

# (Re)locating sacredness in Shanghai

Social Compass  
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## Abstract

Shanghai is a metropolis that sees itself as the cradle of Chinese ‘modernity’, the birthplace of the revolutionary movement, and a hub of cultural and religious diversity – a multilayered identity enshrined in a number of ‘sacred spaces’. This article focuses on the way sacredness continues to be engineered in today’s Shanghai, mapping the religious landscape through the exploration of four dimensions – namely, ‘landmarks’, ‘compounds’, ‘privacy’, and ‘waterways’. The article assesses the role played by churches, temples, and mosques, by home and working spaces, by waterways and virtual networks, in the shaping of an urban sacred space satisfying a variety of needs and traditions while being symbolically organized into a consistent territory. In the context of a religiously vibrant global city, locating ‘sacredness’ means understanding it as a process of ceaseless dislocation and relocation.

## Keywords

Chinese religions, city mapping, imagined geography, religious globalization, sacredness, urban rituals

## Résumé

Shanghai est une métropole qui se considère tout à la fois comme le berceau de la « modernité » chinoise, le lieu de naissance du mouvement révolutionnaire, et une plaque tournante de la diversité culturelle et religieuse – une identité multiple qui s’inscrit dans un certain nombre de « lieux sacrés ». Cet article explore la façon dont le

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sacré est toujours produit à Shanghai aujourd'hui, cartographiant le paysage religieux à travers l'exploration de quatre dimensions – à savoir, «repères», «résidences», «espaces privés» et «voies navigables». Le rôle joué par les églises, les temples ou les mosquées est évalué, ainsi que celui des espaces domestiques ou de travail, des réseaux fluviaux et virtuels. L'espace sacré urbain satisfait ainsi à toute une gamme de besoins et de traditions tout en étant symboliquement organisé dans un territoire cohérent. Et en même temps, dans le contexte d'une ville globale au grand dynamisme religieux, la localisation du «sacré» revient à son appréhension comme un processus incessant de dislocation et relocalisation.

### Mots-clés

cartographie urbaine, géographie imaginée, mondialisation religieuse, religions chinoises, rituels urbains, sacré

## Introduction: modern and sacred

*Shanghai Modern*: The very title of the book that Leo Ou-fan Lee published in 1999 epitomizes the perspective adopted by studies of Shanghai from the 1930s onwards. Since then, other scholars, have continued to explore the contribution made by Shanghai's constant renewal and seemingly unstoppable expansion to Chinese 'modernity' (Fogel, 2010: 316–317; Wasserstrom, 2009).<sup>1</sup> At the same time, researchers in China have continued to debate how the focus on 'modernization' influences the study of Shanghai as a locus of revolutionary history (Xiong, 2000; Zuo, 2009; Liu and Jiang, 2014). The importance of that history in Shanghai's psyche is reflected in the fact that it is inscribed not only in memories but also in architectural landmarks: the affluent district of Xintiandi ('New Heavens and Earth') includes the site of the first congress of the Communist Party of China (held in July 1921), memorialized by a museum; the Longhua Revolutionary Martyrs' Cemetery (next to the Buddhist Longhua Temple) commemorates the Party members and other activists who died during the revolutionary struggles of 1928–1937; and at the northern end of the Bund stands the Monument to the People's Heroes.

Does *Shanghai Modern* equate to *Shanghai Secular*? Probably not. Not only is Shanghai's religious fabric richly layered, but also the modernization of the city has long been linked to religious development: The gazetteer of 1504 mentioned that there were around 100 Buddhist and Daoist temples in the county (Brook, 2001: 92). From 1608 onwards, long-term religious and social changes resulted from the conversion of Xu Guangqi to Catholicism. After 1842, Shanghai became the headquarters of most of the Protestant mission societies in China, bringing profound transformations in education and healthcare. The city was also at the center of the aggiornamento of Buddhism in the republican era (Ge, 2013) and, slightly later, of the shaping of an urban Daoist culture: *Daoist modern* by Xun Liu (2009) applies Leo Ou-fan Lee's line of scholarship to the religious field: 'The elite urban lay Daoist practitioner's utilization of modern mass media shows how inextricably the lay-centered reform movement was tied to Republican Shanghai's thriving public space and popular magazine market' (Liu, 2009: 275). More recently, the internationalization of contemporary Shanghai has come with an expanding and increasingly diverse religious landscape. Jewish, Sikh, and Hindu communities,

among others, claim or reclaim their space in the city's spiritual composition. More generally, the experience of 'displacement' – both expatriation and migration – is likely to foster new religious affiliation (Garnet and Harris, 2013; Tong, 2013 for overseas Chinese Christians in Shanghai).

The present article embarks on the mapping of religious and quasi-religious spaces in contemporary Shanghai through the exploration of four dimensions, which we call 'landmarks', 'compounds', 'privacy', and 'waterways'. Fieldwork led by the authors of this study provide most of the material used here. By outlining the diversity of religious places and groups rather than entering into an in-depth portrayal of some of them, we also try to connect dots into patterns, so as to approach loci and experiences of 'sacredness' in modern metropolises. Certainly, the term 'sacredness' is loaded with equivocations, to the extent, it has been suggested, that it would be better to abstain altogether from using it (Iogna-Prat, 2013: 367). However, we believe that a pragmatic understanding of what the terms convey may prove to be enlightening when organizing field observations.

As is well known, 'sacredness' often refers to a *juridical* quality attributed by a given institution to an object, a person, a space, or a moment in time. 'Sacralized' objects or space-times see their use or exchange restricted, as they are meant to connect different levels of reality through the enactment of rituals and offerings (Hubert and Mauss, 1964). The same notion is alternatively invoked when describing the way such realities are *experienced* by the people who relate to them, independently from any institutional recognition (for an overview of the debates around the notion see De Souza et al., 2013; Tarot, 2008). We see here no difficulty in applying extensively the term to (a) spaces and buildings that have been dedicated to religious worship by the legal authorities; (b) other spaces and buildings used for the same purpose, on a permanent or sporadic basis, by specific groups; (c) areas of the city that have been designed for commemorating and celebrating events and values that the state deems significant in relation to the foundations of the political system; and (d) parts (or even the whole) of the urban space that are perceived, at least by some groups, as needing special care and respect, being subject to 'desecration' (see Animal Release rituals by Buddhist groups in Part IV). In a similar fashion, Dufour and Boutaud (2013: 15) have suggested that 'religious' and 'secular' sacredness be considered as a *continuum*:

The tensive space constructed in this way finds its most intense – and at the same time its least extensive – expression in religious sacredness or, in other words, the expression of something sacred attached to a religion. Conversely, on the extensity axis, are all the detached, deployed forms of secular sacredness highlighted and staged in the media or commercial space, like all the temples to consumerism raised for the adoration of brands. A space that is less sacred, in terms of religiousness, than sacralised, in profane mode, loses in intensity and depth what it gains in extent, in the commercial or professional world.

While such a perspective could be critically enriched, it already suggests how our analysis could be further extended, so as to insert Shanghai's religious 'sacredness' into the experience of the urban setting as a whole.

## Landmarks

Religious buildings marking urban space 'belong' both to the religious communities they serve and to the city as a whole. These landmarks encompass symbols and narratives that

may be shared by all or be interpreted differently by different groups. City god temples, rooted in earthly god cults, which were widespread in rural China, became a state institution when the founder of the Ming dynasty, Taizu (r. 1368–1399), made it compulsory for a city god temple to be created in every county and prefecture (Yu, 2014: 138–140). In Shanghai County, an existing temple was converted into the municipal city god temple (Fan, 2006: 214). During the 1930s, the board of the Shanghai ‘city god temple’ (*chenghuang miao*) was especially active in the shaping of local civil society, asserting its financial autonomy against the Chinese municipal government and managing the procession circuits through which the temple was manifesting its spiritual protectorate over adjacent territories (Yu, 2014: 149–174). Traditionally, guilds or boards of trustees were the caretakers of these temples, but in 1951 the officially sanctioned local Daoist associations were put in charge of their management. Today, the term city god temple refers both to the temple complex, located within the former walled city, and to the district surrounding it.

Besides *chenghuang miao*, religious buildings listed as city landmarks by the official authorities include the Jade Buddha, Jing’an and Longhua Buddhist temples, the Wenmiao (Confucius Temple), the Sheshan Catholic Basilica, the Xujiahui Catholic Cathedral, the Protestant Huai’en, Mo’en, and Hengshan Road Community Churches, the Songjiang and Xiaotaoyuan Mosques, and the Baiyun and Cinciyang Daoist Temples. St Nicholas’ Orthodox Church and the Jewish Refugee Memorial Hall are mentioned too, though neither Orthodox Christianity nor Judaism is an officially recognized religion in China.<sup>2</sup> Studying a neighborhood long relegated to the ‘lower quarters’ category because of its association with the funeral industry and the presence of unregulated graveyards, Pan and Liu (2011: 64–65) note the paradoxical fact that it bordered a variety of sacred spaces:

To the north [of the Bay Bridge] was the restored holy site of the ‘Birthplace of the Chinese Communist Party’ where the First Congress of the CCP was held in July 1921. To its south was Jiangnan Shipyard (which began as an arsenal during the later Imperial era), which was called the ‘Cradle of China’s Proletarian Class’ in the official historiography. To its east, the [city god temple] was a showcase exhibiting Shanghai’s local cultures and customs. Located to its far west was a Catholic cathedral known for its pivotal role in promoting the Chinese understanding of the West three centuries ago.

To summarize, different and otherwise conflicting ‘sacrednesses’ concur in the creation of convergent spatial patterns and meanings. The question of how ‘sacredness’ is lived and expressed and how it extends from these landmarks will frame the cases presented below.

### *The Sheshan Basilica*

At first glance, the Sheshan Basilica constitutes a religious landmark of clear significance. From the 1870s onwards, the site has been progressively developed as the major Roman Catholic pilgrimage site in China (Madsen and Fan, 2009). Located on the western periphery of Shanghai, it was the object of special devotion for the population of mariners and fishermen active on the area’s extensive waterways network, many of them Catholic converts (Tsu, 1952). In the past, the pilgrimage to Sheshan was often made by boat. Since 2010, however, the site has been easily accessible thanks to the development of the

metro system, which has replaced the creeks and rivers formerly connecting the townships and counties that together constitute contemporary Shanghai.

Most pilgrimage activities take place in the month of May, culminating on May 24, feast day of Our Lady Help of Christians. (For the last few years, a low-key students' pilgrimage to Sheshan has also taken place every October.) Even on weekdays, the Basilica is busy with visitors, small groups of women singing in the church, and devotees grouping around the statues on the hill. A site of popular devotion, the Basilica is also part of the Catholic Church's organizational structure, with a large seminary in the grounds. The events following Bishop Ma Daqin's resignation from the Patriotic Catholic Association in July 2012<sup>3</sup> froze most of the official functions of Sheshan Seminary, without diminishing the popular fervor that surrounds the sanctuary. However, except for Christmas and Easter Days, no liturgical service is offered in the Basilica proper, masses being celebrated in the nearby Zhongshan church, a gray building on two floors with a small back yard. Compared to the tourist spot that the Basilica has become, the Zhongshan church looks and feels like the real religious space for local Catholics; the two nuns living there and the seven tortoises in the little pool of the back yard (brought in some time ago by the faithful) reinforce a feeling of intimacy alongside the adjacent public space.

Prominent on one of the few hills in Shanghai, Sheshan nurtures a contradiction: the Basilica is one of the main 'public spaces' in which the story of the city is narrated and represented, it epitomizes Catholic Shanghai – with the adverse consequences this may bring in time of political difficulties, as shown by the current restrictions – and it becomes the grand theater of Chinese Catholic devotional life at a given time of the year; yet it fails to cater to the neighborhood's liturgical and devotional needs, with the sense of privacy that such needs entail. For these, the Zhongshan church provides the necessary 'space within a space'.



**Photograph 1.** Sheshan Seminary Chapel (Liz Hingley, 2013).

The Sheshan Basilica is the major Catholic pilgrimage site in China. It is located on one of the few hills in Shanghai with the Sheshan Seminary at its foot. The Seminary's activities were reduced in the wake of Bishop Ma Daqin's resignation from the Patriotic Catholic Association in 2012.

### Moore Memorial Church

Landmarks often acquire particular significance at certain times of the year. Such is the case with Moore Memorial Church (*Mu'en tang*). Bordering People's Square, this very large church, established by American missionaries in 1887 and expanded in 1931 (Keating, 2012), seems at Christmas time to offer the 'official' civic celebration of the Nativity in a part of the city – between People's Square and the Bund – which in all seasons gathers huge crowds.

At Christmas 2014, Christmas trees lined the walkway from the bustling pedestrian area of People's Square, and a large model of Santa's sleigh drawn by gold-painted reindeer was hung over the baptismal pool. The church was decorated with a large Christmas tree and festive wreaths like those in the adjacent shopping malls. Hanging from the ceiling were large plastic dolls with heavy eye make-up and cardboard wings; clouds made of cotton wool hung under their feet completed the angel imagery. *Mu'en tang* is a well run system with a huge team of volunteers. At each service a crew of smiling people with official T-shirts greets worshippers and onlookers. The church also offers toilet facilities and free hot tea to passers-by. On the evening of December 25, a Christmas performance narrated the gospel parables through song and dance in a crowded church. The overspill of attendees watched and photographed the musical-like performance live on a TV screen hanging above the golden reindeer.

Over a coffee at Starbucks next door, Wendy, a Singaporean who leads the youth group activities, commented on the Christmas gift designed by the chief pastor (a cross-shaped key holder and a faith pamphlet), agreeing that it was particularly 'evangelical' this year. 'We are aware of the significance of the church being located in People's Square, and Christmas is a time to spread the Christian message to people who do not come into the church at other times'. If the adjacent Bund enshrines the symbols of Shanghai's public religion, Moore Memorial Church offers the threshold where the secular enters its sacred space, even at the cost of infringing it.

### Chuansha New Town

Any place can serve as a 'landmark' for a close-knit community, defining a 'center', in relation to which other spaces are being seen as 'peripheral'. The positioning of a community in terms of 'centrality' or 'periphery' is clearer when this community is part of a traditional local culture, defining itself against a larger urban background. Such communities are now harder to find as Shanghai has been entirely remodeled by expansion and urban planning. Still, the continuity and resilience of specific local cultures can be striking: Chuansha New Town is located in the southeast of Pudong, near the sea, a fishermen's village that keeps a distinctively local flavor. Until very recently, the use of the word 'Shanghai' was reserved for the city's central districts, and villagers did not define themselves as 'Shanghainese'. Things have been changing fast, especially since 2010, the year when the Chuansha metro station came into operation. Religious communities used to play an important role in close-knit, traditional Chuansha – a role that is far from having disappeared. Chuansha has been home to a Buddhist temple since at least the year 1189. Catholicism reached Chuansha at the very beginning of the 17th century, and a large church was built there in 1865–1872 (Ruan and Gao, 1992: 655–656; Zhou, 2014: 156).

Changren Temple and the Sacred Heart Church are symbols of ancient Chuansha. Both congregations have at their core groups of women over 60, many of whom worked as farmers or in the textile industry. The local dialect is widely used, even in the recitation of scriptures. On feast days, the congregation swells, but the importance of the core female group can be felt in the course of the celebration. This corresponds in part to a common phenomenon: older women carve a space of their own and transform their assets into moral capital through religious activities (Kang, 2009: 49). At the same time, in Chuansha, Buddhist vegetarian sisterhoods of cotton weavers were a fixture of the social landscape, and at times organized social protests.

Unlike Confucianism, Buddhist-Vegetarian customs did not exclude women from the important ritual life of their community. ... When members of the sect mobilized for collective political action, they relied heavily on the communication channels and leadership provided by the temple associations. (Prazniak, 1986: 216)

Today, cooking vegetarian meals in the temple's kitchen is one of the most popular ways of 'gaining merit' (*gongde*), which extends to the whole family when, for example, auspicious noodles are brought home. Stories of miraculous healings are frequently told, and volunteering is said to make such healings happen more frequently.

Peripheral to Shanghai's social dynamics and geography, Chuansha keeps local memories alive, its two religious communities still contributing to the way it defines its surroundings rather than merely being defined by its integration into a larger urban space. Furthermore, these communities operate a similar reversal in assigning a central role to women, who are positioned at the periphery of the socio-economic organization. Religion here reasserts orders different from the ones inscribed into the 'official' maps of the city.



**Photograph 2.** Changren temple Chuansha New Town (Liz Hingley, 2013).

A group of regular volunteers to Changren Temple prepare vegetarian food in the small temple kitchen. Chuansha New Town is located to the southeast of Pudong, and the strong local identity can still be felt today.

## Compounds

Religious places are not only located and experienced through their degree of visibility and the relationship they establish with a 'center'. They also define a way of living together through the feeling of autarky they engender in worshippers. In other words, they are lived and experienced as a 'compound' – an enclosed place where a variety of needs are catered for. Temples, churches, or mosques thus operate at the frontier of the private and the public. They regulate the relationships between a community of believers and its immediate environment through doors and enclosures that are both symbolic and material – a role made obvious in China by the fact that the tradition of enclosing buildings in walled courtyards extends to religious edifices (Zhou, 2014: 25). At the same time, these enclosures manage the distinction between 'sacred' and 'profane' in ways that vary greatly from one compound to another.

### *The positioning of mosques*

Moslem merchants have been present in the greater Shanghai area since at least the Song dynasty (960–1279), especially in Songjiang district. The Mongol Yuan dynasty dispatched Muslim officials from Central Asia to the area. Erected during that time, the Songjiang mosque soon became an important center for Hui activities, and the number of Muslims grew steadily (Ruan and Gao, 1992: 441–455). At the end of the Qing dynasty and the beginning of the Republican era (1912), Muslim merchants reinforced their presence in local society, participating in patriotic movements and working towards improving education in their faith. A comparative study of their places of worship shows how Muslim communities in today's Shanghai carefully position themselves within the urban space as a whole.

The Fuyou Road Mosque (or North Mosque) is adjacent the city god temple. The smallest of the city mosques, constructed during the Qing Dynasty in Chinese style and renovated several times, it was home to the first Islamic school in Shanghai's modern history as well as to the Shanghai Islamic Board of Directors, founded in 1909. Its architecture and delicate ornamentation continue to attract visitors. Though there is no separate prayer hall for women (some usually sit at the back of the men's prayer hall), on major festival days the prayer hall is separated and genders sit apart. For the celebration of Eid al-Fitr (the festival for breaking the Ramadan fast) on August 8, 2013, at 7am the mosque is already packed with people. Two women are handing out generous bowls of porridge prepared in the mosque kitchen. Hui people originating from Jiangsu are often said to be at the core of the mosque's congregation and management (Ge, 2011). However, people attending on that day come from many provinces, the choice of mosque generally being determined by its proximity to their place of work. Zhaona is a Hui from Henna province, and arrived in Shanghai in 1989. She works as a cleaner and is married to a Shanghainese. The mosque is a 20-minute scooter ride from her home. Before her mother died she visited with her regularly, but now she just comes for Eid.

Also located in the central Huangpu district, the Xiaotaoyuan Mosque (or West Mosque) is home to the Shanghai Islamic Association, established in 1962. First constructed in 1917, it was rebuilt in 1925 in the West Asia Islamic style seen today, with,

on the east side of the courtyard, a three-story Chinese-style building, home to a lecture room, offices, and ablution facilities. Next to the men's building stands the women's mosque, built in 1920 and renovated in 1994. During the Republican period, both mosques served Muslim people from all around China who were embarking in Shanghai to go for Hajj. Early in the morning of October 15, 2013, the day of Eid al-Adha, food sellers set up their stands outside the two buildings. A parade of around 20 men, all dressed in matching dark jackets, processes down the street, chanting in front of the women's mosque before entering the men's mosque. In the packed prayer room of the women's mosque, participants watch the Imam's sermon, transmitted from the men's mosque, on a large screen on the wall. Besides local women, a number of African women and children are attending. After the prayer, a group of men drag a recently slaughtered sheep down the street from the men's to the women's mosque. A group of women spend over half an hour preparing it for consumption. Everyone is invited to eat the spiritually sustaining soup they make from it. On a main street near from the mosque, two sheep tied up outside a Halal restaurant for the festival day excite the curiosity of passersby, who take photos. The frequent communication between inner and outer spaces observed on this day exemplifies the way the Xiaotaoyuan mosque integrates the community in wider city life.

The Pudong Mosque on Yuanshen Road tells a different story: In 1995, support and funding from the district government made it possible for the building to be moved to its current location and rebuilt over a larger area. In November 2013, a tour offered by a mosque administrator confirms that the government sees this very large and well-advertised religious compound, which offers educational activities all year round, as a 'model space'. In the kitchen, women in matching chef's uniform are busy preparing the meals offered daily in the mosque canteen. Catering mainly to a migrant population, the Pudong Mosque contrasts with the unofficial places of worship that have been mushrooming in the peripheral areas of the city. According to the Shanghai Islamic Association, over 100,000 Muslim migrants live in Shanghai, while Muslims with a Shanghai resident permit are estimated (in the last census) to number around 85,000, more than 78,000 being Hui.<sup>4</sup> It is impossible to get an accurate picture of the ethnic composition of the Muslim migrant population, but they come mainly from the northwest, especially Qinghai and Gansu. They generally work in small ramen shops and, as various constraints make it difficult for them to attend the eight official city mosques<sup>5</sup>, often establish makeshift places of worship (usually with the tacit consent of local authorities) around which migrants of the same local origin gather (Ge, 2011).

In contrast with the Hui migrants, Uyghurs generally elect to worship in one of the official mosques (Ge, 2011: 150). As in the rest of China, relationships between Uyghur and both Hui and Han nationalities are sometimes marked by diffidence. However, interviews conducted with Uyghur believers indicate that many are far from marginalized, either within the Shanghai Muslim community or in their new urban context. In the bustling and ethnically diverse Huxi Mosque on Changde road, a young businessman observes:

At the mosque, there is a small training center. There are courses in Islamic history and the contribution of Islam to the world, as well as courses in Arabic and the world economy, martial arts classes, and so on. Most mosques in Xinjiang do not have such facilities or such an outlook.

A Uyghur student who attends the Jiangwan Mosque on Zhengfu Road, northeast of Puxi, observes:

Shanghai mosques provide help for women. They can enter the mosque and worship. Also, in Shanghai, you can see in the mosques believers from different countries. In Xinjiang, such opportunities [to visit other mosques] are very few. Besides, over there, people tend to visit the same mosque all their life, and the influence of the imam on them is enormous. In Shanghai, believers can float from one place to another. The mosque is just a place to worship.

For migrants, integration comes with the redrawing of boundaries between the sacred and the secular. The extent of such redrawing may vary according to the compound in which they choose to worship.

As will now be seen, Shanghai Catholic parishes similarly allow for varying boundaries, differing in tradition and atmosphere among themselves as much as mosques.



**Photograph 3.** Xiaotaoyuan Women's Mosque, Eid al-Adha, October 2013 (Liz Hingley). A group of women remove a banner hung for the Eid al-Adha celebrations in the mosque courtyard. In the adjacent kitchen, they will make soup from the sheep slaughtered by the men in the Xiaotaoyuan Men's Mosque.

### *Parish memories*

Differences between parishes seem linked to the heavily loaded memories of Catholic Shanghai, as the comparison between the St Joseph's and Sacred Heart parishes will show. The period between 1950 and 1980 (and even its aftermath) was even more taxing for Shanghai Catholics than for other religious groups in the city. The decisive blow was dealt on September 8, 1955, when Bishop Gong Pinmei, 14 Chinese Jesuits, other priests and seminarians, and 300 influential lay people were arrested. By the end of the

month, around 1,200 Shanghainese Catholics were imprisoned. Their handwritten or tape-recorded confessions were part of the evidence used in the 1960 trial of the Bishop and other defendants (Mariani, 2011). After 1980, the strategy for reconstructing the Church opposed Bishop Jin Luxian (1916–2013) and the underground bishop Fan Zhongliang (1918–2014), though their respective positions may be interpreted as a kind of division of labor. Here, we contrast two church compounds among the one hundred and ten church buildings presently managed by the Shanghai diocese.<sup>6</sup>

St Joseph's Church, on Sichuan South Road, was much involved in the struggle against the diocese and the government from 1950 to 1955. It was the financial headquarters of the Church (at that time rich in institutions and properties) and it is there that Bishop Gong Pinmei was arrested. Surrounded in the past with convents and Catholic schools, it was seen as the center of Shanghai's Catholic life in the French concession. The church now shares an entrance with a primary school, and visitors have to walk through the school's basketball court to enter it. The inner space comprises two small chapels, one of them housing the remains of the daughter of the first Consul of France. Everything in the church's arrangement reflects deep respect for the Catholic architectural and liturgical tradition, a feeling reinforced by the style of celebration. St Joseph's is the only church in Shanghai that celebrates some masses in Latin according to the Tridentine ritual, something that, according to one visitor, 'gives you the inexplicable flavor of old Shanghai'. St Joseph's anchors its parishioners both in traditional Catholicism and in the local commemoration of things past. As a consequence, strict separation between the sacred and the mundane is enforced. In 2015, Ash Wednesday fell on Chinese New Year's Eve, but while other Shanghai parishes, in accordance with Chinese bishops' directions, informed the faithful that the observance of the fast would be suspended during Chinese New Year, a notice in St Joseph's church was encouraging parishioners to observe the fast nevertheless.

The Our Lady of Lourdes Basilica in Pudong, Tangzhen district, is infused with the collective memories of the Pudong Catholic communities, which date back to the beginning of the 17th century. In 1898, a large church on the model of the Lourdes sanctuary was constructed to accommodate a congregation that had grown to over 3,000. The church is located just in front of the district government building, a small white bridge connecting it to the road. Second in importance to Sheshan Basilica as a pilgrimage site in Shanghai, it similarly experiences an influx of pilgrims during the month of May. The church is a large-scale compound with living quarters, meeting rooms, a kitchen, and a garden. On August 31, 2013, the compound is filled with young people from around Shanghai, who have gathered for a 'Catholic Singles Day'. The day's events mix instruction, prayers, games, and, afterwards, a cookery contest, the rain obliging some of the young people to eat their dumplings under the shelter of the Marian shrine in the garden. The same shrine is put to playful use in the afternoon, when participants are asked to kneel in front of the statue while balancing a book on their heads. All in all, the compound and the activities act as 'bridges' over the gap between the congregation and its surroundings, between devotional traditions and urban culture. Likewise, in another Pudong church (Sacred Heart, on Hongfeng Road), after the mass on Christmas Eve 2014, the manger was being covered with banknotes – a practice reminiscent of Chinese popular religion but unheard-of in downtown parishes like St Joseph's, which enshrines past struggles to preserve Catholic doctrine and praxis and continues to herald their 'integrity'.

## Dispensing sacredness

Parishes and mosques thus nurture their own compound cultures – noticeably different at times from those experienced in affiliated communities. Affinity grouping reinforces the characteristics proper to each compound. Besides, differences between one place and another can generally be ascribed to greater flexibility or strictness in the way ‘sacredness’ is defined, enclosed, and distributed. Some compounds rarefy sacredness, limiting access to a core congregation, while others manage it as a diffused and more accessible commodity, trying to achieve a balance between (exclusive) compound culture and (inclusive) social ethos.

Our fieldwork suggests that the situation may be different for Buddhist temples. In this case, each compound provides for a variety of religious supply, the nature and extent of which is defined less by the place than by the calendar and the nature of the feast day. For instance, in September 2013, nine days after celebrating the most solemn Waterland Dharma Function (*Shuilu pudu da zhai fa hui*), the Xilin Temple, in Songjiang district, gathers the neighborhood for the Mid-Autumn Festival Offering. In the evening, families gather in front of the monks, who, at the end of the short ceremony, distribute vegetarian moon cakes made in the temple. Attendants appear much more familiar and comfortable with the process than was the case during the Waterland Dharma Function. Ritual flexibility is even more obvious on the first day of Chinese New Year, when most Shanghai temples are awash with visitors, each of them conducting his or her devotions as she pleases. Buddhist and Daoist compounds dispense sacredness to a larger population and in more varied ways than is the case with Christian and Islamic places of worship. However (as suggested by the cases of the Moore Memorial Church and the Christmas manger at the Pudong church), Christianity may fulfill functions typical of Chinese ‘popular religion’ at least on some occasions and in certain places. In the eyes of city-dwellers, the religious compounds scattered throughout the urban landscape are charged with varying meaning and intensity at different points of the time-space – but the sacredness they together dispense helps to organize the very time-space they live in.

## Privacy

### *Living privacy in Shanghai*

Landmarks and compounds enclose and define sacredness, while allowing for varying degrees of connection between the religious realm *stricto sensu* and the public/secular space. Still, global cities also enshrine sacredness within the realm of privacy, sometimes more easily than traditional settings would. Certainly, Chinese rural society gives a prominent role to altars and rituals performed at home. But ‘home’ (*jia*) does not necessarily confer privacy. Jie Li (2015: 6–7) has stressed the change from family compounds to nest-like homes that occurred in Shanghai’s Concessions with the development of the *lilong* (alleyways) compound system:

Both as clan and as architecture, the traditional neo-Confucian *jia* is like a tree that grows over time to accommodate multiple generations ... The Shanghainese term for ‘home’ is *wo*, *woli*, or *wolixiang* ... The compound *wolixiang* can evoke for Shanghainese speakers the following meanings: ‘towards the inside of the nest/room’ or ‘room nestled in the wing of a house’ or ‘room nestled inside an alleyway’ ... The Shanghainese term is more intimate and inward

looking, lacking the sense of the traditional family as a corporate lineage or as a microcosm of the state that reinforces Confucian hierarchies.

Shanghai's recent transformations have reinforced the sense of privacy that colonial architecture had started to foster, a privacy practically and ideologically denied from the mid 1950s to the mid 1980s. At the same time, urban dwellers have integrated the way they live and construct privacy into the 'sacredness' of their spatial environment.

### *A shrine of one's own*

Privacy remains a luxury; not every person or group can afford to take refuge in 'a shrine of her own'. Meeting in a KFC with a group of deaf Chinese Christians who usually gather at an underground Korean church, we learn of their dissatisfaction with the arrangement. A member of the group expresses frustration at the KFC interior, screwing up his face at the music and the other people seated around, while the leader repeatedly asks us to help them to find an empty room in Shanghai where they might gather to pray and read the Bible.

Though often associated with underground Protestantism, 'home' is central to many religious landscapes. Sammi is approximately 40 years old and comes from a wealthy Shanghainese family. Her husband, Niketa, of a similar age, is also from a wealthy family, having grown up in Russia and studied in Germany. Sammi and Niketa have their own interior design company with offices in the former French Concession. Sammi came to Tibetan Buddhism in her thirties, and her husband followed. Together, they have built a shrine in the storage room of their lane house. The couple took some time to find the right place. A guru came to offer advice on every potential residence they visited. Once the house had been approved, they held a blessing ceremony in every room, and Sammi spent her pregnancy putting together the elaborate temple. It consists of two altars, one for Sammi to meditate at, and one for Niketa. They bought the majority of the statues and decorations in Thailand. On the walls a few photos recall retreats they have undertaken with other wealthy Tibetan Buddhists from around the world.

### *Home churches and the end of the lines*

Consciously contrasting with the official Protestant churches, 'home churches' (*jiating jiaohui*) emphasize their peripheral or marginal character even when drawing attention to the ever growing number of followers they attract. However, in Shanghai, some Christian worshippers prefer to say that they belong to a 'city church' (*chengshi jiaohui*); unlike country churches, these are rich in resources, and followers can meet in houses or offices, and sometimes even in rented apartments or hotel rooms.

However, these relatively affluent 'city churches' are far from being the only model of home church that can be found in Shanghai. Migrant groups often meet on the basis of regional and dialectal affiliations at a regular location. On the outskirts of the city, Christian bosses may organize such services for their workers. Such is the case in a factory owned by a family from Wenzhou, near the Anting metro station on Line 11, on the northwest edge of Shanghai. The congregation gathers every Sunday at 6.30pm in the meeting room near the managers' offices. One Sunday in August 2013, 30 people from the factory are present for the start of the service, women on one side, men on the other. As they come in, most women put on black caps, though this is not compulsory. A young woman is playing rather

clumsily on a digital keyboard. During the 40 minutes of singing more people enter and sit down. Individual and group prayers follow, along with more singing and then communion. A large white plate is passed around with one round yellow communion wafer, everyone breaking off a piece; a small glass of sweet white wine is also shared. After more singing the young leader gives a 45-minute sermon, during which a few attendees play on their cell phones. As the preacher speaks, the young woman writes and projects notes on the screen above. More group prayers, one song and then 15 more minutes of individual prayers close the service at 8.45pm. The meeting room then recovers its secular usage.

The plasticity of places, trajectories, and liturgical forms offered by these ‘underground’ communities may be their most striking feature. Participants create spaces and rituals that often reinforce existing connections (such as the ones offered by work or regional affiliations), while charging them with new meaning. Unofficial communities are certainly the ones that are the most consciously engaged in a religious ‘re-mapping’ of the urban space. More generally, ‘privacy’ is not to be seen as a mere withdrawal from the public space. Rather, it creates vantage points from which networks and affiliations are re-assessed and redefined. In some respects, the spatial arrangement that summarizes ‘privacy’ for an individual or a close-knit group is experienced as the altar or the sanctuary out of which a larger space is shaped and orientated.

## Waterways

Finally, we turn our attention to the way in which landmarks, compounds, and private spaces articulate into networks that convey, extend, and potentially modify the religious experience they foster, in an attempt to map them into a whole. Given the geography of Shanghai, it is illuminating to call such networks ‘waterways’. Water is a fixture of Shanghai’s geography and history:

Waterways, connected to the moat and the Huangpu, served as the lifeblood of the city, providing defence, a means of transportation, waste disposal and drinking water. Within the city, there were five major creeks with many smaller tributaries. The footpaths and roads tended to follow the line of these waterways, with over a hundred bridges crossing them throughout the city (Denison and Ren, 2006: 22).

Water’s pervasiveness also determined the composition of the city population. During the 19th century,

given the dense hydrographic network that ran through the rural landscape in the Jiangnan/Jiangbei region, most people came on small boats that served both as a means of transportation and [as] housing. They settled along one of the numerous arteries that brought water into the city (Henriot, 2012: 505).

In the first half of the 20th century, the fishing boats of Catholic families would be moored in groups near to churches at nightfall, ensuring mutual protection (Tsu, 1952: 139–140, 150–152).

## Animal release

Nowadays, Buddhist networking often happens through *fang sheng* or animal release (a practice that has been subject to controversy; see Shiu and Stokes, 2008). Tim is a

member of a Shanghai group of lay Buddhists who organize themselves via WeChat and QQ.<sup>7</sup> All members volunteer at a temple and donate money to the group online via Ali Pay. With the donations, they buy fish and birds from markets, releasing the fish into the Huangpu River and the birds into the sky. The group practices *fang sheng* every Saturday, around 100 people coming from all over Shanghai. Once a month, a larger *fang sheng* ritual draws around 400 attendees. Most people discover the group via Weibo<sup>8</sup>, WeChat, or the group's website.<sup>9</sup> Images are key in marketing to potential members. During weekly meetings, the leader takes pictures of the fishes while others note down the price and quantity of cartons of fish, which will later be communicated on the group's website to donors unable to attend the event. On average they spend over 20,000 RMB each week, out of the mainly online donations they receive.

On February 14, 2015, another *fang sheng* group convenes at the Shanghai ferry port. More than 100 people gather on the boardwalk around plastic sacks and buckets containing large amounts of shellfish and river fish. The high-rise buildings across the water are partly obscured by a polluted haze. After an hour of chanting, the groups form into chains to transport the fish from the buckets into the water. The group we mentioned in the preceding paragraph was created and is still led by lay people, while a monk is the undisputed leader of this second one. The first group seems to pay even more attention than the second to the wearing of religious clothing and the display of sacred artifacts. Still, on all occasions observed, chanting, ornaments, vestments, and ritual gestures are mobilized to create a public choreographed solemnity.

Such groups, organized on the basis of virtual social networks, often change location, some of their members meeting regularly in apartments or vegetarian restaurants and organizing visits to Buddhist exhibitions or sacred places. And when they gather along the waterways, these city dwellers ritually re-enchant an urban landscape marred by pollution and unceasing reconstruction. The flux of private lives, pursuits, and encounters



**Photograph 4.** A *fang sheng* gathering at Shanghai ferry port, January 2015 (Liz Hingley).

A number of Buddhist networks gather donations for the Buddhist practice of animal release and perform the traditional ritual on the various waterways that cross Shanghai.

is channeled into ritual practices that symbolically redeem and appropriate a public space from which they feel being estranged.

### *Massaging the disciples' feet*

On January 1, 2015, the church of St Francis Xavier, on Dongjiadu Road (a road that was a pier at the time the church was built), seems almost empty. However, from the early morning onwards, more than 30 people have been gathering in one of the meeting rooms of the parish. The assembly is divided into two groups. One comprises seven beginners to whom Teacher Fang explains the principles of foot massage. The other group comprises around 25 people, mostly women, and is divided into pairs of students who alternately massage each other. Teacher Wang leads their apprenticeship. She is a middle school chemistry teacher who has come all the way from Handan city, Hebei province.

The session has brought together Catholics from five or six parishes. They have all pledged to learn the trade to assist the teaching of migrant workers, who may, in turn, be helped in their search for a job. The volunteers will first undergo three days of instruction and will then assist Teacher Wang in training 35 migrant workers. The Hebei-based team, of which Teacher Wang is a member, can deliver certificates recognized by the Labor Affairs Office. The You Dao Foundation – a charity that focuses on migrant workers, started in Shanghai by a few overseas Chinese and expatriates – will look for job opportunities for the newly trained migrants. Some local Catholics are even thinking of starting a company offering a foot massage service.

The interest in foot massage was sparked by Fr Wu Ruoshi (Josef Eugster), a Swiss priest from the Bethlehem Missionary Society who lived in Taiwan for several decades and became the apostle of reflexology. The method he developed spread Taiwanese-style reflexology throughout Asia. Catholics in China were quick to notice the popularity of this foreign priest-turned-healer, wishing to appropriate reflexology for evangelization purposes. Some of them see in it a spirituality of healing with Catholic characteristics, contrasted with the Evangelical reliance on prayer. A training center was established in Hebei, which Fr Eugster visited several times. This, in turn, caught the attention of Shanghai Catholics. International, national, and local Catholic networks now revolve around reflexology. This and many similar networks cross over landmarks, compounds, and private spaces, displacing sacredness from its original realm and infusing it into a recomposed body.

## **Conclusion**

In Shanghai, as in other global cities, 'sacredness' is stored, engineered, and circulated in various ways. It is *stored* in the religious landmarks that are integrated into the general fabric of the city, carrying both shared legacies and conflicting significances, while compounds and private rooms work as symbolic markers of specific segments of the population. It is *engineered* in other spaces – such as offices, factories, hotels, and even waterfronts, which may be regularly converted into 'space-times' sanctified by the very presence of the worshipping community. This array of spaces comes with varying degrees of flexibility, porosity, or enclosure.

‘Sacredness’ is also a commodity that is *circulated* through networks and circuits for which, in Shanghai, waterways constitute an apt metaphor. Space is potentially being subverted by ‘presence’. Presence can be static, as is the case of Chinese sacred mountains (Lin, 2014). However, it can also be seen as a dynamic that, being carried along highways and waterways, disrupts official enclosures. Observing Shanghai’s religious dynamic teaches us that sacredness truly permeates a city’s collective psyche when the attempt to locate it leads both the analyst and the communities of worshippers to dislocate and relocate its settings.

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### Notes

1. ‘Shanghai’s protean transformations will continue, and it will continue to re-invent itself as a complex city of the future best understood in light of its past’ (Wasserstrom, 2009: 140).
2. See the official Shanghai China travel website, ‘Shanghai Religious Culture’, available at: [www.meet-in-shanghai.net/religious\\_culture.php](http://www.meet-in-shanghai.net/religious_culture.php) (accessed 16 February 2015).
3. Ma Daqin announced his resignation from the Patriotic Catholic Association at his Episcopal ordination, and has been under house arrest ever since, most of the time in Sheshan Seminary.
4. Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Statistics, <http://www.stats-sh.gov.cn/fxbg/201111/235919.html> (accessed 19 June 2015); Ge, 2011: 148; and informant.
5. More exactly: seven mosques and one ‘fixed establishment’ (*guding chusuo*), with 18 imams attached to them. See the city government’s introduction to Islam in Shanghai: <http://www.shmzw.gov.cn/gb/mzw/shzj/yslj/index.html> (accessed 26 June 2015).
6. There are around 70 priests in the diocese, the majority of them working in parishes.
7. WeChat (*weixin*) is a mobile text and voice communication service that has become omnipresent in China. QQ is a Chinese instant messaging program.
8. Sina Weibo is a mini-blogging service.
9. See [www.xuefofangsheng.com](http://www.xuefofangsheng.com) (accessed 15 February 2015).

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