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Prologue: Arrival stories, from Making Food to Making Nuns

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It was a rainy monsoon morning in July 2015 when I awoke in my family's building outside the Ximending neighborhood of Taipei. It is an older part of the city, one that locals refer to as *chengnei* or "inside the old city walls." The building itself was nearly 100 years old and once had an indoor latrine which spawned a cockroach so large that, upon discovering it on his shoulder during a late-night bathroom trip in the early 1990s, my first cousin Eric chose to avoid Taiwan from that moment on. By the time of this research trip, the latrines had gone (flush toilets!), and my *A-ma,* grandmother, who once owned the building, had passed away. I was using her house as a base for my fieldwork. The building was three floors tall. The first floor held a small pharmacy whose shopkeeper was beloved by my grandmother. The second floor had become storage, with a small room still inhabited by my cousin A-Yong. Upstairs, his brother A-kun largely kept to himself in a small room down the hall from my grandmother's chambers and the kitchen. That left me, the visitor from America, with the big room that used to house my grandmother, her pearls, her cigarettes, and her Japanese antiques from when she grew-up under colonial occupation. The scent of her hairspray seemed to linger in the room, years after her death.

That morning, I awoke in my grandmother's bed. She had passed away a few years before and her room had not changed much since then. The red glow of imitation electric candles gently washed over the room from her ancestral shrine. My grandparents' black-and-white photos stared down at me. *A-ma's* old furniture was still there, even the daybed I took naps in as

a child—all just a little dustier. Once, when I visited in 1999, I woke in that bed covered in tiny bites. *A-ma* told me it was because the cats that sometimes prowled the rafters had fleas. "No problem!" she said to me in a confident and aggressive English. "I put DDT there. It's okay now!" Though I knew Mandarin, we spoke in English; her Mandarin was terrible, my Taiwanese was worse, and I couldn't speak the Japanese she'd mastered under colonial governance. "Study hard!" she would tell me before sending me to run around Taipei with a fistful of money in search of delicacies to fill my hungry belly. She meant the imperative, too. On the wall beside the doorway in her bedroom, she hung photos of all her grandchildren. Almost 4 years after her death, those photos still clung to the concrete and paint—reinforcing a hierarchy over which she presided as matriarch. U.S. grandchildren, all boys, were arranged vertically on the wall according to her own rankings of pride and displeasure. My cousin, Eric, held the spot at the top of the wall. A teenage photo of him wearing wispy white linen beside a pool in summer towered over the rest of us. Before she died, he had just completed his MBA, and so climbed his way to the top. My other cousins and I hovered below him.

I stood up to stretch.

The night before, *A-ma* had come to visit me.

I was laying in her bed, contemplating the work I needed to accomplish the next day when a white figure with permed hair appeared at the foot of the mattress. I could never forget that perm—tight grey curls that defied wind and gravity, no matter how she moved. *A-ma* stood there. She stared at me, and I lay there terrified, unsure what to do. I closed my eyes. She was still there. I pinched myself. She turned her head, looked closer. I closed my eyes again and told myself to go to sleep.

I turned my attention to *A-ma's* shrine.

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I had not intended on staying at my family's dark, old house that summer. In 2013, my doctoral project was *supposed* to examine the growing industrial food-processing sector in China. I was *supposed* to map out the powers that Chinese food companies held through the monopolization of global processing capacity. I was *supposed to,* but that plan sputtered when the Chinese companies I tried to contact were embroiled in a series of food safety scandals. They were too concerned with the possibility of negative media to allow anyone to take such a close look at their business practices.

So, in the Summer of 2014, I took a stab at something different. Unable to research food, I landed in Shanghai hoping to turn my research toward the religious. With the largest number of urban Catholics in China, Shanghai seemed like a good place to start investigating the state of Chinese Catholicism. It was also a place where the political divisions between the "above ground" and "underground" Church were rather distinct. It was in Shanghai that I stumbled into the complexities of Catholic life in China.

I say "stumbled" because, completely unwittingly, I came across the "underground" while visiting an "above ground" Catholic church. At this official church, I met an older woman who was working as a cook for priests in the parish. After the priests left to attend their various post-lunch duties, I slunk into the kitchen to see if she might have anything to say about working in the Church. She didn't have much to say. She'd been cooking for this group of priests for a decade and lived nearby. They were kind, and she appreciated the opportunity to serve the Church in her own way. But her mother, she said, would have a lot more to say—she was an old member of the underground Church. To meet her, I was to bring a rosary to a street corner on the far side of the city and wait for a 95-year-old woman to find me.

I went.

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I clutched a rosary. And lo and behold, a woman appeared to bring me upstairs.

I barely understood what she said. She spoke largely in Shanghainese, and while she could understand Mandarin, she responded exclusively in Shanghainese. I followed her to her parish, tucked away at the base of a quiet apartment complex, and joined her for Mass.

I was the youngest person in the "house church" and the only one who could not speak Shanghainese. With more than 60 people crammed into the tiny space, I watched a Mass for the Assumption of Mary unfold, beginning with a chanting of the rosary and ending with a ceremony where we all reached out and touched a relic of Pope John Paul II's bloodied clothing. The bilingual Mandarin members of the community were kind enough to let me know what was happening. Here, I believed I had found the entryway to a new project. Contra the above ground churches which held mass in Mandarin, the underground Churches of this city held Mass and formed community in the local language. Maybe these religious and linguistic geographies would provide fruitful space to tease out the dynamics of the Chinese Church that were often characterized as a Manichean antagonism between a hostile state and a resistant Church.

When I returned to the U.S. in the Fall of 2014, I began learning Shanghainese and drafting a prospectus addressing the political economy of Catholic religious language. I was fully intent on returning to Shanghai.

But this line of inquiry also came to an end. Though I revised my project's focus from food to this new theme of language and religion, I was unable to obtain a research visa to return to China for my second summer of fieldwork. That year, the government changed its policy for distributing research visas. Before, one needed to attach a letter of invitation from a Chinese university professor that summarized the topic of study and expressed support for the research. Now, Mainland Chinese university professors were required to get permission from their local

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branch of the foreign affairs office (*waijiaobu*) before even writing the letter. Suddenly, this project, with its political religious concerns, was "too inconvenient."

Zero for two.

Returning to New Haven, I searched the Yale library for an alternative entry point into Chinese Catholicism. Most of the existing literature on the Catholic Church in China consisted of village studies, historical and ethnographic. But village studies depended on being in the village, and I could not be. But then, I found an archived Catholic news article about how a Filipino priest was directing a program in Manila for Mainland Chinese priests and sisters to take up spiritual and religious studies. Not only did they go to Manila, but foundations in Belgium, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States regularly *supported* this movement of the Chinese religious for study, regardless of their affiliation with either the "above ground" or "underground" Church.

This would be may new way in.

Whereas much of the research on the Catholic Church in China had focused on domestic politics and the growing interest in religion on the Mainland, few scholars had considered how institutional religion in China was part of a transnational process of exchange and movement. This was my opportunity to re-imagine a study of the Church in China *outside* the geopolitical boundaries of "China." Slipping away from the anxieties of the Chinese state, I set forth in the Summer of 2015 on a three field-site excursion to design a new project on the transnational formation of Chinese Catholics.

With a limited budget, and Taipei, Hong Kong, and Manila on my itinerary for research that summer, *A-ma's* haunted house provided a helpful and affordable roof over my head while I assembled a new scaffolding for my project fieldwork for the second time. My failure as a

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grandson—which prompted the appearance of *A-ma's* ghost, and which was visible in her placement of my photo on the wall (below Eric)—however, was showing up at her house, sleeping in her bed, and going about my business without properly greeting her. When I awoke the next morning after seeing her floating perm, I stretched, put on my "meet-a-new-interlocutor-for-an-interview" clothes, combed my hair (which is significantly thinner now), and stepped-up to her red-candled shrine. Putting my palms together, I tried to tell her why I was here.

There's a level of pressure when you have to explain your project project to your committee, and a very different level of pressure when you have to explain it to the spirit of your grandmother who is probably wondering why you came home so late last night smelling of beef stew noodles and fried chicken, why you didn't come to visit sooner, and why you're still in school and can't be more like your cousin Eric.

"*A-ma*, thank you for letting me stay in your house. It's a really big help. I'm working on my PhD now in Anthropology and I'm studying how Mainland Chinese Catholics travel to places like Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Philippines to learn religion. I need to run to the university now, and it's a long-train ride, but thank you again for letting me stay here. I'll see you when I get home." I bowed gently and scuttled off. I did not see *A-ma* return to the foot of the bed for the rest of my time in Taiwan.

I had a long train ride ahead. Traveling from Ximending to Fujen University was at least an hour on public transportation, and then I had to find where I wanted to go. Before I began this three field-site tour, I tapped into the network of Jesuit Universities in the U.S. to see if anyone I knew might know anything about the priests and nuns leaving China for the South China Sea region to study. I received a generous response; having 8 years of high school and college education at Jesuit schools probably helped. Theology professors and Jesuit priests forwarded

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my emails around the world, introducing me to those working at the front line of religious education and spiritual formation in Taiwan and Manila. Introductions led to phone numbers, and phone numbers lead to cold calls. I met with one of these cold-calls at Fujen University, the only Jesuit Catholic university where Mandarin Chinese is the primary language of instruction, and the only Chinese-language school to offer a full range of ecclesiastical degrees. I thought this was to be a key place for observing the transnational spiritual formation of Chinese religious as it occurred in the classroom and in the city.

But sitting in this professor's office, I was received with a significantly diminished degree of excitement than evidenced in the emails I had exchanged with his colleagues. He was, if anything, defensive.

"Why exactly are you here? What do you study? Surely, this couldn't be your doctoral research. It's too vague. You have too much data to sort through! What do you mean you want to see how people change?"

I tried to assure him that my research methods were flexible, and that I was focused on protecting all those I encountered, but he was incredulous. The meeting was short, cold, and embodied a moment of what Audra Simpson might describe as "ethnographic refusal."[1] In this moment, the interlocutor's denial was a greater indication of the stakes of our conversation than his participation in the series of narrative exchanges that we expect to constitute fieldwork might have been**.** What the priest left unsaid in that cold, terse meeting was telling. Taiwan was a sensitive place to engage in a study of Mainland Chinese Catholics. So many of the activities that rely on these cross-strait movements depend upon the Chinese state's withholding of government interference. A simple misstep could result in Chinese Catholics losing their permission to travel

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[1]Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States* (Duke University Press, 2014), 114.

to Taiwan. It could mean the presence of (more) Mainland spies to observe classes in Taiwan and ensure that subversive material was not being taught. It could mean physical retaliation, imprisonment, or the harassment of Catholic Church officials from outside China who then travelled into China. With Taiwan so geographically close to the Mainland, and with such strong Mainland surveillance in Taiwan, my intentions as an anthropological researcher were very much a threat to this professor's existence, and that of his students. To prevent the Taiwanese Church from facing my potential bungling, I moved to Hong Kong.

There, I encountered similar moments of refusal. I met with a high-ranking official in an Office of the Diocese of Hong Kong. I laid my research before him not all that differently than I did with the professor in Taiwan. Acknowledging that this could be a potentially sensitive topic, I asked if he might have any thoughts about how I should proceed. He paused and then proceeded to provide me a 15-minute explanation about how I should just look at the history of the Irish missionary effort in colonial Hong Kong. I politely thanked him for his time and left scratching my head.

He was serious.

He would rather have me study a long-discussed stretch of missionary history than take on the Church in China today.

It was only after I had arrived in the Philippines that this politics of refusal became clear. My contacts in the Philippines, unlike those in Taiwan and Hong Kong, invited me directly into their programs. I sat in their classrooms, attended their seminars, and spoke with individuals at almost every level of the Church bureaucracy, from administrators to students. It was in the Philippines that my interlocutors helped me understand the political landscape surrounding the practice of international study for Chinese Catholics. They saw my "mission," an attempt to

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unpack the process of forming religious subjects through international movement and training, as something parallel to their "mission" to teach all their students, whether they be Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, Congolese, American—anyone—to have reflexive spiritualities rooted in a desire to be closer to God. For my interlocutors in the Philippines, I became another evaluator of the experiment that the Filipino Church was undertaking to "train" the Chinese religious. Their receptivity, in contrast to the kinds of refusals I had met in Hong Kong and Taiwan, highlighted the shifting political-religious geographies which students from the Mainland traversed.

According to the piecemeal accounts of my Filipino interlocutors, when it came to dealing with China, the Vatican had formed a loose committee comprising global stakeholders involved in the effort to handle the complex issue of managing Catholicism within the peculiar political geography of the Chinese state. The Filipino officials I met with sat on this committee alongside their Taiwanese and Hong Konger counterparts, though in mainstream media and scholarly publications, their influence is rarely mentioned. Members of religious orders from the U.S. and Europe were also involved. Despite this diversity of stakeholders, Hong Kong representatives often took the lead in setting the tone for "the state of the Church in China." In the mainstream media, we glimpse only one section of this committee. Cardinal Joseph Zen and those at the Holy Spirit Study Center in Hong Kong regularly comment on issues of Catholic life in China. *CNN*, the *New York Times*, *AP*, *Crux*, the *National Catholic Reporter*, all have turned to Hong Kong as a key resource for identifying the ongoing state-religious tensions in the Mainland. Yet the focus of their reporting and commentary often reproduces a dichotomous narrative, framing the Chinese-state as a monolithic force dueling against freedom-fighting Chinese Christians and those who support them. This, too, is an oversimplification. Depending on where a Catholic resides in China, different regimes of governance unfold. Some local

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governments are more open to negotiating with Catholic populations, whether they exist as part of state-sanctioned “above ground” Churches or the unsanctioned “underground.” While the national Chinese government holds final authority over how religious people are managed within China, this does not mean that the actions of those who resist government surveillance and oversight do so through acts of defiance or resistance. At the same time, this does not mean that those who operate within government-sanctioned religious spaces are “more free.” In many cases, even “underground” activities happen with the tacit knowledge and assent of the state—though that assent emerges from a variety of factors, such as whether the state wishes to face widespread protest. At the same time, those who have registered with the state to practice their faith are not necessarily state collaborators, nor are they granted freedom from surveillance and government management. As this project is primarily concerned with processes of spiritual formation and transformation as subjects move across varied geopolitical spaces, it will touch upon, but not focus on the specifics of underground/above ground political dynamics. This is because these distinctions are less salient outside of Mainland China. While Chinese government surveillance does reach the Philippines, in the words of one well-known priest, “the spies are easier to detect.” As a result, one can see that the stories told about the Catholic Church in China are a product of who is telling the story. The political environments of the storytellers afford the telling of different kinds of stories, ones with specific political valences.

From the shores of Hong Kong, highlighting China’s Catholics as existing in a struggle against communist authority underscores the losing fight for autonomy and freedom that many pro-democracy Hong Kongers support. As Mainland China continues to extend its influence over Hong Kong and protests rage against the Communist Party’s refusal to adhere to the parameters of the Basic Law, many Hong Kongers have identified the Chinese communist party as a

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singular enemy—Chinese Catholics and free Hong Kongers alike have told this story as part of a powerful political strategy. This is a fundamentally Gramscian strategy, identifying hegemonic power to form alliances in hopes of confronting the threat of a dominating political authority. In the course of my fieldwork, I saw the Occupy Hong Kong Movement, the June 4th Protests, and the constant legal battles of pro-democracy individuals and institutions who pushed back against arbitrary interpretations of Hong Kong law that favored Mainland authority. Even so, I caution against viewing the Hong Kong narrative of the Chinese Catholic Church as the single valid account of Chinese Catholicism.

The Hong Kong official's "refusal," which tried to divert me into studying the dusty history of Irish missionary work, indexes the kinds of existential anxieties that Hong Kong faces. In addition to the growing threat of Mainland hegemony, the Catholic Church precariously stands both as an advocate for Catholics under Mainland authority and as a subject of regulation and governance under the fist of a tightening authoritarian state. Alongside these concerns, the Church must also manage its ongoing mission to educate Mainland Chinese Catholics—a process which depends upon moving individuals through borders, under surveillance, and past immigration infrastructures so they can participate in training seminars in Hong Kong and abroad. The direction to study the history of the Irish missions from the Hong Kong official was a sign, my Filipino interlocutors told me, that the Diocese of Hong Kong had enough on its plate, and they did not want some researcher calling unwanted attention to their work. In the face of an unpredictable authoritarian state, they would rather avoid conflict.

The Philippines, however, represented a vastly different political space—the Catholic church was ubiquitous, and many members of the Church demonstrated a strong desire to support the Chinese by welcoming them into the international Catholic family outside

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communist control. The Philippines was, and still is, a hub for Catholic religious education in Asia. And, importantly, for many of the clergy I interviewed, the Filipino church bureaucracy was "much less Chinese" (*buxiang Zhongguo).* There, Mainland students appeared to worry less about surveillance, visa complications, and state crackdowns. The mitigation of these concerns contributed to the Philippines being a space that is liminal enough for the Church to operate their educational mission with a relative degree of political freedom, and for me to gain access to students and administrators without the same levels of anxiety I had been met with in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

As I met more Mainland priests and sisters studying in the Philippines, I also began to notice differences in the kinds of data I could obtain from them. I encountered a surprising trend. The narratives that many priests would provide were short and often filled with general platitudes. Sisters, on the other hand, spoke to me more freely—a distinction which I will discuss more extensively in chapter two, where I highlight the epistemological and institutional distinctions between priests and sisters. Priests gave me aphorisms. Sisters told me stories and, for the most part, seemed at ease. My grant reviewers were skeptical of my ability to connect with nuns as a man, but, it turns out, my youthfulness, the roundness of my face, and my curiosity were disarming. The fact that many Mainland sisters studying in the Philippines did not come from positions of power or authority targeted by Chinese state regulation also contributed to the sisters' willingness to speak with me. Priests, however, did not have the same luxury and often bore the brunt of state scrutiny. Because the state recognized the centrality of priests within the practice of Catholicism, sisters could afford to move and act in ways that their masculine Catholic counterparts could not.

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Despite traveling to a country where Chinese state anxieties seemed to be in remission, many of these anxieties persisted along gendered lines.

For this reason, over the course of my fieldwork, I turned my attention more closely to Chinese women religious. The women in my fieldwork, both Chinese and Filipino (living and ghostly), were central to this project coming together. It would have been possible to write a story about the many layers of refusal I encountered while trying to find a way to study the Chinese Catholic Church, but for my own safety, and the safety of those who often work in spaces of high surveillance, engaging those who were willing to share their lives with me was a safer, and more engaging, path. These women's willingness to tell me their stories gave richness to the process of personal and spiritual transformation that occurred as they moved through the institutional apparatuses designed to train them.

In a peculiar sense, studying nuns' spiritual formation was not all that different than studying the industrial food processing I originally set out to investigate. Industrial food was "made" by the transportation and processing of resources to "produce" a desired end product. These resources traveled across borders and through state mechanisms to be combined and reshaped. Once they became "food," they were sent abroad again. The nuns also followed international pathways to be "made" into something new, converging upon particular "factory" sites like the Philippines where institutions of religious thought sought to form them into particular "products" of Catholic tradition. But unlike food products, these sisters could tell stories. They could grow, they could change or double down on previously held beliefs and demonstrate the successes and failures of the attempts to remake their religious identities within institutional frameworks and doctrines. Moreover, as these women moved through the institutional spaces of their spiritual formation, they also shaped the religious institutions hoping

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to transform them. Their experiences and shared knowledge paved the way for other sisters to come, or warned away sisters they wished to spare from undergoing the hardships that came with moving to a foreign land.

Once they returned home, the nuns demonstrated a range of possibilities that their re-formed religious identities afforded them. Some became crafty agents, carefully working within grey areas of Chinese regulation to establish spaces of worship and prayer. Others contemplated a new missionary frontier, seeking new vocational recruits to come to China from neighboring countries, such as Vietnam. This project traces the pathways extending between the spiritual and social beings these women religious were "before" they went abroad, to those they were "after" they returned home. This is a story of the "heroine's journey"—the transformations of body, spirit, and ideology as one moves across space and time, shaped both by the direct instruction of mentors and teachers, and indirect impressions of environments to which they often uncomfortably adapt. Much like Joseph Campbell's description of the literary structure of the transformative *bildungsroman*, these nuns both experience and are taught to envision their personal development through a teleology of self-realization. This became clear when I interviewed a group of Filipino counselors who worked primarily with Chinese religious studying in the Philippines. The heroines' journey is not just a psychoanalytic heuristic, it is also the framework through which the Filipino counselors psychologically and spiritually guided their Chinese Catholic clients. When they came to their appointments, the Sisters would present their struggles and joys, then their counselor would re-narrate their concerns through the infrastructure of the heroines' journey, baptizing Campbell's framework as a pathway toward God.

And while Campbell's frameworks are rightfully criticized for reifying stable notions of the "self," for giving ethnocentric and teleological accounts of personal change and

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transformation, Campbell's framework parallels some of the core arguments of this project—that people, their ideas, their beliefs, and their practices, can and do change. They change, and not simply because they are subject to their environments, or to social and political atmospheres. These nuns have actively taken a meta-perspective on their own lives, through moments of self-reflection and in their courses within the spiritual education system. Many have grown cognizant of their own patterns of behavior and of how their personal history and experiences shape their actions and interactions. In this sense, when I make the declaration that people change, what I wish to describe is the change that people undergo when they think about how they think—when they undergo a reflexive process of considering their emplacement in the world and the fundamental sets of categories that underlie how they organize their social life and interactions.

While the statement that "people can change" appears perfunctory, one only need to refer to the history of anthropological scholarship to survey the generations of ethnography and theory eminently concerned with processes of social reproduction—of the ways human habits and ideologies tend to engrain themselves within bodies and institutions, leading to the maintenance of power and positions that contain individuals to certain livelihoods. Functionalism, structural-functionalism, environmental determinism, "studying-up," the social suffering paradigm, etc. might be broadly categorized under the umbrella of anthropological approaches to "structure" or the study of forces that shape human action, and contain lives within limited sets of possibilities.[2] Conversely, other waves of scholarship have complemented structure-focused literature by

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[2] Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1997); Victor Turner, *Schism and Continuity in an African Society*, 1996th ed. (Washington, D.C.: Berg, 1957); Laura Nader, "Up the Anthropologist--Perspectives Gained from Studying Up," in *Reinventing Anthropology*, ed. Dell H. Hymes (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 284–311; Julian Pitt-Rivers, *The People of the Sierra* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954); Franz Boas, *The Social Organization and the Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians*, *File from the Report of the U.S. National Museum from 1895, Pages 311-737* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1897); Karen Ho, *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street* (Duke University Press, 2009); Arthur Kleinman et al., *Social Suffering* (Univ of California Press, 1997).

emphasizing "agency," or the ways that individuals navigate and act through social spaces that transform what might be politically or socially possible. Inter-species studies, subaltern studies, resistance studies, the anthropology of revolution, studies of anarchy, and studies of tactics and strategies all complement studies of structure to offer insights about how people, the environment, animals, and agents writ large may not be so rigidly defined by those states, institutions, and classes in power.[3]

Yet in the dialectic between "structure" and "agency," the way many anthropologists tell these stories often reflects a narrative style where ethnographic interlocutors primarily index how a particular social phenomenon has changed over time via the researcher's observations and the interlocutor's words. Anthropologists might study categories of phenomena such as "religion," "capitalism," "environment," "agriculture," "urbanism," or "race," and what changes is not necessarily the people of the ethnography, but our understanding of a phenomenon in which people provide the signs that index how the category in question has mutated. Individuals at particular sites become the ground for how we understand broader transformations in social environments. What does it mean to think more closely about what it takes for people to "change"—to make the site of observation a group of individuals, such as Chinese Catholic nuns, who willingly undergo exercises in spiritual and social reflection for the purpose of leading their religious lives and performing their religious works differently?

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[3] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Sulamith Heins Potter and Jack M. Potter, *China's Peasants: The Anthropology of a Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Benedict Richard O'Gorman Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (Verso, 2005); James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 1: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

This project follows in the tradition of ethnographies interested in how people change—how their beliefs and ideologies about what they believe is normal and true shift over time, how their assumptions about their identities undergo both personal and institutional scrutiny, how their movements across variegated landscapes force their bodies to experience the comforts and discomforts of new experiences. In anthropology, these questions have been explored in various contexts in three general fields. The first is the anthropology of religion and ritual that has examined the structures involved in transforming people from one social or ontological position to another.[4] The second is the anthropology of learning and education which has examined ongoing transformations in who enters a classroom, how the classroom evolves, how educational administration evolves, and how students relate to educators.[5] The third is the disciplinary discourse of reflexivity where anthropologists consider their relationship with their interlocutors,

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[4] Rebecca Lester, "Jesus in Our Wombs," *Embodying Modernity in a Mexican Convent*, 2005; Edith Turner and Victor Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978); Richard Madsen and Lizhu Fan, "The Catholic Pilgrimage to Sheshan," in *Making Religion, Making the State: The Politics of Religion in Modern China*, ed. Yoshiko Ashiwa and David Wank (stanford: stanford university press, 2009), 74–95; David Mosse, "South Indian Christians, Purity/Impurity, and the Caste System: Death Ritual in a Tamil Roman Catholic Community," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 1996, 461–83; Emily M. Ahern, *Chinese Ritual and Politics*, *Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology ; 34 Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology ; No. 34.* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers : Ritual in Industrial Society : The Soviet Case* (Cambridge [Eng.] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[5] Fida Adely and James Seale-Collazo, "Introduction to Special Issue: Ethnographies of Religious Education," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2013): 340–44, https://doi.org/10.1111/aeq.12035; Patricia Baquedano-López, "Traversing the Center: The Politics of Language Use in a Catholic Religious Education Program for Immigrant Mexican Children," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (2004): 212–32, https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.2004.35.2.212; Andrew B. Kipnis, *Governing Educational Desire: Culture, Politics, and Schooling in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Justin Thomas McDaniel, *Gathering Leaves and Lifting Words: Histories of Buddhist Monastic Education in Laos and Thailand* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012); T. E. Woronov, "Governing China's Children: Governmentality and 'Education for Quality,'" *Positions* 17, no. 3 (2009): 567–89; Margaret A. Gibson, *Accommodation Without Assimilation: Sikh Immigrants in an American High School* (Cornell University Press, 1988); Savannah Shange, *Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Antiblackness, and Schooling in San Francisco* (Duke University Press, 2019); Setha M. Low and Sally Engle Merry, "Engaged Anthropology: Diversity and Dilemmas: An Introduction to Supplement 2," *Current Anthropology* 51, no. S2 (October 1, 2010): S203–26, https://doi.org/10.1086/653837; Emily Hannum and Jennifer Adams, "Beyond Cost: Rural Perspectives on Barriers to Education," in *Creating Wealth and Poverty in Postsocialist China*, ed. Deborah Davis and Wang Feng, Studies in Social Inequality (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 156–71.

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and how those relationships with interlocutors, their ideologies, and their self-identifications evolve whilst in the field.[6]

Drawing inspiration from these fields, and from my previous work on industrial food and factory production, I began to experiment with ideas about the processes meant to produce people who possess certain capacities to perform certain actions. The changes and transformations I observed among a population of Chinese Catholic nuns were not unstructured. The Catholic Church's choice to develop programming in the Philippines, the employment of spiritual psychologists and counselors, and the facilitated "cultural exposure" excursions that brought Chinese clergy face-to-face with Filipino families were all aimed at cultivating a modern, cosmopolitan Catholic Church in touch with developments in theology and social engagement since the landmark Second Vatican Council.

As far as the myriad transnational stakeholders involved in the Filipino-Chinese religious education project were concerned, the journey abroad, the need to learn English, the need to study religion and spirituality in English, and the experience of living in the Philippines were all part of a long Catholic tradition of learning through movement. Like the Jesuits, Dominicans, or Franciscans who traveled European metropoles, embarking on journeys of religious education to rise in the ranks of their religious orders and to be of service to the Church, these nuns made their way to Manila to learn from a center of Catholic knowledge production in Asia. Going to the

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[6] Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon, *Women Writing Culture* (University of California Press, 1995); James Clifford and George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Univ of California Press, 2010); Margery Wolf, *A Thrice-Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism, and Ethnographic Responsibility* (Stanford University Press, 1992); Paul Rabinow, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco: Thirtieth Anniversary Edition, with a New Preface by the Author* (Univ of California Press, 2016); Katherine Verdery, *My Life as a Spy: Investigations in a Secret Police File* (Duke University Press, 2018); Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Univ of California Press, 2016); Bronislaw Malinowski, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

Philippines for this kind of reformative education, however, is far from a modern historical phenomenon.

In her pathbreaking book, *Forced Migration in the Spanish Pacific World from Mexico to the Philippines*, historian Eva Maria Mehl describes how from 1765-1811, military recruits and vagrants from Mexico were regularly sent to the Philippines as part of a loose effort for inner reform. Being sent to the "Far East" was an attempt to discipline, punish, and transform people perceived as deviants to reshape them into good citizen subjects.[7] Nearly two hundred fifty years later, the Philippines continues to serve as a factory for reshaping persons, values, and practices. But, as a factory without assembly lines, Fordism, or capital infrastructure, whose products are not small consumable items but people with lives, responsibilities, and aspirations, the Philippines has become a different kind of institutional, geographic, and social space for making and remaking people in the Catholic world.

As I undertook this project of tracing how nuns are made and remade, like the generations of anthropologists before me, I too was transformed by this work. My thoughts about how to frame my research within the anthropological traditions of China anthropology, ritual and religion, and even studies of power needed to adapt to envision the story I want to tell about the transnational religious movement of Chinese Catholic nuns—a story filled with their struggles, their doubts and playfulness, and the challenges that sparked within them the creativity to maneuver around the challenges of surveillance and hostile state governance in China.

I began my research as a Marxist scholar of materials concerned with models of productivity and how control over modes of production could create forms of transnational political power. Food factories in China were discrete spaces. They had infrastructural bounds,

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[7] Eva Maria Mehl, *Forced Migration in the Spanish Pacific World: From Mexico to the Philippines, 1765–1811* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

concrete walls, and mechanical conveyor belts. They had vats of ingredients and workers who changed into uniforms to work on the line. Political power derived from the ability of a country to channel food resources into a factory which that country owned and operated. Power, in the earlier Marxist iterations of my project, was rooted in re-envisioning how control over the means of production of necessary commodities like food gave influence to China and its ever-expanding global reach.

However, thinking about the production process of nuns meant re-thinking the capacity of conventional readings of Marx to speak to the process of "making nuns." To take seriously the range of forces that converge upon an individual for their "production" was an incredible task. At the same time, individuals also create the conditions for their own experiences—people make themselves just as institutions try to remake them, seizing hold of the opportunities their environment affords and establishing new sets of personal relations in the development of their spiritual lives. This is not straightforward factory assembly where objects are assembled within the confines of bounded mechanistic assemblages.

At the same time, this journey of nuns flying to the Philippines was not straightforward discipline. Foucaultian notions of how bodies are produced and made docile and legible rely on assumptions similar to the concrete boundedness that underpins Marx's factory. People are subject to schools, hospitals, prisons, and sexual ideologies that define normative and aberrant—spaces often demarcated by state-defined boundaries.[8] People then internalize the limitations they encounter as they move through the social spaces of their everyday life. Indeed, scholars

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[8] Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine:" Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd Vintage Books (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); Michel Foucault et al., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological* (New York: Zone Books, 1989).

who have taken up Foucault to study how states have produced docile subjects (disenchanted subjects, bureaucratized subjects) have provided powerful accounts of how, when individuals are effectively contained within limited national spaces, discipline manifests.

But the seminaries, spiritual classrooms, and city excursions I saw were not bounded spaces of harsh discipline, and the nuns who traveled to Manila were not determinately bound by national borders. Even their vows of obedience were not seals which guaranteed strict conformity to orders from religious superiors. Instead, what I witnessed was a series of exchanges. I witnessed sisters as they learned to craft reasoning about why they might be better suited to certain mission assignments than others. I watched them learn how to perform particular narratives that increased the potency of their appeals to Church authority for better livelihoods, using prayer and reflection as both tools for mediating their relationship with the divine and communicating their concerns with Church officials. I saw them compare the value of what they learned in the classroom to the value of what they learned on the streets of Manila. Most importantly, I saw them actively contrast the Catholic landscape of Manila with that of their homes in China.

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As I undertook this project, “making nuns” became a tongue-in-cheek gesture to the comical image of nuns popping out of a church-*cum*-factory “assembly line.” At the same time, it became a generative theoretical framework for considering the production of subjects through the context of transnational mobility where people are trained to address pressing political-economic needs. In the age of China’s religious revival—where interest in popular and institutional, centralized and decentralized religion has given birth to massive public rituals and small private gatherings.[9] Who is doing the “work” of religion and where do these workers come

[9] Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank, *Making Religion, Making the State : The Politics of Religion in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Helen F. Siu, “Recycling Rituals: Politics and Popular

from? Why is China unable to train these religious people on their own? Who is doing this work of making these nuns anew? Answering these questions meant accompanying these nuns through the spaces they moved through and reflexively reimagining myself through this journey with them across landscapes where states, institutions, and individuals maneuvered around and in spite of each other in order to achieve what were often competing visions of what it means to serve the Church in China.

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Culture in Contemporary Rural China," in *Unofficial China: Popular Culture and Thought in the People's Republic*, ed. Richard Madsen Perry Link (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1989), 121–37; Peter Van der Veer, *The Modern Spirit of Asia: The Spiritual and the Secular in China and India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).