

# Religions in Asian America

## Building Faith Communities

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## CHAPTER THREE

# RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AMONG THE CHINESE IN AMERICA

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Religious diversity has never been strange to the Chinese. Traditionally, China has had many religions. Along with the three major religiocultural traditions of Confucianism, Daoism (Taoism), and Buddhism there were many syncretic sects and localized folk religions. Meanwhile, many individuals followed an assortment of personalized eclectic practices without identifying themselves with any particular religion. Given these historical and cultural backgrounds, it is not surprising to find that a religious diversity exists among contemporary Chinese Americans or that a large proportion of them claim no religion. What is remarkable is that Christianity appears to have become the largest religion, and Christian churches have, in fact, become the predominant religious institutions among the Chinese in America. For example, a *Los Angeles Times* poll in 1997 reports that 44 percent of Chinese Americans in southern California claim no religion, 32 percent are Christian (including 6 percent Catholics), and 20 percent are Buddhist.<sup>1</sup> Several surveys conducted in other metropolitan areas and the Canadian census all report similar patterns: Christianity is the largest religion, Buddhism the second, and close to half of Chinese claim no religion at all. Organizationally, the latest counts report the existence of more than 800 Chinese Protestant churches, whereas the number of Chinese Buddhist temples and associations is less than 150.<sup>2</sup> This is in sharp contrast to the situation in Chinese societies (Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China), where Buddhism is the largest religion and Christians remain a small minority of between 1 and 5 percent of the population.<sup>3</sup>

More accurate estimates of religious practices and beliefs among the Chinese in the United States and Chinese societies require more focused surveys, which do not exist at this time. Without such surveys, this chapter has to be based primarily on my own ethnographic research on contemporary Chinese American religion in the past six years and complemented by some historical documents, theses, and writings scattered in scholarly publications.<sup>4</sup> To situate religious developments in their

historical and social contexts, I will first provide a short history of Chinese immigration and then provide a brief description of the current status of the Chinese community. Following this brief description, I will discuss three major religions among the Chinese in America: the Chinese folk religion, Buddhism, and Christianity.

## History of Chinese Immigration

The Chinese were the first Asian group to immigrate in large numbers to the United States. Chinese immigration began in the late 1840s. This history may be divided into two stages, and each stage has several waves of immigrants. The first stage covers approximately the first hundred years.<sup>5</sup> Between the late 1840s and 1882, the first wave of laborers came to work in gold mines, railroad construction, agriculture, and fishing. This first wave of Chinese immigration was halted by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Between 1882 and 1943 the Chinese were excluded from immigration and naturalization, Chinese in America suffered severe racial discrimination and social isolation, and only a small number of Chinese managed to come to the United States. The ghetto-like Chinatown in major cities was the haven for those laborers and merchants working in Chinese restaurants, hand-wash laundries, gift shops, and domestics. After the Chinese exclusion laws were repealed in 1943, a small annual quota of 105 legal immigrants was established. Until the 1950s, almost all Chinese immigrants emigrated from rural areas surrounding Guangzhou (Canton) in the southern province of Guangdong. Until the 1960s, Chinatown was very much a "bachelor society" crowded by men. These male "sojourners" either failed to marry or were unable to bring their wives to the United States because of immigration restrictions. These first-stage immigrants have been referred to as *laoqiao* (earlier immigrants).

The Immigration and Naturalization Amendment Act of 1965 marks the beginning of the second stage of Chinese immigration. This and the following immigration laws grant an annual quota of twenty thousand immigrants for each country in the Eastern Hemisphere. Since 1965, Chinese immigrants, as well as refugees from Indo-China, have come in large numbers from several societies in several waves, including immigrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong, mainland China, and Southeast Asian countries. Consequently, the Chinese population doubled between 1970 and 1980, doubled again between 1980 and 1990, and reached 2.4 million in 2000 (see Table 3.1).<sup>6</sup>

Most of the post-1965 Chinese immigrants, like other Asian immigrants but in contrast with early Chinese immigrants, are characterized by their urban background, high educational achievement, and professional

**Table 3.1: Chinese Population in the United States, 1860–2000**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total</i>
1860	34,933
1870	63,199
1880	105,613
1890	107,488
1900	89,863 (118,746) *
1910	71,531 (94,414)
1920	61,639 (85,202)
1930	74,954 (102,159)
1940	77,504 (106,334)
1950	117,629 (150,005)
1960	198,958 (237,292)
1970	383,023 (431,583)
1980	806,042 (812,178)
1990	1,645,472
2000	2,432,585†

\* The numbers in parentheses are probably adjusted numbers including Hawaii and Alaska (see Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*).

† Does not include anyone who chose more than one category in the race question on the Census form.

occupations before immigration.<sup>7</sup> Due to the new immigration laws that established a preference system favoring skilled workers, many Chinese came first as students, then adjusted to the permanent resident status upon achieving graduate degrees and finding employment. Hence, most people work as professionals in nonethnic companies or as technocrats in governmental agencies. In the meantime, many less-educated laborers have come as well. While many Chinese Americans are on the high end of the socioeconomic spectrum, there is also a cluster on the low end. Many of the lower-class Chinese live in the inner-city Chinatowns of New York and San Francisco.<sup>8</sup> The ethnic economies have changed also: hand-wash laundries have disappeared, Chinese restaurants have boomed, travel agencies have arisen with service specialties for transpacific air routes, and real estate and insurance companies have Chinese agents for the growing markets among Chinese residents. Most new Chinese immigrants have bypassed the urban ghetto Chinatown and settled in ethnically mixed suburbs. For these new immigrants, the ethnic community is no longer a geographically separate enclave, but a community scattered throughout the metropolitan suburbs. Because they came during and after the civil rights movement, new immigrants usually suffer less discrimination than their predecessors, and the overall image of the Chinese in America has become one of the “model minorities.”

The new Chinese immigration actually began earlier than many other Asian groups. Following World War II, tens of thousands of Chinese arrived as war brides and refugees and as international students.<sup>9</sup> In contrast to *laoqiao*, most of these people came not from Guangdong but from all over China, and many had received high school and college education before coming to the United States. Therefore, their backgrounds resemble those of the post-1965 immigrants, the *xinqiao* (new immigrants).

## Diversity of the Chinese Population

An important characteristic of the contemporary Chinese population in the United States is the tremendous internal diversity. They come from very different societies and have very different linguistic, cultural, political, and socioeconomic backgrounds. According to the 1990 census, 69 percent of the over 1.6 million Chinese in the United States were foreign-born. Among them, 32 percent were born in mainland China, 15 percent in Taiwan, 9 percent in Hong Kong, and 13 percent in Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries. These societies have been very different in social and political systems: Mainland China has been under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party since 1949; Taiwan has remained as the Republic of China under the rule of the Guomindang (Kuomintang) then the Democratic Progressive Party; Hong Kong was a British colony until 1997; and Vietnam experienced the sweeping Communist revolution in the 1970s. Of the 31 percent native-born Chinese Americans, many are second-generation children of the post-1965 immigrants, but a significant number of them belong to the third, fourth, or even fifth generation of earlier Chinese immigrants. As previously mentioned, there also exists a socioeconomic polarization. While the majority of Chinese Americans are highly educated professionals living in middle-class suburbs, there are also many less-educated laborers, especially recent immigrants from rural areas of China. They live in Chinatowns, work for minimum wages in garment factories and restaurants, and are struggling for a life in poverty.

Culturally, an obvious division exists between *laoqiao* (earlier immigrants) and *xinqiao* (new immigrants). The new immigrants "consider themselves more genteel, more literate, and more modern as most of them have lived in urban areas of China or Hong Kong. They feel that the [earlier] settlers who came from rural areas of the old country are bumpkins with unrefined manners."<sup>10</sup> Linguistic diversity has become very apparent.<sup>11</sup> Taishanese, commonly spoken by people from the Taishan district of Guangdong, was once the lingua franca in American Chinatowns, then it was replaced by the standard Cantonese spoken in the cities of Hong Kong, Macau, and Canton. Mandarin has become increasingly common

inside and outside Chinatowns. Mandarin is the official dialect of China (*guoyu* or *putonghua*) that every educated Chinese is supposed to be able to speak, no matter what his or her mother tongue is. Meanwhile, some people from Taiwan cling to Taiwanese, which is a variation of Minnanese or Fujianese. Many Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong immigrants know little or no Mandarin. Moreover, many ethnic Chinese from Southeast Asia speak none of the Chinese dialects but Vietnamese, Malaysian, Tagalog, or English.

Similarly important, the sociopolitical background of new Chinese immigrants is very complex. From the 1950s to 1970s, most Chinese immigrants were the "uprooted" and "rootless" people. They were born in the mainland under the rule of Guomindang's Republic of China, escaped from wars or fled the Communist mainland, then wandered around in several places—Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Southeast Asia—before coming to the United States. Socially and politically, these sojourners often have connections with the Republic of China in Taiwan. Meanwhile, many also have strong attachments to their birthplace in mainland China and hold a vision of a united and strong Chinese nation. Also from Taiwan and Hong Kong are the sons and daughters of the sojourners. Growing up during the economic boom in Taiwan or Hong Kong, this generation generally has less attachment to mainland China than their parent generation, although their Chinese national identity can be similarly strong. Some Taiwanese natives, whose families have lived in Taiwan for three or more generations, have become sympathizers or supporters of the Taiwan independence movement. Beginning in the early 1980s, tens of thousands of students and scholars from the People's Republic of China have come to the United States. Many of them adjusted to immigrant status upon finding employment. After the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, when the student-led democracy movement in Beijing was violently suppressed by the Chinese Communist government, the U.S. Congress passed the Chinese Student Protection Act in 1992, which granted 52,425 Chinese nationals permanent U.S. residence.<sup>12</sup> These mainland Chinese commonly have great concerns for China's economic modernization, political democratization, and unification of Taiwan and mainland China. In addition, since the mid-1970s, many ethnic Chinese came as refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. These diasporic Chinese had suffered doubly, first as Chinese minorities in host societies, and second as banished natives from Communists countries. Those ethnic Chinese from Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and other countries also experienced ethnic discrimination or political persecution.

All of the preceding cultural and sociopolitical groups share similar challenges from yet another group—the American-born Chinese (ABC) and the American-raised Chinese (ARC). These second-generation or

1.5-generation children of immigrants often speak English as their first or only language. Compared with their immigrant parents, ABCs and ARCs usually have greater concerns for social and political issues of the United States rather than those in Asia. ABCs and ARCs are often well assimilated culturally, socioeconomically, and structurally. On the other hand, however, because of very different family experiences, the internal diversity among ABCs and ARCs is also important.

## Chinese Associations and Organizations

In the traditional Chinatown, the dominant ethnic organizations were *huiguan* and *tang*.<sup>13</sup> *Huiguan* were based on primordial sentiments, including home-district associations and clan (or same-surname) associations. For those who were unable to join a *huiguan*, there were *tang* (triads or secret societies), which were based on fraternal principles. Membership in these associations was not voluntary but often ascribed or forced on individuals. Above these separate and competing *huiguan* and *tang* was the umbrella Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA). The CCBA would coordinate and mediate among its member associations and represent the Chinese community to the larger society. These ethnic organizations provided many services to Chinatowns' Chinese, including housing and employment, social support and protection, credit union and financial help, medical clinics and evacuation services in case of death, and mediation service in case of disputes. Since the 1950s, when the anti-Communist McCarthyism was strong, the CCBA and most of Chinatowns' organizations sided with the Guomindang government in Taiwan (the Republic of China) and expressed opposition to the Chinese Communists in the mainland (the People's Republic of China).<sup>14</sup> Whereas formal religious institutions were almost absent in early Chinatowns, *huiguan* and *tang* had some religious dimensions in their organization and activities.<sup>15</sup> The same-district associations often kept shrines to their own local heroes and tutelary deities. The clan associations always performed rituals of venerating common ancestors, real or imagined. The triads commonly held cultic practices.

Amid the civil rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s, some new forms of Chinese ethnic organizations arose in various Chinatowns throughout the United States, including community service agencies, political organizations, and recreational clubs.<sup>16</sup> These new organizations promoted the interaction between ethnic Chinese and the larger society. Some of these organizations, such as the Chinatown Planning Council in New York City, brought in money with governmental financial programs to improve the social and economic situations of the Chinatown commu-

nity. On the national level, a prominent new organization is the Organization of Chinese Americans (OCA). Since its establishment in the 1970s, OCA has mobilized Chinese citizens to participate in American politics and society, lobbied the U.S. Congress and the administration on behalf of Chinese Americans, and reached out to rally other Asian Americans to fight for racial justice in American society. The OCA has headquarters in Washington, D.C., and branches in every metropolitan area where there is a sizable Chinese population.

Since the 1960s, the growing Chinese population and increasing heterogeneity are accompanied by burgeoning growth of various Chinese associations. Many new *tongxianghui* (same-district associations) have emerged, with either expanded boundaries to the province or a cluster of provinces. For example, in the Greater Washington area, there are provincial *tongxianghui* of Beijing, Fujian, Henan, Shandong, and Shanghai and associations across provinces and even countries, including the *Dongbei* (the three provinces of northeast China), the *Jiangzhehu* (the provinces of Jiangsu and Zhejiang and the city of Shanghai), and the *Indochinese Association* (Chinese from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos). Compared with the old same-district associations (*huiguan*) in Chinatown, these new same-district associations (*tongxianghui*) are more voluntary than ascribed in membership, mostly for networking and social purposes. Because people live scattered in suburbs, interactions among association members are not as frequent and intense as in the traditional Chinatown organizations.

An entirely new type of Chinese organization is the alumni association of Chinese universities. In the Greater Washington area, there are more than thirty alumni associations of the major universities in Taiwan and mainland China. There are even more in the New York and Los Angeles areas. This reflects the educational achievement of many new Chinese immigrants before immigration. These alumni associations hold frequent activities including lectures, forums, karaoke, dancing, and so on.

Meanwhile, the number of Chinese weekend language schools (*zhongwen xuexiao*) has rapidly increased. In the Washington and Houston areas, currently more than thirty Chinese schools each are teaching Chinese language and culture at levels from kindergarten to high school. These schools are not only for children, but also function as a weekly social occasion for parents. Some schools provide *qigong* or *taiji* classes for parents. The content of teaching at these Chinese schools is politically and culturally diverse. Most Chinese schools teach Mandarin, while a few teach Cantonese or Taiwanese. Most schools use textbooks imported from Taiwan, teach traditional Chinese characters, and adopt the traditional *bopomofo* spelling system. Recently, mainland Chinese have established Chinese schools for their children, which teach simplified Chinese characters used in the People's Republic of China (PRC)



and adopt the spelling system of *hanyu pinyin*. These pedagogical differences often have political implications—pro-PRC, pro-ROC, or pro-Taiwan independence.

Several Chinese language newspapers and monthly magazines are widely circulated in metropolitan areas. Some are nationally or even internationally syndicated, such as the *World Journal* daily and the *Sing Tao Daily*, reporting current events in Asia as well as local and national events that are of concern to Chinese in America. They are often backed by governmental agencies or business groups in Asia and have explicit or implicit political ideology toward Chinese politics. However, most of them also try to be inclusive in order to reach a wide audience. Some locally based newspapers and magazines exclusively focus on life in the United States, serve local ethnic businesses and residents, and promote ethnic Chinese unity and solidarity. Such ethnic media seem to have significant influence in terms of forging a sense of Chinese American community.

In sum, Chinese associations and organizations are numerous, diverse, and often unrelated to each other. Chinese people are divided based on political ideology, cultural orientation, and socioeconomic status in American society. These ethnic associations help maintain Chinese identity one way or another. However, sociopolitical tensions and frictions among these ethnic associations have fragmented the Chinese community.

With the preceding brief layout of the historical and social contexts, now let us examine various religious traditions and institutions among the Chinese in America. Briefly speaking, Christianity has become the most practiced institutional religion, Buddhism the second. Traditional Chinese folk religions have revived in the last two decades. Because various sectarian or cultic traditions have attracted few Chinese followers, the following discussion will focus on the traditional Chinese folk religion, Buddhism, and Christianity.<sup>17</sup>

## **Chinese Folk Religion and Cultural Practices**

When the first wave of Chinese immigrants came to the American West Coast in the mid-nineteenth century, like their counterparts from other countries, they brought along their familiar gods and saints and established many temples. These temples are commonly referred to as “joss houses.” The word *joss* is a corruption of the Portuguese word *deos*, meaning god. A joss house is thus a house of gods. The deities in those temples are from Buddhism, such as Guanyin (Kuan Yin), and Daoism, such as Yuhuang Dadi, and some are only known to a particular Chinese village

or district. Charles Caldwell Dobie in 1936 made a detailed observation and description of the joss houses in San Francisco. He pointed out that

It is hard to define a Joss House in Occidental terms. It is neither a church, nor a temple, nor a mosque. But it could easily have elements of all three. A Joss House is not a thing of sect and dogma. It is, to quote the Chinese themselves, simply a "place of worship." Into it may be poured any and all the religious faiths and influences that the Chinese have absorbed and modified in the sixty [sic] centuries of their civilization.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, a joss house was primarily for individual rituals and devotions, not for congregating with fellow believers or adhering to a set of clearly defined dogmas.

The first two joss houses were believed to be the Kong Chow temple and the T'ien Hou temple, which were built in the early 1850s in San Francisco under the auspices of the Kong Chow (Same-District) Association and the Sam Yap (Same-District) Association, respectively. The principal deity of the Kong Chow was Guan Gong (Kuan Kung), the god of wealth, and the T'ien Hou was the temple of the Queen of the Heaven (Tian Hou, T'ien Hou, or the Heavenly Queen). Both temples also had other minor gods.<sup>19</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century, hundreds of joss houses were built on the West Coast, but most were abandoned soon after they were built. In San Francisco's Chinatown, there were at least fifteen joss houses in 1892. By the 1930s, however, only two joss houses were left there, and they had become showplaces for sight-seers.<sup>20</sup>

After half a century, however, some joss houses on certain back streets of San Francisco's Chinatown have persisted or reopened.<sup>21</sup> Actually, the traditional Chinese folk religion, which worships a syncretic variety of gods with many festivals throughout the year, has been revived since the 1970s. This revival is brought mostly by the sudden influx of large numbers of refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, among them many ethnic Chinese. From Los Angeles to New York, from Washington, D.C. to Houston, many syncretic temples have been opened in the Chinatowns or built in suburbs.

In the 1990s in Houston, for example, Chinese from Indo-China (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos) have built three temples with magnificent Chinese-style architecture: the T'ien Hou, the Teo Chew, and the Guan Di. These temples represent the major forms of the contemporary Chinese folk religion in the United States. The T'ien Hou Temple worships the Heavenly Queen and Daoist deities, immortals, and some other gods as well. Tian Hou (Heavenly Queen) is a popular goddess in the coastal provinces of China and among the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia.

This sea goddess is believed to have the powers of protecting fishermen and sailors, healing, and answering all kinds of prayers. The Teo Chew Temple worships a major god named Bentougong along with various Buddhist and Daoist deities. Bentougong is the tutelary god in the Chao Zhou (Teo Chew) district of Guangdong Province. The Teo Chew Temple also houses the Teo Chew Association, which is for people who can trace their roots to Chao Zhou. The newest Guan Di Temple is dedicated to worshipping Guan Di, a historical figure in the third century who was praised as symbolizing loyalty and righteousness and deified as the god of wealth. A statue of Confucius is among the gods as well, but stands outside the main hall. The Guan Di Temple was established under the leadership of the Hai Nam Association, which is for people who claim Hai Nan (now a province in China) as their ancestral land.

These Chinese folk religious temples mainly serve immigrants from Indo-China, including some non-Chinese. They are open every day and welcome visitors and participants of various backgrounds. They often print materials in three languages—Chinese, Vietnamese, and English. Although each temple has its own major constituents, these temples do not have a formal membership system and the same people may participate in activities of several temples. No religious monks or nuns live in such temples; some lay priests and volunteers provide ritual facilitating and maintenance services. Individuals may come to the temple in daytime to say a prayer, conduct a divination in front of a god, or simply enjoy the familiar atmosphere deprived them in the larger society. Festival celebrations are mostly based on the Chinese traditional calendar system, although adjustment to a weekend schedule is often made. Important gatherings include the Chinese New Year, the Mid-Autumn (Moon) Festival, and the birthdays of Tian Hou, Guan Di, Guan Yin, Buddha, and other gods. Buddhist sutras and Daoist scriptures sometimes can be found in these temples.

The temples in Houston all have a weekend Chinese school teaching children the Chinese language, Chinese values, cultural customs, and martial arts. Preserving Chinese culture is one of the key motives of the founders of and donators to these temples. I also observed that few American-born or American-raised young people regularly attend temple activities. Growing up in American social and cultural contexts, receiving American education in public schools, and mixing with children of other ethnic and racial backgrounds, the children of these Chinese immigrants find it hard to maintain the unstructured beliefs and practices of their parents. In the past, the attrition of such temples established in the nineteenth century was in part due to the lack of interest in this religious heritage among the second and later generations.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the continuity of these temples in their current form will depend on contin-

ual influx of immigrants more than on the maturing second and later generations.

Besides these temples, some Chinese maintain tablets of ancestors and altars of gods at home, observe *feng shui*, consult fortune-tellers, conduct divination, and practice *qigong*, all of which may be regarded as part of the traditional Chinese folk religion. *Feng shui* is a type of astrology using the concepts of yin, yang, five elements, eight *gua* (diagrams composed of three solid or broken lines), and stars to maximize harmony and minimize conflicts of a person with the surrounding environment. Practitioners consult *feng shui* masters in choosing the location of their houses and graveyards, decorating rooms, and selecting time for doing certain things, such as a wedding or opening a store. In the past few decades, *feng shui* has spread among many non-Chinese people. *Qigong* is a type of still or slow-motion meditation for the purpose of physical health, psychological peace, and spiritual enrichment. In the last two decades, hundreds of *qigong* schools have emerged and some have flourished throughout China, and a few *qigong* masters have ventured to North America. In the United States, two *qigong* schools have gained large numbers of practitioners, including some Caucasians: One is Yan Xin Qigong; the other is Falun Gong or Falun Dafa. Whereas older people and people with chronic disease usually practice *qigong*, a growing number of young and middle-aged people, including professionals who hold graduate degrees, have been attracted by Yan Xin Qigong and Falun Dafa. In July 1999, the Chinese government began to crack down on the cultic organization of Falun Gong. American and other Western media covered the events with apparent sympathy for the suppressed. This seems to have helped Falun Gong to gain non-Chinese followers in the United States. Interestingly, the spreading of *feng shui*, *qigong*, and other traditional Chinese folk religious practices has extensively used the latest technology—the Internet. A keyword search would generate a list of dozens or hundreds of Web sites and Web pages that provide a variety of information, instructions, publications, associations, and activity schedules on any of these practices. Joined with the postmodern New Age movements and information technologies, these cultic practices, as a whole, will persist even though particular groups or practices may emerge or diminish.

The nature of the folk religion makes it hard to know how widespread the folk religious practices are. Chinese folk religious temples do not have a formal membership system. Other folk religious practices are very individualistic in nature. No social surveys or polls, to my knowledge, have been designed to estimate the number of existing folk religious practitioners. Therefore, we do not know the numbers or proportions of Chinese in America who practice one type or the other of Chinese folk religion.

## Buddhism

Although joss houses built by the earlier immigrants commonly had certain Buddhist deities and some individuals probably made personal devotions to Guan Yin (Kuan Yin, or Alalokitesvara Bodhisattva), it would be far-fetched to call those temples and practices Buddhist. Chinese Buddhism in more organized and less syncretic forms appeared in America along with the coming of *xinqiao* (new immigrants).<sup>23</sup>

As described earlier, Chinese new immigrants arrived earlier than other Asian new immigrants. Following the Chinese civil war (1945–1949) and the establishment of the People's Republic of China on the mainland (1949), many people fled to Taiwan and Hong Kong, some of them later came to the United States. The Buddhist followers among *xinqiao* were different from *laoqiao* not only in socioeconomic terms, but also in their religious orientation. They tended to distance themselves from syncretic religious practices and adhere to a relatively more pure form of Buddhism. This orientation happened in part because of their higher education than *laoqiao* and in part because of the influence of the Buddhist revival movement that had been going on for decades in China. This twentieth-century Chinese Buddhist revival insisted on orthodox Buddhism (*zheng xin fojiao*), modernizing the *sangha* (clergy) and lay organization.<sup>24</sup> After arriving in America, some lay believers gathered together to socialize with each other and to exchange experiences of learning the Buddha *dharma*. Before long, some Chinese Buddhists established nonprofit organizations and began to sponsor monks and nuns to immigrate to the United States. Those monks and nuns, who often had been masters of the most active lay leaders of the *xinqiao* Buddhist groups, had similarly fled mainland China and were wandering in Hong Kong or Taiwan.

Such lay-initiated Chinese Buddhist groups began to emerge in the 1950s. The first was the Chinese Buddhist Association of Hawaii, which was formed in 1953, sponsored a monk from Hong Kong in 1956, and constructed the Hsu Yun Temple in 1965. In San Francisco, the Buddha's Universal Church began in the early 1950s and dedicated its building in 1963. Another important group in San Francisco was the Sino-American Buddhist Association, which was organized in 1959, sponsored a monk from Hong Kong in 1962, built the Gold Mountain Temple in 1970, and since then has established several branch temples on the West Coast. In New York, the first Chinese Buddhist group was the Eastern States Buddhist Association, which was started in 1962 and completed the Mahayana Temple in 1971. This association sponsored more than a dozen monks and nuns from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Burma (Myanmar), and mainland China. Most of the monks and nuns then left to start their own groups, including the China Buddhist Association, the Buddhist Association of the United

States, the Eastern Buddhist Association, the Young Men's Buddhist Association of America, and the Grace Gratitude Buddhist Temple, in New York or other places.

Following the steps of pioneer monks and nuns, more monks and nuns came to America to gather their own followers. In 1972, a nun from Hong Kong, after traveling through major cities in North America, finally settled in Los Angeles and started the Western American Buddhist Association, the first Chinese Buddhist group in Los Angeles. Five years later, a monk from Taiwan, after visiting a New York temple for a while, formed the Buddhist Ortho-Creed Association in Los Angeles. In the late 1970s, Buddha Light Mountain Sect, under Hsing Yun, came to Los Angeles. After ten years of hard efforts, it constructed the grandiose Hsi Lai Temple, the largest and best-known Chinese temple in America.<sup>25</sup> In 1979, a monk from Taiwan, after spending seven years in New York, went out to explore Boston, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and finally settled in Houston and started the Texas Buddhist Association, the first Chinese Buddhist group in Texas. In the Northwest, a Taiwanese immigrant, Mr. Lu Shengyan, came to Seattle in the mid-1980s and founded his True Buddha Sect. Today there are more than a dozen True Buddha Sect branch temples in several metropolises in North America.

Overall, by the end of the 1990s, there were about 120 to 150 Chinese Buddhist groups (temples, associations, and centers) in the United States. Most of them are concentrated in the largest metropolitan areas of New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Houston, whereas small groups are scattered in smaller cities of many states and university campuses. These Chinese Buddhist groups share three general characteristics: They tend to be organizationally independent, theologically (Buddhologically) reformed, and institutionally ecumenical. First, most of the groups are locally organized and nondenominational. Many are lay organized small groups. For those well-established ones with a temple building, the resident abbot may be the heir of certain sectarian lineage, such as some Chan, Pure Land, or Tian Tai schools, but the temple does not belong to a hierarchical organization. On the other hand, some charismatic monks who have been able to gather followers in several places consequently have established several temples and centers under their names. The most successful Chinese monk may have been Hsuan Hua (1918–1995) of the Sino-American Buddhist Association. His teaching was a mixture of Chan, Pure Land, and Tian Tai schools. He led his followers and built the Gold Mountain Temple in San Francisco (1970), the Gold Wheel Temple in Los Angeles (1975), the Ten Thousands of Buddhas City in northern California (1976), the Gold Summit Temple in Seattle (1984), and the Gold Buddha Temple in Vancouver (1984).

Second, most Chinese Buddhist groups follow the reformed Buddhism that emphasizes "Buddhism in the World" (*ren jian fojiao*, or humanistic Buddhism) and/or Orthodox Buddhism (*zheng xin fojiao*).<sup>26</sup> One important exception is the True Buddha Sect, which has obvious elements of Mahayana Buddhism, Tibetan Tantric Buddhism, Daoism, and Chinese folk religion. The syncretic nature of the True Buddha Sect makes other Chinese Buddhist groups refuse to recognize it as an orthodox Buddhism, even though many groups themselves have various degrees of syncretism.

Third, most of the Chinese Buddhist groups in the United States are ecumenical with other major Buddhist traditions. Unlike Japanese Buddhists that have clear and distinct denominations or sects, Chinese Buddhists commonly practice both Chan and Pure Land Buddhism and frequently adopt Tian Tai and other traditions as well. Although some groups clearly emphasize one tradition over others, they are commonly open toward others, including Theravada and Varjana Buddhist traditions. For example, Fo Kuang Shan denomination and local groups such as the Texas Buddhist Association have been active in organizing and participating in ecumenical Buddhist activities.

While ecumenical in the religious sense, Chinese Buddhism in America is also making great efforts to cross ethnic boundaries. As a traditional religion brought in by immigrants, Chinese Buddhism continues primarily to serve Chinese immigrants. However, some non-Chinese, especially middle-class Caucasians, have been drawn into a few well-established Chinese temples under renowned monks. These temples, such as the Hsi Lai Temple of the Fo Kuang Shan and the Jade Buddha Temple of the Texas Buddhist Association, in responding to Euro-American inquiries, provide English instructions for meditation and sutra study. The most remarkable success in this regard was made by the Sino-American Buddhist Association under Hsuan Hua, which later turned into the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association. "By 1971, more than two-thirds of [Hsuan Hua's] disciples were Caucasians. . . . In 1972 at the Gold Mountain Monastery there were ten fully ordained monks and nuns—all but one of them Caucasian."<sup>27</sup>

However, the changes of this and other groups are not straight-line with a definite direction. The Dharma Realm Buddhist Association has not yet turned away from immigrants to become an American Buddhist group. In fact, after changing from a Chinese immigrant group in the 1960s to a mostly Euro-American group in the 1970s, it has changed back to a predominantly Chinese group in the 1990s. Euro-American monks and nuns now serve a majority of Chinese immigrant Buddhists.<sup>28</sup> In this and other Chinese Buddhist temples, Chinese and Euro-American believers interact on various levels. Although these temples regularly provide

two services, one in English and one in Chinese, and the two services often differ in format and content, I find that they cannot be described as “parallel congregations” that lack interaction with each other.<sup>29</sup> For example, in a Chinese Buddhist temple in Houston, most of the active lay believers and leaders are middle-class professionals. The English-speaking immigrant lay leaders are heavily involved in the English ministry targeting Euro-Americans and American-born Chinese. Meanwhile, Euro-Americans are brought in to play active roles in combined services during important festivals.<sup>30</sup>

Several researchers have observed that the proselytizing efforts of the Chinese Buddhist temples are generally toward Euro-Americans besides Chinese immigrants. For example, Irene Lin finds that “Hsi Lai [Temple] strongly encourages and supports the joining of European American members,” but pays little attention to attracting people of other Asian ethnic groups.<sup>31</sup> Having observed the same pattern at a Chinese Buddhist temple in Houston, Yang and Ebaugh suggest a theoretical interpretation: When an immigrant religion (Chinese Buddhism, in this case) changes from a majority religion in the country of origin to a minority religion in the United States, the desire for establishing American identity is a strong driving force for converting the perceived mainstream Americans—middle-class Caucasians.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, in contrast to the great efforts of attracting Caucasians, the Houston temple has done little to integrate Chinese immigrants from different origins. More than 80 percent of temple members are from Taiwan and some are from Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. Very few mainland Chinese, the largest stream of Chinese immigration in the 1990s, have attended this temple regularly. The temple puts more resources on proselytizing among Caucasians than mainland Chinese or other Asians. In comparison, Chinese Christian churches in the United States have been very active in converting and integrating Chinese from various origins, including mainland Chinese.<sup>33</sup>

The well-established Buddhist temples often have a Chinese school for teaching children the Chinese language, traditional values, and cultural customs. However, I have observed that the participation of the second generation in these temples is limited. Many Buddhist immigrant parents, who I interviewed in Houston, do not insist on their children becoming Buddhist practitioners. While the most active lay leaders strongly encourage their children to go to the temple, many parents place moral and cultural education above religious education. They bring their children to the temple to learn Chinese language, moral values, and behavioral proprieties. Regarding religious practice and belief, these parents frequently say that depends on each child’s own karma. In the Houston temple, the Chinese school is large, with about three hundred students registered for weekend classes in Chinese language and culture. However, very few



youths and young adults attend the religious services of the temple. Overall, most of the regular participants in temple activities are middle-aged and older people, with a clear majority (60 to 70 percent) being women. At this time, with limited observation of the second generation in Chinese Buddhist temples, it is hard to predict whether the temples established by the immigrants will succeed in passing the religion onto their American-born and American-raised children.

## **Christianity**

The history of Chinese Christianity in America is almost as long as that of Chinese immigration.<sup>34</sup> However, unlike European immigrants who transplanted their Protestantism and Catholicism to the New World, earlier Chinese Christian churches were missions started by American denominations.<sup>35</sup> Since the 1960s, however, new Chinese immigrants have established hundreds of churches by themselves.

Christianity is not a traditional Chinese religion. Its introduction to China has met many cultural, social, and political obstacles.<sup>36</sup> The first significant impact of Christianity on China was not felt until the sixteenth century when Jesuit missionaries found substantial success in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. Later, Catholicism was banned by the emperor, and Chinese Catholics were persecuted. Protestants began their missions in China in the early nineteenth century. However, their close relationships and simultaneous arrival with imperialists and opium traders caused great resentment by the Chinese people. Consequently, Christianity became stigmatized as the "alien" religion. "One more Christian, one less Chinese" was a common sarcasm visited on Chinese converts. For most Chinese, both elite and ordinary people, Christianity and Chineseness became incompatible, both culturally and politically. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, all foreign missionaries were expelled and the practice of Christianity was restricted. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), all churches were closed and all religions were completely banned for many years. After fleeing from the Communist mainland, some missionaries moved to Taiwan and Hong Kong to continue their missions, especially among people that fled from the mainland. Since the 1950s, there have been some Christian revivals in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Nevertheless, Christians have remained a small minority in both Taiwan and Hong Kong, composing around 5 percent of the population at the maximum.<sup>37</sup> The first Chinese Christian church in the United States was established in San Francisco in 1853 by a medical missionary, William Speer, who had been in China with the support of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. Four Chinese who had been con-

verted in China became the charter members of this first Chinese church. Other denominations then started their own missions for Chinese laborers: Methodists in 1868, and Baptists, Congregationalists, and Episcopalians separately in 1870. By 1892, 11 denominations established 10 Chinese churches (including 3 in Canada), 10 Chinese Christian associations, and 271 Chinese Sunday schools and missions in 31 states.<sup>38</sup> Not surprisingly, the pastors of all the churches were Caucasian,<sup>39</sup> Chinese converts could serve only as assistants to white missionaries. During the decades of the Chinese exclusion acts (1882–1943), and in line with the exclusionist sentiments and policies toward the Chinese in the United States, these mission churches were treated mostly as extensions of China missions.<sup>40</sup> The goal was to Christianize the heathen Chinese and send them back to China to help American missionaries there. These early missions were not very successful in terms of converting the Chinese. It was clear that, as in the case of nineteenth-century China, the ratio of converts to the whole population was minuscule.<sup>41</sup> This was in part because of the anti-Chinese social environment and in part because of the missionaries' racist, nativist, and paternalist attitudes toward the Chinese.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, these churches provided a place for Chinese immigrants to learn English, to learn American values and lifestyles, to receive social services, and to meet non-Chinese Americans.<sup>43</sup>

In the first half of the twentieth century, most Chinese churches were still missions aided and supervised by American denominations. However, despite social, political, and economic hardships, some of these Chinese mission churches gained financial and leadership independence within the denominations, and some Chinese Christians formed a few nondenominational independent churches. By 1952, there were sixty-six Chinese Protestant churches in the United States: Forty-seven were denominational, five were interdenominational (sponsored by several denominations or a council of churches), and fourteen were independent of any denominational body.<sup>44</sup> During this period, a majority of Chinese church ministers were born in China. Most churches were small: The average membership size was 155. Some churches began to grow quickly after World War II.

Since the 1950s, the number of Chinese churches has rapidly increased, reaching seven hundred by 1994. Table 3.2 clearly shows this trend of fast growth in the number of Chinese churches in the United States.

In contrast to earlier Chinese churches, which were missions sponsored by Euro-Americans for the Chinese, most of the new Chinese churches were founded by Chinese immigrants themselves. Beginning in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Chinese students studying in American universities formed many campus Bible study groups (BSGs). As many

**Table 3.2 The Growth of Chinese Protestant Churches in the United States, 1853–2000**

Year	Number of Churches
1853	1
1890	7
1931	44
1952	66
1979	366
1984	523
1994	700
2000	819

Sources: Pang, Wing Ning, "Build Up His Church for My Kinsmen's Sake: A Study of the North American Chinese Churches" (paper presented to the North American Congress of the Chinese Evangelicals, June 23–28, 1980, Pasadena, California); Pang, Wing Ning, "The Chinese and the Chinese Church in America: A Preliminary Report for the Asian Ethnic Committee" (paper presented to the National Convocation on Evangelicizing Ethnic America, April 14–18, 1985, Houston, Texas); Lau, Yuet Shing, *Meizhou Huaqiao Jiaohui* (Chinese Churches in America) (San Francisco: The Convention of Chinese Christian Churches, 1933); AFC (Ambassadors for Christ), *Directory of Chinese Churches, Bible Study Groups and Christian Organizations in North America* (Paradise, Pa.: Ambassadors for Christ, Inc., 1984, 1994, 2000).

students adjusted to permanent resident status under the new immigration act of 1965, many BSGs later evolved into churches. More churches then came to exist through efforts of church planting and schisms.

Besides the rapid growth, contemporary Chinese churches in America have two general characteristics: They are theologically conservative and organizationally independent. On the West Coast, where earlier mission churches for the Chinese are concentrated, many Chinese churches are affiliated with mainline American denominations. For example, in 1996 there were 158 Chinese churches in the San Francisco and Bay areas. Among them, 10 were Presbyterian churches (PCUSA), 7 were United Methodist churches, 6 were Episcopal churches, 5 were American Baptist churches, and 4 were Lutheran churches (Missouri Synod). However, a great number of new churches established by Chinese immigrants are independent, and those new churches that do affiliate with American denominations tend to favor those denominations that are theologically conservative and organizationally less centralized.<sup>45</sup> Nationally, about half of Chinese churches have no affiliation with American denominations; denominational churches tend to maintain a high degree of congregational independence. The largest group of Chinese churches belongs to the Southern Baptist Convention, which claimed about 150 Chinese churches in 1995. The second largest is the Christian and Missionary Alliance with about 60 Chinese churches in the United States.<sup>46</sup>

In traditional Chinatowns, Chinese Christian churches experienced tensions and conflicts with other Chinese immigrant organizations. For

example, Melford S. Weiss notes that in "Valley City" in California, where the first Christian missions for the Chinese started in the 1850s, Chinese churches did not have representation in the Chinese Benevolent Association in the 1930s or in 1970.<sup>47</sup> In New York City, a Chinese Christian minister, Reverend Lee To, once served as the chairman of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in 1919 through 1921. Under his influence, the members of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association decided to cast out the joss (their idol) from their council hall.<sup>48</sup> However, an anthropological study focusing on various voluntary associations in New York's Chinatown does not even mention Christian churches.<sup>49</sup> Among the studies of Chinatown communities, Betty Lee Sung unusually devotes a full chapter to positive influences of Christian missions in the Chinese community, which starts with the Chinese Community Church of Washington, D.C.<sup>50</sup> She has no discussion of how well the Chinese church was integrated in the power structure of other Chinatowns. Because of the short history of Chinatown in Washington, D.C., traditional Chinatown organizations had a limited influence. The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, of which the Chinese Community Church was one of the founding organizations, was formed only in 1955. A Chinese Christian church so integral in the Chinatown community was not common in traditional Chinatowns. Although the number of Chinese Christian churches has increased rapidly in the last four decades, their influence in the ethnic community is still limited. One reason for this may be the extreme conservative theology in most Chinese churches, which calls for exclusive ministry of evangelization and refuses to cooperate with non-Christian organizations to work on social and political issues.

In many Chinese churches, a majority of immigrant members are adult converts from non-Christian family backgrounds. In contemporary pluralist American society, why have so many Chinese immigrants converted to conservative Protestantism? I find that at least four factors are important.<sup>51</sup> First, Third World experiences of the immigrants before coming to America and immigration experiences as racial minorities in the United States have intensified the desire for religious interpretations about the meaning of life and world events. Many Chinese were ruthlessly uprooted from China, then suffered difficulties as displaced persons and as immigrants in this strange land. Facing the rapidly changing and increasingly relativized society, many people longed for order, purpose, and rules. Second, these Chinese immigrants find conservative Protestantism attractive because it proclaims absoluteness, love, and certainty. The Chinese church serves as a haven for the homeless sojourners. Third, in the process of modernization, Chinese cultural traditions have been broken down. Meanwhile, these immigrants continue to cherish many traditional values, especially Confucian moral values. In

conservative Christianity, these Chinese find a good match for their cherished social-ethical values. Fourth, the Christian identity also provides a universal and absolute ground on which these Chinese could selectively reject or accept certain cultural traditions, either Chinese or American. Overall, their construction and attainment of evangelical Protestant identity in the independent ethnic church have important contextual factors of modern China and America.

Becoming Christian and American does not mean that these Chinese immigrants are giving up their Chinese identity. While maintaining the universalism of the Christian faith or the inclusiveness of all peoples within the faith, these Chinese Christians also claim their Chinese cultural heritage.<sup>52</sup> They have made efforts to differentiate Chinese nonreligious traditions from religious ones and selectively preserve nonreligious traditional values, rituals, and symbols. For example, they celebrate the Chinese New Year, but without offering to the ancestors. Many accept and praise some Confucian values and philosophical Daoist notions, but reject religious Daoism and Buddhism. Meanwhile, the church helps American-born Chinese (ABCs) to maintain a Chinese cultural identity while facilitating their selective assimilation into American society.<sup>53</sup> The Chinese school is a common feature of contemporary Chinese Christian churches in the United States. In many metropolitan areas, it was often a Chinese Christian church that started the first Chinese school. The Chinese church also creates a generally favorable atmosphere for ABCs to learn the Chinese language and traditional values that are perceived as compatible with their evangelical Christian beliefs, including respecting parents, older people, and those in authority; preserving harmonious relationships; and being humble about oneself in talking with others. The church teaches thrift despite material prosperity; proclaims strict moral codes regarding smoking, drinking, and sexuality; and endorses stable marriages and intact nuclear families. The moral education of ABCs in the immigrant church is quite successful. Some common morally charged issues in American society, such as drugs, teenage pregnancy, and homosexuality, have rarely occurred among the young people in Chinese Christian churches. On the other hand, like the Korean churches described by Kelley Chong, the Chinese church also enforces gender- and age-based hierarchies.<sup>54</sup>

Generally speaking, Chinese immigrant churches have been successful in socializing the ABC children into Christianity. Through Sunday school classes and fellowship activities for children from kindergarten to college, Christianity often naturally becomes part of their lives. On entering college, away from immediate oversight by their parents, ABCs growing up in Chinese churches take divergent paths. Because of their religious indoctrination, few quit the faith or completely stop attending

church.<sup>55</sup> Some remain committed to Chinese Christian groups. Indeed, Chinese Christian fellowships are noticeably active on many university campuses.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, believing that the Christian faith transcends all worldly boundaries, many college ABCs take initiatives to explore and experiment with various nonethnic churches and groups. Many become active participants in the Campus Crusade for Christ, the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, the Navigators, or independently organized Bible study groups and prayer meetings. However, the social reality of ethnic and racial classifications in pluralist American society bounce many ABC college graduates back to either the ethnic Chinese Christian community or to the pan-Asian American Christian church.<sup>57</sup>

In the last decade or so, some ABCs have joined other Asian American Christians to establish Asian American churches in metropolitan areas, especially on the West Coast but also in other metropolitan areas. Leaders of these churches claim that they are *truly* Asian American churches because the church membership is often a mixture of American-born Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, and Southeast Asians. These churches are monolingual in English and consciously target descendants of various Asian immigrants, especially East Asians. Reading their Internet Web pages and discussions on the listserv list of "Chinese American Christians," I find several common reasons given for establishing such churches. These include the facts that (1) these church members grew up in an ethnic (e.g., Chinese or Korean) church but want to speak only English in a less ethnically focused environment; (2) as Asians, they all look similar with yellow skin and black hair; (3) they share some residual Confucian or Asian values; (4) they have had similar experiences of being subtly or blatantly discriminated against by others in the larger society; and (5) some are children of inter-Asian marriages who find it difficult to remain in a church comprised of one particular ethnic group.<sup>58</sup> The number of such churches is still small, probably about two dozen at this time. How identities are formed and evolve in these churches remains to be observed.

## **Reflections on Assimilation, Ethnicity, and Transnationalism**

Amid the cultural pluralism of the late twentieth-century American society, contemporary Chinese American religions have become increasingly diverse. Three traditions remain dominant: Chinese Buddhism has made significant advancements since the 1950s; some traditional folk religious practices have revived since the late 1970s; and Christianity has grown rapidly in the last four decades and has become the

most practiced institutional religion among the Chinese in America. This religious diversity is associated with the heterogeneity of post-1965 Chinese immigrants who have come from various societies in several waves.

Overall, contemporary Chinese immigrants assimilate quickly into American society in cultural, socioeconomic, and structural aspects. Many Chinese have received American college and graduate education, work in companies of advanced technology and governmental agencies, and live in ethnically mixed suburbs. Actually, because of economic and cultural globalization, Americanization of cultural values and lifestyles often takes place before immigration and accelerates upon immigrants' arrival. Before coming to America, many Chinese had learned English in schools and had been exposed to some aspects of American culture through the mass media, Hollywood movies, and direct contacts with Americans visiting or working in Asia. Many people have adopted some American behaviors and lifestyles without immigrating to the United States. Upon arriving in the United States, universities and the media further facilitate their cultural assimilation and structural integration in American society.

However, in their religious practice, many Chinese immigrants stay in ethnic congregations. Actually, structural assimilation in their public lives—school, work, and politics—does not necessarily reduce their desire to congregate with fellow Chinese in their private, religious lives. It may, in fact, heighten such desire. As a home away from home, the ethnic religious congregation provides a familiar environment in which people can speak their native languages, eat ethnic foods, participate in shared rituals and cultural activities, and meet their nostalgia needs. As these needs are met and religious meaning is found, they can be better prepared or armed for interacting with others in public spheres of school, work, and politics. In other words, assimilation and ethnicity are not exclusive of each other. For Chinese immigrants in Chinese religious communities, many hold adhesive identities that add Chinese, American, and religious identities together.<sup>59</sup>

Transnational networks between the immigrants and the origin countries are another important factor in immigrants' identity construction. Because of the advancements in communication and transportation technologies, contemporary Chinese immigrants can, and often do, maintain close ties across the Pacific. Chinese Buddhist and folk religious temples import construction materials from China to build authentic Chinese temples in America. Chinese Christians and Buddhists frequently exchange visitors, preachers, ideas, materials, and resources between the United States and China. The religious changes in the Chinese American community have important impacts on the religious communities in Chinese

societies, and religious changes in the Far East similarly influence the religious lives of Chinese Americans. Within this context of contemporary transnationalism, complete assimilation by giving up Chinese identity is neither possible nor necessary.

## Notes

1. John Dart, "Poll Studies: Chinese Americans, Religion," *Los Angeles Times*, July 5, 1997, B5. The report is based on a survey of 773 ethnic Chinese in six counties in southern California, which was conducted in May 1997. Among the respondents, 19 percent said they were Protestant, 7 percent answered simply Christian, and 6 percent said they were Roman Catholic. At the same time, 20 percent identified themselves as Buddhists, and 44 percent claimed no religion. An unpublished survey of Chinese Americans in the Seattle area in the 1980s indicates similar patterns. The General Social Survey has too small a sample of ethnic Chinese (total  $N = 78$  in the 1972–1994 cumulative data) for accurate estimates. Nonetheless, it is interesting to list its numbers here: 27 percent Chinese in the sample were Protestants, 22 percent Catholics, and only 14 percent other religions (including Buddhism). It is important to note that Chinese Protestant leaders tend to put much lower estimates of Christians among ethnic Chinese. Based on counting heads during typical Sunday services in Chinese Protestant churches in the San Francisco area, Rev. James Chuck concludes that Chinese youth and adult participation in Protestant churches is probably more near the 5 percent range (Chuck, *An Exploratory Study of the Growth of Chinese Protestant Congregations from 1950 to Mid-1996 in Five Bay Area Counties* [Berkeley, Calif.: American Baptist Seminary of the West, 1996], 15). Wing Ning Pang, an elder at a Chinese church in the Los Angeles area, gave a generous estimate of 10 percent of Protestants in the Chinese population in the United States (Wing Ning Pang, "Build Up His Church for My Kinsmen's Sake: A Study of the North American Chinese Churches" [paper presented to the North American Congress of the Chinese Evangelicals, June 23–28, 1980, Pasadena, California], 36.B). These low estimates include people who regularly attend Chinese churches every week. However, not every active church member is able to attend church every Sunday, and some Chinese Christians attend non-Chinese churches.

2. See Fenggang Yang, *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); Lingbo Yu, *Mei Jia Huaren Shehui Fojiao Fazhan Shi* (The Development of Buddhism among North American Chinese Communities) (Taipei: Xinwenfeng Press, 1996). In his "Chinese Buddhism in America: Identity and Practice" (in *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998], 17), Stuart Chandler also claims that "there are approximately 125 Chinese Buddhist organizations in the United States."

3. Statistics of Chinese Christians in China are hard to come by. In *Christianity in the People's Republic of China* (revised ed. [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986], 78), Thompson Brown comes up with numbers of 936,000 baptized Protestants,



3,274,740 baptized Catholics, 600,000 Protestant catechumens, and 194,712 Catholic catechumens, totaling 5,005,452 in 1949. This total would comprise about 1 percent of the total Chinese population of 450 million at that time. Overall, by 1949, when the Chinese Communist Party took power in mainland China, it had become evident that few of the Chinese people were likely to become Christians and that the missionaries' long-continued efforts, if measured in numbers of converts, had failed. See John King Fairbank, ed., *The Missionary Enterprises in China and America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), 1. Since the late 1970s, Christianity has been the fastest growing religion in mainland China, but there is no informed and consistent estimate. The Chinese government-sanctioned statistics report about 4 million Catholics and 10 million Protestants, which would comprise about 1 percent of the total population of 1.3 billion. Some Christian organizations outside China claim that there are as many as 10 million Catholics and 60 million Protestants, which would be about 5 percent of the population. In Taiwan and Hong Kong, Christians account for about 5 percent of the population at the maximum. See Gail Law, ed., *Chinese Churches Handbook* (Hong Kong: Chinese Coordination Center of World Evangelism, 1981); Allen J. Swanson, *Taiwan Jiaohui Mianmian Guan* (Aspects of Churches in Taiwan: Retrospective and Prospective in 1980) (Taipei: Taiwan Jiaohui Zengzhang Cujin Hui, 1981).

4. Some findings and analyses in this chapter have already been included in the following publications written by Fenggang Yang: "Chinese Conversion to Evangelical Christianity: The Importance of Social and Cultural Contexts," *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review* 59 (1998): 237–57; "Tenacious Unity in a Contentious Community: Cultural and Religious Dynamics in a Chinese Christian Church," in *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration*, ed. Stephen Warner and Judith G. Wittner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 333–61; "ABC and XYZ: Religious, Ethnic and Racial Identities of the New Second Generation Chinese in Christian Churches," *Amerasia Journal* 25 (1999): 89–114; *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); "Hsi Nan Buddhist Temple: Seeking to Americanize," in *Religion and the New Immigrants: Continuity and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations*, ed. Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Chafetz (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2000), 67–88; "The Chinese Gospel Church: The Sinicization of Christianity," in *Religion and the New Immigrants*, 89–108; "Chinese American Religions," in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary American Religion*, ed. Wade Clark Roof (New York: Macmillan Reference, 2000).

5. Betty Lee Sung, *Mountain of Gold: The Story of the Chinese in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1967); Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States Since 1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988); Sucheng Chan, ed., *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese in America, 1882–1943* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); Kevin Scott Wong and Sucheng Chan, eds., *Claiming America: Constructing Chinese American Identities during the Exclusion Era* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); Thomas W. Chinn, ed., *A History of the Chinese in California: A Syllabus* (San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America, 1969); Victor G. Nee and Brett de Bary Nee, *Longtime California: A Documentary Study of an American Chinatown* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973); Bernard P. Wong, *Chinatown: Economic Adaptation and Ethnic Identity of the Chinese* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982).

6. Several special immigration laws have contributed to the accelerating increase of Chinese immigrants. They include the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975 (many Indo-Chinese refugees were ethnic Chinese), the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 (which treats Taiwan as a chargeable country with an annual quota of 20,000), the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (13,752 Chinese in the United States were granted legalization), the Immigration Act of 1990 (which has raised the quota for Hong Kong from 5,000 to 10,000 per year), and the Chinese Students Protection Act of 1992 (52,425 mainland Chinese in the United States adjusted their status as immigrants).

7. See Wong, *Chinatown*; Pyong Gap Min, ed., *Asian Americans: Contemporary Trends and Issues* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1995).

8. See Peter Kwong, *The New Chinatown* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987); Jan Lin, *Reconstructing Chinatown: Ethnic Enclave, Global Change* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

9. According to Chinn (*History of the Chinese in California*, 28–29), approximately 6,000 Chinese women came under the War Brides Act of 1945 and the G.I. Fiancées Act of 1946; 3,465 stranded Chinese students, visitors, and seamen adjusted status under the Displaced Persons Act of 1948; 2,777 Chinese adjusted status under the Refugee Relief Act of 1953; and the Refugee Escapee Act of 1957 and the Presidential Directive in 1962 permitted 15,111 Chinese refugees in Hong Kong to enter the United States. Also, the 1970 *Annual Report* of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (table 6E) reports a total of 17,630 refugees from China between 1946 and 1966.

10. Wong, Bernard P., "Hong Kong Immigrants in San Francisco," in *Reluctant Exiles?: Migration from Hong Kong and the New Overseas Chinese*, ed. Ronald Skeldon (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), 237.

11. While the written characters and basic grammars are the same across Chinese dialects, the numerous Chinese dialects are often mutually unintelligible.

12. Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 1996).

13. Stanford M. Lyman, *Chinese Americans* (New York: Random House, 1974); Lynn Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor: A History of the Chinese Diaspora* (New York: Kodansha International, 1994); Edgar Wickberg, "An Overseas Chinese Adaptive Organization, Past and Present," in *Reluctant Exiles?*, ed. Skeldon, 68–84.

14. Actually, there were complicated reasons. Bernard P. Wong pointed out that identifying with Taiwan had many advantages. In so doing, one could avoid being labeled a Communist and gain much prestige. Leaders of the old overseas were invited to visit Taiwan and were decorated by high-ranking officials in Taiwan. In addition, pro-Taiwan Chinese community leaders often got better value on export/import merchandise and were able to obtain permits and visas for business activities more readily. But it is also important to note that some old overseas Chinese suffered from the revolutionary activities of the Chinese Communists. They and their relatives suffered from the various purges, land reform, and other movements in China. Some had been imprisoned and later had the opportunity to escape to America. These old immigrants, needless to say, are anti-Communist (*Chinatown*, 77).

15. See, for example, Wong, *Chinatown*, 17–21; Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 48–49.

## CHAPTER THREE: YANG

16. M.S. Weiss, *Valley City: A Chinese Community in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman, 1974); Wong, *Chinatown*.

17. For example, Chinese members are the majority at a Mormon Ward in the Washington, D.C., area. Mormon missionaries—often handsome young men speaking fluent Chinese—are very active in proselytizing among Chinese immigrants. Overall, however, very few Chinese have become Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, or Christian Scientists.

18. Charles Caldwell Dobie, *San Francisco Chinatown* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1936), 289–90.

19. Mariann Kaye Wells, *Chinese Temples in California* (master's thesis, University of California, 1962).

20. Dobie, *San Francisco Chinatown*, 287.

21. A Tian Hou Temple, devoted to the Heavenly Queen, closed down in the 1950s, but reopened in 1975. In the 1990s, it serves a small community of Cantonese-speaking Chinese. See S. Chandler, "Chinese Buddhism in America," 13–30.

22. Chandler, "Chinese Buddhism in America," 17.

23. Chinese Buddhism may also include Tibetan Buddhism. However, until very recently, there have been very few ethnic Tibetans in the United States. The lama Buddhist centers and temples in the United States are mostly patronized by Euro-Americans. See Amy Lavine, "Tibetan Buddhism in America: The Development of American Vajrayana," in *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 129–46.

24. See Holmes Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968).

25. See Irene Lin, "Journey to the Far West: Chinese Buddhism in America," *Amerasia Journal* 22 (1996): 107–37.

26. See Welch, *Buddhist Revival*.

27. Emma McCloy Layman, *Buddhism in America* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1976), 155.

28. See S. Chandler, "Chinese Buddhism in America."

29. Paul Numrich, *Old Wisdom in the New World: Americanization in Two Immigrant Theravada Buddhist Temples* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996).

30. Yang, "Hsi Nan Chinese Buddhist Temple."

31. See Lin, "Journey to the Far West," 120; and S. Chandler, "Chinese Buddhism in America."

32. Fenggang Yang and Helen Rose Ebaugh, "Religion and Ethnicity among New Immigrants: The Impact of Majority/Minority Status in Home and Host Countries," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41 (2001): 367–78.

33. See Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*.

34. The discussion here focuses on Protestantism. There are at least a dozen Chinese Catholic churches in the United States, and some can trace their history to the early twentieth century. However, little research has been done on Chinese American Catholicism. I mention Chinese Catholics several times in my book *Chinese Christians in America*.

35. Yuet Shing Lau, *Meizhou Huaqiao Jiaohui* (Chinese Churches in America) (San Francisco: The Convention of Chinese Christian Churches, 1933); Horace R. Cayton and Anne O. Lively, *The Chinese in the United States and the Chinese Christian Church* (New York: Bureau of Research and Survey, National Council of the

Churches of Christ in the United States, 1955); Wesley Woo, *Protestant Work among the Chinese in the San Francisco Area, 1850–1920* (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California, 1983); Timothy Tseng, *Ministry at Arms-Length: Asian Americans in the Racial Ideology of American Mainline Protestants, 1882–1952* (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1994).

36. See Julia Ching, *Chinese Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993); Ralph R. Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ: A History of the Gospel in Chinese* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986).

37. See Gail Law, *Chinese Churches Handbook*; Allen J. Swanson, *Taiwan Jiaohui Mianmian Guan* (Aspects of Churches in Taiwan).

38. Ira M. Condit, *The Chinaman as We See Him and Fifty Years of Work for Him* (Chicago: Missionary Campaign Library, 1900).

39. See Cayton and Lively, *Chinese in the United States*, 41; Woo, "Theological Themes."

40. Wesley Woo, "Chinese Protestants in the San Francisco Bay Area," in *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese in America, 1882–1943*, ed. Sucheng Chan (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 213–45.

41. Woo, "Chinese Protestants," 217.

42. Woo, "Theological Themes"; Karl Fung, *The Dragon Pilgrims: A Historical Study of a Chinese-American Church* (San Diego, Calif.: Providence Price, 1989); Tseng, *Ministry at Arms-Length*.

43. James W. Loewen, *The Mississippi Chinese: Between Black and White* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971); Weiss, *Valley City*; Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor*; Wickberg, "Overseas Chinese Adaptive Organizations."

44. Lau, *Meizhou Huaqiao Jiaohui* (Chinese Churches in America); Cayton and Lively, *Chinese in the United States*.

45. See James Chuck, *An Exploratory Study of the Growth of Chinese Protestant Congregations from 1950 to Mid-1996 in Five Bay Area Counties: San Francisco, San Mateo, Contra Costa, Alameda, and Santa Clara* (Berkeley, Calif.: American Baptist Seminary of the West, 1996); Sharon Wai-Man Chan, *The Dynamics of Expansion of the Chinese Churches in the Los Angeles Basin* (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, 1996); Wing Ning Pang, "The Chinese American Ministry," in *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches, 1995*, ed. Kenneth B. Bedell (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1995), 10–18.

46. See Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*; Yang, "Why Conservative Ethnic Churches Are Growing: The Case of Chinese Protestant Churches in the United States," Center for Immigration Research Working Paper Series, University of Houston, 1997.

47. Weiss, *Valley City*.

48. Julia I. Hsuan Chen, "The Chinese Community in New York: A Study in Their Cultural Adjustment 1920–1940," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., American University, Washington, D.C. Reprinted in 1974 by R and E Research Associates, San Francisco, 1941), 43. Him Mark Lai, *Cong huaqiao dao huaren* (From Huaqiao to Huaren: Social History of the Chinese in the United States in the Twentieth Century) (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 1992), 143.

49. Chia-ling Kuo, *Social and Political Change in New York's Chinatown: The Role of Voluntary Associations* (New York: Praeger, 1977).

50. Sung, *Mountain of Gold*.

## CHAPTER THREE: YANG

51. For a detailed analysis, see Yang, "Chinese Conversion to Evangelical Christianity."

52. For more detailed description, see Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, ch. 5.

53. Those who immigrated to the United States as children with their parents are often referred to as American-raised Chinese (ARCs). Because of their similarities with ABCs in their identity construction, in this paper I use American-born Chinese, or ABCs, to mean the overall second generation of Chinese immigrants.

54. Kelly H. Chong, "What It Means to Be Christian: The Role of Religion in the Construction of Ethnic Identity and Boundary among Second-Generation Korean Americans," *Sociology of Religion* 59 (1998): 259–86.

55. This claim is based on my interviews conducted within midsized and large Chinese churches that have had good English ministries. Therefore, my findings may not apply to those ABCs who grew up in the churches established before World War II or small churches without effective youth ministries. Nonetheless, I think that Helen Lee's assertion of the "silent exodus" of second-generation young adults from Asian immigrant churches may be exaggerated. It may serve the purpose of alarming ministers who fear losing adherents. Moreover, Lee may overgeneralize second-generation Korean Christian experiences as East Asian Christian experiences. There are some estimates about the high dropout rates of Korean young people from immigrant churches (see Karen Chai, "Competing for the Second Generation: English-Language Ministry at a Korean Protestant Church," in *Gatherings in Diaspora*, ed. Warner and Wittner, 300), but, as far as I know, no informed estimates are available about the dropout rates of ABCs from Chinese churches. Some Korean American scholars, according to Karen Chai, observe that most grown-up second-generation Korean Americans do not attend their parents' churches. But this does not mean that they do not attend *any* church. Some well-assimilated second-generation Asian American Christians choose to attend nonethnic or multiethnic churches. In the 1990s, some pan-Asian American churches that specifically target English-speaking Asian Americans have emerged.

56. A quick Internet search of student organizations at various universities would find many active Chinese Christian groups. Cf. Rudy V. Busto, "The Gospel According to the Model Minority?: Hazarding an Interpretation of Asian American Evangelical College Students," *Amerasia Journal* 22 (1996): 133–47.

57. See Yang, "ABC and XYZ."

58. Russell Jeung has completed his dissertation in sociology, *A New People Coming Together: The Emergence of Asian American Pan-Ethnic Congregations*, at the University of California. His study is on churches in the San Francisco area, and Fong's reflection is based on his ministries in the Los Angeles area. For a reflection on pan-Asian American churches from a minister's perspective, see Ken Uyeda Fong, *Pursuing the Pearl: A Comprehensive Resource for Multi-Asian Ministry* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1999).

59. See Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, ch. 6. My interviews with Chinese American Buddhists find that they are also constructing adhesive identities—Chinese, American, and Buddhist—although the emphasis and strategies of identity construction differ from those of Chinese American Christians.