge to "join" Zhu and her mother at a more opportune moment. They got married in February 1971 and had a son and a daughter. The pledge to join Protestantism created a situation of conflicting ritual obligations that would last for the rest of Ma's life. From the first day of his marriage, Ma joined his wife in bible reading and prayer before meals, even in the darkest days of the Cultural Revolution (husband and wife shared a distaste for the ideals of the Cultural Revolution). But Ma never joined his wife's church community, and he did not get baptized. In 1978, when universities were starting to reopen and a dire need existed for teaching staff, the couple moved to Xiamen to work as scholars at the city's university. Whenever visiting his hometown in rural Quanzhou, Ma would burn incense and kneel down before his ancestors. During the Chinese New Year holidays, he would participate in processions of his lineage, honoring the Gods with his financial contribution. On top of that, in 1987 he joined the Chinese Communist Party, according to his wife for the benefit of his family (it remained unclear to me whether this was connected to a promotion at work or for some other reason).

Zhu Enlin said:

My husband is a son with great filial piety. Whatever his father and mother say, he does.
Although he works at Xiamen University, he still listens to his parents (laughs).

— Interview, November 1, 2014

By the time I arrived in Xiamen for fieldwork in June 2014, Ma had been terminally ill for several years. I met his only son, Zhixi, at a family church in that city, where we started talking and arranged to meet several more times. Zhixi shared with me the above narrative about his parents' marriage, but for the precise details he referred me to his mother, Zhu Enlin. Ma Yilong was too ill for me to talk to him. Zhu, Zhixi, and I met several times over the following year to talk about their household's history, which is too complex and eventful to recount in full detail here.
When I attended Ma Yilong's funeral in Xiamen in October 2015, the different ritual communities to which he had committed himself in the course of his life, all came together. These communities were his ancestral lineage community from rural Quanzhou; his Maoist "work unit" (*danwei*) from Xiamen University; and his son's Protestant church community. Ma's links with these different communities and their mutually exclusive rituals became public on that day. Which community would lead the funeral proceedings? Considering the history of acrimony between them, it is difficult to imagine how they would collaborate to enact a funeral together as Communist Party members, Protestant Christians, and practitioners of popular religion.

Put in resonance with my typology of Southern Fujian ritualists, above, which ritual community could claim *ownership* of Ma Yilong's funeral? Did Ma's lifelong devotion to his ancestral clan mean that members of his lineage would provide burnt offerings and food sacrifices, perhaps under the directions of a Daoist priest or accompanied by the chants of Buddhist monks? Or did his Communist Party membership mean that this would be a strictly secular memorial service organized in line with work unit conventions, commemorating Ma's contributions to socialism? Considering Ma's lifelong avoidance of churches, certainly Protestants could have no bearing on his funeral?

This problem was particularly pertinent for Ma's son Zhixi. Zhixi would be the host and chief mourner at his father's funeral, fulfilling the most important ritual obligation a Chinese son has toward his father. But clearly, Zhixi was facing conflicting ritual obligations. Each of these communities was embedded in different ritual systems, with contradictory ideas about proper funerary rites. How would Zhixi, as the host and chief mourner at the ritual, harmonize his conflicting ritual obligations?

*Funeral reforms in modern China*

Before providing an ethnographic description of Ma's funeral, I want to reflect briefly on the different funeral formats in Southern Fujian. Rituals for the dead were standardized to a large extent across late imperial China (1368 - 1911) (J.L. Watson 1988a; Sutton 2007). This meant that across the vast regions under imperial control, people conducted funerals in strikingly similar ways. According to Adam Chau (2011), standard features of late imperial funerals included:

- Dressing the corpse (*xiaolian*) [immediately after the death occurs]
• Public notice of death and reporting the death to the local gods (baomiao) [immediately after the death occurs]
• The encoffining of the corpse (dalian) [usually on the third day after death]
• The third-day reception (jiesan) [right after encoffining]
• The beginning of the condolence-receiving period (kaidiao) [which will last until the coffin leaves the home]
• Completing the tablet (chengzhu) [during the condolence-receiving period]
• Sending off the deceased (songlu)
• The burial procession (fayin) [when the coffin leaves the home for the burial site or the temporary storage place]
• The burial (zang) [may take place right after the funeral procession or a long time afterwards]

— Chau 2011, 83-84.

The period following death and preceding burial was marked by bin (殡) rituals focusing on managing alleged "pollution" (J.L. Watson 1988a) by the corpse; arranging the funeral ceremony; and standing guard by the corpse at night, dressed in sackcloth. Elaborate zang (葬) rituals were those conducted at the gravesite, focusing on parting with the corpse and ensuring the deceased's safe passage through the Otherworld (R.S. Watson 1988, H.M.L. Liu 2015). These could include acts such as loud wailing; burnt sacrifices; and the esoteric rituals of a Daoist priest to negotiate with Otherworld officials. The ritual to bridge the bin and zang phases was the funeral procession, which could be quick and simple in the case of poor peasants, or elaborate and extravagant in the case of funerals for members of the nobility (Chau 2011). According to Feuchtwang,

The quality of the [funeral] procession from the house out to the burial ground, the presence and number of eulogy readers (honoured guests) and the bond friends of the chief mourner display the social reputation of the household at this fixed point in time. It is a theatre enacted by the household and its public themselves.

— Feuchtwang 2001, 22.

More elaborate processions would feature communal ritual enactment such as synchronized prostration at regular intervals; Chinese opera and other musical performances; and
Buddhist sutra chanting along the way. In all cases, some sacrifices were made to feed the deceased's spirit and to appease the officials of the Otherworld, consisting of incense, special spirit money, different types of meat, and wine. After the funeral, descendants continued bringing sacrifices to their deceased ancestor at regular intervals. A myriad of local variations seem to have existed throughout late imperial China, but these basic elements seem to recur in the available historical sources.

After the fall of the Qing empire and the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912 under Sun Yat-sen, the new state attempted to make far-reaching changes to Chinese death rituals, considered as part of "backward" culture. Memorial services in European (Christian) style were introduced, featuring speeches to eulogize the deceased's good deeds and achievements in life. European-style marching bands came to accompany state funeral processions, with instrumentalists dressed in uniforms and playing modern compositions or Christian hymns (Goossaert and Palmer 2011). These were supposed to replace the socially marginal pipers and drummers guiding the deceased's spirit along the path of the procession (J.L. Watson 1988b). Burnt sacrifices were dubbed a waste of the nation's resources and "superstition" unbefitting a modern society. But as in many other areas, the Republican state was ineffective to push through ambitious death ritual reforms, hindered as it was by internal strife and the Japanese invasion.

When in 1949 the Chinese Communist Party came to power, more funeral reforms were implemented and with greater thoroughness. These reforms were most effectively implemented in urban areas, whereas in rural areas party cadres seemed to side with local tradition and local social memory (Oxfeld 2010). As Whyte (1988:291) argues, no differences existed between urban and rural funerals until Communist modernization efforts eradicated traditional funeral structures in urban areas while affecting rural areas to a much lesser degree. Rural funerals in Southern Fujian, for example, may still feature elements of the late imperial funeral format, while urban funerals have been heavily "reformed."

The city of Xiamen exemplifies this situation. A large economic and cultural gap has arisen between the urban area of Xiamen and the surrounding countryside. Its mainland suburbs of Tongan 同安 and Xiang'an 翔安 have been closely linked with Xiamen island for many centuries, as Tongan was designated the administrative center of the area during the Tang dynasty. Tongan and Xiangan, just across the bay from Xiamen island, have not
yet experienced economic development and immigration on a scale comparable with the
island, and are now generally regarded by Xiamenites as backward, rural areas. But
according to an elderly minister who was stationed in Tongan for many years, Tongan’s
funerals closely resemble those of Xiamen island from before its rapid development in the
Reform Era. Even in such close geographical proximity, death rituals in "developed" urban
areas can be markedly different from those in "backward" rural suburbs.

In contemporary urban parts of Xiamen, where our case study, the funeral of Ma
Yilong, is set, the basic structure of a funeral is now as follows:

- Mandatory collection of the corpse by funeral parlor employees [one is obliged to
  report a bereavement within twelve hours, and a vehicle with qualified personnel is
dispatched on short notice. If the bereavement occurs at a hospital, the hospital may
have its own facilities for storing and parting with the corpse]
- Preparations for the funeral [relatives can "visit" the corpse at the funeral parlor to
  wash it, dress it, and to apply make-up]
- The memorial service [usually at a funeral parlor three to seven days after the
  bereavement]
- Mandatory cremation [immediately after the memorial service, as the new funeral
  parlor in Xiamen has a crematorium. Cremation was made mandatory in urban China
  under Mao, and in all of China in the course of the 1980s]
- Collecting the urn [within an hour after cremation]
- Installing the urn at a public cemetery [no mandatory time slot, but private burial
  plots are illegal] (See also the 1983 "Xiamen City Funeral Management Provisional
  Measures," appendix 2)

All three phases of the late imperial funeral - post-mortem bin rituals and gravesite zang
rituals, as well as the connecting funeral procession - have been heavily affected by state
policy. The legal obligation to report a bereavement within twelve hours, and the quick
removal of the corpse by funeral parlor employees, means that the bereaved family
effectively loses control over a corpse until it is returned to them in an ash container on the
day of cremation. Post-mortem bin rituals dealing with death pollution and guarding the
corpse are thus effectively surrendered to the civic authorities. The obligation to cremate
corpses instead of burying them, has largely sidelined the traditional zang rituals enacted at
the gravesite. For under Mao, funeral parlors were designated as the places where urban
work units could gather to hold eulogies for their deceased, and the work unit leaders would sum up their contributions to socialism (Whyte 1988).

Funeral processions, traditionally conspicuous public events, were outlawed in Xiamen in 1983, allegedly because they hamper traffic and thus form a barrier to the city's economic development. People still occasionally hold processions, but in my observation these are brief walks from the deceased's home to nearby busses that bring the mourners to the funeral parlor, not mile-long walks to a mountainside grave (see Colijn 2016). The “Xiamen City Funeral Management provisional measures” (1983), drawn up shortly after the establishment of Xiamen as a Special Economic Zone, detail the continued prohibition of processions in Xiamen. The sixth point of the document states:

Vigorously promote civilization, simple and plain, conserve resources when conducting funerals, oppose feudal superstition, extravagance, and wastefulness. It is forbidden to assemble a large body of marchers to parade in a funeral procession, except when a car rental company is hired through the Funeral Management Office to provide transport. Random work units and individuals may not provide vehicles for funeral processions, and violators will be dealt with by the Public Security Bureau, Traffic Inspection Bureau, and fuel stations respectively.
— Xiamen Funeral Management Office 1983.

The funeral: part I.
Ma Yilong's funeral in October 2015 was to feature no procession and no "traditional" bin or zang rituals but a memorial service in a funeral parlor just before cremation. I knew the funeral parlor in Xiamen's mainland district of Jimei quite well. Members of a so-called "funeral group" (sangshizu) from a big Three Self church had brought me along in their vans many times to observe Protestant funerals and to learn about their work (see Colijn 2016). On the day of Ma Yilong's funeral, in October 2015, I was confident that I would arrive at the parlor on time. Unfortunately, the young motor taxi driver whose services I had enlisted, had been reluctant to admit that he did not know the way. The upshot was that I got to see some of Jimei's more remote, mountainous parts. By the time I arrived at the funeral parlor, people were already streaming out of the designated memorial room. They were mostly retired Xiamen University staff who had attended the memorial service held by Ma's work unit, and now they were going home. The funeral was over. Or was it? As the
work unit members exited Ma's memorial room, another group was waiting to enter. A second memorial service was about to start.

*Splitting up the memorial service*

This option to split the memorial service into several parts or chapters, is a crucial feature of contemporary funerals in Xiamen (for an example from Shanghai see H.M.L. Liu 2015). It means that the funeral revolves around the deceased *individual* and is not exclusively controlled by the socialist party-state (as was the case under Mao), the traditional lineage or family (as was the case before Mao), or a Protestant church (as in Western Christianity). Following Yan Yunxiang (2003, 2009), I argue that these more or less traditional social structures have lost their totalizing grip on Chinese people's lives. Instead of absolute control by one ritual community at funerals in Xiamen, I observed that these collectives are forced, however reluctantly, to carve up the memorial service among themselves in acknowledgement of the individual's complex personal identity and life history.

As anthropologist Kenneth Dean (1993) noted in Southern Fujian and nearby areas,

> more and more, cadres feel that it is appropriate for them to take part in their own families' elaborate traditional funeral rites, although few yet dare openly take part in communal *jiao* sacrifices. This clearly puts them in an awkward position, for in Southeast China, as throughout China, involvement in religious activity is inseparable from social standing and is a precondition of involvement in local organization and local decision-making. — Dean 1993, 5-6.

In other words, in post-Mao China Communist Party members and local cadres are learning to adapt to a situation where they share rituals with previously outlawed or marginalized groups such as ancestral lineages and Protestant churches. Ideological correctness has given way to pragmatism, social status, and cultivation of personal bonds.

This requires compromises so that relatives, colleagues, and church members are satisfied about the funeral. But how to achieve this in cases such as Ma Yilong's, where the deceased did not indicate her or his ritual preferences? This seems to happen often in Southern Fujian; funerals are rarely discussed with the dying. Those who are about to die, expect their offspring or other close relatives to simply take care of the funeral. But when the people organizing the funeral have to satisfy different communities with different
demands, conflicts sometimes occur.

Not entirely by chance, it seems, the "sharing" of funerals by different communities harks back to the ways late imperial and Republican funerals for the rich or the notable were "shared" by Buddhist nuns, monks, opera singers, Daoists, European-style marching bands, and Confucian scholars. Chau's (2011) fascinating description of a Beijing general's funeral in 1939 is a case in point. Multiple teams of ritual service providers participated in that funeral, which confirmed the social prestige of the family and allegedly increased the efficacy of the rituals in safeguarding the deceased's well-being in the afterlife. Buddhist monks, nuns, and lama's chanted different sutras coterminously, resulting in a cacophony that was not perceived as conflictuous but as efficacious.

While we may point to historical continuity, as anthropologists often like to do, important differences also exist between contemporary and late imperial or Republican "shared" funerals. The most important difference is that in today's funerals, like Ma Yilong's funeral, the different communities do not enact their rituals coterminously. The cacophony of late imperial and Republican funerals, described by Chau and which can still be observed in rural Southern Fujian, is not a regular feature of urban Xiamenese funerals. Different ritual communities hold their memorial service consecutively rather than coterminously. This resonates with the "funeral guidelines" of both Protestant churches and secular authorities in the city, requiring funerals to be enacted in "orderly, civilized, dignified" fashion (see appendices 1 and 2). Moreover, the different groups stand in a competitive relationship rather than a collaborative one, competing over such issues as who gets to hold the first memorial service and who brings a bigger groups of mourners. In contrast to late imperial and Republican funerals, the different shades of the individual deceased's identity are compartmentalized and not brought together but explicitly separated. The different ritual communities to which a deceased was committed during her or his life, do not work together to increase the funeral's efficacy, but assert their own (socialist, Protestant, ancestral) narrative about the deceased's life, ignoring the deceased's other communities.

The situation of conflicting ritual obligations facing Ma Zhixi as the chief mourner at his father's funeral in October 2015, was thus a situation linked intimately with the project of Chinese modernity and the subsequent individualization of Chinese society. Modern institutions such as socialist work units and Protestant church communities claim exclusive commitment by their members. They do not "mix" in the same way as
The chief mourner faced the challenge to harmonize between these communities that do not acknowledge the efficacy or value of each other's rituals and do not participate in each other's rituals. Each consecutive memorial service creates a subjunctive world in which the deceased was only a Protestant, or only a lineage member, or only a loyal socialist. The totalitarian nature of modernity is thus exposed through its project of framing people as either "socialist," "Protestant," "Buddhist," or something else. But Reform Era China is at the same time marked by features of "post-" or "second" modernity, where once dominant collectivities have lost their total grip over people's subjectivities (Kipnis 2012). While the work unit and the church still hold separate memorial services and refuse to mix, it is now commonly acknowledged that they are made up of individuals who do mix, depending on their personal circumstances and tastes.

The funeral: part II.

A group of over one hundred Ma lineage members had made the trip from rural Quanzhou to the funeral parlor in Jimei. These were Ma Yilong's siblings, cousins, neighbors, and other relatives to whom Ma had demonstrated dedication throughout his life. But strikingly, the second memorial service was not hosted by Ma's ancestral lineage. According to rule no. 1 of the 1983 "Xiamen City Funeral Management Provisional Measures," deceased cannot be transported from the city where they passed away. This rule seems specifically designed for migrant workers; many work and live hundreds or thousands of miles from their ancestral hometowns, and the authorities are unwilling to finance or sanction their final trip home. Migrants like Ma have to be cremated in the city. For Ma's lineage members, this meant that they had to travel to Xiamen as visitors to attend their relative's funeral, instead of being able to bring him "home" and host the funeral at their own territory. An unwritten rule in Southern Fujian states that visitors must comply by the conventions of the place they enter. This is called "ruxiang suisu" (入乡随俗), follow the customs of the village you entered, or "when in Rome do as the Romans do." Ma lineage members could be no more than "spectators" (see typology above) at their relative's funeral, instead of "casual participants" fulfilling ritual roles in accordance with their own community's conventions.

Contrary to what I had expected considering Ma's habit of abstaining from Protestant church activities, the second memorial service was marked with Protestant
rituals. For on his deathbed, Ma's wife and son had invited various ministers to work on Ma and to pray for his religious conversion. Although Ma's first and last church visit was on the day his son Zhixi got married, they claimed that he had adopted Christianity on his deathbed. His wife and son had made sure that Ma was not cremated as a practitioner of popular religion, but as a Protestant. The Protestant church of his son Zhixi, the chief mourner and host of the ritual, could therefore claim ownership of the second memorial service.

I have come across quite a few deathbed conversions in Xiamen. Whereas traditional Chinese death rituals are centered on feeding and “domesticating” (J.L. Watson 1988a) their loved ones’ souls after death, Christians may provide for the soul before death by converting the dying. Christian conversion before death would qualify the soul for heaven, obliterating the need for further post-mortem rituality aimed at the soul. Unlike other deathbed conversions I had been informed about, Ma Yilong's alleged conversion did not lead to conflict between the church and members of his kinship community.

Zhixi thus dealt with his conflicting ritual obligations in three ways. First, by organizing a funeral where both his own church and his father's work unit would hold memorial services. These two "modern" collectives could hold consecutive memorial services that would not directly contradict (Protestant and "traditional" death rites with spirit money and sacrifices are understood by Protestants in Southern Fujian to contradict). Second, by assigning his lineage community a mere "spectator" role during these services, and effectively shaking off his obligation to host rituals to feed and comfort his father's spirit. Zhixi would honor the lineage community later that day by hosting them to a funeral banquet, to which work unit and church members were not invited. Thirdly, to justify this neglect of an important obligation, he claimed his father's conversion to Protestantism. A filial son buries his Protestant parent in accordance with Protestant customs. And if the parent's religious identity was unclear in life, Protestants in Xiamen know how to seize the opportunity to reconstruct the deceased as a Protestant subject. In this way, Zhixi avoided all "superstition" at his father's funeral and harmonized his conflicting ritual obligations toward his father.

As people entered the memorial hall for the second memorial service of Ma Yilong's funeral, two church volunteers handed them song books and little crosses to be attached to shirts. These crosses serve to distinguish "believers" from "non-believers," although the latter are explicitly encouraged during Protestant funerals in Xiamen to
convert. Ma lineage members who had lined up on the left side of the coffin for the work unit's memorial service, remained standing as members from both Zhu Enlin's and Zhixi's churches, a total of no less than two hundred people, crowded on the right side of the coffin and in the large space in front of the coffin.

Protestant funerals in Xiamen

Like the more or less standardized funeral format of late imperial China, the enactment of Protestant funerals in Xiamen has undergone profound changes in the course of the twentieth century. Up until the early years of Maoism, when Xiamen was a highly militarized area but of little economic significance, corpses would be kept at home for several days until the funeral. During that time, relatives dressed in black sackcloth provided food for all who came to pay their condolences, and kept watch over the corpse at night. They would separate the corpse from the rest of the home by hanging long black curtains around it to shield mourners against any “death pollution” (J.L. Watson 1988b) that might radiate from it. The coffin was then put on the street where a church minister held a sermon in Hokkien and led the attendants in singing. Kin of different degrees of relatedness would be given ribbons of different colored fabric to wear. Then firecrackers would be set off and the whole party marched to a designated mountain where the burial would take place. The procession would be accompanied by a brass band playing Christian songs, while a male relative carried a tall cross and others carried large floral wreaths (see Colijn 2016).

But the rapid transition of Xiamen into a large and wealthy city in the 1980s and 1990s has affected the socioeconomic composition of its church communities. Traces of the historic Southern Fujian church community still exist, but Protestants in Xiamen have largely replaced their local church traditions with a concern for winning converts among the attendants of funerals. As the minister of a mega church on Xiamen Island told me, “At almost every funeral, some people become Christians. Funerals are our main source of new members” (interview, January 25, 2011).

Instrumental in proselytizing are the so-called "funeral groups" (sangshizu). Since most Xiamenese Protestants today hail from elsewhere in China, their funerals do not attract large crowds of local kin, neighbors, former classmates, and friends. In one’s hometown, one is embedded in local society through a host of complex relationships,
obligations, debts, and shared memories (Oxfeld 2010). But among migrants with few shared customs and memories, simple and delocalized funerals prevail.

Standaert (2008, 111-113) notes the existence of philanthropic groups in seventeenth century Chinese cities who conducted funerals for unknown or impoverished deceased. Soon after the first small Catholic communities arose in seventeenth century Fujian, their lay members formed groups who conducted funerals with Catholic rituals. This was a time of experimentation according to Standaert, when Chinese Catholics looked for ways to follow both neo-Confucian prescriptions drawn up in Zhu Xi's *Family Rituals*, and Catholic prescriptions including prayers, hymns, and displays of crosses, without the enactment of "superstitious" rituals such as offerings of food and paper money. Apparently, Chinese Christians have for centuries considered it an obligation to make sure that Christian deceased would receive a Christian funeral that would satisfy both local and Christian needs while avoiding superstition. Protestant funeral groups in Southern Fujian must be understood in this long historical line of lay Christians volunteering to conduct funeral rites for each other.

The funeral groups of Xiamen’s contemporary Protestant churches can provide simple, delocalized funeral services that in terms of rituality are very similar to the kind of funerals promoted by the Communist Party, featuring mandatory cremation after a brief memorial service. Most importantly, the funeral groups provide a critical mass of attendants that is a source of consolation for the bereaved family and an opportunity to win converts for the church.

Protestant funeral groups seem to have become institutionalized when churches in Xiamen saw their numbers grow rapidly in the 1990s and 2000s, while being unable to handle the increasing number of funerals. Their members can be called on at any time of day to go to a house where someone has passed away, to console the bereaved and to initiate the funeral arrangements. Therefore, most of them are retired church members. Apart from being a baptized church member, and being available on short notice to visit bereaved families, there seem to be few criteria such as expertise in local funerals or past leadership for joining a funeral group.

Their tasks include visiting the grieving at home and praying with them; washing the corpse and applying make-up to the face before the memorial service; providing the bereaved family with black armbands or full-body sackcloth to wear during the memorial service; decorating the memorial room with flowers and large Bible verses on the walls;
arranging transport for the funeral party to the funeral parlor; providing a sound system for the minister’s sermon and the eulogies; handing out informative booklets about Christianity before and after the memorial service; leading the music as a choir; and they may provide floral wreaths for decoration and for brief funeral processions.

After settling with a bereaved family on the funeral proceedings, funeral groups extend their routine services free of charge. Hence, they also get many requests for assistance from people with little or no prior connection to the church. One research participant, a Ms Lu Huifei in her late forties, recounted to me how in 1999 she and her mother were unsure about the funeral they would hold for her deceased father, a native of one of the former villages on Xiamen Island. Although he had until recently been of high status in local society, Ms. Lu’s husband had gambled and lost nearly all of his money and property, and the family was heavily in debt. Lacking funds to hire expensive ritual service providers and music groups, Ms. Lu got in touch with a Protestant funeral group for assistance. Despite the fact that Ms. Lu's family had no previous connection to the church, the funeral group members came and helped out, moving Ms. Lu and her mother to convert to Christianity. Soon Ms. Lu herself became an active member of the funeral group that had helped her family. In 2010 she was put in charge of the group, being available at any time of day to drive to a house where somebody is dying. She told me that she routinely persuades non-Christian bereaved kin to convert to Christianity since she had felt the love of God through the work of the funeral group in 1999, and she wants to spread this love to other families in need.

Proselytizing as a central funeral practice entails several actions. First, churches display Protestant generosity and solidarity by providing all funeral items and services for free, although the cremation, the cemetery, and the funeral banquet are usually to be paid for by the deceased’s family. Second, funeral group members visit bereaved families at home and pray with them, invoking divine support for the family members. Third, they hand out informative booklets about Christianity and the church in which they are based to the funeral attendants. Fourth, ministers as a rule of thumb use the memorial service to challenge attendants to start attending church and to convert to Christianity while they are still alive. At the end of the service, they routinely tell bereaved kin that if they are touched by the Christian message, they can approach one of the ministers or funeral group members for individual prayer. Although it is difficult to measure the success of such tactics in numbers of converts, it is clear that Protestants in Xiamen have learned how to employ
funerals to tap into the large flow of new locals who have arrived from locations across mainland China since the establishment of Xiamen as a Special Economic Zone.

An official called Zheng to whom I spoke at the Xiamen Funeral Management Office confirmed that his office does not interfere with religious activities during memorial services. He stated:

> It is not forbidden [to hire religious specialists]. If you believe this, then you can. It is like in the West, you are used to giving a hug and here in China we shake hands. Everyone has a different habit, every place has different customs. If people invite monks or pastors, and it doesn’t influence other people, then there is no problem. Just don’t influence other people.
> — Interview, May 27, 2015.

The funeral: part III.

Ma's Protestant memorial service was commenced by a man I will call pastor Ji, the minister of Zhixi's church. Ji greeted the bereaved relatives and "brothers and sisters from church" (jiaohui de dixiong zimei) to "brother Ma Yilong's" funeral. The term "brother" in Ji's opening sentence already signified that in the course of the memorial service, Ma was to be constructed as a religious (Protestant) subject whose soul was now in Heaven. The minister directed the attendants to sing the first song, lead by a small church choir and joined by the other participants.

Protestant church choirs are a conspicuous feature of weddings and funerals owned by church communities. In China, choirs have connotations of modern Communist marching hymns, and that makes them all the more effective. Choirs, it seems to me, communicate professionalism, organization skills, community size, legitimacy, and perhaps most importantly: power. If a community can dispatch a choir to a ceremony, then that communicates a very positive and powerful image of that community to the audience. I once joined a Xiamenese choir to a funeral in Pinghe county, rural Zhangzhou, Southern Fujian. The fact that a choir from the big city showed up to the funeral was a statement in support of the local village church. Three members of the same Protestant household had passed away in rapid succession, casting suspicion on Christianity, to which the local church responded by inviting an urban choir to come and sing at the funeral. A choir is not
simply a group of people that shows up to a ceremony. It is a statement of solidarity and power.

The first song was titled "I have a beautiful hometown" (wo you yige rongmei jiaxiang 我有一个荣美家乡, see photograph). The singer/composer claims to have a Heavenly hometown due to faith in Jesus Christ. After this song, Ji said a prayer in which he thanked the Protestant God for showing his mercy (endian) to "brother" Ma Yilong, supposedly for granting him passage to Heaven. This prayer was followed by the Chinese version of the famous English hymn "Amazing Grace."

Ji's twenty-minute sermon concentrated on further immortalizing Ma Yilong as a Protestant believer who had "received God's mercy." Ma lineage members and church members probably knew of his lifelong abstention from church activities. Apparently, therefore, this point needed to be emphasized in order to eliminate any doubts with regard to Ma's devotion to Protestantism. Much of Ji's sermon was dedicated to describing church members' many visits to Ma's deathbed, which allegedly resulted in conversion, although it remained unclear whether Ma had gotten baptized. Ji pointed out that Ma Yilong's real name (not the pseudonym used here) can mean "natural selection" in Chinese. For Ji, this supported the claim that Ma was "predestined" by God to become a Christian, thereby integrating him into his church community posthumously. This sermon was undoubtedly a source of comfort for Zhu Enlin, Zhixi, and their Christian relatives on Zhu's side. What started off as a "pluriprax" marriage in 1968 was made a Protestant marriage at Ma Yilong's funeral in October 2015.

After the sermon, Ji said another prayer before calling Zhixi, the chief mourner to the stage. Zhixi's speech was short and emotional. He claimed that his father had faced many difficulties in life, but that he had always been devoted to their household. During his speech, Zhixi did not address his father directly, as is common in non-Christian funerals. He was thankful for Ma's final turn to Protestantism, and thankful to the church members and ministers who had visited him at his bedside. Finally, he thanked the relatives for coming to Xiamen for the funeral.

Pastor Ji took back the microphone from Zhixi and directed all attendants to walk around the coffin. This ritual was enacted in silence and with a simple glance at the corpse in the glass coffin. In walking around the coffin from the right side to the left, one passed Ma's relatives, including Zhu Enlin and Zhixi and a number of Ma lineage elders. Many
attendants shook hands with these relatives as they passed by, sometimes exchanging a look of sympathy. After this walk around the coffin, nearly all exited the memorial room, except for a small group of close relatives and church elders, around fifteen people. They formed a circle around the coffin, and pastor Ji said another prayer there, which I witnessed from outside, as I had walked out with the other attendants. On our way out, each of us detached the safety pin and gave back the small silver cross to the church volunteers at the entrance, along with the songbook we used.

**Reflection**

In the course of his life in modern China, Ma Yilong committed himself to multiple ritual communities; his ancestral lineage, the Communist Party, and the Protestant church of his son Zhixi. For Zhixi, this resulted in a situation of conflicting ritual obligations during his father's funeral. Due to his father's alleged deathbed conversion to Protestantism, Zhixi was able to avoid having to enact "superstitious" death rituals commonly practiced by his ancestral lineage from rural Southern Fujian. This still left him with the obligation to host memorial services by his father's work unit and by his own Protestant church. These two "modern" ritual communities commonly enact consecutive, "non-superstitious" funeral services in Xiamen as a way to accommodate mourners in a situation of conflicting ritual obligations.

Crucially, none of the three ritual communities present at Ma's funeral could claim exclusive ownership of the proceedings. This fact demonstrates important changes in modern Chinese society. These include the diminishing economic and socializing importance of the traditional lineage due to new forms of occupation associated with modernization; rural to urban migration and the accompanying decline of native place solidarity; and political change, in the case of China a rollback of the Communist Party's control mechanisms from people's everyday lives. Chinese society has in fact undergone such far-reaching changes over the past century as to make observers wonder what obligations Chinese people today still have toward their venerable relatives, native place communities, and the socialist state.

Yan (2009) has argued that young Chinese people have become disembedded from traditional social structures. My case study of a funeral in Xiamen, however, suggests an important nuance. The deceased and his household members, rather than being disembedded from social structures, were embedded in multiple communities. Neither of
these communities could claim exclusive ownership of Ma Yilong's funeral — they had to carve it up among themselves. The individual in the coffin was thus quite literally center stage at his own funeral, as various ritual communities could only lay claim to a part of the larger funeral dedicated to him as an individual with a unique, complex social life.

Therefore I agree with Yan's basic claims regarding the individualization of Chinese society — that is the empowerment of the individual at the expense of traditional social structures, but not his (admittedly less heavily emphasized) ideas about individual disembedding from communal life. As I argued in Chapter 1, Protestant converts in Southern Fujian do not become detached from their households, but they rather incur a new set of ritual obligations on top of existing ones. The challenge embodied by Ma Yilong and his son Zhixi is for Chinese people to harmonize their conflicting ritual obligations toward the multiple communities they are able to join in the context of the freedoms gained in the Reform Era. Other than social isolation, Chinese individualization raises the question of how to maintain a household in a context of increasing pluralism and, indeed, pluripraxy.
4. Tolerating individual abstention

Chapter contents:
- Introduction
- Ritual and China's path to individualization
- Vignette: Spring Festival in rural Zhangzhou
- Reflection

Introduction

In this final chapter we return to rural Zhangzhou for a Spring Festival celebration with Lilan and Yuxian, the couple whose wedding ceremony featured in the introduction of the thesis. I ask how people in Southern Fujian maintain pluriprax households when they are unable to "harmonize" their conflicting ritual obligations. What if a communal ritual cannot be split up into different parts, such as the funeral described in Chapter 3? What if it cannot be "simplified," such as the weddings described in the Introduction and Chapter 2? How do members of pluriprax households in Southern Fujian respond to other household members' decision to abstain from an important communal ritual, and how does abstention impact that household's status in the ritual community?

The first section of this chapter offers an historical perspective on how ritual enactment, including abstention from rituals, became a matter of individual choice in Chinese society in the course of the twentieth century. The second section presents an
ethnographic case study in which Yuxian, the son of a village head in Southern Fujian, and his wife Lilan abstained from several important Spring Festival rituals because of their recent commitment to a Protestant church. This case study demonstrates that the possibility to abstain from communal rituals is a familiar one for Minnan people in the context of top-down modernization efforts. Both the Republic and the People's Republic of China attempted to eliminate "superstition" from society, which in practice meant repression of a broad range of ritual practices, ritual venues, and ritual service providers. Abstention from "superstition" became a patriotic obligation to be fulfilled for the benefit of the nation-state, in favor of kinship-based obligations. For Protestants in Southern Fujian, in particular for those descended from earlier converts, abstention from lineage rituals and other superstitions became a key way, and sometimes the only way, to practice their religion. For example, one frequent interlocutor, a descendant from a late nineteenth century convert, practiced Protestantism by not eating foods with animal blood. But he never visited a church, prayed, or read from the bible. In the context of Chinese modernization efforts and state efforts to eliminate feudal superstitions, abstention from lineage rituals became a central feature of Chinese Protestantism.

With the partial rollback of state interference in people's ritual lives since 1978, lineage rituals are once more celebrated openly as well as opulently in Southern Fujian. But this does not mean that ancestral lineages are once more empowered to exercise control over members' ritual lives. This is demonstrated by my observations that despite their abstention, Lilan and Yuxian remained embedded in the household and ancestral lineage of Yuxian's father. Moreover, due to the so-called One Child Policy and lack of adequate pensions, Yuxian's parents still depended on their son to provide for them in their old age, whether the young couple chose to participate in the hometown's communal rituals or not. The chapter thus provides clues to why pluriprax households in Southern Fujian tolerate each other's abstention from communal rituals, with the aim of illustrating more clearly how they are able to maintain such households despite their conflicting ritual obligations.

**Ritual and China's path to individualization**

Following Yan (2009), the individualization of modern Chinese society can roughly be divided into two phases: Maoist collectivization, and Reform Era marketization. This division, simplistic as it may be, intends to depict the tremendous impact of Mao's "Liberation" and Deng's "Reforms" on Chinese communal life. Fujian province presents a
particularly good example of the crucial importance of kinship bonds over other types of social bonds in Chinese society. Extensive patrilineal descent groups, often called lineages in English and zu or zong in Chinese, assigned people a place in late imperial Fujianese society. James L. Watson (1982), following Maurice Freedman (1980) defines a lineage as "a corporate group which celebrates ritual unity and is based on demonstrated descent from a common ancestor" (594). Michael Szonyi (2002) counters that descent from a common ancestor is often impossible to prove, as genealogies in Fujian were constructed by local literati and landlords to link their households to powerful or famous ancestors. This was an especially salient practice in the late Ming dynasty (in the late fifteenth to early seventeenth centuries) when the lineage became an increasingly important form of social organization (Brook 1989). According to Fei Xiaotong,

For Chinese families, the route of expansion is patrilineal; it incorporates only those from the father's side of the family. With few exceptions, families do not include daughters-in-law and sons-in-law at the same time. According to the patrilineal principle, married daughters and their husbands, the sons-in-law, are outside the family. But on the paternal side, the family can be expanded to include very distant kin. A family with five generations under the same roof would include all paternal relatives in all five generations.—Fei 1992 / 1947, 83.

Although the crucial economic and socializing role of lineages has been noted by historians working across various regions of late imperial China, Fujian and Guangdong have been singled out as regions where lineages were, and to some degree still are, of particular social and economic importance (Freedman 1971, 1980; Zheng 2001; Szonyi 2002; Overmyer and Chao 2002; Tan 2006; Faure 2007).

During the late imperial era, ancestral lineages also had important ritual dimensions. They were often officially registered with the imperial bureaucracy as cult communities (Goossaert and Palmer 2011, 24), and until 1950 in parts of Fujian lineages owned extensive "sacrificial fields" for the funding of communal rituals. The extent of these sacrificial fields could amount to sixty percent of all arable land in the province's poorer mountainous regions (Overmyer and Chao 2002). Communal rituals such as weddings, funerals, and lineage processions, as well as festivals for the Gods were funded with lineage wealth. Individual members were expected to contribute to the well-being of the
group by participating in the rituals. Individual ritual enactment was thus pre-determined by one's place in a collectivity based on kinship. The individual existed for the sake of perpetuating and enriching the patrilineal group, and not the other way around.

This situation changed dramatically in the course of the twentieth century. The tumultuous mainland Republican era (1911-1949) saw attempts to mobilize citizens for the benefit of the nation-state instead of the lineage. Historian David Faure (2007) has argued that Republican bureaucrats, inspired by Western modes of governance, sought to oust lineages from their positions as power brokers between the state and the grassroots population. Elaborate lineage rituals with burnt sacrifices, for example, were attacked through awareness campaigns as a waste of the nation's collective resources. But overall the Republican leaders lacked the means to enforce their nationalist ideals because of the continuing influence of local warlords and because of the Japanese invasion that started in 1931.

More far-reaching changes began when the Communist Party under Mao Zedong took over the reigns in 1949. The Land Reform policy which the Communists had practiced in areas under their control since the early 1940s saw the removal of feudal landlords and the redistribution of lineage lands to soviet-style collectives. Within these communes, people's loyalties were thoroughly re-routed from the patrilineal descent groups to the farming collectives serving the Communist party-state. In some places, sons and daughters were even encouraged to publically denounce their authoritarian fathers (Yan 2015), and ancestral lineages were widely branded as remnants of feudal society.

Yan (2010, 489) has convincingly argued that the disempowerment of kinship groups (lineages and households) represented the first step toward the individualization of Chinese society. The demise of kinship as a central organizing principle, we might add, inevitably resulted in changes in communal rituals. For as lineages and temples were stripped of the fields providing sacrificial foods and surpluses to be sold on the markets, the financial control to organize communal rituals came to rest solely in the hands of the state-controlled communes (Vogel 1965). In post-1949 Southern Fujian, it became financially all but impossible for lineages to host communal rituals (Dean 1993). Moreover, many types of communal rituals were targeted for "superstitious" content by Party cadres, who militantly

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20 Lecture, delivered at California State University, San Bernardino on October 22, 2015, titles "Intergenerational Intimacy: A Redefinition of Filial Piety in Rural North China" (accessed via Youtube on March 1, 2017).
spread atheism through campaigns to "re-educate" the masses. Political rallies to celebrate Communism, the nation-state, and Chairman Mao came to replace, in large part, the traditional rituals and festivals (Goossaert and Palmer 2011).

The Communist struggle against "traditional culture" peaked during the so-called Cultural Revolution (1966-1978), when Mao and some of his radical leftist supporters attempted to deal a final blow to the remnants of imperial Chinese civilization. "Destroy the four olds" referred to the central order to destroy "old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas" (Ashiwa and Wank 2009, 10). These included nearly all places of worship, religious clergy, God statues, and forms of "religious" or "superstitious" veneration. In some places, people replaced their domestic Gods with Mao posters and books, in front of which they would "seek guidance" (Ahern 1981, 107-8) (today one can still observe photographs of Mao flanked by images of Guanyin or the Buddha, hanging under front mirrors of Chinese taxi's). At the time of Mao's death in 1976, Chinese people belonged either to a rural collective, to an urban work unit, or to the governing Communist Party, which oversaw all forms of communal ritual activity, limiting people to glorifying revolutionary heroes or to publically humiliating alleged counter-revolutionaries (Mitter 2004). The ancestral lineage as a ritual community around a common ancestor, and as a power broker between the state and the population, had lost both its prestige and its control over valuable assets.

But many of these radical policies were swiftly reversed following Mao's death and the arrest of four leading figures of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. Chinese society came to be governed differently, particularly with regard to the ways in which people were organized to serve the Communist Party's agenda. The so-called Reform Era initiated by Deng Xiaoping saw the gradual disbanding of the urban and rural production brigades. Labor was no longer exclusively arranged for people by the state, and instead individuals were allowed, even encouraged, to engage in commercial activities once decried as petty capitalism.

This led to a culture of individual financial initiatives and volunteering. A telling example is provided by anthropologist Unn Målfrid H. Rolandsen (2010, 135), who describes the transformation of a youth volunteering organization linked to the CCP "from forced duty to individual choice." Young people, Rolandsen notes, became increasingly able to decide voluntarily whether to join this community or not, which was a big change from the days of Maoist collectivism. Moreover, due to Deng's support for experiments
with what came to be called the "contract system" (*chengbao*), land and other state assets could be leased out to private households to make a profit. This ability to accrue personal wealth, coupled with an overall relaxation of restrictions on grassroots social initiatives, created opportunities for people to once again unite in ritual communities more or less independently from the state.

Starting in 1978, all over Southern Fujian, as in other parts of China, temples destroyed or abandoned during the Cultural Revolution were rebuilt by local devotees, often aided by overseas lineage members (Dean 2003). According to Kenneth Dean,

> the first thing that people who had made money did was not to buy televisions and refrigerators but to rebuild temples to their local cult god that had been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Large-scale religious rituals were openly performed in parts of Fujian in 1978, after the fall of the Gang of Four, for the first time in decades.

— Dean 1993, 4.

People eagerly seized the opportunities to join non-governmental ritual communities, igniting a "religious renaissance" (Madsen 2011) in Southern Fujian and in other parts of China.

Religious revival, however, was regarded by the authorities as a potential source of unrest. Dean (1993, 113) cites a lineage procession with temple Gods in the Southern Fujian township of Penglai in 1987, which was hindered by police who had arrived in five vans. While a truck driver managed to hold the police off by dumping stones on the road, the sedan chairs of the Gods were taken up steep mountain paths where the police would not be able to find them. As the truck driver resisted arrest in a scuffle, a fifteen-year-old boy "ran up and shouted that this was their procession and that, even if Deng Xiaoping told them to stop, they wouldn't. He became an instant local hero and his words were repeated around the valley" (Dean 1993, 113). This demonstrates not only the initial tension that accompanied the revival of popular religion after the end of the Cultural Revolution, but also the deep sentimental value people in Southern Fujian attach to their Gods, lineage processions, and communal festivities in general.

White (2011, 88) describes how in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Southern Fujian, Protestant converts were disinherited and disowned by their lineages because of conflicts over communal rites. But in contemporary Southern Fujian, Protestant
converts remain embedded in their households and lineages despite their abstention from communal rituals. Since the start of the Reform Era, neither the state nor the kinship-based lineage has been fully qualified to demand individuals' participation in communal rituals. For while under Mao the power of kinship groups was broken and people were tied to collective labor units loyal to the state, under Deng and subsequent Chinese leaders the power of the state over citizens' lives was rolled back. While lineages in Southern Fujian have regained some of their ritual functions (without their "sacrificial fields"), clan members also have "private" lives in the sense that they accumulate personal wealth, migrate at will, form friend groups at university and at work, or convert to Protestant Christianity. Lineage elders in Southern Fujian have few means to enforce ritual participation.

In contemporary China, a more influential and salient kinship community than the ancestral lineage is the household. Halskov Hansen and Pang (2010) have noted that the demise of collective labor and the pressures of competition amid unleashed market forces have also increased people's dependence on their household members (parents, grandparents, siblings, children). A good example is the revival of Chinese family enterprises in the 1980s, which became a pillar of local economies in many regions of China. Such enterprises seem to revolve around a household rather than a lineage, although kinsmen of various degrees of closeness may be employed in the enterprise. The household has become increasingly important as a source of emotional, financial, and practical support in the individual's quest for success and happiness.

Young Chinese people today regard the household as an asset in the service of the individual's career ambitions and material desires, instead of a sacred institution demanding a lifetime of devotion (Thøgersen and Ni 2010, Halskov Hansen and Pang 2010). It is possible for Chinese people today to determine how they want to serve their households, and no universal standard exists anymore. Yan (2010, 1-2) calls this the "rise of the private family within which the private lives of individuals are thriving."

What my research demonstrates, however, is that the assertion of private preferences by individuals embedded in households and ancestral lineages, is not uncontested but rather creates a field of tension. For while historically and in very general terms we can trace a process of "individualization" in China, on a grassroots level no consensus exists with regard to the limits of patriarchal authority and the extent to which individuals are still bound by obligations toward parents and lineage elders. These challenges are faced by each
individual, household, and lineage in their own specific situation. To establish a comprehensive image of individualization in modern China, we can conduct an intensive study of a limited number of households as insightful examples and as "fragments" of a larger society (Van der Veer 2016).

The following vignette is set in rural Zhangzhou, Southern Fujian. It details the Spring Festival (holiday season encompassing the Chinese New Year) rituals of a pluriprax household embedded in a local ancestral lineage. Due to their conflicting ritual obligations, household members struggle to enact important communal rituals together. It is the only vignette of its kind that I recorded, because my fieldwork covered only two Spring Festivals, for the first of which (in 2015) I was housebound because of the birth of my daughter (see preface). The vignette depicts the friction between the individual preferences of a young couple and their communal obligations to participate in key annual rituals of the ancestral lineage, again addressing a fundamental debate in the discursive field of individualization (Howard 2007). What are the consequences of abstention by household and lineage members refusing to participate in communal rituals? How much control does the household head and various lineage elders have over a young couple's ritual behavior?
Vignette: Spring Festival in rural Zhangzhou

The setting

'You don't necessarily have to go,' Yuxian said to me as we walked up the creaking wooden stairs to his bedroom. 'There will be evil spirits, it's very dangerous.' His wife Lilan was already waiting for us upstairs in their bedroom, a place where we would not be seen by Yuxian's relatives. We formed a small circle, took hold of each other's hands, and closed our eyes. Yuxian spoke a brief prayer to the Protestant God for spiritual protection during my participation in the annual "incense moving" (youxiang) procession of his lineage that evening. 'Amen,' Lilan and I responded as we released each other's hands.

We had driven to Mashan on February 6, 2016, to spend five days of the Spring Festival (chunjie), including Chinese New Year on February 8 and the procession on February 9, with Yuxian and his family. Mashan is a tiny, single-surname mountain hamlet, whose inhabitants all trace their patrilineal descent to a shared ancestor surnamed Chen. The hamlet sprung up only in the 1950s as recent Land Reforms made it possible for members of the local Chen clan to move out of a larger town nearby, which is also dominated by the Chen surname.

Migration of Han peoples to the region started as early as the Han dynasty, and Zhangzhou was made a prefecture in 686 under Tang emperor Ruizong (Clark 1991). The area around Mashan is known for its round, fortified "mud houses" (tulou) built by "guest families" or Hakka people. Mashan, however, has no tulou and no tourist attractions. Its
inhabitants claim Han ancestry and speak Hokkien or Southern Fujian language among each other, which is linked to Mandarin but not mutually intelligible.

In the larger economic, cultural, and administrative area of Southern Fujian, Mashan is a place of little importance. It has a registered population of less than 500, the lion's share of which has moved elsewhere and only visits for family obligations. The hamlet is administered by a nearby town, which falls under one of eight counties making up Zhangzhou prefecture, which is one of nine prefectures of Fujian province. Little money is made in Mashan, as villagers have pursued various kinds of cash crops, only to find each time that the prices of the crops they invested in, had fallen and little or no profit could be made.

My data with regard to Mashan is derived from extensive interaction with members of one household over the course of fourteen months in Xiamen; casual talks with multiple Mashan residents during lunches, New Year visits, and dinners; as well as five days of participant observation in Mashan itself. From my base camp in coastal Xiamen it had been a two hour ride inland into mountainous terrain. According to Clark [t]he dominant feature of the region is the mountains of the interior. These are geologically among the oldest mountains in East Asia; consequently, they are weathered and no longer very high. Yet they cover nearly all the hinterland's land mass and are generally too steep for convenient farming."

The increasingly mountainous toll road from Xiamen to Zhangzhou was paved with high quality tarmac. We had taken Yuxian's brand new German car, red ribbons still dangling from the side view mirrors to show off the recent purchase. Yuxian's career in telecommunications was going smoothly, and he was not afraid to show that off to his relatives who would also come back to Mashan for the holidays. Packed tightly together in the car were Lilan, Yuxian, their baby Tingting, Yuxian's father Lao Chen, his shy cousin Yubiao, and me.

'This road was built by my father,' Yuxian proudly said when we turned off the main road onto a narrow, winding road leading directly to Mashan. This put a smile on the
face of his father, who turned toward me from the front passenger's seat to add that for more than twenty years he had devoted himself entirely to their hometown.

'Serve the people (wei renmin fuwu),' I quoted and all chuckled at the foreigner's use of such an archaic Maoist slogan. Lao Chen was, after all, a Communist party member.

As we drove past the village temple, which was located just outside the village perimeter and which had also been built under his father's direction, Yuxian kept quiet. Lao Chen again turned to me and secretly pointed at the temple, which he had mentioned during a previous talk (Interview, 10 October, 2015). According to Vincent Goossaert,

[!] to the present day, and throughout the Chinese world, it brings great honor and prestige, and possibly even electoral success, to be a temple leader, and to be seen to devote time, energy, and money for the community’s temple. These lay leaders preside over rituals, enforce temple regulations, hire priests to conduct rituals and manage temple assets.

— Goossaert 2011, 417.

Building this temple had been one of the main achievements during Lao Chen's tenure as village head, but he would not brag about it in the presence of his son, who had converted to Protestantism. I raised my eyebrows and nodded to silently convey my admiration for the temple, which was located smartly by a little waterfall in the bend of a mountain stream.

Soon we drove into the valley that sheltered Mashan hamlet. It was inhabited throughout the year by no more than one hundred mostly elderly people. These permanent inhabitants were either childless or had not followed their children to live in nearby Xiamen or Zhangzhou city. About thirty housing compounds (also referred to as "ancestral homes" by Tan Chee-beng, 2009) of sub-lineages (different branches of the Chen lineage) lined the hills surrounding the valley, in the center of which stood a Chen ancestral hall. Each housing compound had rooms for the sub-lineage's sons and their families.

Yuxian had been hesitant to invite me to stay in Mashan for the holidays, because he was afraid that I would be bored. His cousin Yubiao had apologetically declared to me that there was 'nothing fun to do' in their hometown. A sense of boredom and deterioration prevailed among the youth, as attempts to make a profit by growing Camellia trees, bananas, and by raising pigs had failed. Most young people had left Mashan only to return briefly for Spring Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival.
The compound of Yuxian's sub-lineage was located on the slope of one of the tree-covered hills surrounding the valley. When we arrived, a few uncles, aunts, and cousins stood in the outer courtyard and greeted us with smiles. They had clearly been prepared for the arrival of Yuxian's foreign friend, because they did not look surprised when I exited the car. We unloaded our suitcases and presents, and entered the outer courtyard through a plain stone gate without doors. Later that week, the outer courtyard would serve as the place to venerate and set off fireworks for the Gods who visited each sub-lineage compound during the procession, carried on their palanquins by the young men who had returned for the holidays. From the outer courtyard we stepped through a wooden gate with a door, entering the inner courtyard.

At the opposite end of the inner courtyard I noted the compound's domestic altar with statuettes of three Gods: *Tudigong*, the Lord of the Soil in the middle [there seemed to be disagreement about the name of the middle God]; *Guanyin Pusa*, known also as Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, to the right; and *Guangong*, a legendary general-turned-God to the left. Each statuette was no more than a foot tall, and decorated in resonance with his or her customary style. Each had its own incense bowl in front of it. To the right side of the statuettes stood an incense bowl for the ancestors, as well as candles which household members lit and placed to the left and right sides of the statuettes before venerating.

By calling the Gods of their parents "evil spirits" (*xieling*), Yuxian and Lilan as Protestants acknowledged that the statues and statuettes of these Gods harbor "the presence of something beyond" (Meyer 2010, 22), although for them this was a dangerous, evil presence. Whether benevolent or evil, all research participants in Mashan agreed about the presence of non-human forces at the Chen family's domestic altar and the temple built by Lao Chen.

The inner courtyard was surrounded by doors leading to the kitchen and bedrooms, some of which were being used to store wood or waste. Over the course of the following days I would often sit in the kitchen with Yuxian and his wife Lilan to chat and to say secret Protestant mealtime prayers before Yuxian's parents arrived for the next meal. Lilan and Yuxian did not attempt to pray in the presence of Yuxian's parents during our stay, because his parents had strongly opposed both their son's conversion to Protestant Christianity, as well as his marriage to a Protestant woman, Lilan, who became their daughter-in-law.
On the first day of our stay, Lilan and Yuxian recalled to me separately how confusing and difficult their wedding day had been. The sight of the domestic altar during the holidays clearly brought back those memories (see Introduction of the thesis). I was settled in a room on the second floor of an auxiliary building, where previously Yuxian's "fifth uncle" (wushu, the fifth son of Yuxian's paternal grandparents) had lived with his wife. The stairs leading to the room in which I would stay, were made of wood, as were the floors. All walls of the compound were made of mud bricks, the roofs of little terracotta tiles.

The protagonists
Lilan and Yuxian met in 2010, in a family church in nearby Quanzhou. Lilan played the violin there, and according to Yuxian it sounded so awful that he remembered the girl. Three years later they met again, this time in a family church in Xiamen, where both of them were members of the youth group. Lilan had given up the violin by then. They fell in love and got married during Spring Festival 2014. Their two-year wedding anniversary, according to the Chinese calendar, was due during our stay in Mashan.

After getting married, Yuxian had acquired the authority of a married man (referred to as chengjiale) in his hometown, a man who had started a new branch in the lineage. Although still part of his parents' household (and technically of his 91-year old grandmother's household) as long as they were alive, his parents and lineage members had limited authority to interfere with his choices as a married man. Yuxian could not be rebuked like a boy anymore; he had graduated from Jimei university in Xiamen's mainland suburb, he had a good job in Xiamen, had gotten married and become a father. He once recalled to me that whereas before the wedding they tried to stop him and Lilan from going to church, after the wedding they had stopped trying.

At twenty-seven, Yuxian seemed to have an extraordinary sense of duty and responsibility. For example, despite having moved miles away from the "family church" in Xiamen where he had gotten baptized in 2012, he kept returning every Wednesday evening and Sunday morning to assist with setting up the sound system and microphones. While he was deeply concerned with my well-being during my stay in his hometown, he never seemed to take an eye off his baby daughter, whom he shielded from all sorts of danger and dirt. But he did all this in a mild manner that demonstrated genuine care for the people around him.
Lilan was in many ways his opposite. She had an air of carelessness and lightness about her, that was often interpreted by people around her as laziness. I vividly recall her elder sister's chagrin during their brother's wedding, which I had attended in January 2015. While Lilan was playing with the neighborhood children, her sister was mopping floors, carrying baskets of food and presents, and setting up tables. As I had little to do I asked whether I could help, but she angrily pointed at Lilan explaining that her younger sister should be cleaning. Lilan had no job, although she told me she was looking into manga art (her father was a painter of traditional Chinese landscapes). She explained her unemployment to me by claiming that she had to raise their toddler Tingting. This put her in conflict with her parents-in-law, who had apparently offered on many occasions to babysit Tingting on week days so that Lilan could go out and contribute to the household's income. But Lilan refused their help, explaining to me that since her parents-in-law are not Christians, they may put Tingting on the wrong path. Her parents-in-law regarded this as laziness and as profiting from other people's hard work. Yuxian's father, Lao Chen, once said to me in a thinly veiled reference to this conflict,

> Actually, believing in Christianity is much more troublesome than believing in Buddhism. Every Sunday you have to go. We don’t have to. When you eat, you have to make a wish, right? I told my son, if you don’t work hard and toil, then where does your money and your food come from? I told him it’s a scam [laughs nervously]. You pick the fruits of our efforts and hard work. In Christianity you get everything from God, I say this is laziness. You don’t make an effort and you don’t toil, but then a meat pie falls down from the sky, that’s not possible!
> — Interview, 10 October 2015

Since Yuxian was a hard worker who was making a career for himself, Lao Chen was clearly referring to Lilan, who was not working. This was made all the more painful because Lao Chen, in his relatively old age (late fifties) had had to take up a job as a gardener in the city (explained below), while parents of other middle class couples could spend their days looking after a grandchild. Lilan, in short, was regarded by her relatives as somewhat of a scrounger.

Yuxian recalled how during his childhood, his household's fortunes rose and fell several times with the business ventures of his father. Despite his apparent power as head
of a village council, Lao Chen was cheated out of a major agricultural investment by a business partner, and even worse, his pig sty holding fifty animals was demolished without proper compensation by the county administration. Pig sties allegedly polluted the water flowing down from Zhangzhou to Xiamen. After these failures, and despite being a Communist Party member and a respected village elder, Lao Chen had had to move to Xiamen to work as a gardener. Most of Yuxian's relatives, including his two paternal aunts and six paternal uncles, had moved away as well. They had taken up lower-middle class urban jobs as truck drivers, factory workers, and market vendors. Yuxian's sub-lineage, despite providing a village head for many years, was clearly not a wealthy or powerful family. Neither Yuxian's father nor his uncles owned an urban apartment in Xiamen, Zhangzhou, or Quanzhou - urban apartments being the primary indicator of wealth in the region.

Conflicts over religious conversion

On our first day in Mashan Yuxian and I walked about the village area and drank tea with various uncles but fewer aunts, who were busy cooking large amounts of food for the New Year's Eve dinner. As we strolled among the fields of Camellia and banana trees, I asked Yuxian what people in the village thought about Christianity. He said that to his parents, Christianity was a kind of pyramid scheme imported from the West. In Mashan it was derisively called chijiao, loosely translatable as "eating religion," or a teaching followed by people who need food (recall Lao Chen's remarks about Lilan, above).

Historically, chijiao refers to what English language sources have called "rice Christians," that is people who joined Christianity for material benefits. For until the Communist victory in 1949, Christians in several parts of China (especially in or near so-called foreign enclaves or concession zones) could count on benefits from local Western envoys and ministers in legal matters, education, and poverty relief. To hear such a term in rural Southern Fujian is not a coincidence considering the fact that Protestant missionaries have been active in the area for more than 150 years. Yuxian, however, claimed that to the villagers of Mashan "eating religion" meant that Christians had been observed praying before their own meals instead of before the Gods. In short, Christianity was an alien, potentially harmful religion to the people of Mashan.

21 I owe the insight about "rice Christians" to Chris White.
Yuxian's conversion to Protestant Christianity in 2012 had been received by members of his lineage with acrimony, if not outright panic. During Spring Festival 2013, Lao Chen had caught Yuxian reading from the bible in his bedroom. He had recently gotten baptized without telling his parents about it. Spring Festival, as a time of family reunion, was the occasion when this was discovered and contested. His parents immediately wanted to resolve what they perceived as a serious problem of their son having been brainwashed by a foreign teaching. Lao Chen gathered several notable lineage members together in that Spring Festival in 2013, tasking them to dissuade Yuxian from his Protestant conversion. During an earlier, unstructured interview, Yuxian had described this family gathering to me.

Bram: Do you remember at what time of day that was?
Yuxian: I remember it was in the daytime, in the morning between nine and eleven. Why did they choose this time of day? Because from nine to eleven, many people in the countryside are out working. They deliberately picked this time to avoid being seen by others. (...) My father arranged for my uncle (dayizhang, husband of mother's elder sister) to come, since he used to be very fond of me and his words carry a lot of weight. My great uncle (dabo, in this case the paternal grandfather's brother) was there too. The two of them have a lot of authority in our lineage, their words carry a lot of weight. My father got them to work on me. As soon as I sat down they reasoned very clearly with me, first why I shouldn't believe in Christianity. They explained this from the history of our lineage. (...) From generation to generation there were never any Christians [in our lineage]. In our village, in this environment (huanjing), there was no one who believed in Jesus. And they said that if you believe in Jesus this will have consequences, in this environment you will be criticized (zhize) by others. People will avoid you and will not want to communicate with you. So the first point was that they told me about these consequences. The second point was to reason with me from their point of view, from their world view (shijie guan). Because over there we have some Christians, but I don't know what they believe, often in the countryside this is not clear because the pastoral work is deficient. So at that time there was a Christian family in our village, the neighbor of my neighbor of my neighbor, relatively far from our house, like from here to the Expo Center. This family, their situation was that one man became ill, and people came to evangelize to him and he became a believer. And after he believed in the Lord he passed away from his illness. In fact it was just before he fell ill that people had evangelized to him, and as soon as he believed he got this illness, and before long this illness took him away. (...) Christians came to pray for him but he still passed away. And when he passed away his relatives, his
brothers and sisters, they were not very unified (*tuanjie*), and they didn't give him a very decent funeral. (...) So at that time my father recounted this example to me, and told me where it would lead. (...) I thought, if it's like that, then my faith will not bring happiness to the family but disaster!

— Interview, 18 April 2015.

By way of comparison, according to Lindenberg (2009), Chinese converts to Islam in Malaysia can experience similar difficulties with relatives. This comparison is interesting because Islam, although it has a much longer history in the Chinese world than Protestantism, is another monotheistic religion regarded as un-Chinese or at least as un-Han by many Chinese people. Han converts to Islam are bound to new ritual obligations, often leading to their abstention from previous communal rituals. According to Lindenberg, Muslim converts in Malaysia may also undergo a name change (although no longer compulsory), which is considered by relatives as a betrayal of the lineage and its history. Each Muslim convert is considered one fewer Chinese, reducing the power of the minority Han group vis-à-vis the majority Malay. The parents of converts are ashamed of their apparent inability to imbue their children with the proper values. Muslim converts in Malaysia also face conflicts with relatives who make sustained efforts to reverse their decision. In some cases, marriage to a Muslim was considered illegitimate by Chinese community leaders (Lindenberg 2009).

While in the case of Chinese in Malaysia the notion of ethnicity played an important role, objections from family to the individual's religious conversion resonate with those encountered by Yuxian as a Protestant convert in Southern Fujian. Using the precedent of an untimely death and a funeral gone wrong, Yuxian's father, uncle, and great uncle put pressure on Yuxian to stop practicing Protestantism. The next day, an aunt took him to the village temple under the guise of a casual walk. She attempted to make him kneel down before the Gods so he could be set straight by them, perhaps hoping that the Gods would be able to "unwash" her nephew's brain, if only he could be brought into their presence and made to kneel down.

But Yuxian withstood these pressures and stuck to his newfound religion. He clearly was less concerned with his social status in the village than his parents. This echoes Yan Yunxiang's (2009) in his field site in rural North China, to which he refers as Xiajia village. Young people raised in Xiajia in the 1980s and 1990s were fascinated with urban
lifestyle and Western popular culture. Village life had few attractions because it stood for hard, manual labor in an environment where elderly clan members controlled many aspects of life. Likewise, Yuxian was loathe to establish himself in Mashan. He had slowly become detached from village life at an early age, as he entered boarding school at twelve in a nearby town and only returned home on the weekends. After graduating he moved to Xiamen's suburb of Jimei to continue his studies in university. Having found a good job in Xiamen, Yuxian had no ambitions to climb the social ladder in his hometown like his father had done as village head. Due to his slow but persistent detachment from village life explains why the admonitions and warnings of his clan elders, who stood for the traditional village life he had left behind, fell on deaf ears. Like his peers in Northern China, described by Yan (2009), Yuxian was preoccupied with his own circle of friends and fellow believers in Xiamen, with his job, and with his own household. Although he would not intentionally seek trouble with his lineage elders, no reasons existed why he would abandon his religious life at the elders' request.

Yuxian was disillusioned by the apparent inability of the Gods to protect his father's business ventures, despite years of devout service. He was likewise disillusioned with the Communist Party, which had not protected them from the county administration's harsh treatment. Since most Protestant converts in Southern Fujian are either women or younger men like Yuxian, lineage elders confronted what they considered "selfish" or "individualist" behavior from too much exposure to Western culture. Chen lineage elders used the intimate language of social memory as a discursive strategy to convince Yuxian to change his mind about converting to Protestantism. They appealed to Yuxian's sense of communal duty and obligation, and to his place in the larger community of the lineage.

Instead of deconverting, however, Yuxian expressed to me his hopes of converting his parents. He often prayed for God to "change his parents' hearts" so they can accept Christianity. Thus Yuxian followed in the trail of countless of contemporary Chinese Protestants attempting to convert their close kin (see Chapter 1). Yuxian and Lilan were also working to convert Lilan's parents. When Lilan's mother fell severely ill in 2014, for example, they talked to her about Christianity but her father would "interfere" (ganshe).
Six Spring Festival rituals

In this section I will describe the six rituals of which I was made a part in Mashan during Spring Festival 2016. The reason to distinguish between these six rituals is to demonstrate how Lilan and Yuxian selectively enacted some rituals, while they abstained from others. Selective participation or abstention are key in this chapter, because they provide examples of how people in Southern Fujian are able to maintain pluriprax households. Abstention from all Spring Festival rituals may have made it difficult to maintain such a household,
while participation in some rituals apparently satisfied the household members. Although, again, this illustrates a field of tension rather than an ideal situation for the household, a tolerance of members' selective abstention from communal rituals was key as they maintained a sense of unity throughout the holidays.

I was surprised that in Mashan the last day of the lunar year, which fell on February 7, seemed to feature little ritual activity apart from the household dinner. This dinner was the first ritual of my stay in the village. We enacted it on New Year's eve when we sat down in the kitchen with Yuxian's household members and one unmarried uncle (liushu, the sixth son of Yuxian's paternal grandparents) for a very tasty dinner with freshly boiled duck; fried bamboo; three different kinds of soup (fish ball, chicken soup, and pork bone soup); fried rice noodles; stir-fried cabbage; and boiled rice. We ate this with the red wine I had brought along from Xiamen, and with locally brewed rice liquor. Yuxian's parents both stood up and toasted with me (a bit formally), exchanging best wishes and good health for our families in the coming year. This first ritual apparently posed no problems for the Protestant converts in the household, as it featured no "superstition" involving Gods or ancestors.

That evening we all went to bed early, only to be woken at midnight by a barrage of fireworks lasting several minutes. They were lit, as far as I could tell, from the inner or outer courtyards of most of the village's compound houses. But I had not been invited to join any kind of celebration around the fireworks, and indeed, when the cracking and popping stopped after a few minutes, the whole village went quite again. Those lighting the midnight fireworks had apparently gone back to their beds. Yuxian's sixth uncle had warned me beforehand that the fireworks at midnight on New Year's eve would be nothing compared to those on the second day of the lunar month, the day of the lineage procession. For sure, however, Lilan and Yuxian were not involved in lighting the midnight fireworks. Fireworks are known in Southern Fujian as a way to scare off evil spirits, to please the Gods, as well as a way to invite good luck for the new year. Protestants in Xiamen I interacted with, including Lilan and Yuxian, regarded them as a form of superstition and a waste of resources (I did not ask their opinions about the big, government sponsored fireworks shows for Chinese New Year or the 2008 Olympics). From this second ritual they abstained, although it did not seem to be a particularly sensitive issue. After all, another household member, in this case Yuxian's sixth uncle, could represent the household and light fireworks on behalf of everyone.
On New Year's day I got up early to observe a ritual, the third one distinguishable as such, that would be enacted by Yuxian's household members. Since at least the Song dynasty (960-1279), New Year's day in Fujian has been an important occasion for domestic and communal ritual enactment (Szonyi 2002, 141). That morning all household members except Yuxian and Lilan, individually venerated the household's three Gods, as well as Tiandi (Heaven and Earth, analogous with the highest Daoist God, the Jade Emperor), and their ancestors. I found this peculiar because it was clearly an individual rite where I had expected to see only communal rites during Spring Festival, a time when the emphasis was on reunion among living and deceased relatives (tuanyuan).22

The ritual was enacted by walking up to the domestic altar (described above); pouring tea for the three Gods; lighting twelve joss sticks and bowing with them to the Gods and toward the outer courtyard which is associated with the Jade Emperor. After sticking three burning joss sticks in bowls for the household's Gods and three in a supporting pillar for the Jade emperor, one walked to the outer courtyard to burn paper money for the ancestors and to light firecrackers to salute the new year. During the entire morning of New Year's day, I observed Yuxian's parents, (great-)aunts, and (great-)uncles take turns enacting this ritual. Lilan and Yuxian abstained, staying in their bedroom with their baby Tingting, clearly distancing themselves from this annually repeated veneration of the household's Gods and ancestors.

For the afternoon of New Year's Day, however, Yuxian had prepared something new and special: a family lunch for all (great)uncles, (great)aunts, and cousins on both his father's and his mother's side. This was the fourth communal ritual I observed during my stay in Mashan. A New Year's day lunch was not a local tradition. But Yuxian had masterminded this event as a way to get all his close relatives together for a group photograph, and in my interpretation, to make up for his abstention from other communal rituals. He had personally provided the necessary money to buy all ingredients, and a considerable lunch was prepared by his mother and various aunts for approximately sixty people. Dishes included a large amount of fried rice noodles, pork bone soup, and fried fish. Nine tables, undoubtedly reserved for weddings and funerals, were set up in the inner

22 I had been told by several informants, including Yuxian, that on New Year's day households in Southern Fujian commonly set up a table in their courtyard with offerings for Heaven and Earth and venerate together. The table was absent that day, and I am not certain whether it was because of my presence, because of Lilan and Yuxian's conversion to Protestantism, or another reason.
courtyard, and food was placed in front of the household Gods (although it was not "offered" to the Gods with incense). When most of the food had been consumed, group photographs were taken, again in front of the domestic Gods. Yuxian, concerned that people would be bored during "his" activity, had brought all sorts of games and sports equipment such as badminton rackets and a soccer ball, but these were not needed. This fourth ritual, devised and paid for by Yuxian personally, was a communal ritual that seemed to subtly challenge the existing patrilineal structure because relatives from the paternal side were hosted together with those from the maternal side. It also positioned Yuxian as a notable relative who was achieving success in the big city, and who nevertheless had remembered to be generous to his relatives back home. But as Yuxian explained to me the next day during a walk in the mountains, he had only wanted to bring everyone together for a meal and to take photographs with his nonagenarian grandmother.

Lilan and Yuxian's abstention from the village community's rituals was most painfully laid bare during next day's youxiang lineage procession, the fifth communal ritual I observed in Mashan. While I was holding hands with them in their bedroom during Yuxian's prayer, I could clearly hear banging on drums and cymbals outside, as the hamlet's young men were heading from their homes toward the temple to summon the Gods. When Yuxian finished praying for my protection, I walked down to join Lao Chen for a brief walk (under ten minutes) to the village temple he had built. On the way, Lao Chen instructed me not to take photographs, and to be careful with speaking to people: "Don't say too much" (bu yao shuo tai duo). The fact that he brought a foreigner to the community's most important annual event, but not his son, would have people gossiping about him. Later that evening, Lao Chen would complain about this to me while pouring tea, saying that Yuxian's conversion to Protestantism and abstention from communal festivities had people talking bad about their household. I suspect that his restriction on me taking photographs and "talking too much" was necessary to avoid making matters worse.

For Dean (1993, 114), taking part in processions for the Gods in Southern Fujian "and the acceptance of one's place in the traditional organization of the procession serves the recognized function of preserving unity." Ritual is a force for social cohesion; it unites people and holds them together. In Mashan, Lilan and Yuxian's abstention from the annual procession was perceived as a threat both to communal relations and to the status of their household in the community. The very idea of communal celebrations stigmatizes abstention; one actively participates or risks becoming a social pariah. Michael Puett
(2010) provides an interesting way to understand this, by pointing out how in the Book of Rites (one of the Confucian classics) ritual is depicted as a key human endeavor to create order in a chaotic world (Puett 2010, 369). By participating in communal rituals, one contributes to the proper enactment of human and divine relations, while abstention promotes chaos and disconnection. As Feuchtwang (2001, 10) states:

Propriety and impropriety (zheng and xie), order and chaos (anping and luan) or harmony and clash (heping and chong) in any activity, but particularly in ceremony and statement, have been central to Chinese problems of authority and of identification with that authority (belonging to a community, local or imperial).

Nevertheless, the possibility to abstain from the lineage's communal rituals has become a familiar one for people in Southern Fujian. Yuxian's lineage members may have been offended or disappointed by his abstention, but propaganda efforts of both the Republic and the People's Republic of China have long dubbed processions such as Mashan's youxiang as a form of "feudal superstition." Peasants across China are well aware that more "modern" or highly educated people frown upon their customs (Kipnis 1992, Oxfeld 2010). A lineage member educated in the city is liable to abstain from rural customs.

When Lao Chen and I arrived at the temple, a crowd of some one hundred people, mostly men, had gathered in the courtyard, filling it with excited chatter and cigarette smoke. Several men of respectable age came to greet Lao Chen, giving me broad smiles and handshakes in a show of welcome. Upon my asking, Lao Chen said that the women were at home preparing the offerings for the visit of the Gods; food, incense, paper money, and fireworks. The temple was about five meters tall, ten meters wide, and four meters long. It had three Gods: Xuanwu the Dark Warrior God (referred to by Lao Chen as Xuantian Shangdi), Guangong, and Guanyin Pusa the feminized Bodhisattva - the latter two especially being venerated widely across the Chinese world. Their statues were three to four foot tall, with Guanyin being the smallest. Outside the temple there was also a shrine for the Earth God Tudigong, but Tudigong is an old man with a white beard who does not like to be disturbed, so he was not involved in this procession. The roof of the temple was intricately decorated with dragons and other figurines.

Temples embody local identity and are the pride of community members. Pointing out the dimensions of the temple to me as we were standing among the crowd, Lao Chen
said: 'Look, it's not big and not small, not tall and not low, it's just right. We didn't plan this, it [the will of the Gods manifested through divination blocks] told us how to build it, even where to build it. Look at this location, it's just right. Behind, there is a mountain. In front, there is a waterfall. And look at the opera stage, it's also just right.' Clearly, Lao Chen had been very closely involved with building the temple, and was proud of the result.

The earlier village temple had been located inside the village perimeter and torn down during the Cultural Revolution. After the Reform and Opening Up under Deng Xiaoping’s rule, the people of Mashan did not immediately rebuild their own temple, but instead relied on a smaller shrine and the larger temple in a nearby village. In 2005, they finally rebuilt their own village temple under Lao Chen's directions. It was situated inside the village perimeter, close to the compound of Lao Chen's sub-lineage. But after the temple was rebuilt, for two years many people in the village had bad luck and fell ill. 'It was very unpeaceful,' Lao Chen had told me during our earlier talk in Xiamen (Interview, 10 October 2015). So after two years the clan elders decided to move the temple out of the village perimeter. I asked him how they knew that this was the right decision. 'We asked,' he had replied. 'Now it's very peaceful.'

Before the procession, the Gods were mounted on palanquins one-by-one, in an order decided on the spot by casting divination blocks. Each palanquin was carried by four young men. Teenage boys are trained at swaying the palanquins before being allowed to become carrier in a procession. 'Let's stand to the side a little,' Lao Chen said, indicating that he did not want my presence as a foreigner to interfere with the ritual. But the Gods quickly came to greet Lao Chen in person, as the bearers in their drunken fashion stumbled toward us with the palanquins and brought the God Xuanwu and Bodhisattva Guanyin face-to-face with Lao Chen. He piously folded his hands and bowed to them, after which they returned to the temple courtyard, where the carriers continued their dance-like swinging and swaying while a few young men ferociously banged on cymbals and drums. I asked Yuxian's sixth uncle whether the palanquin carriers were drunk, but he said no, they are acting out being moved by the Gods. The Gods allegedly do not like to stand still, they like to move around while on the palanquins. It also looked better this way, the sixth uncle added with a smile.

When all three Gods had been placed on palanquins and the appointed time had come, a string of firecrackers and a box of fireworks were set off, and the whole group started moving. The youxiang procession distributes incense from the temple, which is said
to have special efficacious power, to domestic altars on a special incense palanquin. This palanquin was carried behind the Gods during the procession, and eventually back to the temple. In exchange for the temple incense, people in Mashan placed their domestic incense onto the designated palanquin.

In the wider Southern Fujian area, *youxiang* is just one of many types of lineage processions. According to the famous Dutch sinologist J.J.M. de Groot, who conducted research in Southern Fujian in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century,

> it goes without saying that all processions are not put together in the same way as the one we have just described. There are great differences depending on the divinity in whose honor the procession is held and depending on the caprice and fantasy of the organizers. It would take an entire volume to describe in a complete manner all the different sorts of processions which are held in China.

Tan Chee-beng (2006) describes an annual lineage ceremony called *qinghuo*, "inviting incense fire" (107), in nearby Yongchun county of Quanzhou prefecture. This ceremony also features a procession with temple Gods, and is also held during the Chinese New Year period when all lineage members are home for the holidays. Apparently bigger and more wealthy than the Chen lineage of Mashan, the Li lineage in Yongchun, observed by Tan, hired a Daoist priest to lead the *qinghuo* ceremony and the accompanying procession. Incense fire had been "invited" by a group of men striking a sword against a rocky mountain peak, using the sparks to start the incense fire. Other elements such as elaborate Daoist rituals at each household, and opera performances at the temple, also marked *qinghuo* in Yongchun. Tan concludes that

> [o]n the whole, the “inviting incense fire” ceremony not only fulfills the function of divine blessing of the lineage and community; it is also a ritual reaffirmation of the village territory as well as a public display of the lineage community.
> — Tan 2006, 110.

So while different lineages across Southern Fujian hold processions with different names and different elements, a shared feature is celebrating membership of a
community. Processions are co-funded by the various households of the lineage, each one contributing an equal amount, although some may be called by the Gods to contribute more. Not contributing and not participating is a social vice that may not be easily forgotten by the community.

Back to Mashan, the procession company consisted of an incense palanquin carried by four men; three Gods on as many palanquins likewise carried by four men each; a dozen percussionists beating on drums and cymbals; a cousin of Yuxian's in a Chinese lion costume who would perform a lion dance at every household visited; a half dozen substitute carriers; and the temple boss who walked up front to lead the procession in the right direction. The exact path of the procession had been predetermined by the Gods through divination. In total some thirty-five young men did the carrying and drumming, while a group of about sixty men of various ages followed closely behind. Every household had to send a carrier, preferably a younger, unmarried male who could represent the youth and strength of his household.

Lao Chen and I mostly lagged behind the procession so as not to cause any sort of trouble. While we were walking, he pointed at the procession and complained to me: 'Look at what we have here, our traditions, and Yuxian is the only one who is not participating!' The hand that pointed to the procession waved angrily in the air, as if to dismiss the nonsense of Yuxian's abstention. Lao Chen's metaphor that "one house walks two paths" applied literally as we walked in the procession while Yuxian and Lilan waited, again, in their bedroom with their baby daughter. Lao Chen was powerless to change this situation, which seemed to frustrate him specifically at this moment. All good sons were now out serving the community; ensuring their households' standing in the village; and acquiring the sympathies of the Gods. Although Lao Chen earlier claimed that he had gotten over (chuanxing) his son's conversion (Interview, 10 October 2015), his frustration returned during the year's most exuberant communal activity.

As soon as the procession approached the front gate of the first jing (table with sacrificial foods set up in front of each sub-lineage compound on the route, see also Dean 1993, 103-117), a string of firecrackers was set off by those waiting, as a way to welcome the Gods. Then big boxes of fireworks started spitting out huge colorful explosions. According to Yuxian's sixth uncle, some households had spent 2,000 yuan (approximately 300 euro) on fireworks, while others spent more than 10,000 yuan (1,300 euro). Upon entering, the Gods were lined up in the courtyard, where the household members had
prepared pork, duck, fruits, tea, and wine on tables for the Gods. The residents were given a chance to venerate the Gods with incense, prayers, bows, even in some cases prostrations. Piles of paper money were burnt in metal ovens during the Gods' presence, and joss sticks, once lit, were placed in a large bowl on the special incense palanquin in the procession.

The procession moved from each sub-lineage compound to the next, and everywhere it went fireworks set the evening sky ablaze. One could easily trace the path of the procession from a distance by looking at the sequence in which new fireworks were set off from courtyards. Lao Chen and I followed the procession all the way back to its starting point at the temple. More and more women followed along as their domestic tasks of preparing the incense, the offerings, and the fireworks were finished.

As the procession returned to its starting point, the palanquins were lined up in front of the temple, and the temple boss asked which God should be placed back first. It took over ten minutes before all the Gods had been placed back; according to Lao Chen they had been rather picky regarding the order in which they should re-enter the common dwelling place. During this time of communicating with the Gods, the percussionists were still banging on their drums and someone occasionally lit a leftover string of firecrackers at a little distance from the temple. When all Gods had been reinstalled, the percussion stopped and people started heading home. A dozen or so devotees were still saying prayers inside the temple. Perhaps the Gods would respond with more benevolence to any requests made directly after the annual procession. At home Lao Chen made Tieguanyin tea, one of Fujian's famous tea varieties, which I drank down eagerly as I let the evening's impressions sink in.

The sixth and last communal ritual of my stay in Mashan would be enacted in the course of the following two days. As customary throughout the Chinese world at the start of the New Year, we visited many of Yuxian's great-uncles and other relatives in Mashan and three nearby villages. Entering their homes and sharing drinks and snacks with them, it was clear that these relatives were either impoverished peasants or of lower middle class economic status. Based on my frequent talks with Lilan and Yuxian about kinship and their hometowns, it seemed to me that interactions among Yuxian's household and their relatives took place mostly around annual or lifecycle rituals (although I do not exclude that financial ties also existed between them in the form of loans for small business ventures or weddings). The basic format of our visits to relatives was to arrive, hand over some small gifts or "red bags," sit down, drink tea, eat peanuts, and chat. This was a group of rituals
without "superstition" that Yuxian and Lilan as Protestant converts had no qualms about. It confirmed them as members of a certain household embedded in a larger social landscape based on kinship ties. Most visits lasted less than an hour, but the language of communication was primarily Hokkien. Being unable to follow most of their conversations, before long I greeted the idea of going back to Xiamen and to reflect on everything I had seen, tasted, and heard in Mashan.

**Reflection**

This vignette provides a perspective on the broader issue of how people in contemporary Southern Fujian maintain pluriprax households. Tolerating Protestants' abstention from select "superstitious" rituals, however involuntary on the part of other household and lineage members, meant that the household could enter the New Year without an acute sense of being, in Ngo's (2016, 13) words, "ripped apart." Clearly, the possibility for Lilan and Yuxian to abstain from their lineage's communal rituals became a familiar one for people in Southern Fujian in the context of Chinese modernization. Under Mao's reign, lineages were forced to cede power over members' ritual lives to rural collectives presided over by the Communist Party. The idea that one can stand up to the lineage and resist its calls for ritual enactment has become entrenched in modern Chinese society. In Mashan, the Chen lineage community was thus mostly powerless to force Lilan and Yuxian, who had made a commitment to a Protestant church, to participate in the annual *youxiang* procession, or to venerate the household's Gods and ancestors on New Year's day. For all members, including Yuxian's father Lao Chen, seemed to agree that staying in a household together was important, confirming that the Chinese household has gained financial and emotional significance in the Reform Era (Thøgersen and Ni 2010, Halskov Hansen and Pang 2010). Being the sole source of future financial security for his parents, Yuxian as an unfilial and "brainwashed" (by Protestantism) son could not simply be disowned, as parents and lineage elders did in late imperial and Republican times when they had many sons (White 2011).

Previous vignettes and case studies have described how members of pluriprax households participate in each other's communal rituals during Christmas and during weddings, and how they split funerals into different parts so that different communities can enact their own rituals. In those ethnographic examples people dealt with their conflicting ritual obligations by simplifying the ritual proceedings or by integrating rituals from
different systems. Abstention, in this case locking oneself up in the bedroom to be hidden from view and protected against evil spirits during a lineage procession, is a typical response for Protestants during annual rituals associated with popular religion. These rituals cannot be simplified by a single household because they are co-owned by many households, and the rituals are apparently not split up between church and lineage communities. Abstention is therefore a key mode of enactment for Protestants in Southern Fujian during lineage rituals.

The vignette from Mashan allows us to theorize abstention. It may at first seem like a trivial issue to scholars - abstention can have all sorts of reasons, including illness, a busy schedule, or a new law. Indeed, in Western academia, few studies of ritual have dealt explicitly with the topic of abstention, except for discussing abstention from food, alcohol, and sex. Why study the people who are not enacting a ritual? The vignette from Mashan suggests that good reasons exist to do so. It suggests that abstention is a complex, problematic, and insightful form of ritual enactment, especially when the reason to abstain is tied to a religious motivation.

According to Feuchtwang (2001, 111), "[a]s a line extended in time and as a territorial unit within a locality which includes the graves of its ancestors, a household is included in the festivals of its locality." By hiding in their bedroom instead of going out to the procession, Yuxian and Lilan became illicit abstainees who failed to represent their household during an important community gathering. The minister of their family church in Xiamen, Bailu church, is outspoken about the necessity for Protestants to abstain from "superstitious" events like lineage celebrations featuring non-Christian Gods. Yuxian would not participate in what he considered a demonic custom, and was loathe even to let me participate as a student of Chinese culture.

In modern China, abstention from "superstitious rituals" has become widely practiced, indeed it became an act of patriotism (Duara 1996). For example, students returning to their hometowns in rural Shandong could be excused for abstaining from the customary prostrations to family elders and ancestors during their weddings and Chinese New Year celebrations because they had received a "modern" education in the city, which had increased their ability to serve the nation but also made them adverse to its "backward" traditions (Kipnis 1992). Likewise, relatives of a deceased in China may choose to abstain from certain "traditional" death rituals in the cities, where the modern face of the nation is being constructed (Whyte 1988).
Abstention, as I observed in pluriprax households, can take on different forms, for example complete abstention; partial abstention; having a representative enact rituals for oneself; and performing a counter-ritual against an ongoing ritual. In the present chapter, the complete abstention of Yuxian and Lilan from the New Year's Day veneration and from the lineage procession put them at odds with their household and lineage members. Their prayer against "evil spirits" before the procession can be considered a kind of counter-ritual in subversion of the dominant patrilineal social structure in Mashan (for an example of a subversive ritual in India, see Schröder 2012). In cases when a representative enacts a ritual for fellow household members (see also Chau 2015, 228), such as Yuxian's sixth uncle who lit the fireworks for everyone on New Year's Eve, it seems that conflicts can be avoided and conflicting ritual obligations harmonized. I came across only a handful of examples of Protestants employing a representative to enact the "superstitious" part of a ritual for them (see Chapter 2, the section about "the simplification of weddings"). Protestants in Southern Fujian do not yet deploy this tactic regularly to deal with their conflicting ritual obligations.

Since the idea of ritual representatives is deeply embedded in Chinese ritual life, it seems to me that this is the most promising way to deal with conflicts around rituals in pluriprax Chinese households. People may feel that their participation in a strange ritual will negatively affect them. Theologian and interreligious scholar Marianne Moyaert (2015) states that

Certainly, for people who still have a strong symbolic sensibility, it may intuitively feel wrong to enter into a sacred space of another religion, let alone take part in a ritual central to another community of faith. Mark Heim relates below that this resistance sometimes has “a quality of almost physical recoil from the practice at hand.” Elaborating on this hesitation, he attributes the reluctance of some of his students to a “kind of negative reverence for the sacred character of the place in question, a recognition that it represents and conveys real spiritual powers that are not identical with and may not be controllable by the student’s own religious resources. They believe that real effects are exercised on a visitor by presence and practice in that place, regardless of the intention with which a visitor may enter” (Heim, 27). Participating in the rituals of another tradition is neither irreproachable nor without risk. — Moyaert 2015, 8-9.
Considering the fear of shared ritual enactment among members of pluriprax households in Southern Fujian —fear of being brainwashed, fear of possession by evil spirits — it is indeed no wonder that they often abstain from each other's communal rituals, perpetuating a sense of division and of following different paths. J.L. Watson (1988b, 115-117) describes how Cantonese women represent their households at funerals, bearing the brunt of the "death pollution" one may incur at such events. Although highly discriminatory in terms of gender inequality, Watson's example demonstrates the salience of the ritual representative in Chinese society. Courageous representatives willing to take a risk for the sake of household unity, could form a promising alternative to the more divisive complete abstention that often marks the ritual behavior of members of pluriprax households.

For although the central authorities in Beijing have considerably toned down their campaigns against "feudal superstition" since the start of reforms in 1978, Protestant church communities in Southern Fujian still strongly encourage church members to abstain from rituals they consider illicit. This emphasis on abstention is due to Chinese Protestantism's historic preoccupation with "modernizing" China by eliminating customs associated with "backward" (meaning non-European) traditions (Dunch 2001); to its discursive emphasis on what is perceived by Protestant elites as moral behavior; and due to state-led "reforms" which legitimized the marginalization of practices associated with popular religion (Duara 1991). For Protestants in Southern Fujian such as Yuxian and Lilan, abstention from "superstition" is the fulfillment of obligations toward their church community and toward the ideal of a modern Chinese nation. Their relatives' tolerance of abstention from key rituals signals the disempowerment of the ancestral lineage in Southern Fujian, and is an acknowledgement of the validity of individual preferences with regard to ritual enactment. In this context, although communal obligations have not disappeared altogether, individuals can deviate from communal standards while remaining embedded in pluriprax households.
Conclusion

In modern China, individuals have become empowered both in the domestic sphere and in relation to socio-economic institutions (Zhang 2008; Yan 2009; Halskov Hansen and Pang 2010; Rolandsen 2010; Evans 2012). Once powerful Protestant churches backed by foreign missionaries and armies (Dunch 2001; White 2011; Bays 2012); ancestral lineages with extensive sacrificial fields and other human and material resources (Freedman 1980; Szonyi 2002; Overmyer and Chao 2002; Faure 2007); and socialist production brigades controlling many aspects of life from birth to marriage to death (Friedman 2006; Diamant 2001; Chau 2015) have all lost their totalizing grip on individual members' ritual lives in the course of the twentieth century. In this context, and in resonance with a key debate in the discursive field of individualization (Howard 2007; Kipnis 2012), I have explored the tension between individual empowerment and communal obligation in contemporary China. With a focus on communal rituals in Southern Fujian, my thesis has engaged with this debate and further elucidated China's unique trajectory of individualization.

On the one hand, ethnographic descriptions presented in this thesis resonate with previous work on Chinese individualization, featuring migrants and young women in Southern Fujian who convert to Protestant Christianity in spite of the misgivings of their household and ancestral lineage members. On the other hand, my research has found that Protestant converts pursuing individual religious piety retain certain ritual obligations toward their households and ancestral lineages, and baptized women illicitly marrying "superstitious" men likewise retain ritual obligations toward their church communities. My findings thus illustrate how communal obligations persist despite empowerment of the modern Chinese individual.

Central to my inquiries is the question how, amid this tension, practitioners of popular religion and Protestant Christianity in Southern Fujian form and maintain pluriprax households. A defining problem faced by such households is the shared enactment of
communal rituals. How can a Protestant bride ritually pay reverence to her groom's ancestors on the wedding day in front of lineage elders? How does a respected villager deal with his Protestant son's abstention from the annual lineage procession with the Gods? Unlike the findings of some scholars working on "multi-religious" or "interfaith" households elsewhere (Jones, Chee, and Mohamad 2009; Schaefer Riley 2013; Ngo 2016) I found that people in Southern Fujian are able to form and maintain pluriprax households despite their conflicting ritual obligations. The thesis argues that due to the disempowerment of ritual communities in the course of Chinese modernization, individual household members are able to deploy creative solutions (abstention, simplification, polytrope) to deal with the problem of conflicting ritual obligations. These ways to evade, change or integrate conflicting rituals accommodate the participation of practitioners in different ritual systems, and allow them to form and maintain pluriprax households. Without the totalizing grip of the church, kinship, or the state, individuals can search for ways to enact communal rituals that satisfy their different ritual communities. The following sections revisit the central themes addressed in each chapter.

1. Protestant conversion in the context of China's "turn to intimacy"
Protestant conversion in contemporary Xiamen exemplifies the tension between individual empowerment and communal obligations. It is usually an individual's choice rather than a household's. Converts obtain individual salvation (not for their families) due to Protestantism's inherent focus on individual piety and mental acceptance of doctrines. My interlocutors participated in church activities for their own benefit or happiness. At the same time, they also became embedded in a new ritual community, incurring obligations as "brothers and sisters" and "children of God" in church. Converts in Xiamen are told by ministers to forsake "superstitious" ritual practices such as ancestor veneration and temple visits for divination or blessings. They are instructed to cultivate a ritual life visiting church, praying, singing hymns, and reading the bible.

As a factor contributing to large-scale Protestant conversion, in Chapter 1 I have highlighted the centrality of a "turn to intimacy" in post-Mao Chinese society (Friedman 2006; Rofel 2007; Evans 2012). Protestant churches in Xiamen focus on constructing affectionate, child-parent-like relationships between converts and God. Ministers claim that by "opening their hearts to God's love" and "becoming children of God," converts can learn to love each other as "brothers and sisters." This resonates well with new trends in Chinese
popular culture and media, encouraging emotional expression and intimacy between wives and husbands, parents and children, friends and colleagues. After years of ideological struggle and indoctrination during the Cultural Revolution, Chinese people now search for friendship and love as forms of personal fulfillment. Churches position themselves as communities where people can achieve such fulfillment by sharing stories of hardship; engaging in charitable behavior; enacting rituals together; and developing sibling-like bonds (having siblings in urban China is extra meaningful for young people because of the decades-long One Child Policy). For migrants, removed from their families and native place communities, and for Chinese women in general, Protestant churches fill an important gap by providing refuge in an otherwise highly competitive, male-dominated, and materialistic society (see also F.G. Yang 2005).

To illustrate the importance of intimacy in Protestant churches in Xiamen in Chapter 1, I demonstrated that the concept of "love" (ai 爱) is used profusely in sermons and prayers by church leaders, in testimonies of lay practitioners, and as a character conspicuously depicted on various highly visible objects and places (for example next to the symbol of the cross). The main limitation of my data in supporting this point is that the concept of love can hardly be deployed objectively, detached from what interlocutors told the researcher regarding their understanding of Protestant love. Does the Protestant promise of love mean that converts can expect to find a romantic partner? Does it mean that they will feel "beloved" by other people? Does it promise to provide mental or spiritual access to some form of "divine love?" Does it mean that converts learn to develop emotional bonds with family and friends, or perhaps with the nation-state? Indeed, it is difficult to isolate and theorize love without qualitative evidence obtained from local people. I did not conduct specific inquiry into the meanings individual interlocutors attached to the concept of love in Protestant churches or elsewhere in society. It was only later, during data analysis, that I realized the centrality of this concept for my argument.

Yet it is clear that church leaders have a preoccupation with fostering bonds between strangers as "brothers and sisters," that their sermons frequently reference "God's love" as the basis of the church community; that churches in Xiamen stimulate emotional expression between people through a great variety of activities; and that these various ways of expressing and practicing love are apparently successful in attracting new converts.
Regardless of one's precise definition of "love," this suggests that people pursue individual emotional fulfillment in Xiamen's churches, outside the confines of the household.

Despite Chinese Protestants' focus on individual piety and fulfillment, converts are frequently encouraged by their religious peers to proselytize to their household members. Proselytizing is regarded by Protestants in Xiamen as an act of charity, and a "Christian household" is thought to be less prone to conflict than a pluriprax household. As described in Chapter 1, during Xiamen's Christmas celebrations unsuspecting visitors (often the non-Protestant friends, neighbors, colleagues, or household members of converts) are called to church stages and declared "brothers and sisters." Some join so-called religious seekers courses after Christmas and end up getting baptized. Christmas as a feast of religious conversion may thus start the transformation of pluriprax households into uniprax households when a Protestant's household members convert. Conversely, Christmas transforms uniprax households into pluriprax ones when a convert is the first Protestant in their household.

Chapter 1 identifies a specific mode of ritual enactment that drives religious conversion in the context of a turn to intimacy. Non-Christians attending Christmas celebrations with Protestant colleagues, friends, or relatives, first have to be willing to engage in what Michael Carrithers (2000) has called "polytropy," by physically participating in what is for them a new ritual on top of any rituals they were already accustomed to practicing. Polytropy, in Carrithers' usage, denotes how Digambar Jains in contemporary India turn to multiple sources for blessings. Practitioners of popular religion may not seek blessings or sustenance during Christmas celebrations, but they may get a positive impression of Protestantism. Participating in the rituals of other communities, theologian Bagus Laksana (2015) has theorized, can make people open and "vulnerable" to their religious ideas. Religious conversion of visitors during Christmas and other communal rituals is not merely a coincidence; it is actively pursued by both lay and ordained Protestants as ways of showing and practicing divine and human love (Colijn 2016).

This has compelled me to understand Christmas in sharp contrast with pre-existing communal rituals in the region, such as the youxiang lineage procession I observed in rural Zhangzhou in February 2016 (described in Chapter 4). Protestants in Xiamen do not enact Christmas rituals in celebration of existing boundaries between insiders and outsiders, but instead they celebrate the dissolution of boundaries by warmly (one might say hotly)
welcoming newcomers into their midst. Christmas not only increases the number of Protestants in Xiamen every year, it also increases the number of pluriprax households. Many of my interlocutors were the first converts in their households, drawn individually to the message of love and the prospect of being part of an exciting new community.

2. Individualization and the empowerment of Protestant women

Women in Xiamen convert to Protestantism at a much higher rate than men. Due to the resulting gender imbalance, many young Protestant women have to marry non-Christian men. I deploy the term "religious heterogamy" to speak about the formation of pluriprax households through marriage. Local church leaders generally regard intermarriage with non-Christians as a serious challenge to the integrity of the church and a violation of biblical principles. Chapter 2 considers religious heterogamy of Protestants in Xiamen as a form of boundary-crossing behavior.

I consider "boundaries" as metaphors for the complex demarcations between proper and improper conduct of Protestants in Xiamen. The idea of a bounded religious identity for lay practitioners has only recently become part of mainstream Chinese thought, linked to the introduction of the concept of "religion" (zongjiao) in the late nineteenth century and official state recognition of five "religions" in China. Protestants in Xiamen generally have a strictly exclusivist attitude toward ritual enactment. Church leaders consistently derided ancestor veneration and other non-Protestant (wedding) rituals as "superstition" (mixin) and "idol worship" (bai ouxiang). Chapter 2 explores the ritual boundaries of Protestant churches in Southern Fujian in terms of three parameters: history (why and by whom were these boundaries devised), function (what or whom do the boundaries serve today), and permeability (can people cross these boundaries, and if so at what cost). Identifying these three parameters of the boundaries of Chinese Protestantism helps to deploy this metaphor in a way that enhances a more precise understanding.

Marriages in Xiamen and elsewhere in Southern Fujian are sealed with wedding rituals. On their wedding days, Protestant brides described in two case studies crossed their churches' ritual boundaries in order to participate in non-Christian rituals such as "stepping over a fiery bowl" (kua huopen) or ceremoniously bowing down to Heaven and Earth, ancestors, and each other (sanbai). Their religious peers, in turn, could do little to correct or punish them. Whereas in late imperial and Republican China, powerful foreign missionaries would chastise and evict church members guilty of "superstition" (White
contemporary Xiamenese ministers emphasize the benign nature of Christianity and its benefits to society. Moreover, churches compete to attract as many members as possible. To evict a church member because of her participation in a superstitious ritual is simply less beneficial than ignoring the transgression and focusing on converting her husband and parents-in-law. The two case studies in Chapter 2 illustrate how highly educated and successful Protestant women in Xiamen have become empowered to cast aside the admonitions of ordained community leaders.

"Simplification" of wedding rituals satisfied pluriprax couples, their households, relatives, and native place communities. Deployed emically as jianhua or jiandanhua, simplification is about omitting certain wedding rituals from the local wedding format, or about relaxing the rules for ritualists. The first case study of Chapter 2 described how a Protestant bride was allowed to stand in prayer while her husband knelt down to venerate his ancestors. The couple had also omitted the so-called "three bows" ceremony, although they did step over a "fiery bowl" and proceeded to toast wine and pass out cigarettes to the wedding guests. The second case study of Chapter 2 involved a wedding during which the couple omitted a Protestant ceremony altogether, as well as ancestor veneration with incense. Undergirded by the idea that the degree of ritualization of Southern Fujian weddings is flexible, simplification is a highly potent mode of ritual enactment for pluriprax couples wanting to form a household.

Yet I cannot rule out the possibility that elsewhere in Southern Fujian, or elsewhere in China, ministers have more grip on Protestant brides' wedding rituals. With a view to establishing close relationships with church members instead of studying a large number of churches, I was a more or less regular participant at two registered and two unregistered churches in Xiamen in the course of my fieldwork in 2014-2016. The data on which my argument regarding the disempowerment of Protestant churches builds, were collected mainly in these four mainstream, Evangelical churches. It is possible that the empowerment of individual practitioners is less clearly discernible elsewhere.

On the other hand, my Protestant interlocutors in Xiamen were highly mobile in terms of geographical movement and transfer from church to church. They easily moved between registered and unregistered churches in search of a community that suited their preferences, further underlining my argument that converts join churches on their own terms and for their own purposes. Data collected with Protestant interlocutors in Xiamen often contained anecdotes from their church experiences in different geographical locations.
(for example, the couple in the first case study of Chapter 2 had asked to be married in a Quanzhou church before their wedding in Xiamen, and the bride had been baptized in an Urumqi church). The scope of my argument is thus broader than the four churches I regularly visited as a researcher. For this reason, I have avoided pinpointing my evidence to specific churches in Xiamen. Future research could examine whether my analysis regarding the disempowerment of Protestant church communities in Xiamen also extends to other parts of Southern Fujian and China.

The upshot of focusing my energies on close relationships with interlocutors means that they eventually trusted me enough to share with me details about illicit ritual behavior on their wedding days. These valuable data provide a lucid portrayal of contemporary Protestants’ individual empowerment vis-à-vis church leaders. They shed light on how contemporary pluriprax households are formed through religious heterogamy. The option to "simplify" wedding rituals in Southern Fujian seemed to accommodate the formation of pluriprax households. It was an option eagerly seized by Protestant women in Xiamen as they had little choice but to marry non-Protestant men.

3. The disempowerment of Chinese ritual communities
Forming pluriprax households is one thing - maintaining them and keeping household members together is quite another. Chapters 3 and 4 have focused on the ways people maintain pluriprax households in Southern Fujian after religious conversion or religious heterogamy. If many of my interlocutors had reported that their relationships with spouses, parents, siblings, and grandparents had gone sour because of their conflicting ritual obligations, I may have concluded that pluriprax households are not viable social units in contemporary Southern Fujian. Anthropologist Tam Ngo (2016), for example, found that conversion to Protestantism among the Hmong in contemporary Vietnam had caused deep rifts in local society.

Apparently, things are quite different in Southern Fujian because very few of the pluriprax households I studied were under threat of being ripped apart. This raises the question of how my research participants maintained pluriprax households. In Chapter 3 I focused on the theme of "harmonizing ritual conflicts." I deployed this concept to denote how people in charge of funerals found ways to fulfill their conflicting ritual obligations toward various (seemingly oppositional) communities in charge of the same memorial service. At no other time were my interlocutors' ritual obligations more apparent than
during funerals. Funerary rites prepare a suitable place for the deceased (whether in the Otherworld, in Heaven, or in the memory of the socialist nation-state) and may mark a reshuffling of the household shared by the living. Pluriprax household members in the case study presented, had to find ways to satisfy obligations connected to being an ancestral lineage member; a Protestant church member; and a Communist Party member. For in the course of his life in modernizing Southern Fujian, the deceased had committed himself to these multiple ritual communities.

The ritual obligations of people in contemporary Southern Fujian raise an important question with regard to the individualization of Chinese society. If individuals have such important obligations toward ritual communities, then how can we consider them as empowered individuals? Yan Yunxiang (2003, 2009, 2015) has provocatively argued that the age-old notion that younger Chinese are obliged to be obedient, respectful, considerate, and assisting toward their elders, has disintegrated in the era of individualization. Parents in contemporary China, Yan argues, are now entirely focused on the success of their only one or two children. They exist for the sake of their children, instead of the other way around. This suggests that the individual is now a central figure in Chinese communal life.

Sociologist Qi Xiaoying (2014) counters that while Yan may be correct regarding the widespread collapse of the Confucian idea of filial piety, financial obligations of children toward their parents have remained intact. My approach to this debate is not to look at financial obligations, as Qi (2014) does, but at the ritual obligations of people in Southern Fujian, both toward their own parents and toward various other communities in which they participate. In the context of Reform Era China, individuals may have obligations toward multiple ritual communities. None of these communities, the case study demonstrates, had absolute power over the pluriprax funeral in question.

In order to elucidate people's obligations during funerals in Southern Fujian, I devised a typology of the ritualists that I discerned: 1) one or more ritual communities as owners of the ritual; 2) a host or chief mourner; 3) various ritual specialists; 4) the deceased as the recipient of the offerings and rituals; 5) casual participants; 6) spectators. This typology is perhaps too rigid because people can and do improvise during funerals, switching for example between the obligations of a participant and a spectator. But the typology helps to explicate that funerals in Southern Fujian can have multiple "owners" and that the bereaved may have conflicting obligations toward these communities during the funeral.
Funerals in Southern Fujian traditionally revolve around satisfying communal demands to avoid "death pollution" and to provide lavishly for the deceased's spirit in the Otherworld. But the memorial service I describe in Chapter 3 had to be shared among three ritual communities. In the course of the modernization of Chinese society, all three became disempowered to claim total control over the proceedings, being instead forced to recognize the individual's unique and complex social life. The deceased had been embedded in multiple communities, and his son inherited the obligation to acknowledge these communities at the funeral. Divisibility into different phases was a crucial feature of the funeral that allowed the bereaved to harmonize their conflicting ritual obligations. This solution alleviated pressure on members of the pluriprax household because it did not force them to hand full control of the funeral to one particular community. The vignette demonstrates how people are able to maintain pluriprax households by harmonizing their conflicting ritual obligations.

4. Modernity and the obligation to abstain from "superstition"

Despite options to simplify or integrate rituals of various kinds, pluriprax household members often refuse to take part in each other's communal rituals. The analysis of the first three chapters focused on ways in which members of pluriprax households manage to enact rituals together. The missing piece of the puzzle is abstention, that is when a household member only chooses to participate in certain phases of a communal ritual, or not at all. Abstention may seem like a trivial issue to scholars - people may after all abstain from a ritual for all sorts of reasons, including illness, a busy schedule, or a new law. Indeed, in Western academia, few studies of ritual have dealt explicitly with the topic of abstention from rituals. Why study the people who are not enacting a ritual?

Abstention in existing anglophone literature usually means refraining from food, sex, or alcohol. In Chapter 4 I deployed it in reference to (refraining from) participation in rituals. Protestant Christianity in particular has profiled itself in China as a religion of abstention — a wide range of practices ranging from ancestor veneration to eating foods with blood and foods sacrificed to Gods or ancestors is considered as sinful "superstition" by practitioners. Nevertheless, as a key enactment of social relations, a communal ritual in Southern Fujian is something that community members have to respond to. Whether the response is to go out and participate in the ritual or to lock oneself up inside one's bed

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room, it seems that one cannot get around communal rituals. Abstaining is thus also a way to enact a ritual, just not the most socially desirable or efficacious way.

In modern China, abstention from "superstitious" rituals has become widely practiced, indeed it was at times an act of patriotism (Duara 1996). For example, students returning to their hometowns in rural Shandong could be excused for abstaining from the customary prostrations to family elders and ancestors during their weddings and Chinese New Year celebrations because they had received a "modern" education in the city, which had increased their ability to serve the nation but also made them adverse to its "backward" traditions (Kipnis 1992). Likewise, relatives of a deceased in China might choose to abstain from certain "traditional" death rituals in the cities, where the modern face of the nation was being constructed (Whyte 1988). Peasants across China have long been aware that more "modern" or highly educated people frown upon their customs (Oxfeld 2010).

Although practitioners of popular religion in Southern Fujian tend to abstain from Protestant practices, often out of contempt for "Western customs" and out of fear for being "brainwashed" into following a "foreign teaching." Protestants are often more rigid abstainers, and less easily convinced to join the communal rituals of fellow household members. This emphasis on abstention is due to Chinese Protestantism's historic preoccupation with "modernizing" China by eliminating customs associated with "backward" traditions (Dunch 2001); to its discursive emphasis on what is perceived by Protestant elites as moral behavior; and due to state-led marginalization of practices associated with popular religion (Duara 1991). For Protestants in Southern Fujian, abstention from "superstition" is the fulfillment of obligations toward their church community and toward the ideal of a modern Chinese nation.

Weddings and funerals as lifecycle rituals hosted by a particular household in Southern Fujian can be simplified or carved up by that household at their own initiative and at their own risk. This reduces pressure on ritualists, and prevents their abstention. But such strategies are rarely possible for annual rituals such as Christmas celebrations or Spring Festival rituals. For certain rituals including lineage processions or firework shows conducted during these annual events, are co-owned and co-funded by all households of a community. They do not revolve around a particular household but around the entire community. With no way to alter the ritual proceedings, members of pluriprax households in Southern Fujian commonly abstain from their fellow household members' annual rituals.
For Dean (1993, 114), taking part in lineage processions in Southern Fujian "and the acceptance of one's place in the traditional organization of the procession serves the recognized function of preserving unity." Ritual is a force for social cohesion; it unites people and holds them together. Protestants' abstention from a lineage procession is perceived as a threat both to communal relations and to the status of the abstainees' household in the village community. The very idea of communal celebrations stigmatizes abstention; one actively participates or risks becoming a social pariah. Michael Puett (2010) provides an interesting way to understand this, by pointing out how in the Book of Rites (one of the Confucian classics) ritual is depicted as a key human endeavor to create order in a chaotic world. By participating in communal rituals, one contributes to the proper enactment of human and divine relations, while abstention promotes chaos and disconnection (Puett 2010, 369). How do people in Southern Fujian maintain pluriprax households despite individual abstention from communal rituals?

In the case study from Mashan, Yuxian and Lilan abstained from some Spring Festival rituals, while they participated in others. Three rituals in which Yuxian and Lilan participated were the New Year's Eve dinner; a self-devised new year's day family lunch; and the customary visits to family elders in the region. Three rituals from which they abstained were the New Year's Eve fireworks; the New Year's Morning veneration of ancestors and Heaven and Earth; and the lineage procession to "divide incense" on the second day of the new year. Carefully balancing between Protestant ritual piety and ritual obligations toward kinsmen, Yuxian and Lilan were the subject of gossip in Mashan but remained embedded in their household and lineage. The case study demonstrates how people in Southern Fujian maintain pluriprax households by accepting a degree of individual abstention from communal rituals.

This admittedly does not fully explain how people in Southern Fujian maintain pluriprax households. It focuses on rituals, but other factors in society are at play which also contribute to the integrity of pluriprax households. One could argue, for example, that since the 1980s the household has become a financially and emotionally significant social unit in Reform Era China due to the dissolution of labor collectives (Thøgersen and Ni 2010, Halskov Hansen and Pang 2010). Many young Chinese people today regard kinship as an asset in the service of the individual's career ambitions and material desires, instead of a sacred institution demanding a lifetime of devotion. Yan (2010, 1-2) calls this the "rise of the private family within which the private lives of individuals are thriving." For
Yuxian's parents to break ties with him and Lilan over abstention from rituals, would cause not only emotional suffering but also financial (and eventually perhaps medical) problems. They had little choice but to accept the religious conversion and subsequent ritual abstention of the young couple. Future studies could delve deeper into such socio-economic factors for explaining how people maintain pluriprax households in Southern Fujian. I have instead kept a steady focus on rituals, which allowed me to look at the tension between communal obligations and individual empowerment with regard to ritual enactment.

Since the start of the Reform Era, it seems that neither the state nor the kinship-based lineage is empowered to demand individuals' participation in communal rituals. For while under Mao the power of kinship groups was broken and people were tied to collective labor units loyal to the state, under Deng and subsequent Chinese leaders the power of the state over citizens' lives was rolled back. Although lineages in Southern Fujian have regained some of their wealth and ritual functions, clan members also have "private" lives in the sense that they migrate at will, form friend groups at university and at work, or convert to Protestant Christianity. I understand this disempowerment of once powerful ritual communities as a key feature of an ongoing modernization of Chinese society, which has facilitated the emergence of the Chinese individual as an independent, desiring subject.

Acknowledgement of individual needs, individual ambitions, and individual religious piety by people in Southern Fujian is key to understanding their tolerance toward Protestants' individual abstention from communal rituals. Having witnessed the disempowerment of ancestral lineages and socialist production brigades in the course of the twentieth century, as well as the rise of private individuals within their communities, my interlocutors looked for compromises in ritual enactment. Tolerance of individual ritual abstention is a way to maintain a pluriprax household in contemporary Southern Fujian.

**Future research**

A fundamental question that captivates me is what binds people together in friend circles, households, political parties, worshipping communities, and so on. It seems that human relationships in general depend on whether we can agree to be at designated places at designated times for shared causes. The capacity to organize ourselves and work together lies not only at the basis of businesses and governments, but is also crucial for a sense of solidarity within church communities and within households. Rituals illustrate this point like no other. Scholars have for many years underlined the important connection between
rituals and sociality. In Southern Fujian, getting together for seasonal holidays and lifecycle rituals was key in forming and maintaining relationships among church members; (former) work unit members; household members; and lineage members. Enacting rituals together, in the same place at the same time, seemed to give people a sense of solidarity and togetherness as a community.

Apart from bringing people together, rituals can also divide them. The key problem I explored during fieldwork in Southern Fujian was research participants' conflicting ritual obligations. Rituals can suddenly force people to choose sides between the ancestral lineage in one's hometown and the "spiritual family" of a church community. People's social and religious lives have become highly diverse after the near-complete dissolution of Mao's collective labor units. For the pluriprax households described in this thesis, ritual enactment sometimes posed a conundrum that could only be resolved by changing the ritual, forsaking certain obligations, or by flatly refusing to participate. By accepting a degree of deviance or illicit rituality my research participants were nevertheless able to form and maintain pluriprax households; I have not (yet) come across disintegration as reported by Tam Ngo (2016) among the families of Protestant converts in Vietnam.

An important theme which I have not been able to fully explore in this thesis, is the temporal underpinnings of conflicting ritual obligations. Put simply, the ritual lives of practitioners of popular religion and Protestant Christianity in Southern Fujian are regulated by different calendars; the Chinese calendar and the Gregorian calendar. If communal rituals depend on people's willingness to come together at the same time, then we may expect the situation of "temporal diversity" in pluriprax households to be an important topic for future investigation.

The Chinese calendar is a lunisolar calendar like the Gregorian calendar, but the months are fixed to the moon's lunations. To the contrary, the Gregorian calendar's months are detached from lunations, resulting in 365-day years and a 366-day leap year every four years. Running asynchronously to the Gregorian calendar, the Chinese calendar stipulates the dates of key holidays and festivals such as the Chinese New Year, the Mid Autumn Festival, and the Ghost Festival. The first and fifteenth day of each lunar month are occasions for people in Southern Fujian to venerate Gods and ancestors for "peace and health" (ping'an jiankang). On the second and sixteenth days entrepreneurs can be seen venerating the God of Wealth (caishen) with similar rituals (lighting joss sticks and burning paper money in a small, portable stove). Throughout Chinese history, new rulers or those in
open rebellion to an emperor have adopted new calendars to signify the coming of a new age, hence the calendrical system has undergone numerous changes in the course of history.

The Chinese calendrical system can be viewed as an important structure underlying religious life. So-called farming almanacs, for example, are heeded by many in Southern Fujian who are looking for the best moment to open a business, hold a wedding, or undergo medical treatment. Common farming almanacs are based entirely on the Chinese calendrical system's so-called Five Elements, Earthly Stems, and Heavenly Branches (Smith 1992). For many in Southern Fujian, almanacs are important guides to the rhythm of life. According to Smith (1992),

\[\text{the } \textit{Collected Statutes} \text{ of the Ming and Qing dynasties listed a wide range of activities to be classified as auspicious or inauspicious for any given day in calendars and almanacs. During the Qing period, 67 matters fell under the rubric 'imperial use' (\textit{yuyong}). Of the 67 categories of imperial concern, a number dealt with the specific responsibilities and prerogative of the emperor and his designated agents: the promulgation of edicts, the bestowal of favours and awards (including amnesties, compensation, titles, personnel matters). (...) The categories stipulated for 'almanac selection' included the following: sacrificing to ancestors, praying for good fortune, praying for a son, sending documents to superiors, being ennobled, sending a memorial to the throne, receiving an official appointment, inheriting noble rank, meeting with relatives or friends, starting school, 'capping' (a mark of adulthood for young males), travelling, (etc. etc.) (...) — Smith 1992, 13-15.}\]

An important principle is laid out in Chinese almanacs, namely that one must conform one's important actions, including rituals, to cosmic forces, or risk failure and disaster. This principle may not be universally adhered to in contemporary Southern Fujian, especially in areas where the state has most successfully promoted modernization and "rational thought," such as in universities and other state institutions. But almanacs still circulate on a grand scale, and many people in Southern Fujian own at least one copy in their home or on their cell phone, which they may or may not consult on important occasions.

Protestants in Southern Fujian, however, categorically denied consulting such sources for divination. Instead, they consulted their God for important choices, and some ministers encouraged the churchgoers to pray for even relatively minor blessings such as a safe ride to work in the morning. They frequently cited 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to "pray
Protestants in Southern Fujian based their ritual lives on the Gregorian calendar (Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost, although their dates vary, are tied to the so-called paschal full moon, which is the first full moon after March 20 on the Gregorian calendar). Their most salient communal ritual is the weekly Sunday service, although those working on Sundays may be regular participants in bible study groups or other "small groups" that meet on any given week day. Protestant converts in Southern Fujian adopt a different ritual calendar, a different outlook on the cosmos. They discover a "sinful past life," as well as a new outlook on a future in Heaven.

The Gregorian calendar, as mentioned in Chapter 1 about the rising popularity of Christmas, became the standard calendar for professional life in China in 1912, although it was not thoroughly implemented until the start of Communist rule in 1949. Like other nation-states that have retained an "indigenous" calendar beside or in favor of the Gregorian calendar (for example Iran and Ethiopia), China is marked by a situation of temporal diversity, a diversity embodied by pluriprax households. Calendars in Southern Fujian often designate both the Chinese date and the Gregorian date. While this rarely seemed to lead to confusion among my research population, temporal diversity in pluriprax households in Southern Fujian posed a peculiar challenge for members to enact communal rituals together. The problem is not only that practitioners of popular religion and Protestant Christianity follow different ritual calendars, the practical divinatory implications (when to do what) of these calendars seemed to lead to a sense of division and asynchrony.

Future research on pluriprax households in China could adopt a perspective of "multiple temporalities" (Gallois 2007). This is especially important for the study of communal rituals marking seasonal transformations (Spring Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival) or commemorating a person or event (the birth or enlightenment of a God). The dates of such rituals and the calendars regulating these dates are part of different ritual systems and different cosmologies. What is the origin and future of the world? What is our relationship to the moon, the sun, the constellations, the Gods, the spirits? What is the place of our (village, church, family, national) community in the cosmos? Do we re-incarnate after death, do we go to a spirit world, will we be remembered as good socialist citizens, or do we cease to exist entirely? The timing of communal rituals is related to such cosmological questions.

I understand the ritual lives of members of pluriprax households as running continuously."
metaphorically "out of sync." In ritual enactment, like in synchronized dance, there is often a set of principles agreed or imposed on the actors that lays out where, when, and how they will act. There is no point in celebrating Chinese New Year or Christmas in July; the ritualists must get together at the designated time and place, with a basic agreement on who will do what. From the grassroots perspective of my research participants in Southern Fujian, several reasons exist to enact rituals separately. First, some participants were imbued with a sense of religious freedom, i.e. "I am free to participate in rituals of my own choice." Other participants viewed the problem of asynchronous rituality as a problem of Chinese versus Western culture, i.e. "Christianity is a foreign teaching which deviates from Chinese customs." Still others claimed that forms of popular religion are "superstition" and "idolatry," thus justifying their refusal to participate in communal rituals. "One household walking two paths," or "one country, two systems," are two ways my research participants verbalized this situation.

This posed a problem because my research participants almost uniformly exhibited a strong preference to enact rituals together. They cherished the hope that one day their child, spouse, or parent would abandon her or his faulty ritual practices. Their desire was that one day they would enact rituals together. Protestants, for example, were eager to bring their non-Protestant household members along to Christmas celebrations in churches and to pray together, while practitioners of popular religion were eager to bring their Protestant household members along to lineage celebrations and to eat sacrificed foods together. Ideally, all actors would enact the proper rites at the right time, in proper dress, with the proper items. To achieve this, members of pluriprax households in Southern Fujian often attempted to steer each other away from their "erroneous" path, onto the "correct" path. They also looked for compromises so that all household members would more or less enact a ritual together, with only minor deviations. Getting in sync ritually as a household may take years or decades to achieve, and it may never happen at all until one or more members pass away and the household has gone through another cycle of life and death.

Why, then, do people like living in sync with others? Why is there a performance art called "synchronized dance," but not one called "asynchronous dance?" Some couples fall so deeply in love that for several days, weeks, or even months, they are inseparable. They go shopping together, go to bed together and get up together, share their meals together, go to the library together, take showers together, and say the same things at the same time. These are perceived as truly romantic moments, perhaps because such moments
are removed from the normal "asynchrony" of interpersonal relations. We experience the moments when we are truly "in sync" with others as some of the most fulfilling and precious moments of our lives. Some divisions that almost inevitably arise over issues such as working schedules or migration are overcome through shared rituals. For example, the Chinese New Year is the ultimate annual moment for Chinese people to get together with living family members and deceased ancestors. Eating the same food together at the same time in the same place carries great weight for them (comparable perhaps to Christmas dinners in the Western world, a phenomenon I did not come across in Southern Fujian).

More specifically, why was it so important for my research participants in Southern Fujian to enact rituals together? I distinguish at least five reasons: a personal desire for a sense of togetherness as a household; a conspicuous display of the household's unity (and hence respectability in local society); a conspicuous display of household members' filial piety toward deceased ancestors; a symbol of respect toward the village, neighborhood, work unit, or church community which "owns" (see previous chapters) a communal ritual; efficacy, i.e. that ancestors are properly fed and deceased have accrued enough material or karmic supplies for a successful journey, or that a Protestant deceased can enter Heaven.

During his fieldwork in rural Algeria, Pierre Bourdieu (1977) had observed that individuals rigorously conformed to collective rhythms that

structure not only the group's representation of the world but the group itself, which orders itself in accordance with this representation. (...) Synchronization, in the case of rites or tasks, is that much more associated with spatial grouping the more there is collectively at stake: rites thus range in importance from the great solemn rites (e.g. awdjeb) enacted by everyone at the same time, through the rites performed at the same time but by each family separately (the sacrifice of a sheep at the Aid), through those which may be practised at any time (e.g. the rite to cure sties), and finally to those which must only take place in secret and at unusual hours (the rites of love magic). — Bourdieu 1977, 163.

Whoever fell out of rhythm with the group in Bourdieu's field site, risked being branded as suspicious and unreliable. Likewise, in Southern Fujian, the refusal of a household member to enact a communal ritual seemed to be disadvantageous for that household's status within the larger community. Conflicting ritual obligations interfered with ritual proceedings as
formalized practices that are conducive to relations among human and supernatural actors. Nevertheless, members of pluriprax households often had little choice but to accept the fact that their wife, husband, son, or daughter abstained from important communal rituals.

For several reasons, it was difficult for my interlocutors to turn their pluriprax households into uniprax ones, where rituals are a shared household effort. First, the bonds of ritual obligation are strong. After getting baptized in church, or after having celebrated the village's and lineage's most powerful Gods with neighbors for many years, one does not simply walk away and abstain. This can be a long and difficult process fraught with social conflict and feelings of guilt. During my fieldwork I had heard of (though did not personally encounter) several cases in which an elderly Protestant convert had had nightmares about being haunted by the hungry ghosts of her (husband's) dead ancestors.

To make shared ritual enactment even more difficult, Chinese modernizers of the twentieth century instilled in the population the idea that popular religion is "superstition," while Protestant Christianity is derided by many in Southern Fujian as an "evil cult" or a "foreign teaching." In other words, discursive and social (and for Communist Party members also legal) barriers exist to be a practitioner in either of these ritual systems, and to switch from one to the other. Research participants were often aware of (real or perhaps made up) local precedents in which neighbors or relatives who had joined a particular ritual or church had ended up sick, impoverished, or dead. Protestants and local ritual service providers in Southern Fujian have both been accused of cheating people out of their money or falsely promising benefits. Such local social memories influenced people's opinions about the ritual lives of their household members.

Facing asynchronous ritual lives, how did members of pluriprax households in Southern find ways to reconcile differences? My participants found two ways to enact their communal rituals together. First, by "simplifying" rituals through omission of contentious rituals (see Chapter 2). This could also include relaxing the rules for participants (a bride was allowed to stand and pray next to the groom who knelt down to burn incense for his ancestors). Second, by engaging in polytropy, that is participation of all household members in a communal ritual (see Chapters 1 and 3). Abstention was nevertheless a salient phenomenon and a form of ritual enactment that gave rise to a sense of division within the household (see Chapter 4).

How can the phenomenon of pluriprax households in China be expected to develop in the near future? Although few statistical data are available on this topic, the most logical
trajectory is that the number of pluriprax households in China will continue to increase. If the authorities continue on the course of rehabilitating popular religion as "traditional Chinese culture” for tourism and for political legitimacy (Oakes and Sutton 2010) while Protestants continue to make converts, then pluriprax households may become an increasingly salient feature of society. This is especially likely if converts continue to be mostly female. In that case, church communities will have an enduring hunger for non-Protestant men to marry their women. If, on the other hand, conversion slows down in China, and churches start attracting more men instead of women, then the phenomenon of pluriprax households may become more rare. These two factors, however, a Protestant slow-down and attracting men, are not part of the trend I observed in Southern Fujian in 2014-2016.

Apart from looking at temporal diversity in pluriprax households in China, future studies could take into account a wider range of ritual systems, including Islamic and Catholic ritual systems. Islam in particular has been framed in state media and popular discourse as the antithesis of both Chinese traditional culture and Chinese modernity (Gladney 2003; Erie 2016). For pluriprax households in China with one or more Muslim members, we may expect the issue of ritual enactment to be contentious yet highly insightful for the study of contemporary society.

A recent edited volume on "Muslim-non-Muslims marriages" in Southeast Asia (Jones, Chee, and Mohamad 2009) has outlined some key issues. First, Muslim-non-Muslim marriages in Southeast Asia are quite rare because of restrictions imposed by both religious and political authorities due to past conflicts that arose around such households. Second, conversion to Islam is generally required by relatives in Southeast Asia before a marriage with a previously non-Muslim person can take place. Households in Southeast Asia are thus rarely "mixed" or "pluriprax" in terms of religious participation. Third, conversion from Islam to Buddhism, or abandonment of Islam altogether, seems to be quite rare as well, because Islamic communities in Southeast Asia have strict laws and forms of punishment. The higher density of Muslims in a region (Indonesia, Malaysia, Southern Thailand, and Mindanao island of the Philippines), the more strictly controlled marriage is and the conversion of the non-Muslim partner. Fourth, partners who convert to Islam are usually women. Muslim men in Southeast Asia are expected to be able to "guide" the religious life of a converted wife. Muslim women are more often reserved for marriage to Muslim men because it is feared that a non-Muslim husband or a recently converted
husband may not lead his wife "properly" in Islamic practice. Future studies would do well to take such marriages and households in contemporary Chinese society into account in order to enhance our understanding of Chinese Islam with ethnographic data.

In general, pluriprax households compel us to look beyond conventional, partly state-defined and partly science-defined boundaries between "Islam," "Protestantism," "Daoism," "Buddhism," and "Catholicism" to understand how people and practices mix and mingle in everyday life. On a grassroots level, Chinese people have to deal with multiple sets of rituals, clergy, and communities at the same time. For analytical purposes it can be useful to separate them, but the current study has demonstrated how practitioners in different Chinese ritual systems share villages, neighborhoods, lineages, and sometimes domestic spaces.

In the context of individualization, religion and ritual have become matters of individual conscience, generating tension between individual piety and communal concerns. But individualization is also the context in which pluriprax households can be formed and maintained. The disempowerment of ritual communities in modern China allows people on a grassroots level to apply flexible solutions to the problem of conflicting ritual obligations. Individualization is one shade of a globally informed Chinese modernity (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2010; Kipnis 2012). The pluriprax households I studied in Southern Fujian are therefore not simply a local phenomenon. To probe into the ways people form and maintain pluriprax households in Southern Fujian is to probe into contemporary human societies that are marked by increasing pluriformity and diversity.
Appendices

Appendix 1. Conversion testimony of "Mimi"

[Testimony delivered at an English Corner in Xiamen's "Harbor church" in 2015, handed to me for analysis on November 8, 2015. Anonymized version.]

感谢上帝拣选我成为神的儿女

弟兄姐妹主内平安！

我的中文名[...])英文名 Faith 信心这是我信主后给自己取的,因为圣经很多关于信心的话语“信就是所望之事的实底,是未见之事的确据”人非有信就不能得神喜悦”因着想坚固信心成为蒙神悦纳的人所以取名 Faith.目前在[...])公司是 sales.在现今环境优胜劣汰以绩效为导向的氛围销售都是以业绩说话为公司贡献最大的利益创造最大的价值才有存在的意义但认识神以后我明白了个人的价值并非建立在物质和财富上,乃是要遵行神的旨意为主所用在工作生活中荣耀主的名成为主美好见证.


最大的感动体现在神就是爱,为了我们的罪他替我们受刑罚钉死在十字架上[...])赦免他们,因为他们所做的,他们不晓得]耶稣让我学到必须彼此饶恕,因为我们也有耶稣的过犯.信主前我在家和父亲几乎不说说话的话是烦躁的语气没耐心,经常的以自我为中心,仇恨心理很难释怀过去家庭暴力所带来的伤痛和阴影信主后圣灵的帮助让我重新找回自己认识正确的价值观.仇恨无法驱走仇恨只有爱才可以,信主前每当听到他们吵架时我总是很难控制情绪会站我妈妈这边跟着吵得就更厉害了.信主后我会镇定脾气安静祷告后冷静的和他们沟通,学会饶恕的爱靠着神的恩典开始反省自己从态度言语心意思念学像耶稣的温柔谦卑我努力改变态度谦卑顺服,凡事尊主为大每件事学会让自己冷静以温柔的灵安静的心来到神的面前祷告求神带领帮助.也感谢[...])借着她的分享和祷告让我更明白神的
旨意靠着从神而来的爱来爱父亲释怀所有伤害阴影真正得以自由，靠着那加给我力量的凡事都能做。每天默想神的话语加添力量胜过原本愤怒的脾气。”路加福音 6.28 要为诅咒你们的人祝福，要替恶待你们的人祷告要爱你们的仇敌，善待他们”依靠神的话语我开始遵行并活出来，感谢主改变了我的思维方式态度言语心思念。遵行孝敬父母为第一诫命感谢主这一个月来家里很少有争吵，也感谢课程里老师学员们的代祷借着从神而来的力量得以医治让我在主爱中得以释放感受到平安和喜乐。

建立信心经历转变认识生命的价值，这一年感谢桥梁和同工们带领学习课程的老师让我的生命更加有意义，愿我们成为神活水流通的管道传扬福音让更多的人来认识神做合神心意，蒙神悦纳的人。
Appendix 2. Xiamen City Funeral Management Provisional Measures  
(trans. Bram Colijn)

Xiamen City People’s Government, February 4, 1983 issue

In order to successfully advance funeral and interment reforms and improve the funeral and interment work, in accordance with adapting our city to the “Opening Up to the Outside” policy, and the need to construct a spiritually civilized city, this is an exclusively drawn up, definitive edition.

1. All residing within the jurisdiction of the urban district and who are deceased, their remains should uniformly be cremated, burial is prohibited; those buried without permission will be excavated and cremated by the city’s Funeral Management Office. Excavation and cremation will be paid for by the deceased’s family, and upon refusal to pay, the Funeral Management Office will inform the local work unit of the deceased’s major relatives, and the sum will be deducted from their salaries. The populations of Tongan county, Xinglin district, suburban towns, and Heshan commune should also actively carry out cremation of the deceased. The work unit will not allow burial expenses and financial support to be extended to any cadres and staff who are buried without permission. People from outside who have passed away in this city must be cremated in this city, the corpse cannot be transported from the city.

2. If rural residents pass away, we have to vigorously promote cremation. For those who are temporarily buried, societal groups should establish public cemetery areas in desolate, infertile, and mountainous places nearby. Remains and bone ashes must be buried at a public cemetery area. It is strictly forbidden to occupy and use cultivated land (including private plots), to bury disorderly and untidily, and it is prohibited to sell a burial plot.

3. If burial is requested for a deceased person who is not a resident of Xiamen, or who is a Chinese who has come from overseas to visit relatives, or a sibling from Hong Kong, Macao, or Taiwan, or a resident of the Hui ethnicity, an application should be filed at the City Funeral Management Office. After approval the deceased can be encoffined and buried at the Xue mountain range in the Andoushan public cemetery, according to their customs and habits.

4. Post-cremation bone ash of the whole urban population (including all physical remains) is required to be assigned a place in a public cemetery, where it will be either buried or
deposited in a bone ash room by the City Funeral Management Office. It is prohibited on
Xiamen Island to arbitrarily make a tomb and bury a corpse in another place. If [this policy
is] violated, then the Funeral Management Office will excavate and retain [the remains],
and the expenses will be handled in accordance with the regulations mentioned above
(point 1).
5. For all who have passed away in the city (including those who died at home or in a
hospital), the bereavement should be reported within twelve hours to the city’s funeral
parlor, which will proceed to store the corpse in the funeral parlor in preparation for the
funeral. It is not allowed to keep the corpse at home in preparation for the funeral.
Perpetrators will be fined by the Funeral Management Office. The remains of deceased
persons suffering from an acute contagious disease should be reported and submitted
immediately to the funeral parlor for cremation; the storing of the corpse cannot be
arbitrarily extended. If the death occurred in a hospital, the hospital has the responsibility to
immediately inform the funeral parlor so that it can be dealt with.
6. Vigorously promote civilization, simple and plain, conserve resources when conducting
funerals, oppose feudal superstition, extravagance, and wastefulness. It is forbidden to
assemble a large body of marchers to parade in a funeral procession, except when a car
rental company is hired through the Funeral Management Office to provide transport.
Random work units and individuals may not provide vehicles for funeral processions, and
violators will be dealt with by the Public Security Bureau, Traffic Inspection Bureau, and
fuel stations respectively. If the modes of transport belong to the work unit, and proof is
provided, then fuel supply will be suspended for half a year as punishment. If the modes of
transport belong to individuals, then they will be fined.
7. It is strictly forbidden for random work units and individuals to illegally carry out
funerals, build tombs, and handle corpses, or to manufacture or sell funeral products for
funeral business. Violators will be criticized and educated by the local government and the
local Industry and Commerce Management Bureau; depending on the circumstances and
degree of seriousness, the goods will be confiscated and fines handed down.
8. Governments of all different levels, different communes, groups, all sub-district offices,
and neighborhood committees have to support the work of leading funeral and interment
reforms. Cadres on all levels should take the lead in transforming social traditions, and
conscientiously implement measures. All departments, all work units should propagandize
and educate the masses and cadres, and actively harmonize with departments carrying out
funeral reform work. Good implementation should be praised. Work units and individuals violating these measures, besides being instructed to improve, in accordance with the circumstances and degree of seriousness will be fined between 50 yuan and 500 yuan. Those disrupting funeral reforms will be referred to politico-legal organs to be penalized. Xiamen City Funeral Management Office integrates control over the administrative organization of the entire city’s funeral matters. In order to implement these measures, it has the right to carry out inspections; and on the basis of these measures it may put into effect the detailed rules and regulations. These measures are effective as of April 1, 1983.

Appendix 3. Funeral Guidelines of a Registered Church in Xiamen
(trans. Bram Colijn)

Xiamen [undisclosed] Church Funeral Guidelines

“But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.” (1 Corinthians 14:40)

If a member of this church has passed away, the church is obliged to hold a funeral in accordance with biblical instruction. In the meantime, the family should act in compliance with the following guidelines:
1. The family should go to the household registration bureau to cancel the deceased’s household register and contact the Xiamen morgue to arrange a time for cremation.
2. The family should notify the church’s funeral group and discuss related matters in advance (at least one day) of cremation.
3. The family should wear simple and unadorned black or white clothes in remembrance of the dead; you may wear a black bandage on your arm or a cross on your chest.
4. Gambling, superstition, or other pagan rituals are not allowed.
5. Funeral room layouts should meet church instruction.
6. Portraits of the deceased and offspring are allowed.
7. No superstition-related things such as idols, paper money burning, and incense burning.
8. No koutou to the deceased.
9. No superstition-style bands. Should there be a band, they can only play church hymns.
10. The coffin can be carried by funeral group members or family relatives.
11. We welcome family and relatives to frequent Sunday worship services.
12. Failure to follow the above instructions will result in the church’s refusal to hold a funeral.

2010. 5
Appendix 4. Rules for Funeral Group Members of a Registered Church in Xiamen
(trans. Bram Colijn)

Funeral Group Rules and Regulations
1. Be fearless of filth, fearless of fatigue, disregard rewards, be halted by neither wind nor rain, be on time, be industrious and conscientious, and arrange the memorial hall every time.
2. Do the work in mutual harmony and mutual care.
3. Besides arranging and decorating the memorial hall, use God’s words to comfort, advise, and encourage the bereaved family through concerted prayer.
4. Refuse to accept money or other rewards.
5. If the bereaved family’s financial situation is found to be difficult through inquiries and visits, the group must report this to the church committee.
6. If the bereaved family has particular needs, respond in a way that does not divide the neighborhood, and does not divide the church community, conform to the lessons from Scripture. Be happy to do all that is asked, and act.
Character list

ai 爱
bai ouxiang 拜偶像
bai tiandi 拜天地
bai zuxian 拜祖先
baibai 拜拜
baojia 保甲
baomiao 报庙
baorong 包容
bijiao haode 比较好的
bijiao renke 比较认可
bin 殡
bu gei ta mianzi 不给她面子
bu yao shuo tai duo 不要说太多
budong 不懂
caishe 财神
chengbao 承包
chengjiale 成家了
chengyu 成语
chengzhu 成主
chijiao 吃教
chuanfuyin 传福音
chuandaoren 传道人
chuanxing 穿行
chumen 出门
chunjie 春节
ci'ai 慈爱
dabo 大伯
大连 大殓
dangzuzhi neibu dechufen 党组织内部的处
danwei 单位
dao 道
dayizhang 大姨丈
dengji 登记
dinghun 订婚
dixiong zimei 弟兄姊妹
dixiong 弟兄
duanwujie 端午节
duoyuanhua 多元化
duri runian 度日如年
dedian 恩典
fa 法
fangbian 方便
fayin 发引
fei xintu 非信徒
fengshui 风水
fo 佛
fojiao 佛教
fu 福
fuqi duibai 夫妻对拜
gaikou cha 改口茶
ganshe 干涉
ganxie zhu 感谢主
gege buru 格格不入
gongpin 供品
Guangong 关公
guanxi 关系
Guanyin Pusa 观音菩萨
guiyuan 桂圆
hai mei xin jidu de 还没信基督的
en ruanruo 很软弱
hu 户
huanjing 环境
huasheng 花生
hukou 户口
jia 家
jiahe wanshi xing 家和万事兴
jiandanhu 简化
jianhua 简化
jianzheng 见证
jiao 教
jiaohui de dixiong zimei 教会的弟兄姊妹
jiating jiaohui 家庭教会
jidujiao 基督教
jieqin 接亲
jiesan 接三
jing 境
jingcha 敬茶
jingjiu 敬酒
jinmen 进门
jiujiu 舅舅
juhuidian 聚会点
kaidiao 开吊
kenqiu shangdide dailing 恳求上帝的带领
ketou 磕头
kong 孔
koutou 叩头
kua huopen 跨火盆
kunan 苦难
lao Xiamenren 老厦门人
li 礼
ling 灵
lingying 灵应
liushu 六叔
liyi 礼仪
mao 毛
meiyou fang'aidao wo 没有妨碍到我
mendanghudui 门当户对
mentu 门徒
Minbei 闽北
mixin 迷信
miyue 蜜月
mudaoban 慕道班
naodongfang 闹洞房
nongli 农历
nü'er yao chujiale 女儿要出家了
pai hunshazhao 拍婚纱照
ping'an jiankang 平安健康
ping'an 平安
pinyin 拼音
qianjiu wo 迁就我
qigong 气功
qinghuo 请火
qingke 请客
qingmingjie 清明节
qinpenghaoyou 亲朋好友
qipao 旗袍
qiuhun 求婚
rangbu 让步
renao 热闹
renzhen de jidutu 认真的基督徒
ronghe 融合
ruxiang suisu 入乡随俗
sanbai 三拜
sangshizu 丧失组
sanzi aiguo yundong 三自爱国运动
sanzi jiaohui 三自教会
Shangdi 上帝
shangdi de dajiating 上帝的大家庭
shangdi de ernü 上帝的儿女
shangliang 商量
shaozhi 烧纸
shei dai ni xin 谁带信
Shen 神
shendao 神道
shengchen bazi 生辰八字
shengjing 圣经
shengling 圣灵
shenming 神明
shenxin heyi 身心合一
Shenzhou 神州
shichen 时辰
shijie guan 世界观
shumian de jiancha 书面的检查
xiao 洗脑
xinkao zhuyesu 信靠主耶稣
xintu 信徒
xinyang 信仰
xiongdimen 兄弟们
Xuantian Shangdi 玄天上帝
Xuanwu 玄武
xuqiu 需求
yangjiao 洋教
yansu 严肃
Yehehua 耶和华
yesu jidu 耶稣基督
yi jia zou liang tiao lu 一家走两条路
yidian yidi 一点一滴
yishi 仪式
yiwu 义务
jieyi 介意
you wo zhangmuniang zuo daibiao 由我丈母娘做代表
youxiang 游香
yuanzi 圆子
yuyong 玉用
zang 葬
zeren 责任
zhangmuniang 丈母娘
zheng 正
zhi jiao 之教
zhize 指责
zhongqiujie 中秋节
Zhu 主
zimei 姊妹
zong 宗
zongjiao 宗教
zongjiao xinyang 宗教信仰
zu 族
zuo yuezi 坐月子
zuoke 做客
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