

Housing God, Losing Ground: Protestant and Catholic Chronotopic Ideologies in Urban China

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ABSTRACT

This article examines ideologies of chronotopic partibility at two state-affiliated churches in Hangzhou, one Protestant and one Catholic, that emerged in response to the politics of demolition and development. The presence of Christianity in the state imaginary of the modern cityscape has been challenged by urban renovation projects ranging from Zhejiang Province's 2013–16 cross removal campaign to the construction, beginning in 2018, of a massive commercial complex on land partially expropriated from a Catholic church in Hangzhou. Protestants made sense of cross removals by organizing time, space, and personhood according to qualities associated with the home, separating warmth and sociality (*renqingwei'r*) from the buildings in which they are experienced. Catholics protested the city government's requisition of a part of their "house" by demanding in its place the *renqing*, or human feeling, mediated by money, that is God's in perpetuity. Chronotopic partibility or time-space-personhood fracture is both a symptom of dispossession and an ideology that makes possible moral exchange between church and state.

Christians make sense of the relationship between time, space, and human agency in different ways. In this article, I examine how Protestant and Catholic ideologies of chronotopic partibility, or time-space-personhood

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fracture, shape Christian uptakes of the politics of demolition and development in China's prosperous coastal province of Zhejiang. Occupying a limited but flexible realm of toleration (see Chau 2019), "official," or state-sanctioned, Protestantism and Catholicism strain to fit within the urban development policies of Xi Jinping's New Era. The imposition of these policies—emblemized by the surveillable and futuristic smart city (see Noesselt 2020), which also happens to be visually secular—has resulted in Christian reconfigurations of time-space-personhood relations.

The chronotope is familiar to linguistic anthropologists as the time-space container of narrative events and characters (Silverstein 2005, 6). Each chronotope comes with its own "image of man" (Bakhtin 1981, 85) or representation of personhood, which influences how agency, a concept "pertain[ing] to our control over the *next* moment in time" (Morson 2010, 93), is understood. More fundamentally, agency involves the ability to interpret the semiotic contexts of interpersonal interaction (Agha 2007a, 230). This interpretive faculty, in turn, shapes one's assessment of one's own agency. Both the "image of man" and its implications for agency are experienced within a participation framework (Agha 2007b), or social regimentation of all participants in a textual encounter (Goffman 1983; Goodwin 1999). But what happens when God is a participant?

According to the Christian tenet of divine omniscience, God (fore)knows everything that was, is, and will be. In the "hard" version of divine predetermination, human action is not dialogically negotiated, but monologically unfolded. If God already knows what you will do before you do it, do you truly will your will? One way to reconcile the incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and free will is to place God outside of time altogether: if God is outside of phenomenal time, then the participatory space of an event is decoupled from its unfree unfolding. This workaround is named the "Boethian solution" after the sixth-century Roman philosopher Boethius.

The chronotope according to Bakhtin, however, is precisely the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (1981, 84). Time cannot be severed from space. But if God exists outside of historical time, then the Bakhtinian chronotope, as an "intrinsically connected" time-space-personhood compound, is at odds with Christian cosmology. God, the omniscient hearer not only of the prayers of the faithful but of all communication, exceeds the bounded capacity of any time-space envelope. Although time and space are of course analytically detachable, discursive textuality cannot but bind them together (Agha 2007b).

In light of my juxtaposition of Protestant and Catholic ideologies of chronotopic partibility, it is instructive that the Eucharistic rite, with its diagrammatic and chiastic iconism, is Silverstein's (2004) go-to example of dynamic figuration. God's triune nature as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a basic condition of chronotopic partibility. It is because God exists beyond historical time—but also that Jesus existed *in* historical time—that the here and now of any Eucharistic rite can be dynamically refigured as a re-presentation of the original event.¹ The temporal flexibility of the “persons” of God who, despite their coeternity, have distinct relationships with humanly experienced time, makes possible the ideological decoupling of space from time, time from personhood. The Boethian solution is thus one of chronotopic fissure. Not surprisingly, it has attracted its fair share of dissenters for giving short shrift to God's personhood, arguably a property of greater religious heft than timelessness (see Zagzebski 2018). Such time-space-personhood fissure has consequences for how Christians in China understand God's agency in the turmoil of urban renovation.

This article examines how Hangzhou's Protestant young professionals and Catholic elderly respond to the chronotopic politics of urban renewal. The contrast between an enchanted, hyperritualistic, media-heavy Catholicism and an individualistic, personal, *sola scriptura* Protestantism has long been a cliché; rather than reify these truisms, as even Christian “natives” (e.g., Greeley 2000) are wont to do, I show how Protestants and Catholics take up ideologies of chronotopic partibility descended from but at odds with the Boethian solution. For the young Protestant modern, chronotopic partibility salvages the affective temporality of fellowship from the material vicissitudes of architectural space. In other words, the *chronos* of fellowship appears to be partitioned from the building—the *topos*—that houses it. The removal of rooftop crosses in the name of urban renovation has destabilized the correspondence between the church as fellowship (*jiaohui*) and the church as architectural structure (*jiaotang*). The distinction between *jiaohui* and *jiaotang* organizes a Protestant style of time-space-personhood fractionation. Ultimately, it is a cautious valorization of urban renewal.

For the Catholic filial subject, chronotopic partibility justifies remuneration for government seizure of church property. The distinction here is not between fellowship and facade, but between possession and obligation: that which belongs to God and that which belongs to Caesar. Parishioners acknowledge

1. In “average modern” Catholic theology, sacramental representation is the idea that the “historical sacrifice of the cross . . . [obtains] a new *ubi et nunc* (‘place’ and ‘time’) in the sacramental world which transcends the laws of space and time” (Kilmartin 1998, 187).

that urban renewal is a state prerogative; whether they desire or dislike it is irrelevant. What matters for them is the chronotopic division of ownership into state possession and divine obligation: even though church land by law belongs to the state, to God is owed his due. This demand regiments a time-space-personhood fractionation that sees in the economics of urban renewal the opportunity for moral exchange between God and Caesar. The distinctiveness of Protestant and Catholic ideologies of chronotopic partibility indicates that the bundling of time, space, and personhood in any situation is always a deeply ideological—if not theological—structure of relations.

Challenging Churchscapes

As the story goes, a high-level Party official, “probably not Xi Jinping,” was once stunned to see, as he was being driven past the port city of Wenzhou, a landscape littered with red crosses perched atop a sea of spires. Offended by the sight of what ought to have been any other secular cityscape, this official uttered a disgruntled remark. Provincial officials at once put together an urban renovation campaign, “Three Rectifications, One Demolition” (*san gai yi chai*), hereafter TROD, to address the problem of the “over-crossed” cityscape.

“Imagine you’re a big Party official,” I was told by a Zhejiang University professor, “raised on Party principles and atheism. You’re very, very committed. Think about the kind of country you are working to build. But instead, you see a bunch of crosses! And it’s not just that, but they’re big, they’re red, they’re lit up at night—have you seen them? They even flash on and off! That’s *got* to be hard to endure, don’t you think?”

From 2013 to 2016, under the TROD campaign, an unspecified number of crosses, churches, and other religious and nonreligious structures were removed or demolished. The given reasons were, invariably, structural instability, missing permits, and other banal building code violations. Although not specifically antireligious or anti-Christian in its wording, Christian sites and rooftop crosses were widely known to have been the main targets of the campaign (Cao 2017). According to an internal document obtained by the *New York Times*, “the priority is to remove crosses at religious activity sites on both sides of expressways, national highways and provincial highways.”²

2. Quoted in Ian Johnson, “Church-State Clash in China Coalesces around a Toppled Spire,” *New York Times*, March 29, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/30/world/asia/church-state-clash-in-china-coalesces-around-a-toppled-spire.html>.

What is known with more certainty is that Xia Baolong, then party secretary of Zhejiang Province, had visited Wenzhou in 2013 and had been displeased in particular by the sight of a towering hillside edifice topped, of course, by a large red cross. This was the brand-new Sanjiang Church, the 30 million RMB construction costs of which had been raised by local Christians. Xia demanded that Sanjiang's cross be removed. Thousands of Christians stood guard. But by late April 2014, the church lay in ruins. To many observers, this event heralded the return of government crackdown after a relatively unhampered period of Christian growth following the economic reforms of the 1980s. Indeed, Wenzhou had famously been dubbed—to the pride of some Christians and the distaste of others—the “Jerusalem of China” (Cao 2011) and Henan, the site of more recent anti-Christian activity, the “Galilee of China” (Liu 2014).

The TROD campaign targeted churches registered with the state-authorized Three-Self Patriotic Movement and Patriotic Catholic Association.³ Although TROD's later fadeaway was attributed to the unexpected intensity of Christian resistance and international media coverage, its iconoclastic flattening of the categories “Protestant”⁴ and “Catholic” did not, however, engender much cross-confessional solidarity.⁵ For Protestants, TROD accentuated the partibility of the material, concrete spatiality of the cross and chapel from the homelike qualities of Christian fellowship. After all, so-called underground churches are no less churches for want of an instantly recognizable place of worship. Such recognition, demanded by the aggressive qualia of the largeness and stereotypically Protestant redness of the cross, signifies the social emplacement of official churches. Understanding these structures as agents of Christianization (Chambon 2017) can help explain why they are perceived to be dangers to the sociophysical landscape. Not only do they exteriorize what ought to be one's private confession of faith, but they also monumentalize the economic prowess of local elites (Cao 2017). The TROD campaign was a response to the perceived encroachment of Christian affiliation into the secular public space of the built environment and, by extension, into state modernity. As another account (Talbert 2018) of the story

3. The Three-Self Patriotic Movement (est. 1954) and the Patriotic Catholic Association (est. 1957) are the representative organizations of state-authorized Protestant and Catholic churches in China. The three “selves” stand for self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation.

4. Elimination/unification of denominational groups is supported by the professedly postdenominational Three-Self Patriotic Movement (Weller and Wu 2017). The movement, however, is not free of denominational influence; many of its early leaders were prominent Anglicans (see Wickeri 2015).

5. The Zhejiang Christian Council and the Zhejiang branch of the Patriotic Catholic Association circulated open letters of protest regarding TROD in 2015 (Ying 2018, 61–62), but locally any displays of dissent were separated along confessional lines.

goes, the visiting high-level official, this time Xi Jinping himself, was said to have asked, upon seeing the Wenzhou churchscape, “Is this China or heaven?”⁶

As a physical structure, the church is an object of mediation between confessional subjectivity and state supervision. In her monograph on the shared “currency” of saints among Copts and Muslims in Egypt, Angie Heo (2018) describes how church buildings, together with the Marian apparitions illuminating them, become the very media through which sectarian politics is calibrated. Muslim eyewitnesses are crucial to authenticating a Marian apparition regardless of whether or not they “see” the Virgin or believe that the apparition is nothing more than a laser show (2018, 129). Like the Marian apparitions discussed by Heo, rooftop crosses in a non-Christian country index churches as minoritarian, and thus publicly vulnerable, sites of belonging. Although fleshless apparitions and material crosses belong to different orders of things, both direct attention to the imagined status of the physical structure of the church (2018, 138). The rooftop apparitions point to the territorial presence of Coptic identitarianism; the rooftop crosses, chiasmatically, point to the spiritual infestation of a nonnative belief system—an infestation dire enough to have spilled over onto an entire landscape. As the document obtained by the *New York Times* shows, TROD’s target was not the church but the cross. But like the apparitions, these crosses were only ever found above churches.

First-Tier Anxieties

Three hundred fifty kilometers (220 miles) north of Wenzhou, TROD’s epicenter and Zhejiang’s southernmost prefectural city, lies the provincial capital of Hangzhou. TROD had spared Hangzhou’s Midtown Catholic Church, a modestly sized chapel built after the style of the Church of the Gesù in the heart of old downtown.⁷ Like other protected historical sites, it announced its sheltered status on multiple stone markers. Even the gnarled tree in the middle of the slab-paved courtyard was, I was informed, “hundreds of years old, immovable.” Nor were any parishioners concerned that Midtown, a Patriotic Catholic Association church, would suffer any physical modification. The far younger and taller Catholic church in the subdistrict of Linping, some 26 kilometers (16 miles) away, however,

6. According to Yang (2018), this expression has been widely reported, although its speaker (sometimes Xi, sometimes Xia) varies by account. In Yang’s account (2018, 9), Xia Baolong asks, “Is this land under the cross or under the Communist Party?”

7. Mission churches around the world were modeled after the Church of the Gesù (see Bailey 1999), the mother church of the Jesuit order.

was not so fortunate; its three large crosses, along with those of three other Protestant churches throughout Hangzhou's expanded metropolitan area, were swiftly removed during the wee hours of July 10, 2015, under police watch, after most Christians who had shown up to protest had returned home. For those who did not consider newly developed areas like Linping or Binjiang to "really be Hangzhou," any church outside Hangzhou's protected historical districts was fair game. Although TROD's stated goal was to "fully commence the transformation of old residential areas, old factories, and urban villages in the urban planning area and [to] demolish illegal buildings in violation of the laws and regulations pertaining to land management, urban and rural planning, etc., in the entire province,"⁸ the degree of this "transformation" or "remolding" (*gaizao*) was, in the opinion of many Christians, calculatedly vague.

As a precursor to Xi Jinping's inauguration of a "New Era" (*xin shidai*) in 2017, TROD marked a turning point not only for mountainous Wenzhou but also for the boutique city of Hangzhou. In 2018, Midtown Catholic Church would have to come to terms with pending plans for the massive mall Westlake 66—according to its developer the Hang Lung Group a "high-end commercial complex, comprising a world-class shopping mall, five Grade A office towers and a luxury hotel"—that would eventually tower over it.⁹ Architecture firm Kohn Pedersen Fox (KPF) lays out the New Era chronotope of streamlined cultural continuity, complete with the ecoconscious ethic of an urban workforce, as follows: "Situated between two Hangzhou landmarks—West Lake,¹⁰ a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the Grand Canal—Westlake 66 reinvigorates a deteriorated neighborhood with a new, green pedestrian link and office space suited to technology startups and young professionals."¹¹

The old era of the "deteriorated neighborhood," as KPF puts it, is to be "reinvigorated" and modernized. The New Era's image of personhood is the young professional: the educated, urban, middle-class embodiment of "virtuous behavior and spiritual civilization" (Tomba 2009, 611). The reorganization of neighborhoods and homes recruits middle-class subjects as self-governing, high-*suzhi*

8. "Notice of Zhejiang Province People's Government on the Province-Wide Launch of the Three-Year Program 'Three Rectifications, One Demolition,'" March 3, 2013, http://www.zj.gov.cn/art/2013/3/13/art_13012_77021.html.

9. Hang Lung Properties, "Westlake 66," <http://www.hanglung.com/en-US/mainland-china-properties/hangzhou/westlake-66>. See this page for a digital rendering of the mall complex. For more images, see <https://www.kpf.com/projects/westlake-66>.

10. West Lake is Hangzhou's most famous tourist attraction.

11. KPF, "Westlake 66," <https://www.kpf.com/projects/westlake-66>.

(high-quality) citizens,¹² in contrast to those needing to be governed: unruly “low-quality” rural migrants whose “visual[ly] pollut[ing]” illegal structures (in the words of a former Beijing mayor, quoted in Zhang [2001, 211]) are obstacles to the “idealised vision of . . . an ‘advanced society’ . . . modelled on the achievements and experiences of the most developed countries in the West” (Xiang 2005, 4).

Urban residents often justified demolition as an ordinary, inescapable fact of development. Anna, a former nun and now mother of two, explained it to me this way: “Sooner or later, all those messy old houses will have to go. They don’t look good with the new buildings. Hangzhou counts as a first-tier city . . . it might not be a real first-tier city because there’s Shanghai, but it just *is* a first-tier city.”¹³ Interspersed along major arteries and tucked inside alleyways, old walk-up apartment buildings (*loufang*) eked out their flimsy lifespans as owners waited impatiently for a government requisition notice and the compensation—either money for the expropriated home or, more desirably, the replacement of an old apartment with a brand-new one—that came with it. These relocated households (*chaiqianhu*), many of which became wealthy overnight, found themselves just as swiftly reviled as “eruption households” (*baofahu*, or nouveau riche) whose wealth had come as violently and suddenly as an explosion.

In the eyes of local officials, a church’s structural integrity is an index of its civic and spiritual ability to transcend the embarrassing spectacle of unruly passions and political unrest. Correspondingly, the secular state imaginary of urban renewal considers a swanky new church’s tacky, “hard to endure” cross symptomatic of a spiritual rudeness not unlike the coarseness of “eruption households” and “low-quality” *tuhao*, or rural rich (Ingebretson 2017). Yet by targeting the most recognizable emblem of Christianity, TROD counterproductively reinforced what a (Chinese) church looked like—typically a building of the Gothic style (Coomans 2014, 126–29; Ying 2018, 54), for many an index of Western colonialism.¹⁴ Consistent with their semicolonial pedigrees, many older churches

12. In part because of their membership in official churches, both Protestant and Catholic informants openly championed *suzhi* politics. See Yuan (2021) for a more critical approach to middle-class aspirations among underground Reformed Christians in Nanjing.

13. China’s unofficial city tier system is widely used in the media and in everyday discourse to rank a city’s size and economic prospects (see Lin and Gaubatz 2015, n. 2; and Li 2017, n. 7). “First-tier cities” (*yixian chengshi*) refer to Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen. What Anna is saying is that given Hangzhou’s proximity to Shanghai, Hangzhou is unlikely to become an “official” first-tier city, as it would be presumptuous to equate Hangzhou with Shanghai.

14. Unregistered house churches, formerly prime targets of government crackdown, were unaffected (Ying 2018, 54) because they did not match the expected look of functionally religious buildings.

like Midtown are preserved in what already were the ritzier and more “Western” parts of town; today, they are surrounded by shopping malls and luxury retailers.¹⁵

In May 2018, when Westlake 66’s development site was acquired by the Hang Lung Group, I was surprised to hear Luke, a thirty-something education professional from Shanghai, remark that he had “always said that there were lots of ghosts [*gui*] inside the chapel.” Luke and I cotaught an English class at Midtown Catholic Church, where I volunteered as an English teacher from April to June 2018, on Sunday afternoons. I was perplexed when students voted, on May 27, to discuss the topic of exorcism. (Prior topics included one’s hometown, recent vacations, and favorite films.) Molly, a twenty-four-year-old exam tutor from Wenzhou, chimed in excitedly: “Do you remember what I told you last year or the year before?” She was referring to a time she had WeChatted me about a possessed man convulsing and screaming obscenities during a Saturday Vigil Mass. He had to be physically removed. “Don’t you remember?! I was *there*!” It seemed to make sense to her now.

I mention this short-lived flurry of interest in ghosts because I was jarred by it. At the time, neither Luke nor I, nor anyone at Midtown, knew the name or scale of what would become—and what is still not yet, in 2021—Westlake 66. Parishioners knew only that there would be a dazzling commercial complex to carry the “deteriorated neighborhood” into the New Era. But what they refused to leave behind—or so I initially thought—was a small plot of land adjoining the chapel. The city government had taken it by force, they claimed, without offering compensation. Now it belonged to the Hang Lung Group, which would soon clean up and brighten its surroundings.

So why did it leave behind counter-modern memories of ghosts? What the English class students meant by “ghosts,” and what kind of ghosts exactly, they couldn’t quite say—just that they were definitely there, and there was a host of them. Is the ghost a chronotopic paradox—a type of presence out of place in the present, and yet which refuses, or is somehow unable, to depart from it? Not quite: the production of “history” in real-time events of interaction calibrates multiple chronotopes, even those as contrastive as spiritual immanence and scholarly historicity, to one another and to the interactional present (Wirtz 2016). The same is true of the production of modernity. Before returning to the dispossessed Midtowners, I examine how a small group of Hangzhou Protestants at

15. Embeddedness in urban and residential environments is a distinguishing feature of the Chinese church, and it contrasts with the bucolic, less worldly settings preferred by Buddhist temples (Chambon 2017).

Lian'an Church calibrated the ideology of chronotopic partibility to the developmentalist chronotope of the New Era.

Chrono-Topic Decoupling and the Disenchanted Cross

"Lian'an Church is the only entirely unreconstructed church left in this city," church elders declared proudly. As Hangzhou's Three-Self Patriotic Movement headquarters, Lian'an partakes in the state project of defining and directing acceptably "religious" activity.¹⁶ Although the Chinese state's promotion of atheism is not equivalent to the Western understanding of secularization, the view that science is rational and religion is emotional is prevalent in both state ideology and everyday life (Huang and Hu 2019). Churches like Lian'an and Midtown are, as the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and Patriotic Catholic Association would have it, monumental testaments to church-state harmony and cross-cultural interaction.¹⁷ How did Protestants at Lian'an articulate a politically sensitive Christian semiotics in the wake of TROD? Although TROD had ended well over a year before I settled in Hangzhou, its effects were still felt.

First Fruits, a small-group fellowship (*xiaozu juhui*) at Lian'an that met every Sunday after the 9:00 a.m. service, always kicked off with two to three praise and worship songs and a prayer led by the group leader. We would then take our seats in a circle and commiserate over the travails of everyday life: trouble with coworkers, work-life balance, nagging parents, and health concerns. All ten to fifteen of the regular "fellow-fruits" (*guozimen*) were young professionals in their twenties and thirties. We then would view an episode of an Old Testament video series produced by an overseas Chinese ministry¹⁸ and, textbooks in hand, review its content. After lively discussion, we would conclude by sharing things we promised to work on or were, in retrospect, grateful for. Finally, we would break for a group lunch in the same room.

On December 17, 2017, the video series introduced us to the story of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings): although God did not permit David to build it, it would be built by his family nonetheless; God had made many preparations for it, including transporting the Ark of the Covenant; and the Temple

16. See "Five-Year Planning Outline for Advancing the Sinification of Christianity (2018–2022) promulgated by the Chinese Christian Council and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement"; English translation at <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/outline-of-the-five-year-plan-for-promoting-the-sinification-of-christianity>.

17. Even so, the officially recognized historicity of select church buildings does not purify them of their politics, just as the strained space of negotiation between state law and Hui Islamic law in northwest China does not produce a "depoliticized" Islam (Erie 2016, 7).

18. 加拿大福音證主協會, Christian Communications (Canada).

was to be splendid. The takeaway was that, although the Temple's magnificence was directed toward the honor of God, what mattered most was one's sincerity (*chengxin*).

Minglei was the first to speak. "The Temple really couldn't have been built without God," he said, "what with all the complicated preparations that we read about, all the cubits and cedar and olive and cherubim and gold . . . and for all that, it was eventually destroyed anyway. Actually, it's similar to the removal of crosses. God wants His Temple to be magnificent, doesn't he? That way it can attract more people. Like those baroque and Gothic churches—they look so lavish, but under present circumstances they'd defy building codes. Which means that what really matters is what's within our hearts."

Ruiqi chimed in with an anecdote she had once heard, about a small town elsewhere in China, where some time ago, a very grand church was built. Soon afterward, an even grander Catholic church was built right in the same area. What then? Everybody wanted to spend Christmas at the most Christmassy place in town, and now there were two of them.

Xiao Li took up the topic of grand churches and reminisced about how greatly they had impressed her when she visited Europe. But after seeing church after church after church, she contracted aesthetic fatigue (*shenmei pilao*). Many in the room murmured in understanding.

Already there was a palpable tension between the weight of an exterior that lavishly and worshipfully conveyed the glory of God and the primacy of interiority. When it was my turn, I mentioned this tension. As a would-be fruit, I was eager to convey a passing knowledge of basic Christian themes. I decided to talk about how the human body was, elsewhere in the Bible, a temple that Christians were to maintain with dignity, and that while we shouldn't care too much about appearances, weren't we also supposed to dress nicely when at church? What ought we to do? Xiao Li, herself very smartly attired and very beautiful, quipped that crosses had become nothing more than fashion accessories, and that people indeed attired themselves becomingly for the sake of showing off.

To my relief, other fellow-fruits snatched up the body-as-temple theme. Lang Ge, the oldest fellow-fruit in attendance, and who had been nodding off while others were speaking, shared his thoughts: "Some people are more attractive than others. It doesn't say anything about them—their human worth, that is to say—but if you're good-looking, you get points [*jia fen*, i.e., you're rated more highly]. It's the same with churches. They don't *have* to look nice, but what's the harm? Here, any district government [building] is far more luxurious than any church. When I was remodeling my house, it felt so cold and didn't have any

human warmth [*renqingwei'r*]. Now, of course, it's different—we've moved in. But before, it was just very unsettling because I'd open the door and there'd be no human warmth at all." "It was just this way with those grand churches [*jiaotang*] in Europe," added Zhao Ge, Ruiqi's husband and the small-group leader. "What matters," said Lang Ge emphatically, "is the fellowship taking place right now, the way we talk like family. This is why I come." Xiao Li said, "That's why it's a *jiaohui*, not a *jiaotang*."

Jiaohui (church [association]) and *jiaotang* (church [hall]) can be used synonymously to denote a church. As Xiao Li certainly knew, *jiaotang* is used comfortably by Catholics, while Protestants much prefer the associational flavor of fellowship evoked by *jiaohui*. Most churches have the word *tang* in their formal names (e.g., Jidujiao¹⁹ Lian'an Tang, or Lian'an [Christian] Church; Zhongcheng Tianzhutang, or Midtown Catholic Church). Only when identifying a specific church by name, or when talking about a church as an architectural shell, however, do Protestants use *jiaotang*. In distinguishing a *jiaotang* from a *jiaohui*, they link *hui*²⁰ to time and *tang* to space, but not to the exclusion of space from one and time from the other. *Jiaohui* is widely understood by all Christians to be the church as an active community, housed or unhoused.

A chronotopic ideology explains and validates how time, space, and personhood are connected or divided. Just as a language ideology regiments persona-register relations, so too a chronotopic ideology regulates time-space-personhood configurations. For Xiao Li, the *chronos* of the church during the course of fellowship (the *jiaohui*) is separated from the *topos* of the fifth-story classroom in which we sat, in the Three-Self Patriotic Movement office building next to the chapel (the *jiaotang*). Under the First Fruits' chronotopic ideology, the *jiaohui* is not bound to the ritualized space of a chapel. It is effervescent and mobile (as mobile as the fellow-fruits themselves), whereas architectural shells are rigid and hollow. Remarkably, the *topos* of even the Temple—the original *jiaotang*—is refilled with the recent experience of TROD: Minglei finds the destruction of the Temple (2 Kings 25) "similar to the removal of crosses" rather than the other way around, as might be expected when drawing a lesson from the Bible. (Moreover, crosses slated for removal were usually those erected in recent memory and therefore "without history"—no revered missionary lineage, no government recognition.)

19. The descriptor "Christian" (*jidujiao*) is tacked on to Lian'an Church to modify *tang* 'hall'; cf., e.g., a dining hall (*shitang*), an ancestral temple (*citang*).

20. The most basic meaning of *hui* is 'to meet (together)'. It also frequently denotes a moment in time, e.g., *yi hui(r)* 'a (short) moment'.

Time, space, and personhood are thus subject to flexible chrono-topic mixing and matching such that neither chronological nor indexical correspondence can be assumed: public-facing splendor points not to spiritual flourishing, but rather conceals the impoverished reality of “what’s within our hearts.”²¹

My point is not that *jiaohui* is to time as *jiaotang* is to space, but that the First Fruits’ way of dividing time and space is organized by their distinction between *jiaohui* and *jiaotang*. (The interior space of the heart is not any less a topos with its own palpable qualities: “like family,” having *renqingwei’r*.) Instead of criticizing TROD, which from personal conversation I know he opposes, Minglei points out that the current building code, however discriminatorily enforced, clarifies the faith and human feeling that sustain the *jiaohui* over time. Regardless of how God is understood to transcend time and space, human uptakes of the divine are in time and therefore open to deniability. Under the First Fruits’ TROD-compatible chronotopic ideology of partibility, the “image of man,” or the bundle of visual and characterological traits that indexes one’s social persona, is unreliable: not even the cross can make a church out of a building or a Christian out of a human body.

Ghosts Inside the House of God: *Renqing*, *Renqingwei’r*, and Chronotopic Partibility

For the First Fruits, “the way we talk like family,” as Lang Ge puts it, contrasts not only with the architectural shell of the church, but also with Old Testament prosody. Minglei paraphrases 1 Kings 6 by picking at its ceremonial materiality: “all the cubits and cedar and olive and cherubim and gold.” Anxieties over material externalities such as sartorial and architectural adornments are related to anxieties over “fleshly” language (Keane 2002), and new uptakes of old qualities change how their objects are semiotically constructed (Gal 2017). Observing that not all marked by the cross, and not even the cross itself, was *of* the cross, the fellow-fruits’ contributions after Minglei acknowledge and critique the value of consumptive material splendor: competitive building of churches, European cathedrals, dressing up for church, crosses as accessories, bonus points for attractiveness, fancy government buildings, and home improvement.

21. Feng Zhili, former chairman of the Zhejiang Provincial Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee (ERAC), made the case that the prominence of crosses on churches had no Biblical basis, that the cross was “merely an external manifestation,” and that faith ought to be internalized and purified so as to be respectful of non-Christians’ feelings. See Zhejiang ERAC, “Director Feng Zhili goes to Ningbo to investigate the handling of illegal religious buildings” (2015), accessed July 1, 2019, <http://www.zjsmzw.gov.cn/Public/NewsInfo.aspx?type=10&id=e51ee61-16c2-4b2a-95b0-1237e1116b3b> (as of November 2019, the link appears to be defunct). See also Ying (2018, 54).

Lang Ge's disavowal of literary ornamentation reflects the political disturbance of flashy church structures in recent memory. The First Fruits' Christianized interpretation of TROD would seem to confirm the stereotyped Protestant propensity toward the spiritual and individual over the material and collective. In fact, Protestant Christianity's competitive advantage over rival religions in China has been attributed to its resemblance to the purificatory politics of the campaign against the "Four Olds" (old ideas, old culture, old habits, old customs) and the iconoclasm of the Cultural Revolution (Kao 2020)—of which TROD might seem to be a stunted, late-sprung offshoot. Thus did the Maoist state unintentionally remove long-standing sociocultural barriers to Christian conversion, most notably powerful lineage organizations (Sun 2017). The aim to emancipate society from the material and "superstitious" things of bourgeois and feudal thought-worlds had a familiar precedent in the modernizing, liberatory ethics of Protestant Christianity (Kao 2020).

The project of urban renovation, expressed in KPF's Westlake 66 blurb, borrows a similar emancipatory ethics of cleaning up a "deteriorated neighborhood." The cramped, cluttered appearance of old alleyways—an index of a coarse, inelegant age—is out of place in a first-tier city. Designed to "[minimize] the shadow impact on the surrounding buildings" and to "maximize the amount of daylight into each building while reducing the overall energy consumption,"²² Westlake 66 promises to lighten up the landscape. Like the 1960s Eastern Bloc Socialist Modern aesthetic, it too adopts the qualisigns of lightness and cleanliness, not only with "lightweight furnishings, light colors, and the bright light of the sun flooding in through windows liberated of bulky curtains" (Fehérvári 2013, 87) but also with "cleaner" energy.

I now return to the aforementioned ghosts of Midtown Catholic Church and the land expropriation controversy that stirred them. On May 20, 2018, two years after the long shadow of TROD seemed to have at last slinked away, an unexpected message appeared in a Midtown chat group on WeChat:²³

Emergency prayer sign-up: Brothers and sisters, the 400 square meters of church property [*jiaochan*] on the west side of Midtown Catholic Church has already been put up for public auction. As soon as a deal has been reached on the 28th, there will no chance of getting it back.

22. KPF, "Westlake 66," <https://www.kpf.com/projects/westlake-66>.

23. WeChat is the ubiquitous instant messaging app in China.

[Our] church is our home [or family, *jia*], all of us have the duty of offering up prayers. Earnest prayer is our means of victory. May the Lord begin the work, still the waves, and save our family estate [*jia*ye]!

Let us sons and daughters of Christ, we who love God and Church, together sign up and offer prayers! There are three time slots per day for Adoration and fervent prayer!

Morning 7:30–8:30

Afternoon 2:30–3:30

Evening 7:30–8:30

Please follow this sign-up format: Full name + time, for example:
Zhang Li—afternoon

Prayer content: Rosary + Way of the Cross + Chaplet of Divine Mercy

Three days later, all parishioners were informed of a public pray-in at Midtown:

Tomorrow [May 24] afternoon, the head of the relevant government department is coming to the Hangzhou church specifically to examine the matter related to the plot of land on the left side of the church. On this occasion [we] ask all families to come join in public prayer. Those who can't participate, please appropriately and eagerly offer up your prayers, that God Almighty grant sufficient wisdom and judiciousness. What is Caesar's be unto Caesar, what is God's unto God!! This we ask in Jesus's name. Amen.

Around 100 people showed up, most of them elderly parishioners who lived nearby. Twenty parish representatives accompanied the city inspectors during their visit. Photos were taken and transmitted via WeChat on the spot, along with urgent prayer requests. Variations of the above two messages were relayed over and over again. Midtown was informed that the relevant government boards would convene and submit a proposal to the Hangzhou Party Committee within two days. There, a middle-aged parish representative, was not optimistic. "We must now come up with another plan. Of course prayer is important, but a united effort is also important," she wrote to one of the chat groups on the night of May 25.

The plot of land in question (see fig. 1)—roughly the size of a basketball court, but in later messages more than tripled from 400 to 1,500 square meters, to include an additional plot formerly occupied by a seminary—was located behind the chapel and accessible from a path, often used for parking, between the right side of the church and a two-story office building.

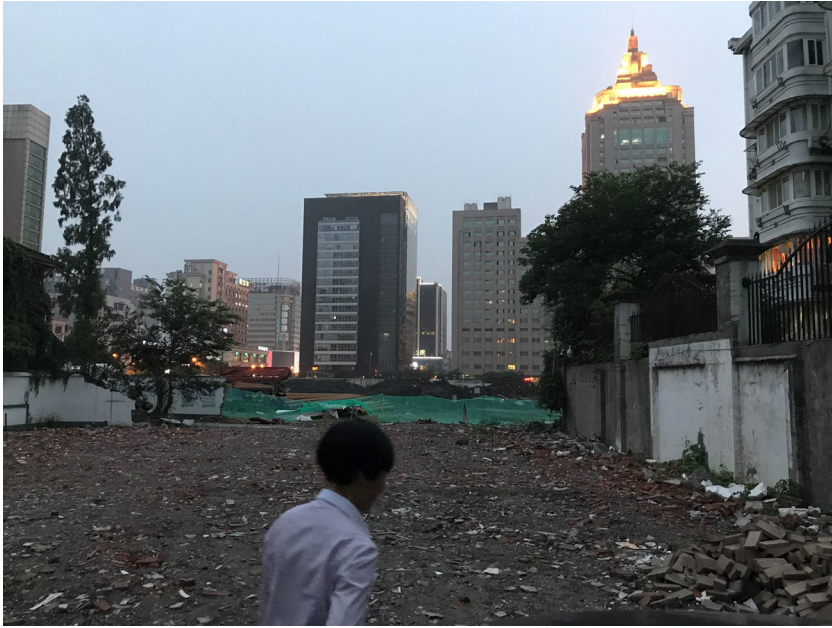


Figure 1. The plot of land in question. Photo taken by the author.

During this time, I frequently heard Midtowners describe the church and its territory as “our home,” “our house,” or “our family” (*women jia*); the refrain “The *jiaotang* is our house” (*jiaotang jiushi women de jia*) was repeatedly intoned. I could not help but remember how Lang Ge had invoked a priceless “human touch” (*renqingwei’r*, literally, flavor of human relationality, scent of sympathy) against the brute quantifiability (cubits, attractiveness points) of material surfaces. *Renqingwei’r* is the substance exuded by *renqing* (human feeling), the moral circulation of sentiment mediated by the exchange of gifts and favors (Kipnis 1996; Chu 2010, 252–56), that is detectible by the senses. It eludes, therefore, un- and under-lived-in spaces, whether lavish and immaculate or decrepit and deserted. On the one hand, a home exists by virtue of it tasting like human relationality; on the other hand, it suggests, or is haunted by, prior claims of belonging (Feuchtwang 2004, 7), long devoid of liveliness. For what *renqingwei’r* did a nearly forgotten parcel of undeveloped land behind the chapel hold for Midtown’s parishioners, until the city took it away?

“As redevelopment unfolded,” writes Julie Chu about a once-bustling Fuzhou neighborhood, “one of the intensifying challenges for residents was to hold their ground amid the dissipation of *renqi*—the unique ‘human atmosphere’ that made a place familiar and habitable” (2014, 361). *Renqi* connotes the buzzing

vitality of a popular area or community. A teeming neighborhood has *renqi*, a cozy home has *renqingwei'r*. Little wonder, then, that Lang Ge had turned to a personal anecdote about his newly renovated but yet unoccupied home's eerie absence of it, and Zhao Ge had recognized this same absence in "those grand churches [*jiaotang*] in Europe." The lack of village-like neighborliness contributes to the spatial anxiety peculiar to urbanized areas, of which ghosts—in Chinese popular religion the souls of those without descendants to worship them—are materialized forms (Wu 2015). The ghostlike "floating" population of rural migrants, too, personifies the threat that landlessness and mobility pose to rootedness (Zhang 2001).

Considering, as well, the penchant of ghosts for manifesting as symptoms of and responses to dislocation and the absence of moral obligation (see Ong 1988), memories of chapel ghosts would appear to have been stirred by the division and confiscation of Midtown's "family estate" (*jiaye*). Like the oppressive, inalienable possessions that Socialist Modern sought to scrub away from modernity (Fehérváry 2013, 87), such religious patrimony—and parishioners' obstinate attachment to it—was hopelessly outdated in an updated, renovated cityscape. The elderly parishioners who came daily to stand guard and pray personified the old age, economic idleness, and deterioration that urban renewal sought to eradicate. (Young adults were, they themselves complained, trapped at their workplaces.) When the seniors kept vigil, it was noted with bemused bitterness that those who accompanied them all through the night were none other than the dozen or so black-shirted policemen. These men occupied a conference room in the office building next to the chapel.

Frail but emotive, Midtown's seniors embodied the other pole of "floating" mobility: aged local stuckness. On the one hand, there was the ghostly danger of displacement. On the other hand, there was the stubbornly retrograde refusal to leave. Older Midtowners cleaved to a spatiotemporally fused patrimony tied to the filial ecclesiology and ethnicization of Chinese Catholic identity (see Lozada 2001). By "filial ecclesiology," I mean a church's self-structuring as a social group organized by generational continuity, geographic provenance, and family membership (see Harrison 2011; Li 2018). As a structure of time-space-personhood relations, this ecclesiology appears to be antithetical to chronotopic partibility. The Midtowners thus seem "ethnic" in comparison to the Protestants at Lian'an. Many of the First Fruits, for example, are the sole baptized individuals in their families. This is a common trait among Chinese Protestants, who as a category correspond to no specific class, region, or clan (Chambon 2020).

As Midtown was protesting territorial expropriation, Luke's timely recollection of ghosts—socially marginal strangers without families (Weller 1987)—became evocative of the threat of chronotopic partition. Perhaps these ghosts, like the Marian apparitions at Zaytun and Warraq (see Heo 2018), shape minoritarian imaginaries of territorial loss and belonging. Nor are ghosts excluded from the moral circuitry of *renqing*; they are in popular religious imagination the pitiable beggars of the spirit world (Chu 2010; Feuchtwang 2010). Whereas the First Fruits had discarded physical quantifiability (again, cubits and attractiveness points) in favor of immaterial *renqingwei'r*, the Midtowners held the quantifiability of church property—its size and market value—inseparable from the *renqing* owed by the Hangzhou city government. God, too, is well within the same participation framework of *renqing*, recruitable by collective, on-site public prayer (see the May 20 WeChat message) directly or through intercession to intervene in the here and now. One parishioner summed up the situation like this:

Your house [*jia*], it's got a plot of land. I get ten or so hired thugs, all in black, and go to your house, encircle that land, and build a wall [to section it off]. These guys are at your house, taking turns standing guard. Then, at the same time, [I] put up your [family's] plot of land for auction. In any case, your Father has already spoken. [Of the] Ten Commandments, one of them is Thou Shalt Not Kill. You must obey. I get to do whatever I want. Who's your Father anyway? [Even if] I know him, I pretend I don't, [because] all I want is the money I can get from the sale.

This antiparable sardonically adopts the aggressor's point of view. The violence of the city police-*qua*-organized crime mob—"hired thugs, all in black" (*chuan heiyifu de dashou*)—caustically subverts urban renovation's spectacle of economic modernity (see Cao 2017, 36). It highlights a condition of chronotopic partibility that the First Fruits, in subsuming the destruction of Solomon's Temple under TROD, had taken for granted: the moral incommensurability of a rival chronotope's claim over the same referent (e.g., a church building or property). In this clash between urban renewal and "home"-ownership, dueling chronotopes, each informing an official worldview, objectify and anathematize one another (see Agha 2007b, 322). Chronotopic contrasts do not always lead to violence. But when they do, chronotopic partibility may emerge, as it did among the First Fruits, as a way of making sense of contrast.

The Boethian solution to incompatibilism, or the incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and free will, is obliquely related to the problem of violence. Its

challenge is to show that God does not cause human evil—human *violence*—despite knowing that it will happen. Just as incompatibilism motivated a chronotopic reorganization of God's place in human affairs and the carving out of secular history from divine history (see Elliot 2015, 63–65), so too has the incompatibility between visually noisome (or deteriorated) Christian spaces and the smart sleekness of the New Era motivated the First Fruits to salvage and sunder the spiritual substance of phenomenal time (the *renqingwei'r* of a home, “the fellowship . . . right now”) from the discardable matter of physical space (“it's a *jiaohui*, not a *jiaotang*”). Despite forcibly dividing, developing, and repopulating (or depopulating) illegal structures and shabby neighborhoods, urban renovation projects like TROD and Westlake 66 justify the violence of demolition and expropriation not as collateral damage, but as positive ideology (see Sargeson 2013, 1075).

“What Is Caesar's Be unto Caesar, What Is God's unto God!!”

To nobody's surprise but everybody's dismay, city inspectors determined that Midtown Catholic Church was not the rightful claimant of the land-use rights. On Sunday, May 27, a group of parishioners unfurled a banner that read: “Implement and execute the spirit of the National Regulations on Religious Affairs. The occupation of religious property is forbidden!”²⁴ Amid talk of law and lawyers, police arrived and a brawl ensued. Clips of the confrontation were shared on WeChat. One of the older women, Therese's mother, fainted; this became the most remembered incident of the confrontation, which died down shortly after an ambulance arrived. Nobody could talk about anything else during the English class that Luke and I taught that afternoon. After class ended, I chatted with a young man outside, one of the thirty to forty people still milling about in the courtyard. “During the Cultural Revolution, they built an elementary school on that plot of land,” he said, “but the school's been shut down long ago. They're saying the land belongs to the school and not the *jiaotang*, but the school doesn't exist anymore.”

Parishioners claimed that the Municipal Tax Bureau had, in 1951, listed Midtown Catholic Church as responsible for the plot. It was then misattributed twice, once in 1958 owing to circumstances related to the Great Leap Forward, and again in 1991 by the Hangzhou City Housing Authority. Midtown argued that the Religious Affairs Bureau and the Housing Authority *had*, in 1992,

24. “贯彻执行《国家宗教事务条例》精神。严禁侵占宗教财产!”

restored its land-use rights. It seemed to parishioners that the city government was, like many a greedy local government (see Lee 2007, 260), illegally upholding the former misattribution. This was a small but valuable plot connected to a much larger tract right in the heart of the old city. Just as decaying infrastructures elsewhere in China have become spaces of encounter between a spectral state, land developers, and resistant citizens (Chu 2014, 352), here too a fallow plot of land—a visual glitch in a sparkling commercial district—became fertile ground for contestation.

What happened in 1958? The land was “dedicated” to the nation and handed over to Yan’an Middle School. But, parishioners argued, this was no true transfer of property rights; in 1984, the Religious Affairs Bureau had said as much concerning all Cultural Revolution-era “dedications.” The slippage between the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution was lost on many; I was informed of an elementary (not middle) school during the Cultural Revolution (not Great Leap Forward) by most interlocutors. No matter what “really” happened, the main complication, I was told, was that the “elementary school” no longer existed.²⁵ Yan’an Middle School had long since been absorbed by Fengqi Middle School (reportedly attended by Alibaba founder Jack Ma), which was itself closed in 2012. The entire expanse (in red, fig. 2) was to be auctioned off to developers.

Parishioners took the lead in protesting. “I’m really angry at Father Huang,” said Marcella, a jobseeker in her thirties from a village north of Hangzhou. “I don’t even want to look at him. He’s telling us to stop protesting. He’s negotiating with the city government, of course! Haven’t you noticed that whenever we’re out there protesting, the priests never join? It’s only ever us *jiaoyou*,²⁶ and a few nuns, but never the priests.”

Independent of sacerdotal leadership, elderly parishioners showed up at Midtown each day to pray, often for hours. Under a filiational ecclesiology, their age indexed the depth of their geographically and genealogically rooted personhood. Under Westlake 66’s developmentalist chronotope, however, it reflected the immobility and nonproductivity of a “deteriorated neighborhood.” Recall that each chronotope, in the Bakhtinian sense of a genre-specific narrative

25. Former structures include a parish school (241.80 square meters), a seminary or monastery (634.02 square meters), and a minor seminary (185.40 square meters). Before Yan’an Middle School there was Tingyun Middle School, a parish school named for Yang Tingyun (1557–1627), the late Ming scholar-official convert who acquired the land on which Midtown Catholic Church was built.

26. The word *jiaoyou* ‘church’/‘religion’-‘mate’ combines the meanings of “fellow churchgoer,” “parishioner,” and “Catholic.”

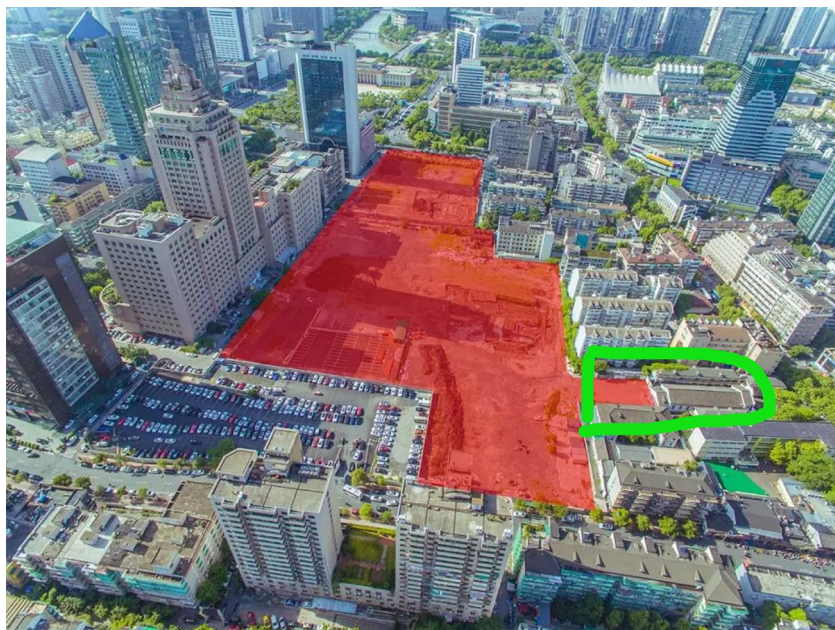


Figure 2. Image shared in Midtown WeChat groups in May 2018. The area circled in green is Midtown Catholic Church, including the parcel of land in contention.

structure, proffers its own representation of personhood and, by extension, concept of agency and mode of participatory access (Agha 2007b, 321; Morson 2010, 93). Many parishioners critically compared Midtown’s middle-aged (but fresh-faced) priests, none of whom was from Hangzhou, to the pious local elderly. (Father Huang was from Zhejiang, but he hailed from a county much closer to the Anhui border than to Hangzhou.)

After many conversations with Marcella, I finally realized that what was unacceptable to everyone was not so much that the land had been seized—it was unused anyway, and there was little that could be done to avert its seizure—but that Midtown was not offered even a courtesy pittance. “People may have misinterpreted the old documents,” she admitted. “There was that school [Yan’an], but you can’t ask them to verify anything because they’re not here anymore. It’s not about *needing* to have that piece of land, you understand? The government wants it, that’s normal. But they didn’t compensate us, not even a little. It’s the right thing to do [*shi yinggai*]. Do you know how much it’s worth? The priests didn’t even try asking!”

This was similar to a *chaiqian* problem, and standard *chaiqian* procedures—think of the overnight wealth of “eruption households”—involved remuneration.

Had the parish priests been colluding with the government?²⁷ According to Marcella, the city government ought to have acknowledged that Midtown had a historical claim to the land. Even though Yan'an was no longer around to authenticate Midtown's 1958 "dedication," was not a little *renqing* in return right and just? Parishioners were outraged that they were treated no better than outsiders and "floaters" when they were by filiation the rightful, original urban residents. The antiparable quoted above suggests as much: "Who's your Father anyway?" asks the aggressor. "[Even if] I know him, I pretend I don't, [because] all I want is the money I can get from the sale." In the absence of *renqing*, the difference between lawful requisition and criminal seizure (by "hired thugs") vanishes. The citation of the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" ironically makes a case for justifiable homicide.

The seizure was swift. On Sunday, May 27, I lingered at Midtown for two hours after my English class with Luke. I chatted with the young man who told me about the "elementary school" during the Cultural Revolution. That very night, under the watchful eyes of the police, the open gateway to the plot was walled in. The land vanished from sight. What happened there, as an onlooker remarked on WeChat the next day, was "the birth of the most expensive commercial property in Hangzhou!" With it, the Midtowners' filiational chronotope was forcibly recalibrated to the accelerated, agonistic temporality of the urban real estate market.

The sale was swifter. On Monday, May 28, news broke that the small plot of land claimed by Midtown Catholic Church, along with the much larger adjoining portion totaling 67.24 *mu*, or 44,827 square meters (about eight football fields), became, at 107.3 *yi* (1 *yi* = 100 million) RMB (1.57 billion USD), the most expensive commercial real estate ever sold in Hangzhou to date.²⁸ This meant that at least 5 million RMB (730,000 USD) belonged to Midtown, argued a nun on WeChat. Others placed the estimate as high as 80 million RMB (11.6 million USD), and still others from 1.64 to 3.58 *yi* RMB (23.8–52 million USD). Some parishioners floated the idea of hiring lawyers but quickly scrapped it. Although others maintained that church property wasn't something that could be measured by money, rising property values added insult to injury.

27. A few parishioners did defend the priests, pointing out that their interference risked causing more trouble. Midtown was also home to an elderly, seldom seen bishop (who died in 2021), but he was distrusted by parishioners for reasons beyond the scope of this article.

28. News articles were shared on WeChat, e.g., Pang Jintao, "Hong Kong Real Estate Giant Hang Lung Buys Core Hangzhou Commercial Tract for 10.7 Billion after 7-Hour Auction," *Pengpai Xinwen*, May 28, 2018, https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_2157955; and Yin Mengyi, "10.7 Billion Yuan! The Prize Tract of Baijingfang Falls to Hang Lung," *Qianjiang Evening News*, May 29, 2018, http://qjwb.zjol.com.cn/html/2018-05/29/content_3658982.htm.

The Midtowners' distinction between what is Caesar's and what is God's (see Matt. 22:21 and the pray-in announcement on WeChat) organizes their division between time, mediated by inalienable patrimony, and space, mediated by alienable property. They know that what is Caesar's is the land itself; by law it belongs to the state (see Zhang 2002).²⁹ Chronotopic partibility is here expressed in the exchangeability of land and *renqing*. This exchangeability is quite unlike the First Fruits' sundering of *renqingwei'r*, a quality of phenomenal time, from the physical structure of a church or house. I do not mean that *renqing* is placeless or immaterial; it very well is not, and such objects as transnational loans and remittances mediate *renqing* across time and space (Chu 2010, 232–38). To criticize the Midtowners for desiring financial compensation more than the land itself—that is, to acquiesce to chronotopic partibility after marshaling archival maps and proclaiming that “the *jiaotang* is our house”—would be to assume a bourgeois division between morality and economics (Kipnis 1996; Chu 2010). Here, topoi are alienable even from a filiational ecclesiology that bundles together time (generational continuity), space (geographic provenance), and personhood (clan membership), provided that sufficient *renqing* is shown.

Sanitized neither from the moral-sentimental circuit of *renqing* nor from the filiational representation of personhood, God's place in phenomenal spacetime is open to uptake and therefore deniable: “I get to do whatever I want,” announces the antiparable's aggressor, exulting in human freedom. “Who's your Father anyway?” God, a participant embroiled in human spacetime, is here subject to the vagaries of human freedom. The First Fruits and the Midtowners attempt to solve this indignity by drawing their own boundaries between time and space, defining the qualities they deem appropriate to each category and negotiating, in Boethian fashion, God's alignment(s) with those categories. The First Fruits make a moral distinction between the event-time of fellowship and the venue of fellowship. The Midtowners concede the real property that is presently Caesar's by demanding in its place the *renqing* or human feeling, mediated by money, that is God's in perpetuity. What makes possible moral exchange between God and Caesar is in fact the condition of their separation—the presumption of an original chronotopic partitioning.³⁰

29. That it lay vacant for so many years betrayed, as several interlocutors surmised, Midtown's historical but less than legal claim to it.

30. Not only of time and space, but also of humankind from God after the original sin of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3). Cf. the *felix culpa* principle, which holds that original sin is a necessary, “happy” split because it makes possible reunion with God (see Stuart 1986; Otto 2009).

Conclusion

I have shown how chronotopic partibility is a Christian response to the arbitrary yet inexorable rhythm of top-down urban redevelopment in Hangzhou. Spatial and temporal qualities associated with “home,” the frequent site of expropriation and transformation, emerge as detachable media with which to negotiate the violent politics of urban renewal (see Sargeson 2013). What these qualities are, and how God interfaces with human spacetime, the First Fruits at Lian’an and the parish community of Midtown differently describe. The way these qualities are talked about implicates speakers in specific moral-political commitments (Gal 2013).

For the First Fruits, *renqingwei*’r organizes homely qualities by separating the perceivable (e.g., architectural grandeur) from the palpable (e.g., coldness, warmth) inside a chapel or house. I was often asked if empty pews were the norm in American churches because “that’s how foreign churches are: big and beautiful but cold and bare [*lengleng qingqing*].” As a quality of human sociality, *renqingwei*’r is detachable to the extent that its producers (sociable individuals) are thought to be disentangleable from the spaces they frequent. The First Fruits plainly profess the partibility of fellowship from its venue. But what about the Midtowners?

In characteristically Catholic analogical fashion (Greeley 2000), perhaps, the Midtowners adhered to a spatiotemporally interwoven filiation ecclesiology. As it was pushed aside by the legal hand of a government that seemed, at the same time, unlawful in its strong-arm tactics, this chronotope was left as vulnerable as the elderly bodies in whom it inhered. The Midtowners thus arrived at chronotopic partibility differently—they appealed to the necessary boundary between God and Caesar that made possible (or rejectable) their liaison. In their own ways, the Midtowners and the First Fruits both respond to forced urban renewal by pointing to the moral flows of obligation that imbue an environment with the scent of human relationality or with the memory of an abundance of ghosts. (Despite the physical proximity of their churches, I knew of no interaction between the First Fruits and Midtowners save for the time I invited Molly, the exam tutor at Midtown, to accompany me to a talent show at Lian’an.)

The politics of demolition and development shapes how Protestants and Catholics conceptualize their agency in a participation framework that includes God in the New Era. Putting God back inside phenomenal time salvages human agency from the flat, monologic unfolding of eternity that the Bakhtinian chronotope rejects.³¹ But with the freedom to deny God (“Who’s your Father anyway?”)

31. No matter how divine and human temporalities coexist and overlap, “whatever is gained religiously in the idea that God is in time is lost unless God is in our time” (Zagzebski 1996, 65). See Morson (2010) for a discussion of the chronotope’s “heresy” of open (i.e., unknown to God) time.

comes the irony of nonbelievers' immunity. Why are the most pious always also the most susceptible? Isn't the house of God, like one's own home, supposed to feel safe? Absolutely nothing, as far as anyone could tell, happened to the police that kept vigil with the elderly, and that later walled away Midtown's small slice of vacant land.

With its weedy reversion to the state of nature, that remnant was out of place in the New Era chronotope of the sleek, futuristic cityscape. Unreplaced and unremunerated, it vanished into the ghost of the neighborhood yet to come: the commercial complex that would "reinvigorate" everything around it. Thinking back, it was no accident that the students in my May 27 English class had excitedly raised and then voted on exorcism to be the following week's discussion topic. What might a newly remodeled house have in common with expropriated land or a haunted chapel? Although they are all "our home"/"our house," these chronotopically fractured places are neither settled-in enough to exude *renqingwei'r* nor ever settled enough to be safe from state or spirit possession. They are incompletely "ours."

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