

FROM ALIENATED TO CONNECTED:
AN EXAMINATION OF RELIGION IN THE LITERATURE
OF BING XIN, SU XUELIN, AND XU DISHAN

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Dedicated to my mother, Nanette Elia

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ABSTRACT

FROM ALIENATED TO CONNECTED: AN EXAMINATION OF RELIGION IN THE LITERATURE
OF SU XUELIN, BING XIN, AND XU DISHAN

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The literature of Bing Xin 冰心 (birth name Xie Wanying 谢婉莹) (1900-1999), Su Xuelin 苏雪林 (1897-1999), and Xu Dishan 许地山 (1893-1941) concerning religiosity is dismissed in previous scholarship by C.T. Hsia, Lewis Robinson, Marian Galik, Chen Weihua, and Yang Jianlong as reflecting simply the personal experiences of the authors themselves rather than as political or social commentary. I argue for a reading of these three authors' literature that acknowledges its efforts to engage with contemporaneous debates on the relationship of religion and modernization. Using close-reading and intertextual analysis, I argue that within the narratives of these three authors' literature, identifying as religious or participating in religious cultural phenomena is for protagonists linked to cultivating the skill of focusing on the well-being of others. This practice in turn leads to greater happiness and contentment on an individual level for the protagonists, who form deeper connections with others and overcome their sense of social alienation. I conclude that the category "religion" is used in the narratives of Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's literature to frame certain skills important to forming connections with other people as "other" than social, in other words as ostensibly existing outside of the social realm that is causing protagonists to feel alienated in the first place. This then allows protagonists to turn to these skills as a set of allegedly objective guidelines for overcoming their social alienation and becoming happier and more contented on an individual level.

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CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Argument

In the literature of Bing Xin 冰心 (birth name Xie Wanying 谢婉莹) (1900-1999), Su Xuelin 苏雪林 (1897-1999), and Xu Dishan 许地山 (1893-1941), the term “religion” operates distinctively compared to in other works of literature written by May Fourth intellectuals.¹ Many May Fourth authors used the category “religion” as a way of naturalizing their own ideologies. They accomplished this by describing any cultural phenomena that did not suit their political agenda as “religious.” Because they simultaneously claimed that “religion” was unscientific and “science” was “modern,” their description of certain cultural phenomena as “religious” served to depict these cultural phenomena as intrinsically not conducive to strengthening Chinese citizenry and the Chinese nation-state in the twentieth century (See “Republican Era/May Fourth Era and Modernity/Modernization” in Chapter One below for a detailed explanation of how they achieved this discursive maneuver).

I argue that in the literary narratives of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan, “religion” is rather used as a conceptual strategy that drives both the plot and narrative structure of their works toward a positive resolution. On the level of plot, protagonists resolve their feelings of anxiety and depression brought on by social alienation through identifying with or participating in religion, which is linked within these narratives to

¹ All individuals with Chinese names whose work is written predominantly in Chinese will first be listed with their last names first. Additionally, they will be listed with their names in both pinyin and Chinese characters. After the first time, only pinyin will be used. This convention also holds for the names of all essays and works of fiction in Chinese.

skills that help them cultivate deeper social relations with others. On the level of narrative structure, “religion” is used as a method of casting the relational skills these protagonists cultivate as other than “social,” in other words as existing outside of the society that is causing the protagonists anxiety and depression in the first place. This then enables protagonists to turn to these skills as an allegedly objective set of guidelines for resolving the depressed mental states caused by social alienation. I also argue that the literary narratives of these authors portray these protagonists’ identification with or participation in religion as extending and deepening their personal liberty rather than limiting it. This demonstrates that the protagonists of these narratives do not have to sacrifice their individual freedom by turning to religion to resolve their social anxiety.

The terms of this argument are further clarified in the “Definition of Terms” section below.

Definition of Terms

I. Republican Era/May Fourth Era and Modernity/Modernization

The “Republican Era” in China is the period between the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1912 and the instatement of Communist rule in 1949. The country was initially ruled by a Republican government united under Nationalist (Guo min dang 国民党) Sun Yat-sen 孙中山 (1866-1925). However, the overall political situation in China was unstable and fragmented during the period, with multiple factions vying for power over the nation (Roy 2003, 55-56). The early part of the Republican Period is also known as the “May

Fourth Era” (1915—1921), referring to the May Fourth Movement in 1919 protesting the decision of Chinese representatives at the Paris Conference to concede economic and territorial rights over Shandong province to the Japanese. This movement initiated waves of literature and essays in the next few years exploring how China should strive to strengthen itself as a nation, a period referred to as the “New Culture Movement.” Often the two terms “May Fourth Movement/Era” and “New Culture Movement” are used synonymously (Hsia 1961, 12). When this dissertation refers to the “May Fourth Era,” “May Fourth values,” “May Fourth intellectuals,” or the “May Fourth agenda,” it is referring to this early period of the Republican Era. Except for Xu Dishan’s novella *Yuguan* [玉官] (1939) and Su Xuelin’s short story “Fire-side Chat at Mt. Hsiu [Xiufeng ye hua 秀峰夜话]” (1945), these three authors’ works concerning religious protagonists were primarily written during the May Fourth Era,²

Many prominent figures in China’s intellectual and literary history were proponents of the New Culture Movement, including for example Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881—1936), Ye Shaojun 叶少军 (1894—1988), Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 (1879—1942), Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885—1967), Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896—1981), and Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904—1986), as well as of course the three authors central to this study—Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan.³

Culturally, the period was rife with intellectual discussions about how China should modernize now that the Dynastic system had fallen. Denton summarizes the

² The original publication date of reprinted works appears in the text of the dissertation. The publication date of the edition used for citation appears in the Bibliography.

³ Denton’s edited collection of English translations of important Republican Era essays, *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893—1945* (1996) provides an excellent introduction to major figures of the period and their ideas for how to modernize Chinese society and individuals.

Republican Era as a period in which Chinese intellectuals were forced to face the reality of the “technological and military superiority of the West and Japan” in comparison to their own nation (Denton 1996, 1). Starr further writes, “...the old ways of society were decried as moribund and collective effort was focused on seeking a new national direction, identity and system of governance” (Starr 2008, 5). Both Denton’s and Starr’s observations capture one of Republican Era literature’s main themes, namely the exploration of how to rejuvenate Chinese society. David Wang elaborates that Republican Era intellectuals called the traits they considered vital to strengthening Chinese society “modern” in order to distinguish them from “traditional” Chinese culture. Inheriting a strong sense of anti-traditionalism from the West, they used the term “tradition” to denote all aspects of dynastic Chinese society, which they viewed as stifling to China’s progress (Wang 1997, 8-9).

“Religion” was generally counted among such “traditional” aspects of society by many May Fourth intellectuals and authors. To begin with, authors such as Zhou Zuoren and Chen Duxiu dismissed “religion” as “unscientific” (Chen 1920, 486; Eber 1999 “Introduction,” 15-16). Science, as C.T. Hsia pointed out, was central to May Fourth intellectuals’ ideas of the traits that characterized a “modern” society (Hsia 1961, 18). Even Xu Dishan, a staunch advocate of considering religion compatible with modernization, defended his stance by arguing that religion was not incompatible with science (Xu 1923, 300-304). By calling “religion” “unscientific,” the figures of May Fourth Era literature, all of whom had a huge impact on the movement, were effectively calling it “traditional,” or in other words, not conducive to modernizing Chinese society and individuals. Rather, May Fourth intellectuals largely considered the modernization of

China a nationalist, patriotic enterprise that would strengthen their country (Denton 1996, 1-2). Thus, though not the same, “modernization” in Republican Era discourse became linked to and essentially synonymous with strengthening the Chinese nation. Given this context, in this dissertation “modernity” will refer to the conditions necessary for building a strong nation and citizenry, while “modernization” emphasizes the processes necessary for and conducive to achieving these conditions.

In addition to the Chinese nation, May Fourth intellectuals also debated how to strengthen Chinese citizenry. This focus on strengthening citizens as a way of achieving the goal of a strong nation-state is nowhere more evident than in Lu Xun’s well-known “Preface [Zi xu 自序]” to his first collection of short stories *Call to Arms* [Na han 呐喊] (1918), where he narrates how he came to initiate a literary movement. The incident that initiated his desire to write occurred while he was a medical student at a provincial medical college at Japan. He explains:

I have no idea what improved methods are now used to teach microbiology, but in those days we were shown lantern slides of microbes; and if the lecture ended early, the instructor might show slides of natural scenery or news to fill up the time. Since this was during the Russo-Japanese War, there were many war slides, and I had to join in the clapping and cheering in the lecture hall along with the other students. It was a long time since I had seen any compatriots, but one day I saw a news-reel slide of a number of Chinese, one of whom was bound and the rest standing around him. They were all sturdy fellows but appeared completely apathetic. According to the commentary, the one with his hands bound was a spy working for the Russians who was to be beheaded by the Japanese military as a warning to others, while the Chinese beside him had come to enjoy the spectacle.

Before the term was over I had left for Tokyo, because this slide convinced me that medical science was not so important after all. The people of a weak and backward country, however strong and healthy they might be, could only serve to be made examples of or as witnesses of such futile spectacles; and it was not necessarily deplorable if many of them died of illness. The most important thing, therefore, was to change their spirit, and since at that

time I felt that literature was the best means to this end, I decided to promote a literary movement (Yang 2003, 34-35).⁴

In the example Lu Xun cites as his motivation for promoting a literary movement, he connects the “spirit” of individuals to the strength of the nation by claiming that the people of a “weak and backward” country like China can only ever be passive onlookers and victims. With this phrasing, he reveals that in his estimation, the passivity of the Chinese onlookers and the victimization of the Chinese spy by the Japanese soldiers in the film are directly connected to the Chinese nation’s weakness compared to foreign powers. Furthermore, the weakness of spirit among the Chinese people he observes in the slides is the *cause*, rather than the *result*, of the nation’s weakness. He thus determines to initiate a literary movement to strengthen the spirits of individual Chinese, which he believes will in turn strengthen the nation.

The idea of improving the spirit of Chinese citizens as a way of strengthening the nation became a major focal point for May Fourth intellectual ideology. Andrew Jones describes how May Fourth intellectuals appropriated Darwin’s theory of evolution in their writings, treating it not just as relating to biological attributes but also to social ones. He explains that many intellectuals during this period understood societies as becoming stronger over time by discouraging characteristics in its citizens that were not conducive

⁴ 我已不知道教授微生物学的方法，现在又有了怎样的进步了，总之那时是用了电影，来显示微生物的形状的，因此有时讲义的一段落已完，而时间还没有到，教师便映些风景或时事的画片给学生看，以用去这多余的光阴。其时正当日俄战争的时候，关于战事的画片自然也就比较的多了，我在这一个讲堂中，便须常常随喜我那同学们的拍手和喝彩。有一回，我竟在画片上忽然会见我久违的许多中国人了，一个绑在中间，许多站在左右，一样是强壮的体格，而显出麻木的神情。据解说，则绑着的是替俄国做了军事上的侦探，正要被日军砍下头颅来示众，而围着的便是来赏鉴这示众的盛举的人们。

这一学年没有完毕，我已经到了东京了，因为从那一回以后，我便觉得医学并非一件紧要事，凡是愚弱的国民，即使体格如何健全，如何茁壮，也只能做毫无意义的示众的材料和看客，病死多少是不必以为不幸的。所以我们的第一要著，是在改变他们的精神，而善于改变精神的是，我那时以为当然要推文艺，于是想提倡文艺运动了 (Lu 1918, III-IV).

to modernization while encouraging ones that were (Jones 2011, 5-11). Mary Farquhar explains how many May Fourth intellectuals emphasized the importance of proper youth education in strengthening society because of its ability to instill so-called “modern” values into children at an early age (Farquhar 1999, 13-14). Indeed, intellectuals debated what kinds of information should be included in children’s literature, as well as what the underlying goals of children’s literature should be and how early children should be made aware of China’s social ills (Farquhar 1999, 26-35). Numerous scholars including C.T. Hsia (1961), Jaroslav Prusek (1980), Leo Ou-Fan Lee (1987), Marston Anderson (1990), and Sabina Knight (2006) have additionally researched the emphasis of May Fourth intellectuals on the experience of individual subjectivity and how to form the self in a way that was conducive to strengthening the nation.

It is into this series of debates that this dissertation will argue Bing Xin’s, Su Xuelin’s, and Xu Dishan’s literature intervenes—not how to modernize “society,” per se, but rather how to modernize Chinese individuals by improving their spirits. Specifically, this dissertation will argue that Bing Xin’s, Su Xuelin’s, and Xu Dishan’s literature showcases a method by which individuals can improve their sense of comradeship with others.

II. Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan

Many Republican Era authors wrote literature that borrowed motifs, images, protagonists, themes, and storylines (below abbreviated as “imagery”) from religious

texts, primarily the Christian Bible.⁵ One example is Lu Xun's poem "Revenge (Part II) [Fu chou (qi er) 复仇 (其二)]," about the crucifixion of Jesus, in his poetry collection *Wild Grass* [Ye cao 野草] (1927). A few authors also borrowed imagery from Buddhism in their fiction. For example, Shen Congwen 沈从文 (1902—1988) borrows narratives from a Buddhist encyclopedia called the *Fa Yuan Zhu Lin* [法苑珠林] in his short story collection "Scenery Under the Moonlight [Yue xia xiao jing 月下小景]" (Shen 1933, 16). Other authors who incorporated Buddhist or Christian imagery into their work include Shi Zhecun 施蛰存 (1905—2003) in his short story "Kumarajiva [Jiumoluoshi 鸠摩罗什]" (1933) and Yu Dafu 郁达夫 (1896—1945) in "Sinking [Chen lun 沉沦]" (1921) and "Turning to the South [Nan qian 南迁]" (1921).

Though many Republican Era authors incorporated Buddhist and Christian imagery into their literature, they do not all do so for the same reason. "Revenge (Part II)" and "Two-Man Comic Show [Shuang huang 双簧]" (1936), written by Lu Xun and Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892-1978) respectively, clearly critique the idea of Christianity as an ideal solution to China's social issues. Mao Dun's short stories "The Death of Jesus [Yesu zhi si 耶稣之死]" (1945) and "Samson's Revenge [Cansun de fu chou 参孙的复仇]" (1942), written during the Nationalist Regime in China, can be read as critiques of the Nationalist government. Robinson points out that Mao Dun may have written them in the form of Christian allegories to hide his criticism from Nationalist censorship

⁵ The most commonly-read translation of the *Bible* in China is the *Union Version*. For a history of the creation of this version, see Jost Zetzsche's *The Bible in China: The History of the Union Version or the Culmination of Protestant Missionary Bible Translation in China* (1999).

(Robinson 1986, 171-183). Chen Duxiu and Zhou Zuoren write essays which on the one hand express admiration of the Christian promotion of fraternity and compassion, but which on the other hand dismiss as unscientific theological components of Christianity such as belief that Jesus is the son of a deity (Eber 1999 “Introduction,” 15-16).

As noted above, many prominent May Fourth intellectuals used the category “religion” discursively to describe cultural phenomena that were not conducive to their own political agenda. By calling these cultural phenomena “religious,” intellectuals cast them as “traditional” and thus as intrinsically unsuitable for the goals of strengthening the Chinese nation and people. Not surprisingly, protagonists in the fiction of intellectuals who employed the category of “religion” to denote allegedly unmodern cultural phenomena are typically portrayed as “outsiders” to religion, observing it from afar as a sort of cultural relic and holding various opinions about it, but never identifying with it or participating in it.

Xu Dishan, Bing Xin, and Su Xuelin stand apart from these other authors in terms of how their literary protagonists relate to ‘religion’ (See “Religion” in Chapter One below for an extended definition of this term). Specifically, they identify themselves as religious people or participate in cultural phenomena that can be considered “religious.” A shorthand method of referring to this different way of relating to “religion” is to describe their protagonists as identifying as religious insiders, rather than religious outsiders. For instance, the protagonists of Xu Dishan’s and Su Xuelin’s works self-identify as Christian, Buddhist, or Catholic. Bing Xin’s literary protagonists do not self-identify as religious. However, according to the criteria I set out for defining ‘religion’ below, her protagonists’ worldviews are as religious as those of Su Xuelin’s and Xu

Dishan's protagonists. The arguments of the following chapters address the significance of this difference in the relationship of Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's literary protagonists to the category of "religion."

Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan all identified with religion themselves at some point in their personal lives.⁶ Bing Xin was attracted to Christianity in her early twenties after attending a Christian secondary school called Bridgman Academy in Beijing (Galik 2004, 255). Her early poetry, short stories, and essays demonstrate her admiration of the unconditional love of Jesus Christ, as will be demonstrated with examples throughout this dissertation. Su Xuelin converted to Catholicism while she studied abroad in France as a youth, and became heavily involved in Catholic circles upon her return to China (Ni 2014, 72). Xu Dishan expressed much interest in adapting an expansive "spirit of religiosity" that was not tied to any specific religious tradition. He promoted the idea that it was good for individuals to participate in religion generally, regardless of the specific tradition or traditions they followed, because it served a useful conceptual purpose in helping them to consistently strive for improvement in their personal conduct and relations in their everyday lives (Xu 1923, 300-304).

It is likely that the personal beliefs and opinions of these authors contributed to their openness to portraying religion in their literature as a resolution to the problem of social alienation caused by modernization, rather than as a descriptor for ideas that were antithetical to it. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that literature should not be

⁶ For recent biographies on Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan, see *Love is Everything: A Biography of Bing Xin* [Ai shi yi qie: Bing Xin zhuan 爱是一切: 冰心传] (2016) by Wang Binggen 王炳根, *The Female Scholar of the Century: A Biography of Su Xuelin* [Shi ji cai nü: Su Xuelin zhuan 世纪才女: 苏雪林传] (2006) by Fan Zhenwei 范震威, and *A Life of Spinning Webs: A Biography of Xu Dishan* [Zhui wang ren sheng: Xu Dishan zhuan 缀网人生: 许地山传] (2006) by Wang Sheng 王盛 respectively.

analyzed exclusively or even at all in terms of the biographical experiences of its authors, as it is usually difficult or impossible to conclusively demonstrate links between an author's personal experience and the content of his or her literature. This is precisely the pitfall into which previous analyses of these authors' work have fallen, and which I strive to avoid in the close-reading analyses of these authors' works I will perform in Chapters Two and Three below. Chapter One will discuss in greater detail how previous scholarship has focused too extensively on Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's personal lives as the sole rationale for explaining the portrayal of religion in their literature.

III. Social Anxiety and Alienation

An increased focus on individual subjectivity in the literature of the May Fourth Era led to a slew of literary protagonists whose feelings of intellectual superiority from those around them leave them feeling disconnected from others around them, whom they feel could never possibly understand them. This social alienation for such protagonists leads to feelings of anxiety and helplessness which inhibit them from taking any action. They are in a sense paralyzed by their inability to communicate effectively with others. One prominent example of such a protagonist is the narrator of Yu Dafu's "Sinking," who feels so disconnected from students and other young people around him that he feels completely incapable of reaching out and connecting with various women to whom he is attracted. Much of the story's narrative is devoted to describing his inner agony at his inability to connect with others around him, especially women, because he does not know

how to effectively reach out to them. This inability is compounded by his foreignness—he is Chinese studying abroad in Japan, and the people with whom he tries and fails to connect are all Japanese. Thus, Yu’s story draws a link between individual inability to form connections with others and the weakness of the nation from which that individual comes.

Another example, albeit in a somewhat different form, can be found in the narrator of Lu Xun’s “Regret for the Past [Shang shi 伤逝]” (1925), Juan Sheng. In this case, Juan Sheng is at first more successful than Yu Dafu’s main protagonist in forging connections with others. His lover Zi Jun, inspired by the ideas of May Fourth intellectuals, decides to live together with Juan Sheng without marrying him, against the wishes of her family. However, the decision of the two lovers to act rashly without taking into consideration the feelings of Zi Jun’s relatives ends in tragedy. Juan Sheng’s love for Zi Jun gradually fades as the two of them settle into the monotony of everyday life. He eventually tells her so. Zi Jun’s father takes her back home, but Zi Jun ends up dying of sorrow anyway. After he hears of her death and the fact that he effectively caused it, Juansheng’s own social alienation becomes even more pronounced. He becomes reclusive, drawing ever more into himself in depression and sorrow and ostensibly writing the “memoirs” which form the text of Lu Xun’s short story (Lu 1925, 312-355).

Lu Xun’s fiction is full of such moody, alienated protagonists. Their presence is so common that Leo Ou-Fan Lee used the image of “the loner and the crowd” to describe the recurring theme. Lu Xun’s protagonists feel that they have great insight to offer on how to modernize Chinese society, but that they have no way of communicating this

insight to others because they do not know how to connect with others to build meaningful relationships (Lee 1987, 69-88).

When this dissertation refers to “social alienation,” it is referring to this pattern that Leo Ou-Fan Lee pointed out in Lu Xun’s work specifically. That is, it refers to a scenario in which a protagonist’s preoccupation with his or her own individual enlightenment compared with others consequently makes that protagonist feel that it is more difficult to effectively forge strong relationships with others. Consequently, the protagonist feels paralyzed, unable to take even a first step toward enacting the social change he or she recognizes is sorely needed. “Social anxiety” refers to the various senses of helplessness, frustration, and depression that result from such a feeling of “social alienation.” This dissertation will argue that Bing Xin’s, Su Xuelin’s, and Xu Dishan’s literature presents religion as a way of strengthening individual emotional and mental states by resolving individuals’ sense of social alienation and resultant anxiety, allowing them to forge meaningful connections with others in their community. In a discourse which directly correlated the strength of individuals to the strength of the nation, this ability to overcome social alienation was a first, necessary step toward the goal of strengthening China.

III. Religion

At the outset, I want to make clear that “religion” is not an ineffable, unchanging, timeless entity that exists in the natural world the same way that, say, trees or rocks do.

‘Religion’ in the sense in which I use it is an invention of modernity.⁷ As a result, I do not treat ‘religion’ as an object that can be pinned down to any one definition. In other words, I do not take an essentialist approach to defining the term. Rather, I treat religion as a conceptual strategy, a category of thought. People have specific agendas in wanting to designate certain cultural phenomena as ‘religious,’ or in other words as not ‘political,’ ‘economic,’ or ‘social.’ One of the main contemporary approaches of the study of religion, ‘constructivism,’ seeks to understand why particular groups label certain cultural phenomena as ‘religious’—in other words, what they gain from doing so. Another possible methodological approach is to consider ‘religion’ from a functionalist perspective, focusing not on who calls what ‘religion’ for what reasons, but rather on what the category of ‘religion’ does for specific groups; in other words, functionalist approaches determine what social problems religion helps individuals or groups to solve.

My arguments in the following chapters primarily approach “religion” from a functionalist perspective, demonstrating that the category is used within Bing Xin’s, Su Xuelin’s, and Xu Dishan’s narratives to present their protagonists with a solution to the problem of social alienation. However, the constructivist approach to the study of religion constitutes a fundamental assumption on which the following arguments are built. Groups call certain cultural phenomena ‘religious’ because they have something to gain from doing so. The following arguments take as their premise that the narratives of Bing Xin’s, Su Xuelin’s, and Xu Dishan’s fiction depict certain cultural phenomena as “religious,” and position protagonists as identifying with or participating in these religious cultural

⁷ To understand the process of how “religion” was created by intellectuals of the European Enlightenment, see Talal Asad’s *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (2009).

phenomena, as a means of driving plot and character development in a specific direction. Consequently, the arguments of the following chapters explore why these narratives designate certain cultural phenomena as “religious,” why they position protagonists as identifying with or participating in these religious cultural phenomena, and how these narrative decisions are important to understanding the works of these authors.

No one “essentialist” definition of “religion” is possible because it is simply a category of thought used to designate certain cultural phenomena as existing outside of the realm of human social interaction, and as such is always contingent on historically specific political, social, and economic contexts. However, some definition of what kind of cultural phenomena can possibly be designated as “religious” is still necessary if the following arguments purport to discuss religiosity within Bing Xin’s, Su Xuelin’s, and Xu Dishan’s literature. Otherwise, if any imagery at all within their work could potentially be considered religious, the distinction between religious and non-religious phenomena in their work would become meaningless. I employ philosophy of religion scholar Kevin Schilbrack’s definition of “religion” to determine which cultural phenomena represented in the fiction of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan can be categorized as “religious” cultural phenomena within their literary narratives. I have chosen Schilbrack’s definition because he exerts great care to come up with a definition that is narrow enough to exclude some cultural phenomena from the possibility of being considered “religious,” while still broad enough to avoid the trap of privileging Protestant-like conceptualizations of “religion.”

According to Schilbrack, cultural phenomena that can be designated as “religious” by individuals and groups necessarily have two features in common. First,

they purport to resolve some social problem, what Schilbrack calls their “promissory function” (Schilbrack 2013, 298-304). Secondly, they acknowledge some ostensible reality that exists beyond the realm of human perception as the justification for carrying out the practices that they claim will resolve social problems. Schilbrack calls this the “superempirical reality” of religious cultural phenomena (Schilbrack 2013, 312-313). According to Schilbrack’s definition, all cultural phenomena represented within Bing Xin’s, Su Xuelin’s, and Xu Dishan’s literature necessarily need to be presented in their fictional narratives as resolving some social problem and as relying on a superempirical reality as the main rationale and justification for their existence to be considered “religious” cultural phenomena.

In Su Xuelin’s and Xu Dishan’s fiction, protagonists explicitly identify as Catholic, Christian, or Buddhist. They explicitly identify with ideological traditions that purport to solve all kinds of social problems and which hold some superempirical reality as the main justification for their existence. Bing Xin’s literary protagonists do not identify explicitly with an existing religious tradition. However, I will argue here that they nevertheless participate in “religious” cultural phenomena, according to Schilbrack’s definition.

In Bing Xin’s stories, her literary protagonists are generally visited by others who tell them that all entities are connected to each other through love, and that they must go out into the world and seek the love that is in everything. They are also told that there is a “Creator [Zao wu zhe 造物者]” who has made the world in this way. The Chinese-language scholars of Bing Xin who will be quoted in the following chapters use the term “philosophy of love [Ai de zhe xue 爱的哲学]” to describe this related set of beliefs

about the nature of the world. Within Bing Xin's "philosophy of love," the notion of a "Creator" qualifies as a "superempirical reality," since the existence of a "Creator" is not empirically testable, at least not by any means currently known to humans. In addition, the "Creator" is given as the explanation for why the world is connected through love and why individuals must go out to find that love. It is because the Creator made the world in that way. Thus, the "Creator" is given as justification and rationale for conceiving of the world as connected in love.

This concept of the world of love also holds a "promissory function" for Bing Xin's protagonists. They are generally despondent at the beginning of her stories, demonstrating the same sense of social alienation and resultant feelings of anxiety, frustration, and inability to affect social change that are described above as common to many fictional protagonists of Republican Era literature. However, after they have encounters with people or ghosts who tell them that the world is connected through love and that they should more fully participate in this reality, they become much happier and more content. True, her protagonists are not necessarily any more enabled to change society than they are at the beginning of her stories. However, their choice to acknowledge the reality of this world of love made by the Creator at the very least resolves their sense of social anxiety and paralysis, as well as their fear of interacting with others that is leading to this anxiety in the first place. Acknowledging that the universe is connected through love, protagonists lose their former social anxiety and fear of communication. This resolution of their feelings of anxiety and fear is the promissory function of Bing Xin's "philosophy of love." Thus, the "philosophy of love" which Bing Xin's protagonists take to heart has both a "promissory function" and is justified by a

“superempirical reality.” It qualifies as a religious cultural phenomenon according to Schilbrack’s definition. Bing Xin’s protagonists do not identify as religious, but according to Schilbrack’s definition, they nevertheless participate in cultural phenomena that can be construed as religious.

Literature Review

I. “Modernity” and “Modernization” in Republican Era literature

The first monograph published in English on Republican Era literature was C.T. Hsia’s *A History of Modern Chinese Literature* (1961). Hsia posits that May Fourth intellectuals primarily imagined “modernity” to mean the belief that rationalism and scientific inquiry were the only valid means of creating new knowledge. Hsia labels Republican Era modernity as devoted exclusively to “scientific positivism” directed toward the goals of developing a stronger Chinese society and nation (Hsia 1961, 18).

Forty years after the publication of Hsia’s monograph, scholars of Republican Era literature began to question the idea that May Fourth literary modernity could be defined exclusively by one set of values or that it truly represented a complete break from Chinese society before 1912. Susan Daruvala’s monograph *Zhou Zuoren and an Alternative Chinese Response to Modernity* (2000) explores Zhou Zuoren’s use of traditional aesthetic categories in his writing to emphasize the importance of individualism. In this, Zhou Zuoren opposed many of his contemporaries who called for Chinese citizens to conform their character and behavior to a standardized norm befitting

of a proper national subject. Haiyan Lee's *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* (2006) delineates yet another form of Republican Era literary representations of modernization processes distinct from that described in Hsia's research, which highlights how Republican Era authors promoted love as essential to the formation of a strong, patriotic modern nation.

At the turn of the 21st century, Shu-mei Shih and David Der-Wei Wang both made theoretical interventions in *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (2000) and *Fin-de-Siecle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1848-1911* (1997) respectively, arguing that formulations of "modernity" in the Republican Era was heterogeneous and varied. Wang even suggests the possibility of multiple "modernities" co-existing during the Republican Era (Wang 1997, 8). Wang's insistence on writing about "multiple modernities" rather than multiple formulations of one "modernity" emphasizes the variance in how intellectuals conceived of the term in the Republican Era. Kirk Denton asserts in his "General Introduction" (1996) that rather than the break with tradition which May Fourth intellectuals imagined themselves to be initiating, contemporary scholars have come to understand the Republican Era as containing within itself continuity with the past. Denton details many different spectrums of values on which the opinions of various May Fourth intellectuals fell, for instance the extent to which modern China should be rational versus romantic (Denton 1996, 3-4). His inclusion of this qualification about Republican Era notions of "modernity" in his summary demonstrates the degree to which it has become an established assumption in recent scholarship on modern Chinese literature that many different formulations of "modernity" existed among intellectuals in Republican

Era China. These were accompanied by different philosophies about how Chinese individuals and societies should best modernize, in other words change their characters and communities in a way that would lead to China's transformation into a strong nation-state.

One understudied area concerns Republican Era notions of ideal processes of modernization. To be sure, many Republican Era intellectuals believed in the power of education to help the young people of their societies avoid the same pitfalls of character weakness into which they felt most Chinese adults had fallen. One area on which they focused was education reform, which Mary Farquhar and Andrew Jones have explored at great length already (See "Republican Era/May Fourth Era and Modernity/Modernization" in Chapter One above for more details on Farquhar's and Jones' arguments). However, there remains much work to be done on better delineating and understanding the specific modernization processes Republican Era intellectuals envisioned for both individuals and societies. The arguments of the following chapters address this topic by detailing one specific process by which to modernize the individual outlined in Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's literature—that is, identifying with or participating in religious cultural phenomena.

II. Republican Era Literary Interest in Religion

C.T. Hsia initiated the historical narrative in English-language scholarship of Republican Era literary representations of modernization as exclusively promoting rationalism, claiming that literature of the period lacks spiritual depth. He writes, "The

superficiality of modern Chinese literature is ultimately seen in its intellectual unawareness of Original Sin or some comparable religious interpretation of evil.” He comes to this conclusion based on his perception that Chinese people tend to be Confucian rationalists. He argues that, while historically such rationalism has been "kept in check" by competing, less rationalistic ideologies such as Buddhism and Daoism, Republican Era rejection of religion led this so-called Chinese tendency toward extreme rationalism to dominate literary writing and thought of the era (Hsia 1961, 503-504). His conclusion is echoed in Vera Schwarcz’s overview of the May Fourth Movement in her monograph *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (1986), in which she emphasizes the value May Fourth intellectuals placed on breaking with tradition and modernizing China.

Hsia’s comments on the lack of interest in religion among Republican Era authors have largely remained unchallenged to the present day in English-language scholarship, except for a few works. Lewis Robinson’s monograph *Double-Edged Sword: Christianity and 20th Century Fiction* (1986) surveys the usage of Christian imagery in Chinese literature from the Republican Era through to the 1970s, as well as in 1970s Taiwanese literature. Irene Eber edited an essay collection entitled *Bible in Modern China: The Literary and Intellectual Impact* (1999) which includes essays detailing the influence of the Bible on several specific Chinese theologians and authors. The essays on Republican Era Chinese authors influenced by the Bible include an abbreviated version of Robinson’s monograph by Robinson, a probing of Mao Dun’s use of Christian parable as political allegory by Marian Galik, and an essay on Wang Jingzhi 王静之 (1902-1996)’s *The Instructions by Jesus* [Yesu de fen fu 耶稣的吩咐] (1926) by Raoul Findeisen.

Galik's Influence, Translation, and Parallels: Selected Studies on the Bible in China (2004) provided an updated survey of Christian imagery in Chinese and Taiwanese literature through the 1990s, focusing specifically on Christian imagery taken from Biblical stories. Except for Galik's monograph, which touches on the influence of Buddhism on Bing Xin's literature, these works deal exclusively with Republican Era literary usage of Christian imagery, as opposed to that of any other religion.

Scholars Chen Weihua 陈伟华, Yang Jianlong 杨剑龙, and Wang Benchao 王本朝, writing in Chinese, have produced many essays and monographs researching Republican Era literary usage of Christian imagery.⁸ All three of these scholars concentrate on drawing connections between the history of social and intellectual interest in Christianity in Republican Era China and its manifestation in literature of the period. They also trace the probable source material in Christian scripture of various instances of Christian imagery in Republican Era literature.

These works of English and Chinese-language scholarship all contain mostly descriptive analyses of Republican Era literature alluding to Christianity. Their goal appears to mainly be pointing out that such literature exists, rather than making any substantive argument about the social or cultural significance of the authors' decisions to incorporate Christian imagery into their literature.

In the twenty-first century, Zhange Ni has finally initiated inquiry into the extent to which allusion to religion in Republican Era literature could be read in a socially or culturally significant manner. She has published an essay entitled "Rewriting Jesus in

⁸ Yang Jianlong's and Chen Weihua's scholarship will be discussed in the following chapters. For an example of Wang Benchao's scholarship, see *20th-Century Chinese Literature and Christian Culture* [20 shi ji Zhongguo wen xue yu Jidu jiao wen hua 20 世纪中国文学与基督教文化] (2000).

Republican China: Religion, Literature, and Cultural Nationalism” (2011), which analyzes the ideological import of the decision of six Republican Era authors who rewrote the Gospel account of Jesus’ life to focus on Christian motifs and themes in their literature. She argues that these authors’ choices reflect their efforts to indigenize an ideology imported from the West as a way of challenging their oppressors by adapting the religion to suit their own needs (Ni 2011, 230). Her work introduces a more nuanced method of understanding allusion to religion in Republican Era literature than the work of Robinson, Galik, Eber, Yang, and Chen. Rather than simply pointing out instances of allusion to Christianity in modern Chinese literature, her work represents one of the first substantial attempts in English-language scholarship to read allusions to Christianity in Republican Era literature critically as a way of shedding light on that literature’s contribution to the May Fourth enterprise of shaping China into a strong modern nation. The arguments of the following chapters will build on Zhange Ni’s scholarship by demonstrating that “religion” is depicted in Bing Xin’s, Xu Dishan’s, and Su Xuelin’s literature as a strategy for helping individuals to overcome their sense of social alienation and resultant anxiety to become mentally and emotionally stronger.

III. Religion in the Literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan

Previous scholarship on Bing Xin’s, Su Xuelin’s, and Xu Dishan’s literary religiosity falls into two groups: those who consider them to be writers primarily invested in the May Fourth modernization project who also harbor an idiosyncratic interest in religion, and those who consider them to be writers primarily preoccupied with religion

who happen to also participate in the May Fourth Movement. Ni points out this dichotomy in her essay “Making Religion, Making the New Woman: Reading Su Xuelin’s Autobiographical Novel *Jixin* (Thorny Heart)” (2014). She describes how fans of Su Xuelin’s novel *Thorny Heart* were divided between Christians who admired its advocacy of Catholicism and followers of the May Fourth Movement who admired its promotion of May Fourth ideals (Ni 2014, 73).

C.T. Hsia falls into the former group. He points out the religiosity of Xu Dishan’s and Bing Xin’s literature, but discounts it as not worth serious consideration. He finds Bing Xin’s interest in religiosity to be superficial, while he argues that Xu Dishan’s efforts to showcase the value of religiosity in modern life ultimately fail to influence Chinese society (Hsia 1961, 84). Most other scholars who have written about the religiosity of these three authors’ literature fall into the latter group. Robinson, Galik, Chen, and Yang focus in their monographs exclusively on summarizing the presence and usage of Christian and Buddhist imagery in the work of the three authors, without linking it to their efforts to use literature as a tool to promote China’s modernization. The many Chinese scholars who have written journal articles on religiosity in these authors’ literature focus mainly on identifying which religions exerted the greatest amount of influence on their work.⁹

⁹ See for example Wang Wensheng’s 王文胜 “Meeting with Jesus: A Discussion of Chinese-Language Theological Thought in Xu Dishan’s Literary Works [Yu Jidu xiang yu: lun Xu Dishan wen xue zuo pin zhong de han yu Jidu shen xue si xiang 与基督相遇：论许地山文学作品中的汉语基督神学思想] (2006), Feng Hong’s 冯弘 “Buddhist Fate in Xu Dishan’s Works [Xu Dishan Zuo pin zhong de fo yuan 许地山作品中的佛缘]” (2010), Sun Yusheng’s 孙玉生 “A Perspective on Religiosity in Xu Dishan’s Literary Works [Xu Dishan Wen xue zuo pin zhong de zong jiao wen hua tou shi 许地山文学作品中的宗教文化透视]” (2006), and Liang Yanghua’s 梁錫华 “Bing Xin’s Religious Belief [Bing Xin de zong jiao xin yang 冰心的宗教信仰]” (1983).

In the past twenty years, Zhange Ni and Steven Riep have pointed out that more nuanced theoretical work needs to be done to understand the role religiosity plays in Su Xuelin's and Xu Dishan's works. The same can be said for the literature of Bing Xin. Ni points out the need to delineate a theory of reading Su Xuelin's literature that integrates its simultaneous promotion of May Fourth values and Catholic belief (Ni 2014, 73-74). As for Riep, he understands Xu Dishan's short story "The Merchant's Wife" as demonstrating how religious institutions can be efficacious in allowing women to attain more social mobility and equality with men (Riep 2004). Riep's essay raises the question, albeit indirectly, of whether according to Xu Dishan's literature the pragmatic social advantages of joining religious institutions are the only benefits religion can offer individuals in the modern world.

This dissertation critically reads the religiosity portrayed in the work of all three authors as related to their interest and participation in discussions of how to modernize Chinese society and individuals. In other words, the religiosity of their literature is not simply a manifestation of their idiosyncratic, personal interests, opinions, and tastes. Furthermore, this dissertation posits that, beyond the access to social mobility that religious institutions present women, religion is depicted in the literature of these three authors as necessary for strengthening individual spirits because of its ability to designate certain skills as existing outside of the social and thus available as resolutions to problems of the social.

Methodology

The entire premise of this dissertation rests on an interdisciplinary methodology that combines literature studies and religious studies. The goal of the arguments of the following chapters is to elucidate a method of reading the literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan that sheds light on how it depicts the relationship of “religion” and ideal modernization processes on an individual level. As is the mainstay of literature research, I will use close-reading analysis to understand how religious cultural phenomena are represented on the page in language throughout the texts. However, the questions that drive my analysis are taken from constructivist and functionalist methodologies of studying religion outlined within the discipline of religious studies: what is the category of “religion” doing for the protagonists? To which cultural phenomena does the term “religion” in these three authors’ narratives refer? Why are those cultural phenomena important to the protagonists, and why is it important that they be considered “religious” for plot and character development to proceed? In asking these questions, I am treating “religion” within the texts of these authors as a category of thought that the narrative uses to refer to certain cultural phenomena for a specific reason, whether it be to drive forward plot or character development. This allows my analyses to avoid treating the representation of religious cultural phenomena within these authors’ texts as “imagery,” or in other words a static representation within the text of something in the real world. To treat the representation of religious cultural phenomena in these authors’ literature as imagery implies that it depicts phenomena that exist in the natural world, such as for example imagery of frogs or grass would. In other words, treating

“religion” as imagery allows the word to continue to be considered as a referant to something that exists in the natural, empirical world outside of human-made constructs. By thinking of the representation of “religion” within these authors’ literature instead in terms taken from the discipline of Religious Studies, I have moved from considering “religion” as imagery to considering it as “narrative device”—an abstract category that actively drives plot and character development forward by designating certain cultural phenomena as “religious,” because it somehow helps the protagonists or the narrative action for those phenomena to be labeled as such. Religious Studies scholars understand “religion” as a political category, its meaning always contingent on specific social circumstances. Scholars of literature can acknowledge this contemporary understanding of how the category of “religion” operates by viewing it as a narrative device within texts, always strategically calling certain cultural phenomena religious to drive forward plot or character development, rather than as a kind of imagery.

In addition to this overarching interdisciplinary methodology, my readings and interpretations of Bing Xin’s, Su Xuelin’s, and Xu Dishan’s literature in the following chapters will be based upon the interplay of four methods, each of which will be explained in turn below: intertextual, interdisciplinary analysis of these authors’ literature in comparison with the *Union* and *English Revised* versions of the Bible; historical contextualization; close-reading analysis; and the grounding of their literature in previous theoretical arguments. These arguments include those made about representations of modernization in May Fourth literature made by Hsia (1961), Wang (1997), and Lee (2006), those concerning the representation of the relationship between individualism and determinism in May Fourth literature made by Knight (2006), Anderson (1990), and

Prusek (1980), and Mahmood's (2001) theory about the act of identifying with religion as itself a form of agency.

It would be impossible to delineate the specific role of religiosity on Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's works without understanding exactly how their narratives employ quotations and images borrowed from specific passages of the Bible. The original context of the Biblical texts or images in question must be understood first to then determine how they are reworked in the literary text under examination. It is thus necessary in analyzing the work of these three authors to continually return to the Bible for comparison and contrast. This method is most evident in Chapters 3-4, which both include extensive close-reading analysis. I will sometimes accomplish this intertextual analysis through my own close readings of the Bible, while other times I will consult secondary scholarship on the relationship of the content of Biblical narratives to the literature of these three authors. To make these comparisons, I employ the *Union Bible*, the most common Protestant Bible in China then and now, which was likely to have been these three authors' main Biblical reference. The translations in the *Union Bible*, made by a team of nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries, were created from various source texts, including the original Biblical Hebrew Old Testament and Ancient Greek New Testament as well as portions of the *English Revised Bible* (Zetzsche 1999, 232-238; 304). For this reason, I will use the *English Revised* edition of the Bible for any English translations of Biblical passages I will discuss below.

This dissertation also employs historical contextualization as a mode of analysis, primarily in Chapter 1. This chapter will introduce the work of an array of scholars from the fields of history (Prasenjit Duara, Vincent Goosaert), religious studies (Rebecca

Nedostup, Chloe Starr), and literary historical studies (Yang Jianlong, Chen Weihua) to establish a picture of the social and intellectual interest exhibited in Christianity and Buddhism as possible ideological foundations for modern society in early Republican Era China. It suggests that given this historical context, the religiosity of Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's literature can be read as socially and politically significant, aligned with social and intellectual movements at the time exploring the potential of religion as a guiding force for the cultivation of modern individuals. This historical contextualization lays the groundwork for the rest of the dissertation, which focuses on close-reading and theoretical analysis rather than on historical context. Nevertheless, incorporation of relevant historical details will be used in Chapters 2-4 when it relates to a specific argument about these three authors' works or about secondary scholarship.

The basis of my arguments in Chapters 2 and 3 will be formed through close-reading analysis. I will combine my own readings of the texts with those formed by previous scholars who have written about religiosity in Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's literature to come to new insights and conclusions about potential methods of reading these authors' works. By close-reading analysis, I refer to a process by which I will first observe unusual or noteworthy uses of language within a given passage, and then extrapolate from this usage based on a variety of factors to make an argument about how to interpret it. These factors include the extent to which it is used throughout the author's entire body of literature and essays, as well as the context of the passage and interpretations of the same passage by previous scholars. I have concentrated my reading of these authors' literature on those stories that both narrate tales of religious protagonists and are among the most well-known of their works, which indicates that they have left

the greatest impact on the development of modern Chinese literature. These works include various very short stories of Bing Xin's from 1919-1922, Xu Dishan's "The Web-Mending Toiling Spider [Zhui wang lao zhu 缀网劳蛛]" (1922) and *Yuguan*, and Su Xuelin's *Thorny Heart* and "Fire-side Chat at Mt. Hsiu".

Close-reading analysis must form the foundation of any literary study that claims to use the contents of the literature on which it is focusing to draw conclusions about the ideological import of the texts at hand. However, broader literary and philosophical theories can contextualize conclusions drawn from close-reading analyses to demonstrate their wider applicability beyond simply an enhanced appreciation of the work of the specific authors who are the focus of the study. Keeping this in mind, I have engaged with previous theoretical interventions in my literary analyses to enforce my arguments as well as to ensure that the broader significance of the conclusions I draw from them is evident.

The dissertation would not be possible without its reliance on David Der-Wei Wang's notion of "multiple modernities" simultaneously existing in early 20th-century China, as detailed above in the literature review. This understanding of Republican Era literary conceptualizations of modernization makes possible the recognition that the literature of Bing Xin, Xu Dishan, and Su Xuelin depicts a distinctive imagining of this process in the Republican Era. C.T. Hsia's and Haiyan Lee's arguments for distinct literary formulations of modernization in Republican Era China are used in Chapter 2 as counterpoints to the literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan, to demonstrate how these three authors' works contain ways of thinking about modernization that differ from those in Republican Era literature which Hsia and Lee have previously researched.

Finally, Chapter 4 is framed by the Western philosophical debate on the relationship of individualism and determinism to demonstrate the stakes of reading Su Xuelin's, Xu Dishan's, and Bing Xin's literature as portraying protagonists who choose to identify with or participate in religious cultural phenomena positively. I use Prusek's summary of the value Republican Era intellectuals placed on individualism to make evident the apparent problem of reading Su Xuelin's, Xu Dishan's, and Bing Xin's works as simultaneously encouraging individualism and participation in religion. Later in the chapter, I engage Saba Mahmood's theory that a woman's choice to participate in a patriarchal religious tradition can be considered a form of agency without the need for that woman to harbor any aspirations to overthrow the patriarchy in question. Relying on Mahmood's theory as a foundation, I argue that the narratives of Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's works depict protagonists' participation in religious cultural phenomena as allowing them to demonstrate and deepen their individual freedom, rather than forcing them to stifle it. I also contrast these three authors' literary protagonists, whose religions allow them to optimistically hope for progress despite the social deterministic structures that oppress them, with those in literature surveyed by Anderson and Knight, who remain pessimistic that society will ever change because they replace religious determinisms with social ones.

Chapter Outline

Each chapter of my work builds on the previous one to make a comprehensive argument for understanding the literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan as portraying a distinctive conceptualization of modernization on the individual level. In

Chapter One, I argue that the works of these three authors which involve religious protagonists should be understood not as idiosyncratic or insular, but rather as engaged with and responding to larger May Fourth Era intellectual discussions predominant in the late 1910s and early 1920s concerning religion's potential as an ideological foundation for modern society.

Chapter Two then showcases how the works of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan involving religious protagonists all contain variants of the same basic narrative structure. They begin by introducing the protagonists, who in most cases have been awakened to the necessity for social improvement in China for which May Fourth intellectuals call. However, these protagonists suffer from a sense of social alienation, an inability to effectively connect with other people and disseminate their enlightened thoughts. This feeling leaves them frustrated, anxious, depressed, and lonely. Eventually, they overcome their sense of social alienation by discovering religion and participating in religious cultural phenomena. Protagonists find that by participating in religious cultural phenomena, they cultivate the skill of focusing on the well-being of others, either by prioritizing their needs and desires or by loving them unconditionally. Possession of this skill then allows them either to finally forge strong connections with others, or at least to be filled with joy and hope that they will be able to connect deeply with others going forward in their lives, even if they have not yet started by the end of the story. In either case, protagonists' feelings of social alienation and resultant anxiety are resolved.

Chapter Two also underscores how portrayals of both rationalism and love in these three authors' literature are distinctive from those in Republican Era literary modernities previously delineated by C.T. Hsia and Haiyan Lee.

Chapter Three addresses explores why Su Xuelin's, Bing Xin's, and Xu Dishan's literary narratives would portray skills that protagonists perceive as important to cultivating social relationships as accessible primarily through participation in religious cultural phenomena. As discussed above, society is presented within the literature of these three authors as the source of anxiety, alienation, and depression to protagonists, who feel frustrated at their inability to communicate or forge deep connections with others. In this, these authors' literature is aligned with most May Fourth Era fiction. Unlike other May Fourth Era fiction, however, the protagonists of these three authors' stories eventually figure out how to resolve their social alienation and strengthen their individual mentalities. I contend that the narratives of these works of literature take advantage of the positioning of the category of "religion" as allegedly a referent to superempirical realities existing outside of the human social world. "Religion" within these narratives becomes a means of presenting the skill set of caring for others as ostensibly existing outside of society. This then allows protagonists to turn to this skill set as an allegedly objective, disinterested solution to their sense of alienation and anxiety, which is in the first place caused by human society. "Religion" in these works of literature is a narrative device that, by means of presenting the skill set of caring for others as existing independently of the human social world, shifts plots toward positive resolutions and allows protagonists to strengthen their mentalities.

Finally, in Chapter Four I clarify the tension that arises from reading these three authors' works as simultaneously promoting individualism and a deterministic conceptualization of the world. I argue that their literature posits that a universe deterministically conceived can still allow for individualism and liberty. I argue that in

fact, literary protagonists' participation in religious cultural phenomena enables them to dismiss the restraints imposed on them by social determinisms as impermanent and unimportant, since their religion ostensibly calls them to a higher purpose, justified by the existence of a superempirical reality. Thus, the literature of these three authors is more optimistic than Republican Era literature which dismisses religion as traditional and antiquated by using it to denote anything that is not considered "scientific" and thus "modern." Literature that employs the category of religion in this way decries it as an oppressive traditional superstition, but simply replaces it with social institutions or human depravity as oppressive forces that are impossible to overcome.

Significance and Implications

This dissertation represents one of the first efforts to delineate a way of reading Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's literature that integrates their literary interest in religiosity with their status as May Fourth intellectuals desiring to modernize China. This dissertation understands the religiosity of their literature not as separate from its simultaneous advocacy of May Fourth conceptualizations of Chinese modernization, but rather as inextricably intertwined with it, to the point that in fact their literature portrays a distinctive conceptualization of modernization on an individual level. In portraying identification with or participation in religion as necessary to strengthening the mentalities of Chinese individuals, they depict a relationship between religion and modernization that has yet to be commonly recognized in Republican Era literature. Chapter One below highlights some of the recent scholarship by religious studies scholars and historians demonstrating the widespread debates among Republican Era intellectuals

regarding the extent to which religion was compatible or even necessary to modernization. Yet, almost no scholarship exists on the significance of religion within Republican Era literature. This dissertation is an effort to bring recent scholarly knowledge on Republican Era interest in the relationship of religion and modernization to bear on studies of literature produced during the period.

Secondly, on the level of form, this dissertation utilizes research questions of the discipline of Religious Studies to treat “religion” within literature as a narrative device, which refers to certain phenomena to drive plot and character development. The arguments of the following chapters explore which phenomena are designated as “religious” in Bing Xin’s, Su Xuelin’s, and Xu Dishan’s literature, and why. In contrast, previous scholars writing on religion in Republican Era literature, including Marian Galik, Lewis Robinson, Chen Weihua, and Yang Jianlong, treat “religion” in literature simply as “imagery.” By treating “religion” as a conceptual category, a device, rather than as imagery, my research avoids analyzing the literary representation of “religion” as a referent to an entity that exists in the real world outside of human thought and abstraction. This methodology aligns the study of religion and literature in the Chinese tradition with the approach of contemporary Religious Studies, acknowledging that just as “religion” works as a conceptual, political category in the human social realm, so it must accordingly function in any artistic efforts at representing this realm. It is hoped that this methodology will be employed in future studies of religion as depicted within Chinese literature.

CHAPTER 2: THE SHADOWS OF IDIOSYNCRASY AND THE SPECTER OF THE AUTHOR IN PREVIOUS ANALYSES OF THE LITERATURE OF BING XIN, SU XUELIN, AND XU DISHAN

Introduction

When writing on Bing Xin's and Su Xuelin's literature, Lewis Robinson, Marian Galik, Yang Jianlong, Chen Weihua, and Meng Danqing 孟丹青 (1999) have generally read the allusions to religiosity in their work biographically, as purely a reflection of the authors' personal religious identities and experiences. None of them have attempted to look beyond a purely biographical rationale for explaining the religiosity within these authors' works, as will be demonstrated below. Except for Meng Danqing, who writes exclusively on Su Xuelin, the above scholars also focus their analyses of Xu Dishan's literature on in-depth explorations of its allusions to Christianity. While they do not suggest that the Christian themes of Xu Dishan's literature are simply reflections of his personal spiritual journey as they do with Bing Xin and Su Xuelin, the focus of their analysis nevertheless implies that the Christian themes of Xu Dishan's literature are not connected to any of its other themes. C.T. Hsia takes a different approach in his analysis of Bing Xin's and Xu Dishan's works, focusing mainly on their contributions to the May Fourth Movement while dismissing the religiosity of their literature as insignificant. The result of either approach is the same: the religiosity of these authors' literature is implied to be simply an idiosyncratic quirk of their writing, a reflection of their private belief as opposed to a call to the public to rethink how modernization efforts on an individual level should be conceived. In the twenty-first century, Zhange Ni (2014) and Steven Riep (2004) have finally written a few journal articles recognizing the potential of the

religiosity of Su Xuelin's and Xu Dishan's literature respectively to be read as commentary on how to modernize the public sphere, rather than as simply a reflection of their private reflections. Bing Xin's early literature depicting religiosity has not yet enjoyed any such reappraisal. In short, reading the religiosity depicted in these three authors' literature as a social provocation as well as or instead of as an exploration of the personal spiritual journeys of the authors themselves has yet to be practiced in great depth.

Su Xuelin, Bing Xin, and Xu Dishan all expressed belief in either Buddhism or Christianity, sometimes both, at different points of their lives, so it is not illogical to read their literature as a reflection of their personal experiences of religion.¹⁰ However, it is unfortunate that until now, very few scholars have considered reading the religiosity of their literature from any other standpoint besides this one. This chapter makes a case for reading religiosity in these three authors' literature as a call for social change. First, it will demonstrate how these scholars, when examining the religiosity of these three authors' works, have almost without exception interpreted religiosity therein as primarily an expression of their private, individual beliefs, rather than as social commentary and provocation. The second part of the argument demonstrates the plausibility of viewing these authors' literature from a different perspective, as engaging with a question at the

¹⁰ Su Xuelin mentions her conversion to Catholicism in her essay, "The Religious Environment of My Youth [Wo you xiao shi de zong jiao huan jing 我幼小时的宗教环境]" (1945). Marian Galik provides an overview of Bing Xin's devotion to Christianity, and to a lesser extent Buddhism and Hinduism, in her early youth (Galik 251-270). Cheng Xiaojuan 程小娟 discusses Xu Dishan's personal religious views as part of his analysis of the author's works in his essay "Religious Tolerance and Harmony in the Literary Sphere—Xu Dishan's Non-Monotheistic Concept of God and its Inspiration [Wen xue ling yu zhong de zong jiao kuan rong yu he xie—Xu Dishan de fei yi jia lun Shangdi guan ji qi qi shi 文学领域中的宗教宽容与和谐—许地山的非一甲论上帝观及其启示]" (2010).

forefront of current social and political debates during the May Fourth Era regarding the proper role of religiosity in modern society. The chapter will provide a short overview of some of the major debates in social, political, and literary spheres at the time regarding how to define the role and nature of modern religiosity. This section will be followed by an overview of the views on this subject of two prominent groups of May Fourth authors. These two groups include those like Chen Duxiu, who saw some value in the teachings of Christianity even if he dismissed religion overall as too traditional, and those like Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 (1897-1931), who argued that citizens of a successful modern nation-state would have to cultivate belief in something superempirical. Thematically, the literature of Bing Xin, Xu Dishan, and Su Xuelin represents a literary contribution to efforts of intellectuals in the social, political, and literary spheres of Chinese society to define modern religiosity, as well as engaging in dialogue with the viewpoints of authors Chen Duxiu and Xu Zhimo. These two sections taken together underscore the thematic parallels between the literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan and contemporaneous social, political, and literary debates among both prominent religious and non-religious intellectuals regarding how to incorporate religiosity into modern China. In sum, this chapter is an effort to free the works of these authors from the assumption that they must be read as reflections of the personal, private beliefs of those who wrote them. Instead, it is plausible and in fact illuminating to recognize in the subject matter of their literature and essays reflections and continuations of widespread, public debates in the May Fourth Era across social, political, and literary realms regarding the proper relationship of religiosity and modernization efforts.

At the outset, it should be noted that it is impossible to know Bing Xin's, Xu Dishan's, and Su Xuelin's intentions in writing their works and whether they explicitly meant to reflect or perpetuate in their literature the discourses about religiosity ongoing in society at the time. This chapter by no means purports to be able to discern what their *intentions* in writing religiosity into their literature were. Rather, it is an effort to contextualize the literature of these three authors within the larger social, political, and literary debates on the relationship of religion and processes of modernization at the time by underscoring how it is thematically related to them. Demonstrating how their literature reflects and further develops the arguments of a variety of May Fourth intellectuals that some form of religiosity was necessary for modernization efforts provides a historical context for reading depictions of religiosity and modernization within their literature as connected. Given this historical context, the decision to read their literature as presenting a distinct conceptualization of modernization advocating participation in religion as necessary to the formation of strong Chinese citizens in Chapters 2-4 will not seem to be without rationale.

One further qualification is that the goal of this chapter is not to demonstrate simply that Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan wrote literature which defied the idea that religion was incompatible with modernization. Such an enterprise would perpetuate the idea of a stark duality in the May Fourth Era between intellectuals who were antireligious and those who were pro-religious. Rather, this chapter aims to show that the literature of these authors can be understood as forming part of a larger set of dialogues across political, social, and literary spheres exploring different possible relationships of religion and modernization. In other words, this chapter aims to show that these authors

participated in a set of May Fourth Era discourses about the relationship of religion and modernization that are not easily categorized into a pro-/anti- dichotomy. Nedostup's understanding of the anti-religious sentiment that rose during the New Culture Movement [Xin wen hua yun dong 新文化运动] (another term for the "May Fourth Movement")

clarifies the goal of this chapter:

The political and cultural elites of the late Qing and Republic were heavily involved in...new iterations of religious culture...In this context, then, the third development—the doubts about the place of religion in the Chinese nation and world civilization that boiled over during the New Culture Movement and the anti-imperialist movement of the mid-1920s—looks less like simple antitraditionalist critiques and more like one proposition among many for the shape of Chinese modernity to come (Nedostup 2010, 12-13).

Nedostup argues that given her scholarship on the complex debates in which late Qing and Republican Era intellectuals engaged concerning the proper relationship of religion and modernization, the anti-traditionalist critiques for which the May Fourth Era is known can be contextualized as simply one idea among many on this subject. Like Nedostup's recasting of the anti-traditionalist and anti-religious critiques of the May Fourth Era, this chapter is also an effort to allow the work of these authors sympathetic to the value of religiosity to be seen no longer as idiosyncratic, but as part of a larger May Fourth literary discourse debating the role of religiosity in modern society ongoing in political, social, and literary spheres at the time.

Previous Readings of Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's Literature as Reflections on Their Individual Experiences of Religion

Previous scholarship by Robinson, Galik, Yang, Chen, Hsia, and Meng has consistently understood the religiosity of Bing Xin's, Xu Dishan's, and Su Xuelin's literature as an in-depth, individual, private exploration into the authors' sensations of religion. Robinson, Galik, Yang, Chen, and Meng analyze the religiosity alluded to in these works of literature almost exclusively in terms of how it reflects the spiritual experiences of the authors who wrote them, while Hsia dismisses the religiosity of Bing Xin's and Xu Dishan's work as idiosyncratic or nonessential to understanding their works. The result of both approaches to studying these three authors' literature is the same—they underscore the religiosity of these authors' works as primarily reflections of their own private spiritual-religious explorations and journeys. On the rare occasions when Robinson and Hsia do read the depiction of religiosity in Bing Xin's and Xu Dishan's literature as linked to their depictions of modern, progressive societies, both scholars minimize the significance of the relationship between the two themes.

Robinson, Yang, and Chen's scholarship focuses on an in-depth exploration of the allusions to Christianity in Xu Dishan's literature without linking it to any of the other themes of his work. Robinson limits his analysis of Xu Dishan's short stories "The Web-Mending Toiling Spider," "The River-Merchant's Wife [Shang ren fu 商人妇]" (1925), and *Yuguan* to an in-depth discussion of their themes and motifs borrowed from the Bible and from Christian teaching (Robinson 42-60; 183-201). His exclusive focus on the portrayal of Christianity in Xu Dishan's literature is especially obvious in the third of these analyses. Robinson methodically considers the progression of Yuguan's relationship with Christianity, from the beginning of the novella when she pragmatically sees missionary work as a form of access to monetary resources through to her gradual

change of heart resulting in her real conversion toward the end of the story (Robinson 187-196). He reads the story as primarily about a triumph of Christian missionary work, a detailed portrait of a woman who joins the Christian enterprise for the wrong reasons but whose internal moral compulsion eventually guides her to spiritual enlightenment (Robinson 196-197). His analysis emphasizes a reading of *Yuguan* as essentially a conversion novella.

However, *Yuguan* is a complex work with many themes, which C.T. Hsia hints at in his assessment of the work as a “masterpiece” (Hsia 1961, 88). While Robinson’s reading is viable, it is by no means the exclusive way in which to understand this text. For example, the theme of “modernization” on an individual level is also present in the story, in the evolution of Yuguan’s relationship with her son and daughter-in-law over the course of the novella, two protagonists whom Robinson’s monograph hardly mentions. For the greater part of the novella, they both disdain Yuguan for the rural, peasant lifestyle she leads, which to them seems crass. Sleek, intellectual, English-speaking, and Westernized, the couple clearly consider themselves more attuned to China’s evolving society than Yuguan is, with her traditional village upbringing and lack of formal education or travel experience (Xu 1939, 359-361). Later in the story, however, after Yuguan undergoes a profound spiritual awakening, her peace with herself and her selflessness toward others attracts the admiration of many people in her life, including the son and daughter-in-law who once looked down on her (Xu 1939, 363-365). Clearly, this sub-plot of the novella could be read as a portrayal of a successful strategy for strengthening one’s individual character. Yet, Robinson makes no mention of this sub-plot. It is just one example of the various elements of the novella that indicate its

potential to be read in ways other than simply as the conversion narrative Robinson offers.

Yang's more recent monograph similarly underscores the religiosity of Xu Dishan's *Yuguan* above other possible readings of the novella. He focuses his analysis on the various personal decisions Yuguan must make throughout her life regarding her religious identity, including whether to lead a worldly or religious life, worship the Christian god or ancestral spirits, and believe in the Bible or the Yi jing [易经] (Yang 2012, 337-352). Through this analysis, he paints a nuanced portrait of Yuguan's character and internal struggles throughout her life. However, like Robinson, he hardly mentions the parallel narrative of how Yuguan's relationship with her ostensibly more modern son and daughter-in-law progresses over her life. In focusing only on Yuguan's personal struggles with her religious identity, Yang perpetuates the precedent Robinson has set for reading *Yuguan* primarily as a conversion narrative.

Chen also confines his analysis of Xu Dishan's literature to a description of how it reflects Christian values. This is clear in Chen's description of Xu's short story "The Web-Mending Toiling Spider," the central protagonist of which is a Christian woman named Shangjie 尚洁. Chen argues that Shangjie exemplifies the glorification of Christian teaching in Xu Dishan's work, and that "Christian doctrine becomes the standpoint and principle underlying Shangjie's behavior" (Chen 2007, 204).¹¹ For Chen, Shangjie's devotion to a life based on Christian teaching is the most remarkable aspect of this short story. However, another aspect of Shangjie's character is also unusual: namely, her independence from men. The story opens with her making clear that she does not care

¹¹ "基督教教义成为尚洁行事的主张和原则。"

about the slanderous rumors her husband spreads about her because he does not like her frequently going out of the house to help the needy. She does not define herself by her relationship with him or even consider it a major aspect of her identity. Nothing he says can impact her behavior (Xu 1922 “Zhui wang,” 77-79). Even after her husband attacks her with a knife and runs away from home in guilt and shame, she does not let this incident affect her well-being, but continues to maintain her inner calm and raise her children even in his absence (Xu 1922 “Zhui wang,” 84-91). Eventually her husband re-initiates contact with her, expressing remorse for his behavior and begging her to return to him (Xu 1922 “Zhui wang,” 92).

These three episodes demonstrate that the power dynamic between this couple is not that of the husband domineering over Shangjie or Shangjie treating her husband as though he is the center of her world. Rather, Shangjie maintains a frame of mind and identity totally separate from her husband's. If anything, she is the rock of the relationship, demonstrated by her stable behavior in comparison to her husband's irrational and volatile actions. This portrait of a marriage in which the woman maintains complete independence from her husband and upon whom he is dependent is unusual in Republican Era fiction.¹² Since Shangjie's independence and sway over her husband is rare among Republican Era female protagonists, the possibility that her progressive characteristics are linked to her Christian religiosity merits consideration. By emphasizing the depth of Shangjie's Christian identity without also considering Shangjie's modern characteristics, Chen's work of scholarship adds to the scholarly

¹² Much scholarship has been published on how Republican Era literary intellectuals, who were mostly male, conceptualized of the “new woman [Xin nǚ xìng 新女性]” as primarily defined by her relationships with men, rather than as an independent agent in her own right. For examples of such scholarship, see Edwards (2000), Feng (2004), and Yan (2006).

precedent described above by reading Xu Dishan's literature primarily as an exploration of Christian faith.

Bing Xin's literature has been subject to much the same treatment as Xu Dishan's by scholars writing in Chinese and English. In a chapter of Yang's monograph entitled "The Christian Value of Bing Xin's Sacred Poetry [Lun Bing Xin sheng shi chuang zuo de Jidu jiao jia zhi 论冰心圣诗创作的基督教价值]," he engages in a descriptive analysis of the extent to which Christian themes and motifs permeate her work (Yang 2012, 322). Likely because of his monograph's focus on exploring the influence of the Bible on Chinese literature, he focuses his analysis on how Bing Xin's literature was influenced by the Book of Psalms, and concludes with a call for Chinese scholars to conduct more research on the Psalms to better understand the extent to which they influenced the development of modern Chinese literature (Yang 2012, 335). Yang's goal, which he appears to achieve by the end of the chapter, is to demonstrate one example of the influence of the Bible on the development of Chinese literature. However, one consequence of this analytical focus is that Bing Xin's literature is depicted as concerned primarily with exploring Christian religiosity, rather than with exploring possible processes of Chinese modernization as other works of May Fourth Era literature did.

Marian Galik's scholarship on Bing Xin's literature similarly focuses on its explorations of religiosity, which he reads primarily as expressions of her own personal religious journey. He first introduces her literature by linking it immediately to her biographical exposure to religious ideas:

Her universe was confined to the firmament of heaven known to her from the Bible, but it was filled also with the notions and images taken from Buddhism and the *Upanishads*, the last being familiar to her through the mediation of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) ...All-embracing love manifested in her

literary works—typical of Christ and Tagore—has become a merger and a compass (Galik 2004, 47).

Here, Galik is providing insight into Bing Xin's inspiration for the message of "all-embracing love" depicted in her work. He acknowledges Bing Xin's interest in religion, as well as its manifestation in her literature as a philosophy of "all-embracing love." He is focusing his analysis completely on tracing the sources of Bing Xin's personal religious inspiration in religious texts and teachings she encountered in her own personal life. Later in the book, he devotes a whole chapter to her called "Young Bing Xin and Her Poetry," which focuses exclusively on clarifying the religiosity of her early poetry by searching for an explanation of it in her personal life (Galik 2004, 251). He spends much of the chapter tracing Christian and Buddhist themes that were of interest to her or that came into play in her later poetry, including her fascination with the Christian god's creation of the cosmos and nature, the image of the "Biblical Good Shepherd," and the "endless" as emulated by the concepts of "perfect love" and "perfect harmony." He suggests that her fascination with the Christian god's creation of the cosmos originated from a quote from the Book of Genesis in Luella Miner's *Geology* textbook, which she was assigned to read at her Christian high school, Bridgman Academy. He traces her interest in the "Biblical Good Shepherd" to her reading of the Bible and her interest in "perfect love" and "perfect harmony" to the Buddhist-influenced ideas of Tagore's poetry, which she read voraciously (Galik 2004, 256-260). Thus, Galik's analysis clearly takes as its main objective finding explanations for Bing Xin's early religiosity in her biographical experiences. One consequence of this decision is that it underscores her early literature as primarily reflecting the author engaged in a self-reflexive dialogue with herself as she explores her religious feelings and beliefs. Galik's reading grounds this understanding of

Bing Xin's literature as self-reflexive and personal above any potential reading of her work as social commentary or call to action.

Scholars writing on Su Xuelin also tend to view the religiosity of her literature exclusively as a reflection of her personal beliefs, or at least as unrelated to her literature's simultaneous focus on Chinese modernization. Zhang Ni provides an in-depth summary of the split in reactions to Su's novel *Thorny Heart* after its initial publication. On the one hand, some intellectuals praised it for touting Enlightenment values that were also advocated by many May Fourth intellectuals. On the other hand, members of intellectual Catholic circles praised it for touting Catholic religious values (Ni 2014, 72-73). In other words, at the time *Thorny Heart* was published, critics did not understand the themes of religiosity and processes of modernization within the novel as interconnected, but chose to focus on one or the other as of central importance. Ni points out the need for the novel to be critically examined as a work which strives to reconcile values of individualism and egalitarianism with Catholic belief, but does not undertake this enterprise within the boundaries of her article (Ni 2014, 94). Meng Danqing, writing on ethics and morality within Su Xuelin's literature, presumes that its exclusive purpose is to reflect the author's own beliefs. In fact, the entire purpose of his essay on Su Xuelin's *Thorny Heart* is to ascertain Su's moral beliefs from a close-reading of what the author calls Su's "autobiographical-style [Zi zhuan ti 自传体]" novel (Meng 1999, 157-160).

When Robinson and Hsia do acknowledge a link between themes of religiosity and modernizing China in the works of Bing Xin and Xu Dishan, they minimize its significance. Robinson notes of Bing Xin and Xu Dishan that they "...shared an approach

to Christianity which emphasized individual self-cultivation as the ‘grassroots’ basis for greater national salvation” (Robinson 1986, 38). Robinson is arguing that while Xu Dishan’s and Bing Xin’s conceptualization of what is needed for “greater national salvation” is informed by Christianity, their religious identities ultimately lead them to prioritize “individual self-cultivation” as the “basis” of such an endeavor, which is aligned with the views of many other authors of the period who viewed self-cultivation and education necessary to achieve a successful modern society.¹³ In other words, according to Robinson’s reading, the Christian belief of Xu Dishan and Bing Xin, while unique, does *not* cause their conceptualizations of what strategies are needed for China’s modernization to differ substantially from that of their contemporaries. Furthermore, note the conflation in Robinson’s sentence between the authors themselves and the literature they write. His conclusion about how Christianity influences these two authors’ imaginings of ideal modernization processes stems from a close-reading analysis of their *literature*, a move that reveals the underlying assumption of his reading of their works that their literature should primarily be read as biographical reflections of their personal beliefs and experiences.

Hsia also acknowledges the connection between themes of religiosity and processes of modernization in the work of Xu Dishan and Bing Xin, but minimizes the significance of this connection in both cases. He writes of Xu Dishan:

What distinguished Lo Hua-sheng [Penname of Xu Dishan] from his contemporaries was his religious preoccupation.... Though his success is largely unimpressive and his influence on other writers minimal, his almost unique endeavor to recover spiritual values for his time entitles this author to our respect and a place in this history (Hsia 1961, 84).

¹³ For summaries of Republican Era education reform movements, see Farquhar (1999) and Jones (2011).

Hsia refers to Xu's literature as "an almost unique endeavor," marking him as isolated and idiosyncratic for his in-depth interest in religiosity. Hsia's observation is in fact factually wrong--Bing Xin and Su Xuelin also wrote literature similarly preoccupied with religiosity, not to mention other authors like Ba Jin 巴金 (1904-2005), Fei Ming 废名 (1901-1967), and Yu Dafu, to name a few, who also incorporated some allusions to religiosity within their work. Furthermore, the May Fourth Era also witnessed a preponderance of discussions not only in literary spheres, but also social and political ones regarding the proper relationship of religiosity and modernization processes (See "The Historical and Literary Context of Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's Literature" in Chapter Two below for an extended discussion of these May Fourth Era debates). In addition, it would be enlightening to learn what metrics Hsia is using to be able to so conclusively state that Xu Dishan's success is "largely unimpressive" and his influence on other writers "minimal." Xu's appearance in so many works of scholarship on Republican Era literature suggests otherwise. Hsia's summation of Xu's impact on history appears stubbornly determined to convey that he was little more than a peculiar blip on the radar of Republican Era literature who deserves a place in Hsia's monograph only for the curiosity of his "unique" contribution to modern Chinese literature. In this case, Hsia does not necessarily minimize the significance of religiosity to Xu Dishan's work. Neither does he explore it in any depth. Rather, he dismisses Xu Dishan's literature altogether as only just barely worthy of special notice.

On the other hand, Hsia minimizes the significance of Bing Xin's literary religiosity to her work. He writes that compared to Xu Dishan, who "was mainly concerned with the basic religious experience of charity or love and attempted in nearly

all his stories to demonstrate its ubiquitous presence in human lives,” Bing Xin “extols mother love and pantheism, but her philosophy, erected primarily upon her childhood happiness, is little implicated in the deeper religious issues” (Hsia 1961, 84). Here, Hsia is essentially understanding Bing Xin’s works as not really about religiosity. He claims that the so-called “religion” depicted within Bing Xin’s literature really refers to virtues like “mother love” and “pantheism” that are not in themselves religious. However, there is no unbiased way to pronounce the way her literature touches on religion as without a doubt “little implicated in the deeper religious issues.” The vague language of Hsia’s claim, such as the phrase “the deeper religious issues,” also makes it difficult to know precisely what he means. Bing Xin wrote extensively about Christianity and the Buddhism of Tagore in her early essays and letters, and her early literature is replete with Christian images. It thus appears that Hsia has been hasty in his conclusion that it would serve no purpose to regard at least Bing Xin’s early work as seriously engaging the question of the relationship between religiosity and Chinese processes of modernization.

The above readings exemplify how throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the literature of Bing Xin, Xu Dishan, and Su Xuelin involving religious protagonists has been read with the underlying assumption that it mainly concerns the individual exploration of religious feeling and belief. In the case of Bing Xin’s and Su Xuelin’s literature, these scholars also assume that this theme of individual religious exploration in their works should be read as linked to their own personal experiences, seeing their literature mostly as thinly-disguised autobiography. When Robinson and Hsia do refer to the possible linkage that may exist in Bing Xin’s and Xu Dishan’s literature between themes of religiosity and ideal processes of modernization, they are

both quick to dismiss the significance of the link. In all fairness, it is understandable that until now, the religious literature of these three authors has been read primarily as an exploration of individual religious journeys, and in some cases as semi-autobiographical imagining of those journeys. Su Xuelin describes the semi-autobiographical nature of *Thorny Heart* in her essay, “The Religious Environment of My Youth.” Bing Xin’s early writings often blur the line between fiction and non-fiction because of her use of the ambiguous term “I [Wo 我]” to refer to the narrator, as well as the semi-autobiographical subject matter of many of her works. Furthermore, all three authors spent portions of their lives grappling personally with how to define their personal religious identities (See Footnote 10 above). These facts have all likely contributed to the assumptions of the above scholars that the literature depicting the religiosity of Xu Dishan, Bing Xin, and Su Xuelin should be read in one of two ways: either as autobiographical or semi-autobiographical records of personal religious conversion and experience, or else as fictional works which are mainly concerned with exploring individual religious journeys. Nevertheless, it is a long-established premise of literary inquiry that no one correct reading exists for individual works of literature, and there is no reason to assume that the readings of Bing Xin’s, Su Xuelin’s, and Xu Dishan’s works of literature conducted by these scholars are the only possible ways to read them. The following section of this chapter argues that it is possible and plausible to read these authors’ literature depicting religiosity as dealing with a thematically much broader scope than these scholars have recognized. Specifically, the next section will demonstrate the plausibility of reading the literature depicting religiosity of these three authors as engaged with the question of how

to define Chinese modernization efforts that was at the forefront of the minds of so many intellectuals during the May Fourth Era.

The Historical and Literary Context of Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's Literature

To briefly reiterate the terms of my argument, “religious literary modernization” is the name I give to the conceptualization of “modernization” that is depicted in the literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan, which I argue is distinctive from other May Fourth Era literary modernities. Specifically, their literature depicts “religion” as a conceptual strategy for resolving protagonists’ social anxiety. The detailed arguments supporting these claims will be introduced in Chapters Two-Four. This section of Chapter One will demonstrate the plausibility of reading these three authors’ literature about religiosity as engaged with the question of the proper relationship between religiosity and modernization that was dominant in political, social, and literary spheres of Chinese society at the time it was written.

It is notable that religiosity is mostly present in the literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan published between the late 1910s and the early 1920s, except for outlier *Yuguan*, Xu Dishan’s novella, which was not published until 1939. In other words, these authors’ interest in incorporating religiosity into their literature for the most part coincides with the May Fourth Era. This should come as no surprise. The heyday of Chinese intellectual interest in religion was the early 1920s. Before Marxists ultimately began to dominate discussions of what modern China should look like in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Chinese religious laypeople, organizations, and ordained members of

religious institutions as well as non-religious intellectual elite seriously considered various aspects of Christian and Buddhist traditions as possible ideological foundations for modern Chinese society. It could be said that religiosity and Marxism were locked in an intense battle for the hearts of the Chinese people, one which Marxism ultimately won. This is self-evident in the literary sphere from observing the evolution of writings by Chinese intellectuals from the 1910s through to the late 1930s documented by Hsia (1961), Robinson (1986), Anderson (1990), and Knight (2006), all of whom acknowledge that Chinese literature became increasingly Leftist in the decades leading up to the War against Japanese Aggression. It is also affirmed by the state's shift away from government-endorsed approval of Christianity during this period. Goossaert and Palmer explain two reasons underlying this cessation of government support for Christianity: first, there were not many Christian sympathizers left in the Nationalist government at that point, and second, students and Marxists became increasingly more forceful in their critiques of Christianity as a sign of Western imperialism in China (Goossaert and Palmer 2010, 71-72). Such widespread approval and promotion of Leftist ideology paved the way for the Communist Party's assumption of leadership over China in 1949. This section posits that Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's literature concerning protagonists who participate in religious cultural phenomena can be best understood within this historical context of vibrant social and political debate in the May Fourth Era about how to incorporate religiosity into individual and social modernization efforts before intellectual interest gradually shifted to Marxism as the key to national salvation by the 1930s.

The first sub-section will provide a broad overview of arguments about how to incorporate religiosity into modernization efforts among religious intellectuals in the political, social, and literary spheres at the time. The second sub-section will provide an overview of how two groups of authors felt that religiosity could be effectively incorporated into modernization efforts on an individual level. Read in the context of these contemporaneous debates from across multiple spheres of May Fourth Era society, the literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan can be understood as an effort to coalesce other intellectuals' ideas about the relationship of religiosity and modernization. Given the historical context in which their literature concerning religious protagonists was written, it is not difficult to imagine that in addition to the emphasis of such works on personal spiritual journeys, they could also be read as a form of political and social commentary on how to modernize China.

I. May Fourth Era Debates on Religion and Modernization

It is by now widely accepted in the field of China Studies that Republican Era intellectuals formulated many different ideas of ideal processes of individual and social modernization in their essays and literature. Zhang Hao (1989), Kirk Denton (1996), David Der-Wei Wang (1997), and Susan Daruvala (2000) have noted that the May Fourth Movement was not the radical break from traditional Chinese society that May Fourth intellectuals presented it as, but in fact contained many strands of continuity with traditional beliefs and practices. On this note, historians including Vincent Goossaert and David Palmer, Rebecca Nedostup, and Prasenjit Duara have begun to pay more attention to the role that religious institutions and practitioners, as well as sympathizers of religion,

played in Republican Era social, political, and cultural reforms (See “The Historical and Literary Context of Bing Xin’s, Su Xuelin’s, and Xu Dishan’s Literature” in Chapter Two below). One pattern emerges clearly from these historians’ scholarship regarding attitudes of religious intellectuals in political, social, and literary spheres of May Fourth Era society, namely that these would-be defenders of religion spent much of their time strategizing new definitions of religion that they hoped would convince others of religion’s importance to individual and social modernization efforts. This section will demonstrate how the tolerance of politicians of the early Republic for some religious organizations gave the latter, as well as lay believers, freedom to explore how they should modernize their practices and beliefs. It also demonstrates that ultimately, religious intellectuals across religious, social, and cultural spheres advocated for a humanistic formulation of religion.

The tolerance of the early Republican government for some forms of religion likely made possible the vibrant discussions across social and cultural spheres about how to define “modern religiosity.” There existed a general understanding among religious believers that if they wanted to allow a place for religion in China’s modernization efforts, they would have to reform it in such a way as to be considered compatible with the goal of building a modern nation-state by China’s Republican government [Zhong hua min guo 中华民国] (1912-1949), led initially by President Sun Yan-Sen of the Nationalist Party. Goossaert and Palmer explain that in general, Sun’s government considered a “Christian-Secular Normative Model” as its main measure of how compatible with China’s efforts to modernize a given religious organization was, relegating any group that did not fit this model to the margins of society. Intelligentsia

and other elite in China followed suit, using a Christian-Secular Normative Model in their own estimations of how compatible with the goal of modernization a given religious organization was (Goossaert and Palmer 2010, 73). Goossaert and Palmer define the term “Christian-Secular Normative Model” as follows:

In this model, the Christian and the secular are two sides of the same coin: it is ‘Christian’ because it is based on the notion of a church separate from and independent of other social institutions, and at the same time ‘secular’ because it involves the state and other social institutions asserting their independence vis-à-vis the church (Goossaert and Palmer 2010, 68).

In other words, a religious organization that conforms to this model would consider itself separate from both the government and from other societies and organizations. Furthermore, in this model the government would demonstrate its autonomy as a governing body in large part by highlighting that it operates independently of any religious organizations. Goossaert and Palmer explain that Christian Nationalists prominent in this early government as well as members of the influential Nationalist circle supporting it financially or politically, namely Sun Yat-Sen, Chiang Kai-shek 蒋介石 (1887-1975), and their wives Soong Ching-ling 宋庆龄 (1893-1981) and Soong Meiling 宋美龄 (1898-2003) respectively “...considered that the decline and decay of China were due to idolatry, while the strength, prosperity, and higher civilization of America were due to the Christian religion. Christianity, for them, could bring dignity and equality to China” (Goossaert and Palmer 2010, 69).

Goossaert points out several historical factors that may have influenced the liberal attitudes of the Nationalists toward Christianity. First, Christian organizations played a substantial role in some of the strides in social progress that had been made over the last century. For example, the Women’s Christian Temperance Movement was active

in the anti-footbinding activism of the nineteenth century (Goossaert and Palmer 70).

Goossaert and Palmer argue that the even more important reason Nationalists approved of Christianity was the importance they attached to the idea of “religious citizenship” (Goossaert and Palmer 2010, 71; term qtd. from Duara 2008, 46). They point out that the Nationalists lacked “indigenous models” for how to be a citizen of a modern nation-state, explaining:

...Christians promoted the idea that a good believer, that is, a public-minded, thrifty, honest, sober, decent person, was de facto a good citizen. The involvement of many Chinese Christians in public life, civic projects, and campaigns against opium, foot-binding, and other ‘social ills’ convinced many urban Chinese of the practical benefits of religious citizenship, and they became sympathizers or even converted (Goossaert and Palmer 2010, 71).

Goossaert and Palmer’s understanding is that many Chinese intellectuals who were looking for models of national citizenship became convinced of the merits of the Christian model of “religious citizenship” by observing the active involvement of Chinese Christians in progressive social reforms. Under such a normative model, Goossaert argues:

Chinese traditions...had to reinvent and redefine themselves. They had to represent themselves as distinct religious institutions, independent and disconnected from the local cults of village society. They had to create national associations capable of representing them to the state (Goossaert and Palmer 2010, 74).

Thus, religious organizations in China had to redefine how they conceptualized of their relationship to the State. To be considered compatible with the goal of building a strong nation-state, they had to emphasize their independence from the government and from other social institutions. This applied to all kinds of religious groups, not only Christian but also Buddhist, Daoist, Confucian, and Muslim groups (Goossaert and Palmer 2010, 79-88). Those that failed to redefine the scopes of their organizations in this

way were marginalized. Without the support and resources of the government, they were often forced to practice in secret (Nedostup 2010, 28-29). Still, those organizations that conformed to the standard set by the Republican government enjoyed relative freedom to explore how they could best “modernize” their beliefs and practices in addition to their structures.

In general, intellectual elite within religious organizations as well as lay believers approved a form of religion that was human-centric, focused on the needs of individuals in the everyday rather than on mystical beliefs about other worlds and the afterlife. Translated into practical terms, this meant that religious traditions often revised the emphasis of their belief systems from intangible ideas such as gods, spirits, and the afterlife to focus instead on social welfare in the present. Nedostup documents the formation in the late Qing and early Republic of religious groups that structured their goals around educational reform. These included for example Buddhist, Islamic, and Daoist study societies and lay groups that spearheaded projects such as the “creation of publication programs encompassing popular magazines as well as canonical studies and reprint projects...” (Nedostup 2010, 12). These organizations focused their efforts on creating, distributing, and increasing access to knowledge, a goal aligned with the emphasis of many May Fourth intellectuals on the importance of education to China’s modernization efforts.

Another specific instance of humanistic reform can be found in the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) [Jidu jiao qing nian hui 基督教青年会], one of the most popular associations on college campuses at the time. This organization actively

participated in various movements for social reform.¹⁴ In fact, YMCA leader Wu Yaozong 吴耀宗 (1890-1979) argued that values like social egalitarianism advocated by the Communists [Gong chang dang 共产党], another popular political party vying for power during this period, were the ideal way to translate Christian ideals into reality (Robinson 1986, 7). The organization may have even stressed these values to a fault--it constantly struggled with the question of the extent to which it could identify with Communist values while retaining its unique identity as a Christian organization (Garrett 1970, 164).

Yet another prominent example of religious reform from this period was the “Humanistic Buddhism” revival movement of Buddhist monk Taixu 太虚 (1890-1947). Taixu believed that Buddhism in earlier centuries had put too much emphasis on funeral rites. He advocated a Buddhism that emphasized living humans and life (Goossaert and Palmer 2010, 81).

Outside of the realm of ordained and lay practitioners working from within religious organizations, lay intellectuals also contributed to the ongoing May Fourth Era debates regarding what kind of religion could be considered compatible with individual and social modernization. Sze-kar Wan provides an overview of various interpretations of Christianity by Chinese Protestant authors including Zhao Zichen 赵紫宸 (English name T.C. Chao) (1888-1979), Wu Leichuan 吴雷川 (1870-1944), Ni Tuosheng 倪柝声 (popularly known as “Watchman Ni”) (1903-1972) and Chen Chonggui 陈崇桂 (1884-1964) (Wan 2008, 99). His scholarship demonstrates that similarly to the religiously-

¹⁴ See Shirley S. Garrett’s *Social Reformers in Urban China: The Chinese Y.M.C.A., 1895-1926* (1970).

affiliated groups described above, these lay intellectuals also generally advocated for more humanistic formulations of religion as most compatible with or necessary to China's modernization. For the most part, they all agreed in a formulation of Christianity that emphasized the moral teachings of Jesus while deemphasizing Christianity's theological teachings (Wan 2008, 97-117). They argued for incorporating a more human-centric view of Christianity into the ideological foundations of Chinese modernization.

Richard X.Y. Zhang focuses on one of the authors profiled in Sze-kar Wan's essay, T.C. Chao, to provide a case study of such humanization of Christianity in action during the 1930s, about a decade after the heyday of the May Fourth Era. T.C. Chao argued that the most essential values of Christianity were embodied in the figure of Jesus Christ, and that proper Christian belief entailed namely emulating his personal characteristics of selflessness and self-sacrifice. Chao emphasizes this view of Jesus in his retelling of the New Testament, entitled *Life of Jesus* [Yesu zhuan 耶稣传] (1935), which focuses on the experience of Jesus as a human being experiencing human emotions, rather than on Jesus as immaculate Savior of Mankind. Zhang suggests that Chao's interpretation of the story of Jesus emphasizing his qualities as a human may have in part been due to personal belief, but was also plausibly a reflection of a popular strand of thought promoted during the May Fourth Era called "Jesus-ism [Yesu zhu yi 耶稣主义]," which laid "emphasis entirely on the human side of Jesus" and rejected "any articulation of his divinity" (Zhang 2008, 137). Thus, Zhang links Chao's decision to emphasize Jesus as a person over Jesus as a divine being to a broader idea current among Christian intellectuals during the May Fourth Era regarding how to properly conceptualize of Jesus (Zhang 2008, 134-142).

Religious intellectuals of the Republican Era considered the question of how to best incorporate religion into Chinese modernization efforts across political, social, and literary spheres. Many of the prominent figures associated with the early Republican government were Christians. As such, they advocated a “Christian-Secular Normative Model” of religion as compatible with China’s processes of modernization. This tolerance on the part of the government for certain kinds of religion opened the doors to social and cultural discussions exploring what would characterize a religion that would be compatible with individual and social modernization. In general, both ordained and lay religious intellectuals called for religion to become more humanistic, focusing on the needs and desires of people in their everyday lives rather than on promises and stories about more abstract ideas such as the afterlife and the dead.

It is important to recognize that debates about the kind of religion proper to modernizing Chinese society was not limited to those who identified with religion, however, but in fact expanded far beyond such borders into the circles of authors and other intellectuals who did not identify with religion. Erik Hammerstrom has remarked upon how the boundaries between religious and non-religious intellectuals in the May Fourth Era were more porous than scholarship on the period indicates, with both groups regularly participating in the same gatherings and social circles (Hammerstrom 2016, 87). Non-religious authors, far from unanimously critical of religion, included among their number some who were fascinated by the potential of certain forms of religiosity to enhance or even create progressive modern societies. They were some of the most prominent literary figures of the May Fourth Era, and their interest demonstrates that discussions about the potential of a “modernizing religion” in the May Fourth Era were

no niche topic, but rather of widespread interest to intellectuals of the period. The perspectives of these authors are explored in the next section.

II. Interventions from Authors in the Debate on Modernizing Religion

If this chapter were to provide an overview of every author who demonstrated interest in *religiosity* broadly construed in their fiction and essays, it would be much longer. Many significant authors of the period toyed with representations of religiosity in their works in a variety of styles and for a variety of purposes, including Yu Dafu, Mao Dun, and Shen Congwen, to name just a few. However, the goal of this chapter is not simply to catalogue instances of allusion to Christianity and Buddhism in Republican Era literature. Rather, the chapter aims to demonstrate specifically how intellectuals who were interested in incorporating identification with or participation in religious cultural phenomena into Chinese modernization efforts made their case. In the literary sphere of Republican Era China, two groups of authors stand out as especially concerned with this topic.

I have divided the four groups or individuals who wrote substantially on this topic into two subcategories. The first subcategory, which includes the *New Tide* [Xin chao 新潮] (1919) writers and Xu Zhimo, advocated that it was important to acknowledge a superempirical reality for individuals to improve their characters, but did not go so far as to identify this behavior as “religious.” Note that they did not refer to the so-called reality existing beyond human perception in which they wanted people to believe “superempirical;” here, I borrow Schilbrack’s term as a form of shorthand to refer to

these authors' ideas (See "Religion" in Chapter One above for a more in-depth discussion of Schilbrack's definition of "religion," including an explanation of the terms "promissory function" and "superempirical reality"). The second subcategory consists of authors and essayists Chen Duxiu and Zhou Zuoren, who argued that Christian teachings on love, charity, and fraternity symbolized in the figure of Jesus Christ would be valuable in China's ongoing modernization, even if they considered religion overall to be too unscientific. In a sense, Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's works are a way of coalescing these two perspectives. By linking the practice of religion to the cultivation of the skill of prioritizing others over oneself, the narratives of these authors' literature present a model of modern society in which identification with or participation in religion is important to China's modernization.

Some non-religious authors and intellectuals of Republican Era China demonstrated open-mindedness to the idea that "belief" in a superempirical reality might in fact be necessary for individuals to strengthen their characters. This is evident in the writings of authors who published in *New Tide*, a short-lived yet influential magazine publishing intellectual writings about a decade after the generation of authors including Chen Duxiu and Lu Xun first published many of their writings in *New Youth* [Xin qing nian 新青年] (1915-1926), one of the representative magazines of the New Culture Movement. Although *New Tide* was published later in the history of China's Republic, the attitude of its authors regarding belief is nevertheless revealing of openness among some intellectuals toward accepting that the world could not be reduced to scientifically provable principles and facts. In Vera Schwarcz's comparison of these two groups of writers, she depicts the *New Youth* authors as united in their suspicion of any system

purporting to uncover truth that was not based on the scientific method, such as religion. On the other hand, she upholds the *New Tide* writers as more open to the role that “belief” in a superempirical reality, though they did not call it religious, could play in strengthening individual characters. While the *New Youth* writers dismissed “belief” as superstitious, according to Schwarcz, the *New Tide* writers argued that belief and science were incomplete without each other, and that philosophy was the medium through which they could merge. That is, they argued that the primary method of truth-seeking in modern society should not be the scientific method, but rather “philosophy,” in which science and belief could come together to complement each other in the pursuit of truth. These authors wrote that perhaps it was necessary to *believe* in certain ideas, with or without the benefit of tangible evidence, as a means of fostering *hope* for social change. Without the force of belief, they argued, countering their *New Youth* elders, cynicism and skepticism would paralyze efforts to reform society (Schwarcz 1986, 104-107). Schwarcz over-generalizes the stance of the *New Youth* writers as unanimously anti-religious. For example, Chen Duxiu promoted the incorporation of Christian values, if not belief, into Chinese modernization efforts. Still, Schwarcz’s comparison between *New Youth* and *New Tide* authors demonstrates the divide between intellectuals of the Republican Era who dismissed non-empirically provable ideas as unmodern and those who embraced them as ways of fostering hope and optimism. It is important to underscore, however, that Schwarcz argues only that *New Tide* authors advocated for a generalized belief in some abstract superempirical reality that would ensure China’s successful modernization. They never characterized the “belief” for which they called as “religious.”

Xu Zhimo similarly advocated for the importance of belief as a foundation upon which to build a strong modern nation a decade earlier than the *New Tide* writers. In his essay “Art and Life” (1922), he observes that much of the great art, architecture, and literature in the Western world was created by artists out of inspiration caused by the fervor of their religious identities. He contrasts this with the artistic output of the Chinese historically, which he views as pathetic in comparison, and ties this to the lack of a religious sentiment among the Chinese people. While he is not interested in promoting religion to the Chinese, he argues that the wellsprings of religious belief and artistic inspiration within human individuals are in fact one and the same. He thus concludes that to create the kind of sublime, transcendent art that Europeans have created throughout history, it is necessary for the Chinese people to cultivate a feeling of divine “belief” in the power of sentiments and other unseen aspects of human experience to lead to transcendence and sublime experience (Xu 1922 “Art and Life,” 169-181). He seems to mean a feeling of quasi-divine inspiration, a sense that belief in the possibility of transcendent experience in the universe will lead to the production of sublime art. Though Xu’s judgments of the relative merits of European and Chinese art are dated and questionable, his essay represents another example of openness among May Fourth intellectuals to the idea that “belief” in non-empirically provable ideas was necessary to foster a strong nationalist sentiment. The *New Tide* writers advocated for belief as a way of encouraging optimism, while Xu Zhimo understood belief as a pathway to feelings of sublime transcendence, which would in turn lead to a strong literary and artistic output reflective of the cultural sophistication of the nation.

While some Republican Era authors were open to belief in non-empirically provable ideas as important to China's modernization, other authors dismissed this kind of belief as unscientific, but expressed admiration of the values advocated within Christian teaching. Such authors included notable figures such as Chen Duxiu. Writings by Chen Duxiu on this subject acknowledged the alleged incompatibility of identifying as religious with Chinese modernization efforts, but held that some values from within the Bible were admirable and worth emulating. These values included the teachings of Jesus regarding love for others, selflessness, and forgiveness. Chen's emphasis on the value of Jesus' teachings on selflessness and love is perhaps best represented by his essay entitled "Christianity and the Chinese People [Jidujiao yu zhongguoren 基督教与中国人]" (1920). Chen's Marxist training leads him to decry the theological aspects of Christian belief within his essay, but he embraces Jesus's moral character, namely his teachings on love. He feels that Jesus's life philosophy is necessary for individuals to successfully strengthen their characters (Chen 1920, 487-489). Chen Duxiu's approach to Christian religiosity is reflected in several works of May Fourth Era literature. For example, the protagonist of Yu Dafu's short story "Turning to the South" proclaims that Jesus's Sermon on the Mount describes the virtues that the citizens of a modern society would possess. However, he does not at any point himself identify with or participate in religious cultural phenomena. Another literary example is Ba Jin's novel *Fire* [Huo 火] (1940), in which one of the protagonists believes that the compassion and love advocated by Jesus form the components that individuals of a modern society would possess. Both these works, like most other writing on Christianity in early 20th-century China,

emphasize the religion's moral teachings on fostering in oneself love and compassion for one's fellow human beings over its more theological teachings.

In addition to Biblical teachings on love and compassion for others, several works of May Fourth literature also demonstrated great interest in Jesus' teachings on forgiveness. This is clear from Chen Weihua's analysis of the popularity of the Biblical "lost sheep" motif among Republican Era authors. A common metaphor within Christianity is to compare the relationship of Jesus to humanity to that of a shepherd to his sheep. As a shepherd leads his sheep toward green pastures, so does Jesus lead humanity toward salvation. In the logic of this metaphor, a "lost sheep" figuratively refers to a person who has lost sight of Jesus; who does not believe or who, in any case, does not lead a wholesome and honorable life according to the teachings of Jesus. This metaphor comes from a parable of a lost sheep who is found again by its own in the New Testament Book of Luke. In the Bible, this parable is used to illustrate is that Jesus is loving and forgiving, and that no matter how far a sheep strays, the good shepherd will always welcome it back with loving and open arms (*English Revised Bible*, Luke 15: 1-7). Chen Weihua points out that Republican Era authors employed this motif frequently in their literature, so much so that it should be considered a sub-category of literature of the period, "lost sheep" literature. He lists numerous works that utilize this motif including Guo Moruo's *Fallen Leaves* [Luo ye 落叶] (1931), Yu Dafu's "Lost Sheep [Mi yang 迷羊]" (1926), (1928), Lu Yin's 庐隐 (1899-1934) "Fallen [Lun luo 沦落]" (1933), and Xiao Qian's 萧乾 (1910-1999) "Stars of Separate Skies [Shen shang 参商]" (1936), among other works. Chen suggests that this metaphor was so popular in Republican Era literature because authors were attracted to the idea of compassionate forgiveness—that

no matter how far they had strayed, it was always possible for them to be saved as individuals and as a nation (Chen 2007, 211-214). Though not the same argument, Chen's contention nevertheless resonates with Jing Tsu's idea that Republican Era intellectuals deliberately developed a discourse of "failure" because it was easier to think that their nation was capable of greatness, but had failed to achieve it in the period from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, than it was to think that they were a weak nation because they were not capable of being a strong one (Tsu 2005, 7-8). Both arguments depict a group of authors and intellectuals who were disappointed with the current state of their nation, but filled with hope that with hard work and the right kind of mentality, making China into a strong modern nation was still possible. The Christian proclivity for forgiveness despite past errors therefore must have come across as appealing to many of them. One of the most notable examples of this motif, the one with which Chen Weihua leads his analysis, is Bing Xin's essay "A Painting—A Psalm" [Hua—shi 画—诗] (1920) (See "The Christian god as Guiding Shepherd in Bing Xin's Early Literature" in Chapter Four below for an in-depth analysis of this work). Her essay demonstrates her participation in this wide-scale interest in Jesus as symbol of forgiveness and hope for a better future.

Considering these two perspectives in relation to each other, the first group of May Fourth Era authors advocated for adapting a sense of "belief" that was not necessarily tied to any pre-existing religion or other ideology, while the second group advocated for adopting the values preached by Christianity without the additional baggage of identifying as religious. The literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan, represents a coalescence of these two viewpoints. Thus, their literature makes a

unique contribution to Republican Era discussions of the relationship between modernization processes and religiosity. It combines the idea of Xu Zhimo and the *New Tide* writers that a need for belief in something beyond scientifically demonstrable phenomena was necessary for building a modern nation with the approval of Christian values of compassion, selflessness, and forgiveness espoused by Chen Duxiu. Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's literary conceptualizations of modernization on an individual level can be understood as the most like the views of intellectuals, such as T.C. Chao and Taixu, who advocated for incorporating religiosity into Chinese modernization efforts. This should not be surprising, given the centrality of identification with or participation in religion to the work of these three authors, which is precisely the factor that makes the contribution of their literature to May Fourth Era discussions of how China should modernize so distinctive.

Conclusion

This chapter contextualizes the literature of Xu Dishan, Bing Xin, and Su Xuelin within the broad interest exhibited by intellectuals during the May Fourth Era in religiosity as a possible component of China's strategies for modernization. Illuminating the spectrum of views that existed on this topic at the time underscores that it was not an idiosyncratic topic of a few works of literature and essays, but rather a subject of great debate and discussion between many of the most prominent literary, political, and social figures of the May Fourth Era, both religious and non-religious. This historical contextualization thus demonstrates the plausibility of reading Su Xuelin's, Bing Xin's,

and Xu Dishan's literature about religious protagonists as social commentary, rather than as simply personal accounts of private religious experiences and beliefs.

The literature of Xu Dishan, Su Xuelin, and Bing Xin did not exist in a vacuum, but rather in a time where many discussions and debates were occurring in public and intellectual spheres regarding the possibility of incorporating religion into guidelines for modernizing individuals and societies. Far from near-unanimously decrying such a possibility, many prominent intellectuals defended religiosity's viability as a modern concept. Spurred on by the tolerance of certain forms of religious expression among politicians of the early Republic including Chiang Kai-Shek and Sun Yat-Sen, some intellectuals such as Taixu and T.C. Chao emphasized the importance of reforming religious practice and belief to focus on everyday lived experience. Other intellectuals such as Chen Duxiu argued that religious teachings contained important lessons that were relevant to efforts to build a successful modern nation and citizenry. The *New Tide* authors and Xu Zhimo, while not promoting religiosity per se, underscored the necessity of allowing for belief in non-empirically provable ideas as a way of fostering engaged, expressive, and sophisticated citizens.

Thus, the appearance of religious protagonists in the literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan should not be assumed to reflect exclusively the authors' own personal experiences and attitudes regarding religion. To do so is to obscure the real social, political, and intellectual debates about the proper role of religiosity in the Republican Era that were ongoing at the time of their literature's publication. Their literature should thus be taken as representing a distinctive conceptualization of modernization on an individual level. The religiosity of their work should no longer be

read with the assumptive premise that it reflects idiosyncratic experiences and beliefs from the authors' personal lives, but rather as engaging with a distinctive, significant set of discourses in the Republican Era open to incorporating religiosity into Chinese modernization efforts.

Having established the historical context of Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's literature that demonstrates the plausibility of reading political significance into the religiosity of their literature, it is now possible to begin delineating how the category of "religion" operates in the plot and character development of these three authors' texts. What traits are categorized as "religious," and why? What value do protagonists seem to experience in participating in religious cultural phenomena, and to what extent does it help them to modernize? How does categorizing these traits as "religious" drive forward plot and character development? These questions will be addressed in the following two chapters. The first chapter will lay out the typical narrative structure of these three authors' works that involve protagonists who participate in religious cultural phenomena, including their usual motivations for doing so and the results of their participation on their character formation. The following chapter will address why it is beneficial to plot and character development in these works of fiction for certain skill sets to be presented to the protagonists as "religious," or in other words as existing outside of society.

CHAPTER 3: BUILDING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS: RELIGION AS A SOLUTION TO SOCIAL ANXIETY

Introduction

Chapter One argued that the themes of religiosity and modernization intersect within the protagonists of Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's literature. Chapter Two specifies how these two themes intersect by providing an outline of the basic narrative structure of each of these authors' works containing religious protagonists. To do so, this chapter will cite the case examples of Xingqiu 醒秋 from Su Xuelin's novel *Thorny Heart*, Ling Yu 凌瑜 from Bing Xin's short story "What is in the World is Joy...Light... [Shi jie you de shi kuai le...guang ming...世界有的是快乐...光明...]" ("What is in the World") (1920), and Yuguan from Xu Dishan's novella *Yuguan*.

First, the chapter will demonstrate that two of these protagonists, Xingqiu and Ling Yu, sympathize with the May Fourth Movement and feel that they have been enlightened to the ways in which their societies need to strive for change. However, their enlightenment also leads them to feel a sense of social alienation, an inability to communicate their knowledge with others in a way that the others will understand, which in turn leaves them feeling frustrated and alone. Another protagonist, Yuguan, though she is not apparently aware of the May Fourth Movement, nevertheless also feels dejected by her inability to forge strong connections with others.

Specifically, Xingqiu believes in May Fourth values, but is unhappy because she feels that her insistence on pursuing her own desires at all costs is negatively impacting her relationship with her mother. She also feels that the same value she places on

individualism is occurring in China on a national scale, but that unfortunately this phenomenon is preventing China from becoming a stronger nation. Ling Yu identifies as a May Fourth intellectual, but is disheartened by the realization that the May Fourth Movement has done nothing concrete to change society. Unlike Xingqiu and Ling Yu, Yuguan is an uneducated peasant woman who shows no signs of ever having heard of the May Fourth Movement. Still, in her old age she realizes that she has always been unhappy. In her case, it is evidently not the isolation of being the sole enlightened figure in a crowd that causes her to feel social alienation. Her story thus highlights what the others fail to, that social alienation is a fundamental struggle of all human experience, whether it is due to an individual's sense that she understands more of the world than those around her.

Afterwards, the chapter will show that these three protagonists resolve their dissatisfaction with their lives or societies through their identification with or participation in religion. Yuguan realizes that she is unfulfilled in her life because she has always been driven by selfish actions, and determines from that moment forth to always live selflessly in the service of others. She decides in the same instant to convert to Christianity because its teachings preach the importance of this kind of lifestyle. For Xingqiu in Su Xuelin's novel, Catholic belief becomes an ideal means through which to resolve her conundrum because of its valorization of a mother's selfless love. By simultaneously being Catholic and believing in May Fourth values, Xingqiu does what her mother desires for her out of love, without feeling oppressed or restrained in doing so. As for Ling Yu in Bing Xin's short story, his acceptance that love exists intrinsically in the universe beyond the influence of human action allows him to go on living in a

hopeful effort to seek it out. In Xu Dishan's and Su Xuelin's literature, protagonists learn how to prioritize the needs of others over their own needs. In Bing Xin's literature, protagonists learn how to love others unconditionally. Both these traits are methods of caring about the well-being of others. In short, then, the literature of all three authors portrays protagonists as cultivating care for the well-being of others through participation in religious cultural phenomena. This skill set then helps protagonists to forge deep connections with others or at least gives them optimism that they will be able to do so. Consequently, they overcome their sense of social alienation and resultant anxiety.

The chapter further argues that the conceptualization of modernization on an individual level portrayed within these three authors' literature is distinctive from other literary conceptualizations of modernization in the Republican Era that have been previously delineated in C.T. Hsia's *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* and Haiyan Lee's *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*. Each of these scholar's books represents a significant effort to define and delineate specific conceptualizations of individual and social modernization in Republican Era literature. Hsia argues that the overarching conceptualization of "modernization" among Republican Era intellectuals is a valuation of rationalism and scientific positivism as the only acceptable tools in a modern society to measure the validity of ideas. He further claims that given this characteristic, Republican Era literary imaginings of modernization could be said to be devoid of any religious feeling except for Xu Dishan's literature (Hsia 1961, 18; 504). Lee contests this view that most Republican Era conceptualizations of "modernization" emphasized rationalism and scientism. She points out a discourse of emotionality in Republican Era literature that underscored the importance of cultivating

the proper kind of love for oneself and one's nation as part of the process of successful modernization (Lee 2006, 10-20).

The literary formulations of modernization of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan differ significantly from those described by either Hsia or Lee. Xu Dishan argues that religion, science, and rationalism all must complement each other in China's modernization efforts, while Bing Xin and Su Xuelin problematize the very idea of relying exclusively on rationalism and science as measures of truth by pointing out their inherent limitations. Furthermore, the portrayal of the relationship between love and modernization in the literature of these three authors differs from that in Lee's monograph on love in Republican Era literature. While the literature of these three authors does emphasize the importance of love to modernization on the part of the individual, it is a love cultivated through identification with or participation in religion and directed toward others rather than oneself or the nation. The nature of this love differs for each author. Su Xuelin's literature underscores the importance of expressing maternal love toward others, while Bing Xin's describes a universal love that connects all matter. Xu Dishan's literature emphasizes the importance of dedicating one's life to the service of others. The conceptualization of modernization on an individual level within Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's literature is unique both because of its refusal to consider rationalism and scientific inquiry as a modern individual's only legitimate measures of truth and because it portrays the kinds of love necessary for individual modernization as best cultivated through identification with or participation in religion and as directed at others, rather than at oneself or the nation.

This chapter takes as its theoretical foundation David Wang's idea of "multiple modernities," which he elaborates on in *Fin-de-siecle Splendor*. Wang invokes Bakhtin and Foucault to contend that the literary voices of a given era are never monolithic, but rather always exist in constant tension and dialogue with one another.¹⁵ Using these theories as his foundation, Wang establishes the idea of "multiple modernities." He explains that when the West made contact with China during the late Qing, it already had many ideas about what constituted "modernity," but that these multiple ideas then had to further refine themselves upon encountering China's own traditions, either by engaging with or resisting them. Wang concludes that given so many competing formulations of "modernity" in contestation and dialogue with one another, it was inevitable that "multiple modernities" would form during the period (Wang 1997, 8).

Wang's idea of "multiple modernities" forms the premise of the argument of this chapter, which contends that Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's literary conceptualization of individual modernization is one of many such varied conceptualizations throughout Republican Era literature. Hopefully, the recognition that Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan portrayed the category of "religion" as conducive to strengthening individual mentalities will inspire future scholarship to cast a more critical eye over the many varied representations of "religion" in Republican Era literature.

¹⁵ See Foucault (1976) and Bakhtin (1975).

To Be Young, Enlightened, and Disillusioned

Su Xuelin's Xingqiu from *Thorny Heart*, Bing Xin's Ling Yu from "What is in the World," and Xu Dishan's Yuguan from his novella of the same name are all protagonists who feel that they are unable to forge deep connections with others, which leaves them feeling alienated, frustrated, anxious, depressed, and lonely. Xingqiu is dismayed that her fiercely independent nature makes it difficult for her to maintain her deep relationship with her mother. Ling Yu is disheartened by the May Fourth Movement's evident failure to truly reach the bulk of China's citizens, since Chinese society remains largely unchanged. This in turn leads him to question the utility of placing so much value on individualism. Yuguan has difficulty forging connections with either her son or daughter-in-law, which leads her upon unhappy reflection to feel that her selfish behavior throughout her life has caused her to have issues connecting with others.

The fierce individualism of Su Xuelin's protagonist Xingqiu leads to several opportunities for her. She insists on pursuing higher education, first at a boarding school in Beijing and then abroad in France, despite her traditional family's initial feeling that so much education is unnecessary for a woman (Su 1929, 22-28). However, even though this strength of character and refusal to conform to what her family and friends expect presents her with the incredible opportunity to spend seven years abroad studying art in France, she feels unhappy there. Tragedy strikes her family when her brother dies of illness, throwing her and her parents into grieving. The death causes Xingqiu to reflect on her own distance from home and especially from her mother. Worrying that her mother might die as well before they have a chance to see each other again, Xingqiu wonders

why she even wanted to come to France to begin with. She remembers stubbornly insisting on leaving home despite her mother's plaintive entreaties of her to stay, telling herself that the kind of self-improvement she would achieve by studying abroad would enable her to more effectively transform Chinese culture. However, her brother's death makes her admit to herself that more than a little of her motivation to come to France stemmed not from a nationalistic desire to improve China, but from her own vanity and wish to advance her studies (Su 1929, 51-61). Xingqiu's anxiety that she will lose more family members without having a chance to see them again impacts her ability to live happily in France, causing her to frequently feel sad and to yearn for her mother.¹⁶ She also becomes suspicious of her own individualism for leading her to prioritize herself over her family ties to begin with.

Eventually, Xingqiu links her unhappiness with the value she places on individualism to dissatisfaction with ongoing efforts to modernize China. In her diary, she observes that the Catholics she has met in France credit their religious identity as the main reason that they practice selflessness, compassion, and love in their interactions (Su 1929, 94-101). Admiring this characteristic, she determines that "to save China and to promote science are as a matter of course urgent tasks, but it is first necessary to strive for the transformation of the spirit. To strive for the transformation of the spirit, it is first necessary to break through the traditional selfish outlook and attend to moral life" (Su 1929, 101).¹⁷ Here, Xingqiu hearkens back to Lu Xun's emphasis on needing to first

¹⁶ Xingqiu's yearning for her mother is one of the main themes of the book. Some examples, though this is not an exhaustive list, can be found on p. 75, p. 80, p. 129, p. 134-135, and p. 143.

¹⁷ 要救中国，提倡科学固是急务，然而先要讲究心灵的改造，讲究心灵的改造，第一须得打破传统的自私自利人生观，注意道德的生活。

strengthen individual Chinese people before the Chinese nation can be strengthened (See “Republican Era/May Fourth Era and Modernity/Modernization” in Chapter One above). Xingqiu acknowledges that it is important to push for saving China as a nation and for disseminating scientific information. However, her phrasing that “it is first necessary to strive for the transformation of the spirit” indicates the value she places on first improving the mentality of Chinese individuals. Her entry suggests that without discarding the selfishness that she believes was encouraged by traditional society, China’s current society will never truly modernize. Observing the behavior of Catholics she knows in France, she has come to believe that “the moral life,” by which she seems to mean prioritization of the needs of others, is crucial to fundamentally transforming the “spirits” of the Chinese people. Without such a transformation on the individual level, she argues, China will never modernize on the societal level.

Xingqiu’s feeling that selfishness is a major cause of individual unhappiness and weakness is affirmed by her own personal experience. On the one hand, she wishes to be close to her mother. On the other hand, she desires to move as far away from her family ties as possible in pursuit of her own individual desires to improve herself, which pushes her away from her mother. Xingqiu’s fierce individualism enables her to lead a modern life, but she also feels that this excessive attentiveness to her own desires is the cause of her unhappiness and anxiety. In examining her unhappiness as well as China’s ongoing struggle to modernize, she draws a link between individualism and selfishness, determining that the self-centered thinking individualism encourages must be counter-balanced by an attentiveness to morality, which for her means prioritizing the needs of others over herself. However, at the point in the story that she recognizes this, she still

refuses to convert to Catholicism, thinking it at odds with reason (Su 1929, 101). In the first two-thirds of the story's narrative, she is a fiercely individual, yet unhappy woman who has come to believe in the importance of morality to counterbalance selfishness, but who refuses to convert to Catholicism because she feels it is too unscientific. Her eventual decision to identify with Catholicism, and subsequent increased ability to prioritize the needs of others and forge a deeper connection with her mother as well as with her eventual husband, will be explored in the next section of this chapter below, "A Solution to Disillusionment: Religion as a Way of Improving Social Relations."

Just like Xingqiu, Ling Yu of Bing Xin's short story "What is in the World" struggles with an inability to forge deep connections with others. He also once believed in the May Fourth agenda, but has come to despair over the movement's apparent inability to motivate others to action. The short story begins by introducing his depression at the current state of society:

'A country this chaotic, a society this dark...is there any path for the young to walk down other than suicide?'...He was not more than nineteen years old, a young man who was indifferent to fame and gain, detached from those kinds of worldly concerns. He was young but extremely bright...he regarded all material things in the world as akin to moving clouds and running water—as having nothing to do with him. But these past years, watching the state of his country, he couldn't help but think of the old phrase, 'The rise and fall of the nation concern everyone.' He had temporarily abandoned his interest in "maintaining his own integrity," wanting to undertake a cause to save these distressed masses...ever since the Shandong Problem had occurred, public figures from within China had stirred up indignation. Every kind of student union and every sort of association...surged forth, using every ounce of their energy to think of how to arouse the nation's soul and resist foreign aggression...He had thought that with this kind of...flourishing popular morale, it was quite possible to have a little hope for China's path forward. He hadn't anticipated that several months after that, society's excited and acute fervor would gradually and unwittingly die down...Looking at the way this movement had become more dead than alive, he was terribly worried.... As for carrying on himself, there would be too many tasks before him, he wouldn't know where to begin...in sum, if he threw his body into

this whirlpool, he would be relieved of this anger-inducing and vexing affair. No matter what, the great number of worries rooted in his heart not be severed, and he would never be able to return to his previous calm and detached state (Bing 1920 "Shi jie you de," 70-71).¹⁸

Ling Yu is described as valuing knowledge and education and as eagerly participating in the fervent student movements calling for China to modernize that occurred after the Shandong Incident, by which he means the May Fourth and broader New Culture Movements.¹⁹ However, he has become depressed by the failure of the May Fourth Movement to have any significant impact on his society. He points out that to carry on the spirit of the May Fourth Movement himself is an impossible task, hinting at his critique of his own erudition as impractical in the struggle to modernize society. The last sentence of his lament makes this critique explicit, observing that he can never go back to his detached intellectual state now that he understands the distressed state of his society. Unable to bear the thought of continuing to live in such surroundings, he determines to kill himself. He is clearly distressed by what he perceives as an inability of May Fourth intellectuals like himself to connect with others outside of their elite circles, the first step toward reforming Chinese society on a large scale.

¹⁸ '这样纷乱的国家，这样黑暗的社会…难道青年除了自杀之外，还有别的路可走么？'…他的年纪不过十九岁，是一个很恬淡超脱的青年，自少十分颖悟…对于世上的一切事物，都看得行云流水一般，与自己毫无干涉。但这几年来，他看着国家的大势，不禁使他常常的想到，'天下兴亡匹夫有责'这一句话，便暂时的把'独善其身'的志趣抛弃了，要想做一番事业，拯救这苦恼的众生…自从山东问题发生了之后，国内人士，打动义愤，什么学生联合会啊，各界联合会啊，风起云涌的发生出来，竭力的想怎样的唤起国魂，怎样的抵御外侮，心力交瘁的奔走运动。他以为像这样张旺的民气，中国前途，很可以有点希望了。不想几个月以后，社会上兴奋激烈的热情，渐渐不知不觉的淡了下去，又因为种种的爱国运动，不能得十分完满的结果，收了种种的压迫之后，都寒了心…他看着这种半死不活的现象，着急的了不得，但是这"狂澜即倒"的人心，是难以勉强换回的。自己单独进行呢，可做的事业太多了，不知从何处下手…总而言之，他既已投身入了这个漩涡，解除了这些愤激苦恼的事情，他心中的万根烦恼丝，无论如何是折不断的，决不能再回到从前那种冷静寂灭的天性了。

¹⁹ The Shandong Incident refers to the decision during the writing of the Treaty of Versailles to give the territory of Shandong to Japan, to which Chinese representatives at the convention assented. This is the historical incident that initiated the May 4th student protest in China and ensuing May Fourth and New Culture literary movements (Hsia 1961, 12).

Unlike Xingqiu and Ling Yu, Xu Dishan's Yuguan is not concerned with the inability of May Fourth Movement rhetoric to reach the hearts of the Chinese people. In fact, an uneducated peasant woman, she shows no indication of even having heard of the May Fourth Movement or its ideals. Still, she also struggles to connect with those around her. The catalyst of her realization that she struggles from a sense of social alienation is her relationship with Annie [An ni 安妮], her daughter-in-law (Xu 1939, 357). Annie resents living together with Yuguan because she had originally wanted to live alone with her husband. She disdains Yuguan's house for being too unfashionable and poor. Furthermore, Annie insists on managing the affairs of the household, refusing to allow Yuguan say in any matter. She also continually speaks with her husband in either English or Mandarin, neither of which Yuguan understands. This leaves Yuguan feeling isolated in her own home. Eventually, Annie starts insisting on her and Yuguan's son moving out, so unbearable does she find the living situation. This decision infuriates Yuguan (Xu 1939, 361). The terrible relationship between them also depresses her and leads to her realization that that despite her independence, she has never felt truly happy in her life (Xu 1939, 362).

Yuguan's suffering stands in contrast to the that of Ling Yu and Xingqiu because it has nothing to do with dissatisfaction at the inability of her political views to inspire others. It is rather due to a personal problem, her inability to make a meaningful connection with her daughter-in-law or son. Her story is a reminder that the struggles of Xingqiu and Ling Yu are also personal—no matter to what they attribute their sense of alienation and resultant frustration and anxiety, their sufferings are theirs alone. They are struggling with themselves, their own minds. The problems that the narratives of all three

authors portray their protagonists as experiencing are those of the individual against him or herself, rather than against society. This struggle leads Xingqiu to question whether May Fourth focus on the importance of individualism is misplaced, while it leads Ling Yu to suicidal despair. Yuguan feels deeply unhappy. Fortunately for the protagonists, they are eventually presented with a resolution to their individual suffering in the form of identifying with or participating in religious cultural phenomena. How this happens will be explored in the following section.

A Solution to Disillusionment: Religion as a Way of Improving Social Relations

All three protagonists eventually resolve their unhappiness by identifying with or participating in religion. In each case, the narratives of these three authors' stories represents protagonists as learning to focus on the well-being of others by participating in religious cultural phenomena. The cultivation of this skill in turn helps protagonists to forge connections with others, or at least to become more optimistic that they will be able to do so in the future. Yuguan realizes that she is unhappy in her life because she has always been driven by selfish actions, and determines from that moment forth to always live selflessly in the service of others. She decides in the same moment to convert to Christianity because she wants to finally embody the teachings she has been preaching for years as a Christian missionary who did not believe in what she was preaching. For Xingqiu in Su Xuelin's novel, Catholic belief becomes an ideal means through which to resolve her anxiety because of what she perceives as the religion's valorization of a mother's selfless love. This valorization provides a justification and rationale to Xingqiu

for obeying her mother's wishes without feeling that she is oppressed. For Ling Yu in Bing Xin's short story, his belief that love exists intrinsically in the world outside of human influence gives him hope to go on living in pursuit of that love.

Whereas Xingqiu and Ling Yu start out in their respective narratives already despairing over their dissatisfaction with the ability of May Fourth ideology, as well as and more importantly themselves, to inspire other Chinese people, Yuguan acknowledges her own discontent late in life. In fact, for her, this realization occurs in the same moment that she decides to identify with Christianity—the first is the impetus for the second. This entire process of recognizing her discontent and identifying with religion as a solution is condensed into a single paragraph:

While her daughter-in-law was out, house-hunting day after day, Yü-kuan spent most of the time in her room doing nothing. She began to realize that everything that she had done for her son since her husband's death was out of selfish motives. Decades of missionary life could be summarized by the old saying, 'A chinaware dealer who used broken bowls himself,' because she herself had never benefited from what she had preached. When she thought about this, she got up from her chair as if suddenly she grasped some priceless truth. She began to realize that her brother-in-law's words to her when she first became a widow had been right. Her widowhood was nothing but vanity; her missionary work was close to hypocrisy; and her present suffering was, in fact, a natural outcome of her past deeds. She wanted to go back to the country to start a genuine missionary life. But first she must repent. She felt that she should do at least one good deed for someone (Hsü 1981, 84).²⁰

Yuguan realizes that all her actions throughout her life have been selfish and insincere, and believes that her present suffering is a direct consequence of this. Her newfound turn

²⁰ 安妮每天出去找房子，玉官只坐在屋里出神。她回想自守寡以来，所有的行为虽是为儿子的成功，归根，还是自私的。她几十年来的传教生活，一向都如“卖瓷器的用破碗”一般，自己没享受过教训的利益。在这时候，她忽然觉悟到这一点，立刻站起来，像在她生活里找出一件无价宝一般。她觉得在初寡时，她小叔子对她说的话是对的。她觉得从前的守节是为虚荣，从前的传教是近于虚伪。目前的痛苦是以前种种的自然结果，她要回乡去真正做她的传教生活，不过她先要忏悔，她至少要为人做一件好事，在她心里打定了一个主意 (Xu 1939, 362).

to Christianity is evidenced by her self-admonishment that she has never practiced what she preached, and her decision to return to the countryside to “start a genuine missionary life.” She inaugurates her newfound turn to Christianity by determining to do something kind for somebody. This reflects her willingness to live her life in service to others from this moment on. In her case, she has already been exposed to Christian teaching for many years before this moment. As such, when she determines that the cause of her present suffering is her long history of selfishly-motivated actions, her intuitive next step is to identify with Christianity. She turns to Christianity because it advocates the practice of selflessness and service to others. Religion provides her solace because it preaches the character traits she has come to believe are crucial for forging strong connections with other people, thereby overcoming social alienation.

Su Xuelin’s Xingqiu also finds eventual relief in identifying with Catholicism, whose valorization of selflessness and love toward others she has admired throughout the novel. She discusses at length the happiness, joy, and peace she feels after converting to Catholicism that come from feeling that she lives in the presence of the Christian God, a state of mind at odds with the anxiety she has experienced for the first two-thirds of the novel (Su 1929, 161). Her newfound calmness is evident throughout the remainder of the plot, in which her mother dies of old age and Xingqiu marries a dull engineer she does not love to honor her mother’s wishes (Su 1929, 199-210). However, Xingqiu is not distraught over either of these occurrences. She feels relieved that her mother’s soul, which suffered in life, will be at peace in Heaven (Su 1929, 210). She is also at peace with marrying Shujian 叔健, the dull engineer, out of a deep love and concern for her mother’s happiness (Su 1929, 154). In fact, her acceptance of their marriage allows her to

appreciate the positive aspects of Shujian's character, and eventually the two of them fall in love (Su 1929, 199-200). The novel ends with Shujian feeling happy at reading a letter from Xingqiu, a scene which emphasizes how close the two of them have become and how contented they both are with their current lives (Su 1929, 210).

Identifying with Catholicism has transformed Xingqiu's life, allowing her to shed the anxiety that plagues her for the first two-thirds of the novel and take on an air of calm acceptance for its remainder. Her calm acceptance has resulted from a de-emphasis on her own desires and a focus on acting out of love for her mother. She feels that respect for her mother is justified by what she perceives to be Catholicism's valorization of the mother figure, as exemplified by the extensive imagery of Virgin Mary throughout the novel. Consequently, identifying with Catholicism provides her a rationale for prioritizing her mother's needs over her own, which allows her to forge a stronger connection with her mother. In forging a stronger connection with her mother, she overcomes her sense of social alienation and becomes calmer and more at peace than she was for the first two-thirds of the novel. Her newfound state of mind gives her more resolve than she used to have, so that she can face trials like her mother's death with fortitude. Thus, her change of mind represents a strengthening of her character.

Ling Yu is also profoundly impacted by participating in religious cultural phenomena in Bing Xin's short story "What is in the World." On his way to commit suicide, he encounters two young children. The three of them have an awkward conversation, in which the children ask him what he is doing and he responds, "I am

walking down a dark and tragic path!” (Bing 1920 “Shi jie you de,” 55).²¹ The children stare at him, then start to walk away. Right before they disappear out of sight, however, they turn back to him and call out, “Sir! What is in the world is light and joy! Please go yourself and seek them!” (Bing 1920 “Shi jie you de,” 55).²² Ling Yu is deeply moved by these words:

Looking at their silk clothing as white as snow, their tender smiling faces saint-like in their virtue, as well as the golden-red evening sun which circled their heads like the halos atop the heads of angels, shining so brightly that the children could not be looked at directly, Ling Yu at this moment was nearly moved to put his palms together and bow down before them. The shadows of the angels grew further and further away...raising his head and staring into the vast sky full of stars, he said softly, ‘Now I understand. The world is full of light and love. It is waiting for my young self to go look for it—there is no need to go down that dark and sorrowful path!’ (Bing 1920 “Shi jie you de,” 55).²³

Ling Yu emphasizes the white clothing and blinding light circling the children’s heads to suggest that they appear like “angels” to him, so much so that he feels almost moved to bow down before them. The Chinese term for “angels [Tian shi 天使]” that he uses has a Christian connotation in Chinese, just as it does in English (Han yu da ci dian 2007, “Tian shi”). In fact, Ling Yu refers to the children directly as “the angels,” without any qualifiers, as he observes them walking off into the distance. Though the origin of the children is not clear, the imagery connoting angels used to describe them hints that their origins might be from beyond the empirically-detectable world—in other words, they might represent a superempirical reality. In any case, Ling Yu takes for granted the truth

²¹ 我要走一条黑暗悲惨的道路!

²² 先生!世界上有的是光明,有的是快乐,请你自己去找罢!

²³ 看着他们缟白如雪的衣裳,温柔圣善的笑脸,金赤的夕阳,照在他们头上,如同天使顶上的圆光,朗耀晶明,不可逼视,这时凌瑜几乎要合掌膜拜。天使的影子,渐渐的远了…凌瑜…抬头望着满天的繁星,轻轻的说道,“我知道了,世界上充满了光和爱,等着青年自己去找,不要走那黑暗悲惨的道路!”

of the children's statement that there is light and joy in the world. Because of these words, he gives up his idea of suicide and determines to live his life in search of the love in the world (Bing 1920 "Shi jie you de," 73). The encounter with the children has given him hope that, if he keeps in mind that the world is connected through love, he will be able to forge strong connections with others. Consequently, he sheds his sense of alienation and overcomes his social anxiety, strengthening his character. Even if the children do not represent a superempirical reality, the idea that the world is connected through love certainly does. It also is presented by the children as a justification for living life with a goal to find the love that connects all entities in the universe, the "promissory function" of the worldview they are pushing on Ling Yu. Thus, given the presence of both a "promissory function" and a "superempirical reality," I argue that Ling Yu's acknowledgment of a world connected through love that justifies his continual search for it counts as participation in religious cultural phenomena.

Luo Yihua also reads this story as indicative of Bing Xin's early interest in religion, part of his argument that her 1920s "short poems [Xiao shi 小诗]" were influenced not just by the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), but also by her "religious feeling [Zong jiao gan 宗教感]," though he neglects to further elaborate on what he means by that term (Luo 2013, 153). After reminding his readers that Bing Xin attended a Christian school for her secondary education, he quotes Bing Xin as once remarking in her essay "Record of the Enthusiasm at the Yanjing University Co-ed Campus Get-Together [Yan jing da xue nan nü xiao lian hui zhi sheng 燕京大学男女校

联会志盛]” (1920) that she was moved by the speech of a fellow student.²⁴ This student argued that Christ embodied fraternity [Bo ai zhu yi 博爱主义] and the spirit of working together [He xie jing shen 和协精神] and that only by emulating these values would China have hope (qtd. In Luo 2013, 154). From this, Luo deduces that Bing Xin was moved by the religious message of her Christian secondary education (Luo 2013, 154). Keeping in mind Bing Xin’s early exposure to Christian thought, Luo then reads “What is in the World” as a story through which she demonstrates her religious interest, observing that the two little “angels” exert an immense impact on Ling Yu:

[The angels] ...make Ling Yu, who is just about to meet his death, attain an awakening akin to Buddhist enlightenment. Ling Yu sees from their figures ‘the shadows of the angels,’ which arouses in him ‘a kind of indescribable, dignified, magnificent feeling.’ This story demonstrates the strength of belief and reveals Bing Xin’s identity as an ‘expert of religion’” (Luo 2013, 154).²⁵

Luo describes the ‘indescribable, dignified, magnificent feeling’ that Ling Yu experiences at the end of the story as akin to an “empowerment and wisdom caused by attaining knowledge of the perfect Buddha-truth [Ti hu guan ding 醍醐灌顶].” This emphasizes that Ling Yu’s entire frame of reference for how he conceptualizes of the universe has changed after his encounter with these two children. He points out that Ling Yu’s “indescribable feeling” is induced by the sight of the “shadows of the angels.” Given that Ling Yu’s recognition of the children as “angels” leads directly to his magnificent, resplendent feeling of renewal that Luo compares to attaining knowledge of the perfect Buddha-Truth, Luo sees fit to read this story as exemplifying Bing Xin’s early

²⁴ Galik further provides the name of the school: Bridgman Academy in Beijing (Galik 2004, 255).

²⁵ 让即将赴死…凌瑜获得了醍醐灌顶般的苏醒。凌瑜从他们身上看到了‘天使的影子，’唤起了他‘一种不可思议，庄严华美的感情。’这篇小说彰显了信仰的力量，也揭示了冰心的‘宗教家’的面相。

interest in religion (Luo 2013, 154). His argument lends support to the interpretation of Ling Yu's epiphany as religious in nature.

Ling Yu's epiphany also represents an example of Bing Xin's "philosophy of love," the academic name for a consistent worldview that appears throughout her early short stories (Wang 2005, 121). As this worldview possesses both the promissory function and reference to a superempirical reality necessary to be considered a religion, it will be elucidating to describe it in some detail here, though it is described in even more detail in the following section. Su Xuelin describes Bing Xin's philosophy of love in the following manner:

[Bing Xin] ...felt very deeply...that a "harmony" existed between people and the universe... (qtd. In Wang "Su" 121). This "harmony" is linked together and united through love...so the source of Bing Xin's "philosophy of love" is the promotion of motherly love toward...all that is beautiful in the world (qtd. In Wang 2005, 121).²⁶

Su summarizes the depiction of universal love in Bing Xin's early works as the idea that a harmony intrinsically exists between people that has come about through love. She does not mention another important detail, that several of Bing Xin's works from the early 1920s specifically refer to the existence of a "Creator" who has made the world to be this way, namely the short story "The Boundaries of 'Limitless Life' ['Wu xian sheng' de jie xian '无限生'的界线]" (1920) as well as the collection of short poems "Sacred Poems [Sheng shi 圣诗]" (1921). In summation, the "philosophy of love" in which Ling Yu comes to believe refers to a universe made by a Creator in which all living and non-

²⁶ [冰心]...深深感到人和宇宙之间...其实有个“和谐”的存在，这“和谐”以“爱”为之贯通联合...所以冰心“爱的哲学”的起点是鼓吹母亲的爱，推，而至于...世间一切的美。

living entities exist in harmony with each other through mutual love. Bing Xin's further reference to the Creator in her "Sacred Poems," praiseful works which are inspired by various Biblical passages about the god of Christianity and Jesus, suggests that this Creator is the Christian god, or at least is very similar. The Christian nature of her "philosophy of love" is further indicated by Luo's observation, cited above, of the early influence of Christian thought on her during her secondary education. Whether the "Creator" was inspired by the Christian god, the concept in any case meets the criteria to be considered a superempirical reality, as does the concept of the world being connected through love. In "What is in the World," acknowledging the latter of these superempirical realities as true is what convinces Ling Yu to go on living. Acknowledging such a reality gives him hope that there will always be love in the world, independent of human action, and that the responsibility falls on humanity's shoulders to seek out that love and draw it to the forefront of everyday life. Consequently, he overcomes his sense of unconquerable social isolation and subsequent pessimism. This dissipation of his depression is the promissory function of Bing Xin's philosophy of love. "What is in the World" forms part of a series of stories that represent Bing Xin's "philosophy of love," which itself meets the criteria set out in the dissertation's "Introduction" above to be considered a religion. This lends further credence to the idea that Ling Yu's experience is religious.

Xingqiu, Yuguan, and Ling Yu all come to understand focusing on the well-being of others, either through unconditional love or through prioritizing the needs of others, as a necessary trait for them to develop to forge deep connections with others and overcome their social alienation. They each find that identifying with or participating in religious

cultural phenomena allows them to cultivate this skill and finally connect with others, or at least become optimistic that they will be able to do so. Yuguan believes in her old age that she is unhappy because she has lived her life selfishly, and in almost that same moment of recognition determines to embrace the teachings of Christianity because they advocate selflessness and love for others. Xingqiu's conversion to Catholicism motivates her to become selfless in her relationship with her mother, eradicating her initial desire to resist her mother's wishes in pursuit of her own desires. Finally, Ling Yu despairs over his inadequacy to inspire others until he encounters two children he believes are angels. These children inform him that love exists intrinsically in the world, giving Ling Yu hope to keep on living in search of it. Participating in religious cultural phenomena enables these three protagonists to proudly go forth confident in their ability to finally forge deep connections with others and overcome their social alienation. Therefore, participating in religious cultural phenomena strengthens their individual characters.

The Distinctiveness of Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's Literary Conceptualizations of Modernization

The conceptualization of modernization on an individual level in Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's literature is distinctive in comparison to those in other works of Republican Era literature that have been previously delineated in scholarship by C.T. Hsia and Haiyan Lee. First, Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan do not define "modernization" as requiring individuals to accept that rationalism and scientific inquiry are the only valid measures of truth. In the essay, "What Kind of Religion Do We Need?

[Wo men yao shen me yang de zong jiao 我们要什么样的宗教?]" (1923), Xu Dishan argues that rationalism, science, and religion need to complement each other for modernization to occur. Bing Xin's and Su Xuelin's literature takes an even more radical turn, questioning the very premise of taking rationalism so seriously as a measure of truth. A close intertextual reading of Bing Xin's use of the term "undertaking [shi ye 事业]" in her short stories "What is in the World" and "The Boundaries of 'Limitless Life'" suggests that her literature represents human undertakings, more specifically the May Fourth Movement, as meaning little in the overall cosmos of the Creator. Acknowledging the limits of human-created strategies of thinking, including rationalism, enables Bing Xin's protagonist to accept that identifying with or participating in religion is a viable and in fact important component of strengthening the mentalities of Chinese people on an individual level. The reasoning is reversed for Su Xuelin's Xingqiu: she is so convinced of the need for religion as a way of helping individuals to forge deep bonds with others that she comes to view rationalism as limited because of its inability to provide a defense for religion. Either way, both authors depict literary conceptualizations of modernization that question the value of relying on rationalism as the final measure of truth because of the intrinsic limitations of what humans can know. These literary conceptualizations of modernization on an individual level are thus distinct from the kind of Republican Era literary formulations of modernization Hsia delineates that privilege the role of rationalism and scientific inquiry as measures of the validity of ideas.

The formulation of modernization on an individual level in the literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan is also distinct from Lee's delineation of Republican Era literary formulations of modernization which underscore the cultivation of the proper

kind of love for oneself and one's nation. The cultivation of love is important in Bing Xin's, Xu Dishan's, and Su Xuelin's literature as well. However, all three authors in this study depict this love as best cultivated through participation in religious cultural phenomena and as directed toward others, rather than toward oneself or the nation. Furthermore, each author represents the love that protagonists displays toward others differently. Su Xuelin's *Xingqiu* values the cultivation within herself of maternal love for others, which Catholicism affirms to her because of its glorification of the mother figure. Bing Xin's *Ling Yu* cultivates a philosophy of love in which he believes that he is united with every other entity in the universe, living and non-living, through a mutual love that has been made by the Creator. Finally, Xu Dishan's *Yuguan* values above all selflessness and humility in her interactions with others and converts to Christianity because she perceives it as encouraging and cultivating these traits. Thus, these three authors' formulation of the necessary kind of love for individuals to modernize is distinct from that of the authors Lee profiles in her work.

Xu Dishan's essay "What Kind of Religion Do We Need?" demonstrates that Xu's conceptualization of modernization on an individual level differs from that Hsia delineated in that it understands religion as compatible with science and as not at all impairing humanity's rational faculty. In the essay, Xu argues that religion is necessary for Chinese modernization, but that it would have to be of a certain kind to be compatible (Xu 1923, 198). Later in the essay, he specifies what traits would be characteristic of a so-called "modern" religion. The fourth item reads:

It must have a scientific spirit. Some people say that religion and science cannot exist simultaneously. Actually, this is not true. Science is the seat of correct explanations for the material world, which give us correct knowledge.

This correct knowledge is exactly what is necessary for religion. It is necessary to first have correct knowledge to then have correct beliefs. So religion must necessarily contain science; it must have a scientific spirit (Xu 1923, 200-201).²⁷

Here, Xu contests the idea that religion and science are mutually exclusive, arguing that on the contrary, religion must take scientific principles as its foundation and guide for forming “correct beliefs.” He understands religious belief as emerging from an understanding of the world that is informed by scientific knowledge. In seeing science as compatible with and in fact necessary for the development of proper religious belief, Xu’s conceptualization of modernization is distinct from that which Hsia delineates.

Furthermore, while Xu does acknowledge that religion is separate from rationalism, he insists that identifying as religious will not compromise mankind’s reasoning faculty. He lists three major problems with humanity: sensuality [Rou yu 肉欲], selfishness [Wo yu 我欲], and willingness [Yi yu 意欲] (300).²⁸ The first two are self-explanatory. Xu never defines “willingness,” but says that it is the most powerful of the three, and that it has the power to destroy life, but also to create (Xu 1923, 301). He thus seems to be referring to mankind’s willpower, which can be used for evil as readily as it can be used for good. After listing these three vices of humanity, Xu writes:

...In the universe or solar system, man cannot be considered the best; just so on the planet, man cannot be considered the most complete or the freest. So in addition to the rationalism we have now, we need to seek a wiser “god” to obey. Whether a god exists is not the issue we are discussing tonight. What I am calling “God” is simply the expression of mankind’s high aspirations. Man would build

²⁷ 要有科学精神的. 或谓宗教与科学不并立, 其实不对. 科学对于物质的世界, 有正确的解释, 能与吾人以正确的知识. 此正确的知识, 正为宗教所需要. 必先有正确的知识, 然后有正确的信仰. 所以宗教, 必须容纳科学, 且要有科学的精神.

²⁸ These terms are translated into English by Xu himself within the essay.

him up as a model; it would not be any kind of despotism, nor would it restrain man's reason (Xu 1923, 303).²⁹

Xu Dishan points out that humanity is not more perfect or successful than anything else that is observable in the solar system or on earth. Given humanity's imperfections, he believes it is natural for people to create a god to look up to, even if this god is simply an amalgamation of their highest aspirations. He envisions this god as providing a "model" for people to aspire to in their imperfection, a reminder of their own ideals that they should continue to strive for in their perpetual struggle to overcome their weaknesses.

Xu also argues that conceiving of a deity in this way, as an amalgamation of humanity's highest ideals and a model to aspire to, allows people to become religious without compromising their rational faculties. In Xu Dishan's conceptualization of ideal modern individuals, people would not address the theological question of whether a deity exists in the universe, but would rather use the idea of a deity as a conceptual framework for inspiring them to constantly improve themselves. Thinking of a deity as a conceptual framework rather than a real entity in this way allows people to avoid compromising their reason. Rather, they are using their reasoning skills to build a role model based on their ideals, to which Xu feels they will naturally aspire. In sum, Xu's essay on modern religion depicts a formulation of modernization distinct from that which Hsia highlights

²⁹...人在宇宙，或太阳系之中本来不能算是最好的；就是在地球之上，人类也不能算是最完全的，最自由的。所以我们，于现有之理智以外，要想求得一位更高明的“神”来服从。神的有无，不是今晚我们所说的问题。但所谓神，不过人类更高理想的表现，人设立他来，作个模范；并不算是怎样专制，或约束人的理性。

as central to the Republican Era because it understands religion as compatible with scientific knowledge and as not at all impairing humanity's reasoning ability.

Bing Xin's and Su Xuelin's literary formulations of modernization differ to an even greater extent from that which Hsia pinpoints as central to Republican Era literary intellectuals. Xu Dishan acknowledges that religion is separate from rationalism, but argues that it works together with scientific inquiry and does not impair humanity's reasoning ability. Bing Xin and Su Xuelin question the very assumption that human reasoning and scientific inquiry should be the final measure of the validity of an idea, given how little it is possible for humans to truly understand about the universe. For Bing Xin's protagonists, this recognition of humanity's inability to fully understand the universe enables them to accept religion as giving them a set of guidelines for how to function well within it. The reasoning is reversed for Su Xuelin's Xingqiu: she is so convinced of the need for people to identify as religious to forge stronger connections with others that she comes to view rationalism as limited because of its inability to provide a defense for religion. Either way, the literature of both authors questions the value of relying exclusively on what humans can conclusively know to understand the workings of the universe. These literary conceptualizations of ideal processes of modernization are thus distinct from that which Hsia delineates.

A close reading analysis of the term "undertaking" in Bing Xin's short story "What is in the World" and her story "The Boundaries of 'Limitless Life'" highlights the smallness of all human endeavors in comparison to the vastness of the universe. It thus implies that it is impossible for people to ever truly understand the universe without believing in anything external to themselves. Ling Yu, the protagonist of "What is in the

World” described above, expresses that during the May Fourth Movement, he was caught up in the desire of his fellow students to carry out some sort of “undertaking” that would lead to a great change and re-awakening within Chinese society. However, the short-lived nature of the movement’s fervor and his observation of Chinese society’s quick return to the traditional state it was in before the movement have disheartened him and made him feel that the entire May Fourth enterprise is hopeless (Bing 1920 “Shi jie you de,” 70-71). Only his encounter with children he believes are angels, detailed above, gives him the hope to go on living (Bing 1920 “Shi jie you de,” 71-73).

In the story “The Boundaries of Limitless Life,” written the same year as “What is in the World,” the narrative voice “I [Wo 我],” allegedly Bing Xin herself, narrates her depression following the death of a classmate and close friend. However, this same classmate visits her in a vision and tells her not to despair. The friend explains that everything in the universe, including the dead, is just an extension of oneself. She describes all entities in the universe as in harmony with one another and connected through love. Furthermore, the friend claims that the universe has been created as such by the “creator” (Bing 1920 “Wu xian zhi sheng,” 95-96). The friend is clearly describing the same universe of love in which Ling Yu comes to believe at the end of “What is in the World.” She explicitly connects this universe of love to belief in a god who has created it. Furthermore, she asks the narrator rhetorically whether, given this vast universe that the Creator has made, all human undertakings seem like no more than tiny ants in comparison (Bing 1920 “Wu xian zhi sheng,” 96). This simile underscores to the narrator that the struggles of the human world are insignificant from the point of view of the Creator of the cosmos.

“Undertakings” here is the exact word that Ling Yu used in “What is in the World” to refer to the ambitious but ultimately failed efforts of May Fourth Era intellectuals to modernize society. Bing Xin’s friend uses the term to make the point that the Creator has made an entire universe that exists beyond the human realm, and that in comparison all human undertakings are insignificant. Given the use of the same term “undertaking” in “What is in the World” and the similar time in which both stories were written, it is possible that when Bing Xin’s friend is referring not only to all human enterprise, but more specifically to the recent May Fourth Movement. “The Boundaries of Limitless Life” could thus be read not just as a critique of the limitations of mankind’s knowledge generally, but also as a critique of the limited knowledge of May Fourth intellectuals specifically. Read in this way, her story portrays the movement as arrogant for believing that any human undertaking could ever claim to understand what is necessary for modernization, given the vast extent of what humans do not understand about their universe.

Xingqiu in Su Xuelin’s *Thorny Heart* also acknowledges the limitations of rationalism, but in a more specific and targeted way than Bing Xin’s protagonists do. That is, she specifically points out that May Fourth intellectuals’ over-reliance on rationalism impedes them in achieving their aims. Unlike Bing Xin’s protagonists, Xingqiu comes to believe in the Christian god first, which then leads her to question the value May Fourth intellectuals place on rationalism. She feels that the impossibility of proving the existence of a deity through rationalism demonstrates its limitations as a tool through which to understand the universe. As such, she reflects on how May Fourth intellectuals have not yet realized that they must value participation in religion as much

as they do their other ideals if they truly desire to pursue greater knowledge and understanding of their world (Su 1929, 183). Her reasoning differs from that of Bing Xin's protagonists, but her conclusion is similar and more specific: rationalism is an inadequate tool for measuring the truth or validity of an idea because of its inability to perceive the Christian god. Thus, the value May Fourth intellectuals place on rationalism, without an equal value placed on identifying as religious, will not lead to the truer understanding of themselves and their universe that they so desire.

Taken together, Bing Xin's and Su Xuelin's literature critique the May Fourth Movement's reliance on rationalism as the sole measure of the truth of an idea. The protagonists in the fictions of the two authors recognize that rationalism is unable to understand the entire universe because of the limited subjectivities of the humans who created it. This recognition allows them to readily decide to identify with or participate in religion. The representations of modernization in the literature of these two authors is thus distinct from that delineated by C.T. Hsia.

These literary conceptualizations of modernization are also distinct from those that Lee delineates in her monograph. Both the works that Lee analyzes and the literature of Xu Dishan, Bing Xin, and Su Xuelin emphasize cultivation of the proper kind of love within individuals for those individuals to grow in intellectual and emotional strength and resolve. However, Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's literature portrays this love as directed at others, rather than at oneself or one's nation. Furthermore, it is a love that can only be cultivated through identifying with or participating in religion. The protagonists in the works of these authors feel that participation in religious cultural phenomena helps them to cultivate within themselves selflessness and love toward others.

Additionally, the ideal manifestation of this love toward others envisioned in these works of literature differs among the three authors in question. Su Xuelin's Xingqiu strives to cultivate within herself a maternal love for other individuals. She converts to Catholicism to affirm to her the importance of this kind of love because of Catholicism's glorification of the selfless love of mothers. Xu Dishan's Yuguan values above all selflessness and humility in her interactions with others and converts to Christianity because she perceives that it encourages the cultivation of these values. Finally, Bing Xin's literature conceptualizes of "love" as something that exists inherently in the universe, made by the Creator, which he calls all human beings to pursue. Because these three authors differ from those that Lee focuses on in their depictions of love and their insistence that love be cultivated by identifying with or participating in religion, their literary formulation of modernization should also be considered distinct from that which she delineates.

Xingqiu comes to believe that she should strive to express maternal love toward others. As such, she converts to Catholicism, whose adoration of the mother figure motivates her to cultivate this kind of love within herself. Xingqiu's guilt at feeling as though she has continued to act selfishly toward her mother despite the latter's love for her is one of the central factors in her conversion to Catholicism. This is clear from the endless imagery of Mary throughout the novel, which helps Xingqiu to associate the valorization of the work of a mother with Catholicism. For example, she notices a giant statue of Mary in front of her school in France when she first arrives, her dormitory contains a statuette of Mary, and the local Catholic cathedral is named after Mary (Su 1929, 38; 91; 176-181). The influence of this seemingly ubiquitous figure of Mary on Xingqiu is evident when, after returning to China, she convinces her mother to convert to

Catholicism as well and reveals that both she and her mother have chosen the Confirmation name “Maria” (Ma li ya 玛利亚—Mary’s official name among Mandarin-speaking Catholics, from Mary’s Latin name) (Su 1929, 209). Furthermore, Xingqiu admires the compassionate behavior of her Catholic friends Bailang and Masha toward others, which she describes as akin to that of a mother (Su 1929, 94).

Toward the end of the novel, she hears that she must go back to China earlier than she planned because her mother is terminally ill (Su 1929, 181-182). She prays to the virgin Mary to guide her mother through her illness, mentioning in her prayer that both she and Mary know what it is to be a mother—how much a mother suffers, and how many thorns a mother has in her heart (Su 1929, 186). Xingqiu prays to Mary, the consummate symbol of motherly love in Catholicism, rather than to Jesus or to the Christian god, emphasizing her devotion to Catholicism’s reverence of mothers. Secondly, it is evident from this quote that the name of the novel, *Thorny Heart*, directly references the suffering heart of the mother. This title suggests that Xingqiu’s growing appreciation of the suffering her mother has endured for her sake forms her central transformation in the novel. Taken together, these signs all indicate that Xingqiu is convinced of the truth of Catholicism because she has come to value the importance of expressing maternal love toward others, a behavior she sees validated in Catholicism’s reverence for motherly love. Thus, the conceptualization of ideal modernization on an individual level in Su Xuelin’s novel is distinct from those which Lee pinpoints in her study.

Xu Dishan’s literary formulation of the kind of love toward others necessary for individual modernization also differs from both Su Xuelin’s and Bing Xin’s formulations,

as well as the formulations of individual modernization in the literature that Lee analyzes. Xu's depiction of the ideal kind of love for others needed for forging connections with others takes the form of a radical selflessness and dedication to the happiness of others. Yuguan's embodiment of these values is evident in her behavior toward her friend. In terms of her friend, David Wang points out that:

After her [Yuguan's] husband's death, she carries on with her own plan, including finding herself a new husband. Her goal is never reached, but she attains a kind of magnanimity by transforming her wish for personal fulfillment into an altruistic dedication: at the end of the story, she is on her way to seek for her friend's long-lost husband, whom she could almost have married years ago (Wang 1989, 248).

Yuguan could have developed feelings of envy that a man who was once interested in her ended up married to her friend. Instead, Wang points out that she "altruistically dedicates" herself to the pursuit of her friend's happiness by going off to find her husband for her, thus attaining a state of "magnanimity." Her behavior demonstrates a total lack of pretense or presumption and a dedication to maximizing the happiness of others. This formulation of love is distinct from either Su Xuelin's or Bing Xin's, as well as those in the literature of the authors Lee pinpoints in her monograph.

The depiction of modernization on an individual level in Bing Xin's literature also includes a manifestation of love that differs from that which Lee explores in her monograph. Like Su Xuelin's literature, Bing Xin's fiction depicts a formulation of love grounded in maternal, unconditional affection for others. Nevertheless, it differs substantially in that it links the practice of maternal love to the creation of a mutually interconnected, harmonic universe. In fact, Bing Xin's formulation of love requires the most explanation of the three because it is her own creation, and thus not easily labeled or

described. Galik provides a detailed analysis of the characteristics of Bing Xin's philosophy of love depicted in her early short stories and poems (Galik 2004, 251-269). He explains that, "The Four Gospels of the New Testament where the physiognomy of love is explained, as well as some parts of the Old Testament together with the Gospel of Love of Rabindranath Tagore, formed the basis of the "Cosmic Love" or "Loving Universe" of Bing Xin" (Galik 2004, 258). Here, Galik lists three characteristics as comprising Bing Xin's "Loving Universe": the "physiognomy of love" as explained in the Four Gospels of the New Testament, some parts of the Old Testament, and the "Gospel of Love of Rabindranath Tagore." Each of these influencing factors will be examined below.

Bing Xin's love of the Old Testament appears mainly in a collection of short poems called "Sacred Poems." Each poem is full of praise to the Christian god or Jesus for creating a universe filled with love. At the end of each, Bing Xin cites which part of the Old Testament inspired the specific poem. For example, in "Midnight [Ye ban 夜半]," she writes, "God is a God of love, the universe is a universe of love" (Bing 1921 "Sheng shi," 165).³⁰ In this poem, she is expressing her conviction that the Christian god emphasizes love above all else, and that the universe he has created is one of love. At the end of the poem, she cites the Biblical line that inspired the poem: "I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night season"

³⁰ 上帝是爱的上帝，宇宙是爱的宇宙。

(*English Revised Bible*, Psalms 16:7).³¹ Bing Xin is moved by the Old Testament's call to love.

She reads a similar message in the New Testament. When Galik refers to the 'physiognomy of love explained in the Four Gospels of the New Testament,' he is specifically referring to the image of the Good Shepherd that permeates the New Testament as a metaphor for the Christian god, pointing out Bing Xin's preoccupation with this image in her essay "A Painting—A Psalm." In this essay, Bing Xin conveys how moved she is by the compassion that the Biblical Good Shepherd demonstrates in searching all over for his one lost sheep to bring it back to the herd, and who continues to love that sheep unconditionally despite its desertion (Bing 1920 "Hua," 260). Although Galik does not mention it, Bing Xin's preoccupation with the image of Jesus and the Crucifix in some of her early poetry and essays also suggests that she is moved by the story of Jesus Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, a symbol in some variants of Christianity of his limitless self-sacrifice out of love for humanity (*Catechism* 2: 1-2). For example, in the essay "The Garden of the Crucifix" [Shi zi jia de yuan li 十字架的园里] (1922), she expresses consternation that her peers think the Crucifix is a macabre symbol. She feels on the contrary that it is peaceful and comforting, and writes that she enjoys sitting nearby it and reading (Bing 1922, 39-41). Clearly, Bing Xin finds comfort in the Bible, seeing in it primarily a message about the importance of universal love and compassion toward all.

³¹ 我颂赞上主，因为他指导我；夜间，我的良知唤醒我。

The other major influence on Bing Xin's conceptualization of universal love that Galik mentions is Tagore's poetry. Galik's mention of "Tagore's paradigm of 'child' as an object of love" refers to the poet's depiction of children in his poetry collection *Crescent Moon and Other Poems* (1913). Galik observes that Tagore's poetry collection idealizes "the love of children and mutual love of all people," and that "the child is... [in his poems] ...the angelic messenger of love" (Galik 2004, 258). Thus, Tagore's "paradigm of 'child' as an object of love" refers to the depiction of children in Tagore's poetry as signifying love between all people. This collection was translated into Chinese by Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎 (1898-1958) and formed one of the inspirations for Bing Xin's "first essay in the form of an open letter, entitled *Yao ji Yindu zheren Taige'er* (Sent Far Away to the Indian Sage Rabindranath Tagore)" in 1920 (Galik 2004, 257-258). Bing Xin's essay understands Tagore's "Child Angel" as "'inhabiting a world of innocence and joy opposed to the stupid, greedy world of man'" (qtd. in Galik 2004, 258). Bing Xin is inspired to carry forth Tagore's "child" symbol into her own writing, stressing the importance of innocence and joy for an ideal world. Galik further quotes Bing Xin's observation of Tagore that he was the "'beautiful and sublime' sage of India who transcended life and death and became the source of 'endless light for humanity'" (qtd. in Galik 2004, 258). It is clear from Bing Xin's characterization of Tagore as a virtual superhuman, an "endless light for humanity" who "transcended life and death," that she understands the vision of his literature as crucial to the ongoing vitality of human society. She is convinced that the kind of lifestyle Tagore's child represents—one of simple innocence, joy, and unconditional love for all—is crucial to the betterment of humanity. Thus, the influence of Tagore's poetry on Bing Xin's conceptualization of

“universal love” is essentially its idealization of the unconditional love of children as worthy of emulation by individuals in their efforts to strengthen their characters to face the modern world.

Both these characteristics Galik pinpoints as constituting Bing Xin’s formulation of “universal love” indicate a vision of a world in which all its constituent entities, living and non-living, are mutually loving toward one another. An additional characteristic of her philosophy of love is that it posits an entity who has made the world in this way. She refers to this entity as the “Creator.” In other stories and poems published around the same time, she also refers to this entity using the Christian terms “God [Shang di 上帝]” and “Christ [Ji du 基督].” The term “Creator” appears in “The Boundaries of ‘Limitless Life,’” while all three terms appear in “Sacred Poems.” While the term “Creator” is not specifically Christian, Bing Xin’s use of that term in both the story “What is in the World” and “Sacred Poems,” which is explicitly Christian, links it to her interest in the Christian god. Thus, Bing Xin’s “philosophy of love” can also be said to encompass believe in a Creator who has united the universe in love—a creator whom her early work, taken together, strongly suggests is the Christian god. In conclusion, then, Bing Xin’s “philosophy of love” may best be thought of as conviction in a universe in which all entities have been linked together in mutual love by a God who strongly resembles, or perhaps is, the Christian god.

In conclusion, the formulation of modernization on an individual level in the work of these three authors is distinct from those previously delineated in scholarship by Hsia and Lee. These authors’ literature is distinct from the works of literature on which Hsia

focuses because it does not define modernization as entailing an exclusive reliance on rationalism and scientific positivism to measure the validity of ideas. Xu Dishan believes that religion complements science and rationalism, allowing mankind a role model as an inspiration to resist giving in to his weaker self. Furthermore, he makes clear that such a belief model is primarily conceptual and does not take a stance on whether a deity exists in the real world, thus requiring no compromise with reason.

Bing Xin and Su Xuelin go further in their own formulations of modernization on an individual level, questioning the very notion of relying exclusively on rationalism and science as measures of truth when mankind's ability to know the universe is so limited. In Bing Xin's literature, the impossibility of mankind to truly understand the universe enables her narrator "I" to accept the possibility of belief in a universe of love that exists beyond the realm of human influence. Su Xuelin's protagonists Xingqiu believes so readily in the value Catholics place on selfless, motherly love that she concludes May Fourth dependence on rationalism must be misguided, then justifies this conclusion by noting the impossibility humanity's ever being able to understand the universe through rationalism alone. Thus, the formulations of modernization on an individual level of all three authors differ from that which C.T. Hsia defines as central to Republican Era literary representations of how individuals should strengthen their characters.

The three authors' literary formulations of modernization on an individual level are also distinct from Lee's depiction of Republican Era authors whose literature emphasizes the importance of cultivating the proper kind of love for the self and the nation in modernization efforts on an individual level. Su Xuelin calls for the cultivation of maternal love and selflessness toward others through Catholic belief. Xu Dishan's

Yuguan dedicates herself in her later life to selflessness and dedication to the happiness of others, values which she finds encouraged in Christian teaching. Bing Xin advocates belief in a universe connected in harmony and based on mutual love made by a Christian-like or Christian Creator, a belief in other words that love can be found in the world if only humans devote themselves to seeking it out and drawing it to the forefront of their lives. Though all three authors differ in how they conceptualize of the kind of love that should be expressed toward others for individuals to forge stronger interpersonal connections, they are all distinct from the authors Lee explores in her monograph in their emphasis that this love must be cultivated through identifying with or participating in religion and directed toward others.

Conclusion

The literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan is distinguished by its depiction of protagonists who identify with or participate in religion because through it they cultivate the skill of caring for the well-being of others, which helps them to forge stronger social connections and overcome their sense of social alienation and anxiety. Xingqiu in Su Xuelin's novel and Yuguan in Xu Dishan's novella find comfort in the teachings of Catholicism and Christianity calling people to practice love and selflessness toward others. Ling Yu in Bing Xin's short story is motivated to live his life in pursuit of love because he believes that it will always exist, regardless of what is going on in the human world.

These three authors' literary conceptualizations of modernization on an individual level are distinct from other such literary conceptualizations in the Republican Era that

have been previously delineated in scholarship by C.T. Hsia and Haiyan Lee. Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's literary conceptualizations of Chinese individual modernization problematize Hsia's efforts to portray Republican Era intellectuals as envisioning one way of modernizing Chinese individuals, in which people must denounce religion in the name of rationalism and scientific empiricism. Their literature does depict love as necessary to individual modernization efforts, like the literature that Haiyan Lee surveys in her work. However, for Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan, this love is directed toward others, rather than the nation or the self. Furthermore, it can only be cultivated through identifying with or participating in religion. The formulation of this love differs further among the three authors. Su Xuelin's Xingqiu strives to cultivate within herself a maternal love for other individuals. She converts to Catholicism to affirm to her the importance of maternal love because of that religion's glorification of the mother figure. Xu Dishan's Yuguan converts to Christianity because its teachings valorize the practice of living life in service to others, which helps her to forge strong connections with others. Finally, Bing Xin's Ling Yu comes to believe that love will always exist intrinsically in the world independent of human actions, which motivates him to live his life in pursuit of it.

Delineating Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's literary imaginings of modernization on an individual level broadens current scholarly conceptualizations of the various ways in which literature represented "religion" and in early 20th-century China. Continuing to enlarge these conceptualizations is important to elucidate as much as possible the competing perspectives and ideologies that David Wang points out exist at a given moment of history, in this case concerning the way that intellectuals thought about

“religion” and its relationship to modernization (Wang 1997, 8). However, recognizing and delineating these three authors’ portrayal of ideal processes of modernization on an individual level raises another question. Why do the literary narratives of these three authors portray care for the well-being of others as a skill best cultivated through participation in religious cultural phenomena? Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan could have chosen to write protagonists who admire some aspects of religious traditions without identifying with or participating them, as for example Yu Dafu does in his short story “Turning to the South.”

The following chapter will address this question, arguing that their literature demonstrates protagonists as identifying with or participating in religion because it presents certain skills that help them to build relations with others as existing outside of the social, and thus as presenting an allegedly objective set of guidelines for helping these protagonists to resolve their social alienation.

CHAPTER 4: THE RELIGIOUS TURN: THE USEFULNESS OF RELIGION AS A CATEGORY DELINEATING THE ‘NON-SOCIAL’

Introduction

In *Influence, Translation, and Parallels: Selected Studies on the Bible in China*, Marian Galik observes that “For Xu [Dishan], the morality of Christians was of paramount value and not the belief in virgin birth, miracles, not even resurrection. This *two-dimensional* nature of his short stories has been observed by researchers [emphasis added]” (Galik 2004, 48). Sun Yusheng 孙玉生 similarly argues that Xu Dishan’s literature portrays superficial versions of Christianity and Buddhism by emphasizing only aspects of those religions that appeal to his personal values (Sun 2006, 169). It is true that Xu Dishan’s stories do not delve heavily into the extensive theology underlying Christian and Buddhist traditions. Still, Galik misses a central theme of Xu Dishan’s literature when he labels the author’s portrayal of the religions as “two-dimensional,” as does Sun when he implies that Xu’s incorporation of religion into his stories has more to do with selectively picking elements of religion that promote his own worldviews than with an interest in the religions themselves.

Xu could have chosen to write protagonists who admire the teachings of Christianity or Buddhism without identifying as religious or participating in religious cultural phenomena. Such a view of Christianity was in fact not uncommon in the Republican Era, espoused by Chen Duxiu, Shen Congwen, and Zhou Zuoren (Chen 1920, [page #](#); Kinkley 1987, 112; Eber 1999 “Introduction,” 15-16).

Yet, the protagonists of Bing Xin’s, Su Xuelin’s, and Xu Dishan’s literature do participate in religious cultural phenomena. By dismissing Xu Dishan’s portrayal of

Buddhist and Christian belief as superficial, Galik and Sun avoid having to ask why, if his protagonists are not interested in most of the beliefs unique to these two religions, they are portrayed as identifying with or participating in them at all. The question that should be asked of these authors' literary narratives is *why* they portray the skill of caring for the well-being of others as cultivated through participation in religious cultural phenomena. The depictions of religion within the literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan need to be analyzed in the context of the stories in which they are contained, rather than in comparison to some abstract notion of what "Christianity" or "Buddhism" should mean. Such an analysis will reveal more precisely exactly why the stories of these three authors portray identifying with or participating in religion as fundamental to individual fulfillment.

This chapter argues that identifying with or participating in religion is depicted as important to individual fulfillment in the literature of these three authors because as a category, "religion" refers to alleged realities that exist outside of the human social world. On the level of narrative, phenomena labeled as "religious" appear to be distinct from the human social world, and as such are presented as an ostensibly objective, disinterested resolutions to the protagonists' anxiety, which is caused in the first place by human society.

Many protagonists in other works of Republican Era literature never overcome their social alienation because they are caught in a seemingly unresolvable relationship between themselves and their social surroundings. They want to reach out and share their insights about how to improve society with others. However, others scorn them for being different because of their unique insights. Or, protagonists fear that their insights will

make them scorned by others, and their anxiety leads them to act in awkward, shy, and aloof fashions that prevent them from being able to forge meaningful connections with others. Protagonists in Yu Dafu's, Lu Xun's, Mao Dun's, and Ye Shaojun's stories present good examples of this phenomenon, and are researched at great length in Lee (1987), Anderson (1990), and Knight (2006) (See Chapter One above as well as Chapter Five below for more in-depth discussions of this phenomenon in Republican Era literature). Protagonists in such works of Republican Era literature have nobody to turn to for help in resolving their social anxiety, since it is other people, or more precisely the act of engaging with other people, that gives them anxiety in the first place.

Protagonists in the literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan, however, do resolve their social anxiety because the skill of caring for the well-being of others is presented to them as "religious" and thus, by definition, as existing outside of society. These works of fiction use the category of religion as a narrative strategy to present protagonists with a resolution to their mental suffering by positioning this resolution as ostensibly outside of society. In this fashion, the category of "religion" shifts the narratives of these three authors' works toward a positive resolution, as well as aiding protagonists in growing stronger mentally and emotionally.

The chapter will first present passages from Xu Dishan's essay "What Kind of Religion Do We Need?," Su Xuelin's "Thorny Heart," and selected short works from Bing Xin's early literary corpus. These passages will provide textual evidence that these three authors depicted religion as a conceptual tool to help people to overcome their social alienation by portraying skills for cultivating relationships with others as existing beyond the human social realm.

The remainder of the chapter will demonstrate how this conceptualization of the role of religion in strengthening individual characters manifests in examples throughout the works of these three authors. Taken together, Bing Xin's "A Painting—A Psalm," "Sacred Poems," and *Letters to Young Readers* [Ji xiao du zhe 寄小读者] (1926) depict human beings as participating in religious cultural phenomena to learn skills for loving others unconditionally that they are unable to learn from other human beings. The emphasis she places on the Biblical image of the Good Shepherd in her essay "A Painting—A Psalm," as well as the poems of her "Sacred Poems," demonstrates the role of the Christian god as a gentle and loving guide and shepherd to her protagonists. On the other hand, *Letters to Young Readers* portrays human beings who do not participate in religious cultural phenomena as cold, indifferent to suffering in the world that does not affect them. In Xu Dishan's "The Web-Mending Toiling Spider" and *Yuguan*, the jealous husband Zhangsun Kewang 长孙可望 and the soldiers respectively are motivated to seek remorse for the harm they have caused the women around them after participating in religious cultural phenomena. Furthermore, the protagonists of these two stories Shangjie and Yuguan respectively, once they identify as religious can easily forgive those who have transgressed against them, overlooking feelings of self-preservation in the name of prioritizing the well-being of others.

Su Xuelin's short story "Fire-side Chat at Mt. Hsiu" provides another example of this phenomenon. She writes in the "Preface [Zi xu 自序]" to the 1967 edition of her short story collection *Cicada Slough* [Chan tui ji 蝉蜕集], originally published in 1945, that she renamed it *Fire-Side Chat at Mt. Hsiu* after its eponymous short story, which she feels is relatively important compared to the others (Su 1967, 3). Her comment suggests

that the content of that short story is especially significant. In the story, protagonist Qu Shisi 瞿式耜 critiques Chinese intellectualism as driven by self-interest and consequently responsible for the collapse of the Ming.³² Throughout the story, Qu Shisi argues that Confucianism has not succeeded in motivating its followers to internalize its behavioral guidelines. He claims that in comparison, Catholicism has been successful in motivating him to defend his emperor to the death, primarily due to the two values its missionaries emphasize of love and piety.³³ These are the strategies through which Qu successfully prioritizes the well-being of others over his own. Though “Fire-Side Chat at Mt. Hsiu” takes place in the Ming Dynasty, it is possible to read Su Xuelin’s short story as an analogy to Chinese intellectualism during the Republican Era, since that is the period in which she wrote it. Furthermore, the Republican Era was like the late Ming in some respects—it marked a period of transition between historical eras, and it was characterized by many debates among intellectuals about what characteristics of Chinese society made it weak and how it should best reform and strengthen itself. It is plausible, then, that Su’s story is in one sense a criticism of Republican Era intellectuals, who focus so much on the importance of individualism and self-interest that it hampers their ability to strategize successful methods for cultivating strong relationships with others.

The literature of Bing Xin, Xu Dishan, and Su Xuelin depicts identification with or participation in religion as crucial to the strengthening of individual characters because it presents the skills for connecting with others as ostensibly existing outside of society. This then makes them appear to protagonists as the perfect disinterested solution to their

³² This protagonist is based on a real-life late Ming general of the same name, who lived from 1590-1651 and was rumored to be Catholic (“Zhongguo Yesu hui shi,” 1663, in Fang 1988).

³³ The two original Chinese words translated here as “love” and “piety” are “re ai 热爱” and “qian cheng 虔诚” respectively.

anxiety. The category of “religion” thus becomes a narrative device to shift the plot of these authors’ stories toward a positive resolution and to positively impact the development of their protagonists. It is possible to read the literature of these three authors as reflecting a pessimism that individuals could ever overcome their sense of social alienation by turning to society, which is the root of their anxiety in the first place.

Religion as A Conceptual Tool to Resolve Social Alienation

Both Su Xuelin’s novel *Thorny Heart* and Xu Dishan’s essay “What Kind of Religion Do We Need?” suggest that participation in religious cultural phenomena is a useful conceptual strategy for helping individuals to overcome their social alienation. They imply that any effort to convince people to prioritize the well-being of others that stems from other human beings is bound to fail because it is social relationships that have caused protagonists to feel alienated and anxious in the first place. According to the following passages of Su Xuelin’s and Xu Dishan’s texts, “religion” is a useful conceptual category for helping individuals to overcome their sense of alienation because of its positioning as “not social.” While Xu Dishan makes this argument in one of his essays and Su Xuelin’s Xingqiu makes it in *Thorny Heart*, Bing Xin never expresses her portrayal of religion in these exact terms. Nevertheless, her literature frames the value of participating in religion in a similar way through its depiction of the relationship between the Christian god and his followers as primarily one of guidance.

In “What Kind of Religion Do We Need?” Xu Dishan believes that mankind possesses three shortcomings—sensuality, selfishness, and willingness, by which he seems to mean a desire to affect change that can be wielded for good as well as for

destruction (See “The Distinctiveness of Bing Xin’s, Su Xuelin’s, and Xu Dishan’s Literary Conceptualizations of Modernization” in Chapter Three above for a more in-depth analysis of this essay). He argues that it is necessary for people to envision a deity who represents to them their ideals of themselves so that they have a role model toward which to strive in their own behavior (Xu 1923, 303). To Xu Dishan, whether a deity exists in the natural world is not of crucial importance. The conceptual category of “religion” is rather for him an important strategy that individuals could employ to overcome their personal character flaws and weaknesses. The key to Xu Dishan’s philosophy is in the final vice he lists, “willingness,” which he states can be used equally to destroy life or to create (Xu 1923, 301). Xu Dishan allows humanity a capacity for doing good, but is skeptical that people will consistently choose to act for the greater good if their only role models are other flawed people. Xu Dishan contends that believing that a deity exists, regardless of if he is real, would motivate people to aspire to overcome their individual shortcomings in their everyday behavior.

In Su Xuelin’s *Thorny Heart*, Xingqiu feels that believing in the Catholic god would be a good way to protect her from herself. One of the first aspects of Catholicism that Xingqiu appreciates is its depiction of its god as a provider of guidance for the imperfect human world. Painfully aware that her individualistic pursuit of her professional goals in France has led her to act selfishly by leaving her mother behind in China, she thinks to herself that she would not mind having a god to believe in as a perpetual reminder not to let self-interest overtake her (Su 1929, 60-61). Xingqiu’s initial feelings reflect her conviction that without acknowledging an ideal figure who ostensibly exists beyond the human realm whose image she can aspire to imitate, she cannot

overcome her inclination toward putting herself first in her decisions. The initial appeal Catholicism holds for her lies in its potential to motivate her to aspire to prioritize the well-being of others over herself.

A close reading of Bing Xin's literature indicates that the primary value she sees in participating in religious cultural phenomena is in the motivation it provides to people for leading a life filled with love for others. In "What is in the World," Ling Yu's meeting with angelic children convinces him that his sense of social alienation would be resolved were he to go out into the world with a goal of seeking love (See "A Solution to Disillusionment: Religion as a Way of Improving Social Relations" in Chapter Three above for a more in-depth analysis of this story). In "The Boundaries of 'Limitless Life,'" a recently-deceased friend of the mourning first-person narrator appears to her as a ghostly vision. She explains that the entire universe is connected, and that the narrator should live in pursuit of the love that connects all on earth. In both these two stories, the perspectives of the protagonists are initially obscured by their despairing self-pity. They are both finally rescued only by intervention from otherworldly figures that originate from beyond the human realm. In these stories, otherworldly figures are guides for human beings, leading them from self-centered pity and despair to the path of selfless, joyous love toward others.

Additionally, Bing Xin's "Sacred Poems" and "A Painting—A Psalm" respectively portray the Christian god as a guiding light and emphasize the New Testament allegory of the Christian god leading humanity as a shepherd leads his sheep (See "The Christian God as Guiding Shepherd" in Chapter Four below for a more detailed explication of this text). They envision the Christian god as a guide and shepherd

to humanity. Deities can and have been envisioned in many kinds of relationships to humanity—as leaders, disciplinarians, teachers, and so forth. Bing Xin’s choice in these works to emphasize the Christian god’s relationship to humanity as its compassionate, forgiving guide and shepherd emphasizes that she values religion as a source of guidance for humanity to lead it always to the path of greatest love. Her early work collectively depicts the power of participating in religious cultural phenomena as stemming from its ability to guide individuals toward joy and love.

The writings of all three authors suggest that the value of the conceptual category of “religion” for individual modernization lies primarily in its ability to serve as a role model of perfection existing beyond the imperfect human social realm. Xu Dishan’s essay “What Kind of Religion Do We Need?” argues that religion is necessary to the self-improvement of individuals because of humanity’s intrinsic imperfection, and that consequently the kind of religion most appropriate for the modern world is one characterized primarily by identifying as religious to create for oneself a role model for selfless behavior. Su Xuelin’s protagonist Xingqiu concedes a similar perspective on the necessity of identifying as religious as a motivation for her to strive for selflessness in the novel *Thorny Heart*. Finally, it is clear in various works of Bing Xin’s early literature that the role of the Christian god is portrayed primarily as one of guidance. The Christian god is a role model for people, leading them toward the light of joy and love, away from the darkness of self-pity and despair. This model of the social value of participating in religious cultural phenomena, reflected in each of the work of these three authors, is useful for understanding how religion operates in their work more broadly. The following section will explore how religion as a conceptual model for overcoming social alienation

comes into play in other instances of their literature, even when the value of religion to individuals as one of guidance is not expressed as explicitly as in the above examples.

Examples of Religion as Conceptual Model for Overcoming Social Alienation in Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's Literature

I. The Christian god as Guiding Shepherd in Bing Xin's Early Literature

Bing Xin's early literature depicts humanity as requiring the gentle, compassionate guidance and forgiveness of the Christian god in the same way that sheep require the unerring patience and guidance of their shepherd for survival. She emphasizes the image of the Christian god as a shepherd-like guide for humanity in her essay "A Painting—A Psalm." In "Sacred Poems," she praises his guiding force and subtly acknowledges humanity's great need for it. Finally, in her *Letters to Young Readers*, she demonstrates that adults who do not identify as religious are cold and indifferent to suffering that does not directly impact them. The overall message of her early literature is that identification with religious cultural phenomena helps individuals to develop the skill of prioritizing the well-being of others that helps them to overcome their sense of social alienation and strengthen their characters.

"A Painting—A Psalm" emphasizes the similarity of the Christian god's relationship with humanity to a shepherd's relationship with his sheep. Bing Xin, appearing in the essay as its first-person narrator "I [wo 我]," describes going to the home of a teacher for a make-up exam on the Bible. She must stand behind the teacher facing a

wall of the study while the latter quizzes her on the Book of Psalms. While gazing at the wall, the narrator notices a painting that moves her tremendously. It depicts a shepherd who is lovingly embracing a lone sheep that has evidently wandered off into a field of craggy rocks. She is touched by the depths of love that has led the shepherd to devote so much time and energy to pursuing this sheep to bring him back to the herd. Furthermore, having finally found the sheep, he apparently shows no trace of judgment, disapproval, or resentment, but rather rejoices at being reunited with his beloved animal (Bing 1920 “Hua,” 116-117).

In Chen Weihua’s monograph *New Material on Christian Culture and Chinese Fictional Narrative* [Jidu jiao wen hua yu Zhongguo xiao shuo xu shi xin zhi 基督教文化与中国小说叙事新质] (2007), he points out that the motif of “lost sheep [mi yang 迷羊]” in Bing Xin’s “A Painting—A Psalm” was extremely popular in Republican Era Chinese literature (Chen 2007, 214). He observes that it is used frequently in literary and artistic narrative as a metaphor for salvation, and writes that its popularity in Chinese Republican Era literature is connected to intellectual interest at the time in the New Testament (Chen 2007, 209). Turning to the Bible itself, he points out that the “lost sheep” motif is used throughout the New Testament, for example in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, as a narrative form demonstrating that sheep will always get lost, and shepherds will always be devoted enough to them to pursue them until they are found (Chen 2007, 213). In other words, the Bible uses this motif as a parable for the endless love of Jesus Christ for all of humanity. As Chen suggests, it is a metaphor for the possibility of salvation that the Bible claims is available to all members of humanity who choose to follow the path laid out for them by Jesus. Chen’s analysis suggests that

Republican Era literary interest in the “lost sheep” motif reflects a fascination with this Biblical theme of the continual possibility of salvation despite the tendency of human beings to be self-absorbed and negligent of the needs of others.

To be sure, this expression of patient and compassionate guidance resonates with the narrator of “A Painting—A Psalm.” Immediately after feeling moved by the painting, the narrator turns toward her teacher and clearly sees in the Bible on her lap the line, “The Lord is my shepherd—he restores my soul” (*English Revised Bible*, Psalms 23: 1-3). The teacher turns a page, and the narrator sees yet another line, “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork... There is no speech, nor are there words... Yet their voice goes out through all the earth” (*English Revised Bible*, Psalms 19: 1-4). The shepherd’s patient, unerring guidance of his sheep, as conveyed in the painting, ensures that they will always have a chance to once more find the path to safety. The Psalms call the Lord a shepherd of the people, similarly always patiently pointing them toward the path that will lead to joy and salvation, a “restoration” of the soul. The second Psalm that the narrator reads emphasizes the gratitude that the entire “firmament” feels for the Lord’s guidance, proclaiming and telling the glory of the Christian god. The painting and the two quotes from the Book of Psalms clearly move the narrator, who claims that while she forgets everything else about this day, she remembers this moment vividly (Bing 1920 “Hua,” 117). Clearly, she is moved by the depths of patience and unconditional love that the Christian god demonstrates for humanity, despite people’s persistence in erring from the path of greatest joy and salvation. To her, the Christian god’s most moving role is as a guide for the people, a source of light they can see clearly and toward which they are always able to strive, if they so choose.

Bing Xin also demonstrates the Christian god's role as a guide to humanity in her collection of poetry "Sacred Poems." Each of the poems in the collection is inspired by a different Bible passage, which Bing Xin cites at the beginning and end of each one. Many of the poems portray this god as a loving, guiding force for humanity or proclaim their thanks to him. For example, in the poem "Dusk [Huang hun 黄昏]," inspired by Job 15:8, Bing Xin exclaims "My Lord! /Endless wisdom/Limitless mystery/Who can know? /...Nobody/Unless, from your perch in the light, you direct him/My Lord! /Please, from your perch in the light, guide me/..." (Bing 1921 "Sheng shi," 164).³⁴ Here, Bing Xin praises the Christian god as a guiding light for humanity. Through him, humanity will be directed toward a greater understanding of the mystery of the universe. The Psalm that inspires this poem concerns the imperative of humanity to look to the Christian god for guidance and wisdom, reinforcing this poem's focus on his role as a shepherd for humanity. This vision of the Christian god as guide for humanity permeates every poem of the collection of "Sacred Poems," so that overall, they come across as first and foremost praising him for his role in guiding humanity toward understanding, wisdom, and joy.

The poem "Midnight [Ye ban 半夜]" stands out from other poems in the collection, both because it suggests that the path of greatest joy is that of unconditional love toward others and because it subtly implies the imperfection of human social world that necessitates relying on "religion" as the locus of a resolution to social alienation in the first place. In "Midnight," which is inspired by Proverbs 16:7, Bing Xin writes, "God

³⁴ 上帝啊!/无穷的智慧/无限的奥秘/谁能够知道呢? /...都不是的, /除了你从光明中指示他, /上帝啊! /求你从光明中指示我...Job 15:8 reads, "Have you listened to the council of God? And do you limit wisdom to yourself?"

is a God of love/The universe is a universe of love/And people? --/Oh Lord! I express my thanks to you, because you instruct and teach me, Amen.”³⁵ The narrative voice of this poem first reiterates Bing Xin’s philosophy of love by calling the Christian god “a God of love,” and the universe “a universe of love” (For an explanation of Bing Xin’s “philosophy of love,” see “The Distinctiveness of Bing Xin’s, Su Xuelin’s, and Xu Dishan’s Literary Conceptualization of Modernization” in Chapter Three above). This suggests that the path of greatest joy and salvation she has referenced in her other poems, as well as in “A Painting—A Psalm,” is that of universal love. She then asks, “What of people--?” with a question mark. By leaving the line about people incomplete, Bing Xin suggests that, without any external intervention, she cannot say that the people are a people of love in the same way that the Christian god and the universe are. This incomplete line is followed by the narrator’s exclamation of thanks to the Christian god for instructing and teaching her. Taken together, the two lines read as though the narrator has paused at the thought of people, unable to say that they are “a people of love.” However, she is reminded of how the Christian god’s guidance of humanity prevents it from succumbing to its inherent selfishness. The reminder inspires her to proclaim her gratitude that the Christian god guides and instructs humanity in seeking always to strive for love. Her emphasis on the role of identifying as religious to view the Christian god as a guiding light toward empathy and love toward others is reinforced by the Psalm on which the poem is based: “When a man’s ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him” (*English Revised Bible*, Proverbs 16:7). Clearly, Bing Xin sees the importance of identifying as religious as first and foremost its ability to

³⁵ 上帝是爱的上帝/宇宙是爱的宇宙/人呢?--/上帝啊! 我称谢你, 因你训诲我, 阿门.

guide people toward the cultivation of true love and compassion. The language of “Midnight” encapsulates the relationship of guidance that exists between the Christian god and humanity. People’s intrinsic imperfections necessitate their acknowledgment of the Christian god, whom they perceive as guiding them in cultivating the skill set of prioritizing the well-being of others by loving them unconditionally.

Furthermore, Bing Xin portrays adults who do not identify as religious as cold and unable to empathize with others in her *Letters to Young Readers*, a collection of letters addressed to children about her travels to the United States as a college student. In one of the first letters, Bing Xin narrates a story of a mouse who ran out in front of her and her parents one night while they were at home. Frightened, Bing Xin impulsively crushes the mouse with her book. Her parents frown and question why she had to take the life of an innocent creature. Their words plunge Bing Xin into depths of guilt for having been the direct cause of the mouse’s death. The other adults in her life to whom she narrates her guilt, however, including her parents after several days’ time, are unfazed by the incident, laughing because they feel that she is blowing its significance out of proportion. Their dismissal makes her feel worse, so in her letter she turns to her readership, assumed to be composed of children, for a fairer judgment of the gravity of the incident (Bing 1926, 62-64). It appears that she feels that adults have become so beaten down by the world that they have become indifferent to any suffering that is not relevant to them. Children, on the other hand, are innocent enough to understand the gravity of killing another living creature. She wishes her readership to acknowledge the validity of her guilt and shame, which would in turn affirm her feeling that all life is valuable and deserving of respect.

Since Bing Xin views children as the embodiment of love, it is not surprising that she turns to them for a fair appraisal of the gravity of the mouse incident (See “The Distinctiveness of Bing Xin’s, Su Xuelin’s, and Xu Dishan’s Literary Conceptualization of Modernization” in Chapter Three above). However, Bing Xin herself is not a child. It is curious that Bing Xin, who was in her twenties when she wrote the letters, depicts herself as having avoided the same fate as the other adults to whom she compares herself in them. In Letter Six [Tong xun liu 通讯六], she even discusses the differences of the “children’s world [Er tong shi jie 儿童世界]” compared to that of “adults [da ren 大人],” using the pronoun “our [wo men 我们]” in reference to the former and “their [ta men 他们]” for the latter (Bing 1926, 69). She depicts herself as belonging still to the world of children, even though she is twenty-three years old at the time of writing this letter. Even the most liberal definitions of “childhood” in China at the time set its upper limit at twenty (Farquhar 1999, 124). While Bing Xin never explains why she views herself as more akin to her assumed child readership than to other adults, her references to her participation in religious cultural phenomena throughout the letters suggest at least one reason why she might feel this way. At the end of the sixth letter, she writes to her imagined audience of children, “Pray that God’s selfless, shining light of love will forever envelop and warm us” (Bing 1926, 70).³⁶ She highlights the role of the Christian god as a guiding force in her life, and her hope that he will watch over her as she prepares to embark on her journey abroad. Her reference to her participation in prayer in the same letter in which she demonstrates her greater affinity with children than with adults

³⁶ 愿上帝无私照临的爱光，永远包围着我们，永远温慰着我们。

suggests that it might factor into her perception of herself as more child-like than her other adult peers.

She mentions her participation in religious cultural phenomena at several other points throughout the letters. For example, at the end of “Letter Five [Tong xun wu 通讯五],” she mentions off-handedly that she is only willing to reveal the full extent of her sorrow at leaving home to the Christian god and to children. She is worried that adults will laugh at her for feeling sad at a seemingly wonderful opportunity, the chance to study abroad in the United States (Bing 1926, 68-69). As with the story about the mouse, her anxiety demonstrates her fear that adults, who value self-interest and self-promotion more than their relationships with others, will not understand the depths of love she feels for her parents that makes her sad to part with them. She is only willing to reveal her sadness to the Christian god and children, presumably because she perceives them to be the only ones who will understand how important her relationship with her parents is to her. With this admission, she links her religious identification to the value she places on unconditional love and her conviction that it is embodied in children.

In “Letter Fourteen [tong xun shi si 通讯十四],” she frames a minor illness she has contracted as a gift from the Christian god that gives her an excuse to spend time recuperating by the sea, not only physically but mentally as well (Bing 1926, 121). She also dedicates most of “Letter Twenty-Five [tong xun er shi wu 通讯二十五]” to writing an ode of praise and thanks to the Christian god for his guidance in her life (Bing 1926, 254-256). These references to her participation in religious cultural phenomena reinforce her vision of the Christian god above all as a guiding force in her life toward unconditional love for others. The two factors which clearly distinguish Bing Xin from

the other adults she mentions in her letters are her participation in religious cultural phenomena and her propensity to identify with children more than adults because of the extent to which she emotionally connects with others. Especially given the context of Bing Xin's other early works, it is possible to read *Letters to Young Readers* as suggesting that the narrator's participation in religion is one of the factors that has enabled her to sustain into adulthood the unconditional love and compassion for others that she perceives to exist for the most part only in children. Identifying as religious thus emerges in her *Letters to Young Readers* as a tool to help adults preserve the same sense of unconditional love toward others that Bing Xin associates with childhood.

In conclusion, Bing Xin's early literature portrays protagonists as cultivating the skill of loving others unconditionally by turning to religious cultural phenomena as a guide for navigating the human social world. This contrasts with protagonists who do not identify as religious, who are also portrayed as unable to empathize with others. She uses the Biblical metaphor of the shepherd tending to his sheep as an apt way of representing the Christian god's patient, loving guidance of humanity in "A Painting—A Psalm." Her "Sacred Poems" make clear the Christian god's guiding role for humanity and subtly suggest the imperfection of people that makes them require his guidance in the first place. The narrative of her *Letters to Young Readers* underscores that adults rely on identifying with religious cultural phenomena to achieve the unconditional love for others that the narrator perceives children to possess. Taken together, Bing Xin's early works of literature portray protagonists as unable to connect with others until they identify as religious. At that point, they accept the teachings of the religious cultural phenomena

with which they identify as non-social and thus can use them without any anxiety as a strategy for resolving their sense of social alienation.

II. Remorse and Forgiveness in the Work of Xu Dishan

Only participating in religious cultural phenomena motivates individuals to prioritize the well-being of others over their own in Xu Dishan's literature. In his short story "The Web-Mending Toiling Spider" and novella *Yuguan*, this journey from self-absorption to focusing on the needs of others is represented primarily by the willingness of protagonists both to experience remorse and to forgive others for transgressions committed against them. In "The Web-Mending Toiling Spider," participating in religious cultural phenomena motivates the jealous husband Zhangsun Kewang to preserve his relationships with others by humbling himself through expressing remorse. Shangjie's willingness to forgive her husband also reflects a de-emphasis on her own self-preservation combined with a focus on valuing the inherent good in other people despite their selfishness. A similar pattern is observable in *Yuguan*, where Yuguan's sermon on how all people are brothers and sisters convinces the soldiers not to go through with raping their female hostages, and where Yuguan is forgiving of her daughter-in-law Annie despite the latter's disdainful treatment of her.

In "The Web-Mending Toiling Spider," the main protagonist Shangjie is a saint-like Christian who extends love to all individuals who cross her path, regardless of how they treat her. One night, a thief attempts to climb over the wall to Shangjie's house, but is quickly beaten down by a neighbor. Seeing the thief lying upon the ground hurt, Shangjie's compassionate reflexes kick in and she ceases to be afraid. She begins to tend

to his wounds, and it is at this moment that her jealous husband Zhangsun Kewang arrives home. He assumes that she has been cheating on him with this man and stabs her. Thinking he has killed her, he is immediately overwhelmed with guilt and runs away from home, leaving her to fend for herself with the children (Xu 1922 “Art and Life,” 81-84). Zhangsun Kewang is so preoccupied with himself that he is immediately overwhelmed with paranoia at the thought that his wife might be cheating on him, without waiting until he has heard the circumstances of the strange man’s appearance in his home to make conclusions. His actions demonstrate no regard for his wife or children. In this incident, he clearly demonstrates self-centered behavior.

However, he is moved to feel remorse after listening to a sermon on Mark 10, in the Biblical New Testament. After hearing the sermon, he refers to himself as contemptible, cruel, and obscene, demonstrating the extent to which he has realized the error of his ways.³⁷ A protagonist in the story named Mr. Shi 史先生 even goes so far as to call Zhangsun’s change in attitude and behavior a “miracle [shen ji 神迹],” implying that the cause of the husband’s transformation is the sermon itself (Xu 1922 “Zhui wang,” 91).

The story’s narrative does not specify which part of Mark 10 impacted Zhangsun Kewang so deeply, which in turn allows the reader to interpret any one or multiple stories from that chapter of the Bible as having exerted this life-changing impact on him. The two that relate the most to Zhangsun’s issues are Mark 10: 1-11, on divorce, and Mark 10: 17-31, on the complete poverty of wealth and spirit that is required to enter Heaven. In the first passage, Jesus tells his disciples that marriage is a loving union between a man

³⁷ The original Chinese adjectives respectively are “bei bi 卑鄙,” “xiong can 凶残,” and “yin hui 淫秽.”

and a woman under the Christian god, and that no man should tear asunder what has been unified in the name of that god. Surely this passage causes Zhangsun to reflect on the unfairness of his jealous behavior toward his wife. In the second passage, Jesus laments how difficult it is for the wealthy to enter Heaven, proclaiming that people who follow him must be willing to give up their possessions and to be humble of spirit. This passage would also likely impact Zhangsun on several levels. On one hand, it would remind him of how unduly possessive he has been of his wife. Additionally, it would cause him to reflect on how his obsession with his own self-interest that causes him to act so cruelly toward others is the opposite of the humble spirit for which Jesus calls.

Wang Wensheng 王文胜 additionally interprets Shangjie's participation in religion as an important contribution to Zhangsun Kewang's transformation, writing that "praying as one quietly endures suffering, as Shangjie does in "The Web-Mending Toiling Spider," is often understood as a kind-hearted but weak gesture. In Xu Dishan's literature, however, it becomes an important reason for Zhangsun Kewang's transformation" (Wang 2006, 82).³⁸ Wang understands Shangjie's prayers for her husband throughout the text as crucial to his eventual transformation. She points out that in several of Xu Dishan's other stories, people are saved by a god-like or at least supernatural force. The eponymous protagonist of *Yuguan*, for example, preaches a sermon that successfully convinces a group of soldiers to give up their agenda of raping their female hostages. Wang reads these texts as demonstrating that in the world of Xu Dishan's literature, people cannot change themselves through willpower alone, nor are

³⁸ 《缀网劳珠》中尚洁隐忍时的祷告这一细节,通常只被理解为善良、软弱的注解,其实在许地山那里却构成了长孙可望改变的一个重要原因。

their fates pre-determined. Rather, it is due to participating in religious cultural phenomena alone that they finally improve themselves (Wang 2006, 82). In other words, Wang reads Xu's story as reflecting a pessimistic view of individuals' abilities to improve their character through strategies available to them in the imperfect human social realm. Wang's interpretation supports the contention that protagonists in Xu's work must be presented with strategies that are packaged as existing outside of the social realm, which then allows them to whole-heartedly utilize these strategies to improve their relations with others.

Shangjie herself also exemplifies how her identification with and participation in religion inspires her to prioritize the needs of others above her own, not just in her compassionate behavior toward others but in her willingness to forgive transgressions committed against her. When she hears of her husband's remorse, she "didn't look particularly excited. She just said, '...however people treat me, I accept it. I have never resisted. When other people hurt me, I still forgive them. Why would he be any different?'" (Xu 1922 "Zhui wang," 92).³⁹ Shangjie easily forgives her husband for his actions, harboring no more resentment toward him than she does toward anybody else. Her forgiveness represents an understanding that every member of humanity errs, and that as such none should remain forever unforgiven for the errors they are bound to make. This forgiveness of all those who err against her represents a de-emphasis on her own ego and self-preservation, as well as an unconditional love for humanity like that which Bing Xin depicts in her literature. Shangjie can forgive others so easily because she loves them *knowing* that they will fail many times. She loves them for what they are—creatures for

³⁹ 尚洁听了这一席话，却没有显出特别愉悦的神色，只说“...人家怎样待我，我就怎样受，从来是不计较的。别人伤害我，我还饶恕，何况是他呢？”

whom it is exceedingly difficult to overcome their selfish inclinations. To love others despite their selfishness, she has also necessarily become less focused on her own self-preservation—a mindset which would lead her on the contrary to resent and avenge transgressions against her.

While Shangjie is an admirable protagonist, she is too ideal to be relatable to most readers. “The Web-Mending Toiling Spider” has been roundly criticized by Robinson as portraying an unrealistically docile protagonist in comparison to Xu Dishan’s later *Yuguan*, who has more spirit (Robinson 1986, 44). Yet, as she grows older, *Yuguan* grows to readily demonstrate the same level of forgiveness as Shangjie. Her expression of her religious identity through an impassioned sermon convinces a group of soldiers to give up their intent of raping their female hostages. Furthermore, her religious identity allows her to forgive her daughter-in-law Annie’s disdainful behavior toward her and continue to love her. *Yuguan*’s identification with and participation in religion motivates her to truly embody the concept of prioritizing the needs of others in her everyday practice.

An incident of near-mass rape in Xu Dishan’s *Yuguan* depicts participation in religious cultural phenomena as powerful enough to persuade a group of selfish soldiers not to rape a group of female hostages. It also demonstrates that man-made movements explicitly labeled as such that promise to disseminate strategies for modernizing China are doomed to fail to help protagonists improve their interpersonal communication skills because it is interactions with other people that cause them to feel alienated in the first place. The group of soldiers who have overtaken *Yuguan*’s town are Communist, competing with Christian missionaries in Republican Era China to have their ideas form

the foundation of Chinese society in the modern era (Xu 1939, 344).⁴⁰ The Communist soldiers trap all the women of the village, including Yuguan, inside a temple, which they intend to turn into a pleasure facility for themselves (Xu 1949, 348). This incident suggests that humanity's intrinsic tendency toward selfishness causes even the most idealistic of man-made movements to be unable to teach individuals how to forge relationships with other individuals, instead of using others as objects.

When the first round of soldiers bursts into the temple, Yuguan shouts above the fray before anyone has a chance to grab her. Silencing the crowd and finding someone to help translate her words from Hokkien into Mandarin, she begins what might be the most impassioned sermon of her entire missionary career:

She told them that debauchery and exploitation were the greatest human crimes. She told them that within the Church, men and women were brothers and sisters. She warned them that those who resorted to force would be destroyed by force, and, at the same time, told them that these women were fearless and were prepared to sacrifice their lives when the time came. Many pious sayings flowed from her lips in a most mellifluous way. The more she talked, the more she was carried away by her self-generated enthusiasm, which was burning brighter by the minute. Gradually the soldiers began to loosen their grips on the women (Hsü 1981, 74).⁴¹

In this translation, the main verb of the third sentence, “warned,” is different from the main verb of the previous two, “told.” Furthermore, the third and fourth sentences in the original have been combined into what is here the third sentence. Unfortunately, these decisions mask the parallel structure of the first four sentences of the original text, all of

⁴⁰ See Zhange Ni's “Rewriting Jesus in Republican China: Religion, Literature, and Cultural Nationalism” (2011) for a detailed overview of these two groups vying for an ideological grip over Chinese society in the early years of the Republican Era.

⁴¹ 她告诉他们淫掠是人间最大的罪恶。她告诉他们在教会里男女都是兄弟姊妹。她告诉他们凡动蛮力必死蛮力之下。她告诉他们，她们随时可以舍命。许许多多好教训都从她口里泻出，好像翻开一部宗教伦理大辞书一般。她也莫名其妙，越说越像有像舌头的火焰在身体里头燃烧着。那班兵士不知不觉地个个都松了手，把女人们放开 (Xu 1939, 348).

them simple sentences beginning with the phrase “she told them... [ta gao su ta men 她告诉他们…]” This parallel structure of the sentences describing Yuguan’s sermon and its effect on the soldiers reinforces the power with which she delivers her message. The content of the sermon focuses on the Christian teaching of brotherly and sisterly love toward others, and just hearing it enunciated powerfully by Yuguan is enough to convince the soldiers to have a change of heart and let the women go. The text even describes them undergoing an internal change of character, using the verb “gan hua 感化” which means to change by persuasion or by setting an example (Xu 1939, 349). The sermon does not simply make the soldiers feel guilty in the present moment, but rather causes them to undergo a thorough transformation of character. This episode also demonstrates Yuguan’s willingness to forgive others—rather than harboring a grudge against the soldiers for their original ill intentions, she accepts that all people are capable of error. As with Shangjie in “The Web-Mending Toiling Spider,” Yuguan’s willingness to forgive the soldiers demonstrates her focus on unconditional love for those around her rather than on her own individual self-preservation. This kind of forgiving behavior demonstrates her selfless outlook:

Some of her ideas were quite modern, such as the notion that eating and sex are instincts and that when a man is aroused, he is simply hungry for sex just as his empty stomach is for food. Yü-kuan went on to explain that there was nothing wrong with these instinctual desires, except that one should, for example, eat only what one was justly allotted” (Hsü 1981, 75).⁴²

The original Chinese phrase that has been rendered as “modern” in the English translation is “xin si xiang 新思想,” meaning “new thought.” This original phrase is

⁴² 有些沾染了新思想的说, “饮食男女”原是本能, 男子动起情欲来要女子, 也和饿的时候动起食欲要吃一般. 玉官又开导他们说, 那原不错, 只是喫得合乎正义… (Xu 1939, 348-349).

much more telling than the English translation, as it implies that Yuguan's ideas specifically reflect new thought that has emerged recently within Chinese society. The phrase links Yuguan's religiously-inspired sermon to so-called modern thinking. Her desire to empathize with the motivation of the soldiers is a manifestation of love for them stemming from Christianity's call to be non-judgmental and understanding. This religiously-inspired desire to be non-judgmental leads her to understand sex as a natural drive rather than condemning it, which here in the text is labeled as a "modern" notion. The call to love others unconditionally is here linked to a modern mindset.

Yuguan's religious identity also gives her the strength to be forgiving and accepting in other situations as well, a stark contrast with non-religious protagonists in the story who are not able to think of anything other than their own self-interest and self-preservation. Whereas Yuguan comes to accept her relationship with Annie and harbors no resentment toward her after her conversion, Annie continues to act selfishly and disdain Yuguan. She nags her husband to go back to Nanjing less than two days after arriving in the village for a ceremony commemorating a bridge that is to be named after Yuguan in honor of her service over the past thirty years. The ceremony must be moved forward just to accommodate Annie's wishes (Xu 1939, 365).

Yuguan is not upset by any of this. She says nothing of Annie's behavior, but only repeats how grateful she is for the chance to see the two of them. She even travels to the harbor one last time to see them off, demonstrating her total lack of resentment at Annie's behavior (Xu 1939, 365-367). In fact, it is this visit to the harbor to see them off that finally leads Annie to admire Yuguan because of the older woman's depths of love for her son (Xu 1939, 365). The relationship between these two women improves not

because of any aspect of Annie's modern education, but rather because the extent of Yuguan's love for her son impresses Annie. The implication of this is that selfless love for others has much more power than modern university education alone to improve social relationships.

Xu Dishan's protagonists can prioritize the needs of others once they identify with or participate in religious cultural phenomena. This is demonstrated through the way that identifying with or participating within religion cultivates feelings of both remorse and forgiveness in his protagonists. Communism, a man-made ideology, is portrayed in *Yuguan* as failing to help individuals forge strong connections with each other because of the tendency of the modern human social realm to value the individual before others. The husband in "The Web-Mending Toiling Spider" and the soldiers in *Yuguan* are only convinced of their own wrongdoing and need for forgiveness after hearing impassioned sermons on Biblical teachings. Xu Dishan's religious protagonists also more readily forgive others in the name of promoting harmonious relationships than do non-religious ones. Their identification with religion allows them to perceive skills conducive to valuing the well-being of others as existing beyond the social realm. The categorization of these skills as "religious" ostensibly frees them of all ties to social world, thus making them easy for protagonists to accept as a disinterested resolution to the anxiety that the social world causes them. In these two works, people are unable to practice remorse and forgiveness until they identify with or participate in religion.

III. The Self-Centeredness of Chinese Intellectualism in the Work of Su Xuelin

Su Xuelin accuses Chinese intellectualism as being too self-centered throughout her works. This critique emerges with great force in her short story, “Fire-Side Chat at Mt. Hsiu.” After a Ming general named Qu Shisi and his loyal officer Zhang Tongchang 张同敞 are captured by the invading Manchu forces and imprisoned, the leader of the Manchus tells them they have one night to decide whether they will surrender to the authority of the Manchus. If not, they will be executed in the morning (Su 1945, 75).⁴³ In Su Xuelin’s imagined rendering of this scene based on a real-life historical incident, Qu spends the final night of his life explaining to Zhang that Catholicism has been the key to his ability to remain loyal to his emperor. Qu feels that though Confucianism at its foundation is a good philosophy, it has been corrupted in the China of his times by intellectuals who tout its precepts without following through on them in practice. Qu then turns to Catholicism in his monologue, which he believes complements Confucianism with its dual emphasis on piety and compassion. It is evident that he views these two values as lacking in Confucian teachings but crucial to cultivating the kind of compassion for others in intellectuals that leads to loyalty to the emperor until death. Thus, the story draws a direct link between identifying as religious, being able to forge stronger relationships with others by valuing their needs more than one’s own, and increasing the strength of the nation. Lastly, while the story critiques late Ming intellectualism, it is

⁴³ Like Qu Shisi, Zhang Tongchang is also based on a real-life Ming officer of the same name who died in 1651 (his birthdate is unknown). He and Qu Shisi were imprisoned and later executed together for refusing to surrender to Manchu authority (Qu 1987, 64-74).

possible to simultaneously read in the work of historical fiction a parallel with Republican Era intellectualism.

Qu Shisi feels that though Confucian teachings are fundamentally good, they have been corrupted in the China of his times by intellectuals who tout their precepts without following through on them in practice. When Zhang Tongchang tries to blame the Ming Dynasty's demise on the weakness of Chinese military strategy, Qu responds that it is in fact the Chinese intellectual class, like themselves, who are to blame. He details how the typical intellectual proclaimed loyalty to the emperor, yet was never willing to put his own life on the line. Instead, Qu opines, Chinese intellectuals devoted their time to frivolous pursuits like chess and calligraphy, thinking themselves pinnacles of good character and yet quickly shirking away from the strenuous hard work required to truly defend their emperor. Not to put himself on a pedestal, Qu self-deprecatingly acknowledges that until recently he, too, was such an intellectual (Su 1945, 75-79).

Qu Shisi's unflattering depiction of Ming Dynasty intellectuals demonstrates his depth of disgust at the hypocritical, self-centered yet self-contented lives that Ming Dynasty intellectuals including himself had been accustomed to leading. As one of the only Ming generals who has held out for so long against Manchu forces that he will be executed for it, Qu clearly feels that in fleeing their posts at the first sign of Manchu invasion rather than suffering, Ming Dynasty scholar-officials did not truly exhibit loyalty to their emperor before themselves. The moment that their own comfort and safety was under threat, most intellectuals immediately surrendered to the Manchus (72-74). Reading between the lines, Qu's critique also suggests that he views selflessness, specifically a willingness to put aside one's own self-interest for the sake of one's leader

and for the greater good of all people in a community, as an important component of a modern citizen. When he decries the hypocrisy of Ming Dynasty intellectuals, he is in fact lamenting the absence of a mentality of selflessness among them, a mindset of putting the good of others and by extension the empire before their own good.

Though Qu is disappointed by the failure of Confucianism to truly inculcate selflessness within intellectuals, he is hopeful that the message of Catholicism does have the power to eventually transform the Chinese people (Su 1945, 80). He explains that Catholicism promotes two elements that are missing from Confucianism, and which he feels were crucial in motivating him to reform his ways and remain loyal to the Ming emperor even though it would mean sacrificing his life—great love and piety (Qu 1945, 81-82). Qu's emphasis on great love is like the notions of love for others propounded in the literary works of Bing Xin and Xu Dishan above. Like the protagonists of Bing Xin's and Xu Dishan's literary works, Qu feels that it will not be possible to modernize society unless individuals first love others with a vast love. He mentions the often-proclaimed sentiment that all men are brothers, but wonders aloud how often anybody truly lives up to this ideal of universal love. Afterwards, he describes the love for others burning within him that Catholic teaching has ignited (Su 1945, 82). Catholicism has succeeded where Confucianism failed in helping him to attain such depths of love for his fellow human beings.

With this second value Qu admires, great piety, Qu introduces the idea that the actual structure of the Catholicism has something to do with its ability to truly transform him where Confucianism failed. He argues that piety is the only virtue that truly motivates men to behave selflessly for the sake of the greater good. He points out that

piety drove missionaries like Matteo Ricci to endure extreme struggles in crossing the ocean and moving far away from home to preach the word of the Christian god (Su 1945, 81). After describing how suffering is welcomed by Catholics as a test of their faith, Qu proclaims, "...Ever since I became acquainted with Catholicism and entered under its influence, I have loved my emperor with my God-loving heart and defended my country with my beliefs" (Su 1945, 82).⁴⁴ Qu's willingness to emulate the Catholic ideal of suffering in his own life reflects a decrease in his inclination toward self-preservation and self-centeredness. Since he no longer fears suffering, he is no longer anxious about the possible negative consequences of remaining loyal to his government despite the political situation. Thus, identifying with a religious structure—that is, one that justifies its teachings by the presence of a superempirical reality--allows him to strengthen his dedication to his emperor and country. In short, his piety has enabled him to value his emperor and country more than himself. He specifically refers to the heart that allows him to love his country and emperor so selflessly as "God-loving," drawing attention to the aspect of Catholicism involving belief in a deity imperceptible by the human realm. Qu Shisi's praise of piety is an admission that identifying with religious cultural phenomena is responsible for his ability to give his life selflessly for a country and emperor to which he is loyal.

Lastly, a case must be made that the critique of intellectualism in "Fire-Side Chat at Mt. Hsiu" can be applied to Republican Era intellectuals as well as to late Ming intellectuals. In Su Xuelin's preface to *Fire-Side Chat at Mt. Hsiu*, the second edition of the short story collection *Cicada Slough*, she mentions that there are always parallels

⁴⁴ ...自从与西儒交游以来，受其感召，以爱神的心爱君父，以信道之意捍卫国家。

between historical fiction and the present (Su 1967, 3-4). Her observation implies that the stories within her collection, including “Fire-Side Chat at Mt. Hsiu,” can be interpreted in the context of the late Republican Era, when she originally wrote the stories. In fact, it is easy to draw parallels between the late Ming Dynasty and Republican Era China. Both were periods of transition in which China was forced to grapple with the influence of foreign culture, whether through literal invasion during the late Ming or through the influence of Western ideology and the impact of Western semi-colonialism during the Republican Era. In the late Ming era, Su’s short story depicts intellectuals as confused about how the empire they had believed to be so enduring had fallen so easily to the Manchu invaders. In the Republican Era, intellectuals tried to understand why their once-strong empire had succumbed so easily to Western forces in the 19th century, leading to its weakened state in the early 20th century (See “Republican Era/May Fourth Era and Modernity/Modernization” in Chapter One above for a more thorough discussion of the intellectual environment of Republican Era China).

In Su Xuelin’s imagined rendition of this general’s last night, it is the self-centeredness of Chinese intellectuals, their preoccupation with their own comfort over that of their compatriots and by extension their nation, that is responsible for the fall of the Ming Dynasty. Especially given Su Xuelin’s own caveat in the preface to this work, it is fruitful to read in the story a critique of Republican Era intellectuals, who call for Chinese people to become more caring and compassionate while they themselves perpetuate self-centered thinking. Such a reading would be consistent with the critique of the self-centeredness of May Fourth intellectualism evident in her earlier novel *Thorny Heart* (See “To Be Young, Enlightened, and Disillusioned” in Chapter Three above for a

more in-depth analysis of this novel). Read as a critique of Republican Era intellectualism, “Fire-Side Chat at Mt. Hsiu” reinforces this novel’s message. The nation’s strength is tied to the extent to which Chinese individuals, specifically the intellectuals who direct the course of social thought, can overcome their inclinations toward self-centeredness to forge strong connections with their compatriots by learning how to prioritize the well-being of others over their own. According to Qu, Catholicism provides the allegedly non-social tools to teach individuals how to better value other people and thus forge stronger connections with them.

In conclusion, Su Xuelin’s short story “Fire-Side Chat at Mt. Hsiu” conveys the message that piety is the necessary instigator for becoming learning how to prioritize the well-being of others over one’s own. Qu Shisi critiques Confucianism, which does not encompass the idea of a literal deity who exists beyond the human realm, as inadequate for persuading Chinese intellectuals to reform their hypocritical ways and become truly selfless. Catholicism, on the other hand, complements Confucianism with its emphasis on great love and piety, two traits that are depicted in the short story as essential to the formation of Qu’s selfless character. Like the short stories of Xu Dishan and Bing Xin, Su Xuelin’s story depicts a world in which identifying with or participating in religion is provides people with an allegedly objective and non-social set of tools to resist their intrinsic tendencies toward self-absorption, which lead to alienation and an inability to connect with others. Qu’s esteem for great love and piety, combined with his newfound unbreakable loyalty to his emperor and country, demonstrates the power of identifying as religious in transforming his character.

Conclusion

The protagonists described above all identify with or participate in religion, thereby cultivating social skills that help them to overcome their social alienation. Xu Dishan's essay "What Kind of Religion Do We Need?" and Su Xuelin's *Thorny Heart* depict religion as a conceptual tool to motivate people to avoid succumbing to the self-centredness that prevents them from forging strong relationships with others. Bing Xin's early literary works also emphasize the role of the deity who created the world as first and foremost a guiding force in helping people to lead lives full of love for all life.

This conceptualization of the role of identifying as or participating in religion to strengthening the mentalities of individuals is reiterated in other examples of the Bing Xin's, Xu Dishan's, and Su Xuelin's literature, even ones that do not explicitly label religion as providing a set of guidelines for individuals to navigate the social world. Taken together, Bing Xin's "A Painting—A Psalm," "Sacred Poems," and *Letters to Young Readers* depict an ideal world as one in which human beings rely on the guidance of the Christian god to help them avoid becoming cold and indifferent to the world's problems. The emphasis she places on the Biblical image of the Good Shepherd in her essay "A Painting—A Psalm" and her "Sacred Poems" emphasizes the role of the Christian god as a gentle and a loving guide and shepherd for humanity. On the other hand, *Letters to Young Readers* depicts belief in the Christian god as a way of sustaining the unconditional love of childhood into adulthood, thus staving off the jaded indifference toward other people which the letters depict other adults besides Bing Xin as possessing.

For protagonists in Xu Dishan's *Yuguan* and "The Web-Mending Toiling Spider," identifying with or participating in religion helps protagonists to cultivate skills of remorse and forgiveness. As far as remorse goes, listening to Biblically-inspired sermons present the soldiers in *Yuguan* and the jealous husband Zhangsun Kewang in "The Web-Mending Toiling Spider" with a vision of the sort of care for other people to which they could aspire. This vision in turn gives them the strength to acknowledge their weaknesses and seek remorse for their actions in their efforts to become better people. In the same vein, this vision gives Shangjie and Yuguan the strength to value the humanity of their oppressors more highly than they do their own self-interest and self-preservation. This allows them to forgive their aggressors and continue to seek relationships with them. The magnanimity of these protagonists reveals great strength of character and resolve.

Su Xuelin critiques Chinese intellectualism as driven by self-centeredness in "Fire-Side Chat at Mt. Hsiu." Though it is a work of historical fiction that takes place in the Ming Dynasty, it is possible to read Su's story as an analogy to China's situation during the Republican Era as well. While Ming Dynasty general Qu Shisi is rumored to have been Catholic, Su Xuelin's story imagines his Catholic belief as the central motivating force behind his patriotic defense of the late Ming against the Manchu invasion. Qu believes that integrating into his character great love and piety, two values Catholic missionaries preach that he finds lacking in Confucianism, has successfully transformed him into a loyal general who selflessly defends his emperor to his death. These values suggest that identifying with religion was the necessary impetus for him to care about the well-being of his fellow compatriots, and thus an ideal defender of his empire.

Exploring the rationale behind the decisions of Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's protagonists to identify with religious cultural phenomena reveal an underlying assumption of these texts that human beings are incapable of successfully cultivating within themselves care for the well-being of others over their own without a set of guidelines for doing so that ostensibly exist beyond the social realm. The category of "religion" serves as a narrative device to drive the plot toward a positive resolution and positively impact the character development of protagonists. It does this by strategically presenting skills for cultivating strong relationships with others as ostensibly existing beyond the human social realm and thus as free from the imperfections of that realm.

One remaining question concerns how the literature of these three authors depicts free will. Their literature seemingly depicts protagonists who exhibit free will in their decisions to identify with or participate in religion to change their ways. Yet, religious worldviews are generally deterministic in nature, given that they involve acknowledgment of a supposed superempirical reality who makes the world to be a certain way. Thus, an interpretation of the literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan that reads it as depicting protagonists strengthening their individual characters by participating in religious cultural phenomena at first glance poses an inherent contradiction. How can these protagonists both display a focus on free will and individual agency, which they seemingly do in their choices to identify as religious and resultant social successes, while also acknowledging a deterministic universe? If a protagonist acknowledges the existence of a superempirical reality, can they be said to exhibit free will and agency in their actions? The following chapter will attempt to answer these questions.

CHAPTER 5: WE CAN SAVE OURSELVES: THE RELATIONSHIP OF FREEDOM AND DETERMINISM IN BING XIN'S, SU XUELIN'S, AND XU DISHAN'S LITERATURE

Introduction

If the literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan is to be read in the way that the previous chapters have described, then its portrayal of individual freedom in relation to determinism at first glance seems problematic. This tension is related to that between “free will” and “determinism,” which will be briefly introduced now as context for the arguments of the rest of the chapter. The philosophical argument on the nature of the relationship between “free will” and “determinism” is traceable to ancient Greek philosophers Anaximander and Heraclitus, followed by Aristotle and Epicurus. While the debate is nuanced and complex, at stake is essentially whether individuals can choose between possible actions unhindered (“free will”) or whether only one course of events is possible, governed by natural forces (“determinism,” Pereboom 2014, 1). Most schools of Western philosophy have argued that free will and determinism are mutually exclusive, though the compatibilists argue that a logical argument is possible for conceiving of them as co-existing. In the words of prominent compatibilist philosopher A.J. Ayer, just because an individual’s action might be causally determined, this does not make it constrained. In other words, of all the possible options an individual has available to him given the causes that have led to his present moment, he is unconstrained in his option of which choice to pursue (Ayer 1954, 271-284). In the moment of a choice, compatibilists hold that individuals possess a unique will that can choose from among finite options, while determinists insist that no such will exists.

Compatibilists define “free will” as freedom to act according to one’s own desire. Arthur Schopenhauer summarizes, “Man can do what he wills but cannot will what he wills” (Schopenhauer 1839, 531). In other words, an individual cannot create the choices of action available to him, but given those choices, is free to choose whichever he wants to. This definition of “free will” hints at the subtle difference between how compatibilists use the term “free will” versus “freedom.” While “free will” refers to the metaphysical ability or lack thereof to make a choice, “freedom” emphasizes an individual’s state of being unconstrained, rather than his capacity to make a choice *per se*. The two concepts are closely related; still, this is an important distinction to make because when Republican Era intellectuals engaged this debate, it was *freedom*, specifically the freedom of individuals, more so than *free will* whose existence they defended.⁴⁵ For them, the question of whether to believe in determinism was essentially a question of whether to accept or reject traditional Chinese beliefs. Jaroslav Prusek writes that Republican Era intellectuals understood individualism as modern because it was a way of resisting the deterministic components of certain strands of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism in pre-modern Chinese thought (Prusek 1980, 1-2). In other words, they pitted individual capability to make choices without constraint—individual freedom—against deterministic conceptualizations of the cosmos. Republican Era intellectuals understood individual freedom and determinism as mutually exclusive.

As such, it is at first glance hard to imagine that Bing Xin’s, Su Xuelin’s, and Xu Dishan’s literature presents an optimistic outlook on the potential of individuals to demonstrate free will. Their literary protagonists express no desire to resist

⁴⁵ In this chapter, the term “freedom” will be used interchangeably with the term “liberty.”

conceptualizing of the world as deterministic. If anything, their religiosity indicates that they embrace the idea that they are not the sole determiners of the course of their lives. How could individuals transform their societies if they live in a world where events are beyond their control? This characteristic seemingly precludes the reader from interpreting the literature of these three authors as depicting individuals that champion the importance of individualism and liberty. If their literature did not champion individual liberty, it would be difficult to understand it as depicting protagonists whose lifestyles reflect the values of the May Fourth Movement. Protagonists' acceptance of a deterministic world largely beyond their control in the literature of these three authors calls into question whether it makes sense at all to read it as an effort to unite identification with or participation in religion with the visions of individual progress and modernization championed by May Fourth intellectuals (See "Republican Era/May Fourth Era and Modernity/Modernization" in Chapter One above for an overview of May Fourth Movement origins, goals, and ideals).

Most scholars who have previously written about the literature of these three authors have struggled with this issue. Robinson, Galik, Chen, and Yang see these authors' literature as reflections of their private religious experiences, insular in its alleged lack of explicit treatment of the values of individual liberty promoted by the May Fourth Movement. On the other hand, Sun Yusheng recognizes Xu Dishan's literary emphasis on religiosity as an effort to depict a distinct strategy of modernization incorporating tenets of Buddhism and Christianity (Sun 2006, 169-170). Yet, Sun argues that it makes no sense to read Xu Dishan's literature as truly advocating for identification with or participation in religion as an important component of individual growth and

fulfillment because religion is inherently an antiquated and anti-logical idea (Sun 2006, 169). To Sun, the only reasonable explanation is that Xu has chosen to advocate in his literature for certain generic values of which he approves from these two religions, such as Christian fraternity, without simultaneously advocating for the reasonability of the religions themselves (Sun 2006, 171). Given the analysis of Chapter 3 above, however, it should be clear that Sun's reading is dubious because it does not explain why Xu made his protagonists religious believers if his interest in religious traditions was so superficial.

Steven Riep, on the other hand, argues that Xu Dishan's short story "The Merchant's Wife" is an effort to delineate a successful way of integrating religion into May Fourth conceptualizations of Chinese modernization processes. Nevertheless, he limits his argument to how the short story demonstrates the access to social mobility women gain through membership in religious institutions, without considering how identifying with or participating in religion might also help protagonists to address more abstract intellectual or emotional problems (Sun 2006, 2-3). C.T. Hsia is the only scholar writing in English or Chinese who understands Xu Dishan's literature as both advocating a strategy for modernization and arguing that this strategy involves participating in religion. In the same sentence that he makes this observation, however, he minimizes the significance of Xu Dishan's influence on the development of modern Chinese literature (Hsia 1961, 84).

This tension between individual freedom and determinism has been written about at greatest length regarding Xu Dishan's literature, but it is evident in the works of Bing Xin and Su Xuelin also. It inevitably arises from reading the literature of these three authors as advocating for May Fourth values of individualism even though it also reinforces a

religious conceptualization of the world in which many events lie beyond the ability of the protagonists to change.

This chapter will argue that the narratives of these three authors do indeed portray individual agency and identification with a deterministic conceptualization of the universe as compatible. This is largely possible due to the treatment of “religion” as a conceptual category on the level of these authors’ narratives rather than as a substantive reality. Imagined as a strategy of thought rather than as a reality, there is no reason identifying as religious would have to entail believing oneself to be deprived of one’s individual agency. The following chapter will demonstrate that within these three authors’ stories, narratives depict protagonists as expressing individual freedom even as they participate in religious cultural phenomena. In fact, these narratives portray protagonists as expressing their individual liberty more after they participate in religious cultural phenomena than they did before. In other words, the narratives of these three authors’ literature suggest that individual liberty is enhanced by acknowledging a deterministic universe. Social determinisms appear much less intimidating when human social relations are viewed in relation to a superempirical reality that orders the cosmos. By “social determinism,” I refer to C.T. Hsia’s concern that in Republican Era fiction, “The social evil depicted...is usually of such weight and magnitude that the characters caught under it cannot possibly counteract it in any human manner...” (Hsia 1961, 162). That is to say, “social determinism” is shorthand here for belief in the inevitability of one’s fate based on the immutability of social power relations and one’s own subordinate status within the social system. Hsia voices this concern in relation to the short stories of Mao Dun specifically, but Sabina Knight demonstrates that it applies to many works of

Republican Era literature, especially the works of Lu Xun and Ye Shaojun (Knight 2006, 104-130).

This chapter will highlight several ways in which the literary narratives of these three authors paint protagonists as exhibiting a greater sense of personal liberty through their acknowledgment of a deterministic world. First, the chapter will focus on how these literary narratives portray religious protagonists as making advances in their conceptualizations of gender relations, a sign of increased individual liberty for women specifically. Secondly, the chapter will argue that these three authors' literary portrayal of individual freedom and determinism as co-existing ironically allows protagonists to possess greater confidence in their own individual agency despite the limitations imposed on them by their societies. Thus, they possess an optimistic outlook on the ability of enlightened individuals to transform their societies. This stands in stark contrast to the literature of Lu Xun and Ye Shaojun, two other prominent Republican Era authors, surveyed by Lee, Anderson, and Knight. These scholars argue that Lu Xun's and Ye Shaojun's works portray intellectuals as enlightened, but helpless to do anything to change their societies because of the weight of social oppression.

The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's literary portrayal of the world as deterministic does not preclude their protagonists from being interpreted as reflective of the value May Fourth intellectuals placed on individual liberty and gender equality. Furthermore, their protagonists are confident in their capacity for action because of their identification with or participation within religion, meaning that their acceptance of a deterministic world allows them to maintain an optimistic outlook on humanity's potential to transform itself. In other words,

the representation of individual freedom and determinism in their literature as co-existing does not represent a call to return to a more traditional way of conceptualizing of the world opposed to that promoted by other May Fourth intellectuals. Rather, it is yet another method by which these three authors strive in their literature to reconcile identification with or participation in religion with the visions of individual progress and modernization championed by intellectuals of the May Fourth Movement.

Individual Freedom as Co-Existing with Determinism: A Modern as Well as Religious Perspective

I. Introduction

This section will argue that the narratives of Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's literature portray protagonists as exhibiting greater individual freedom after participating in religious cultural phenomena than they did before, since their religious outlook allows them to see alleged social barriers as an impermanent, insignificant part of their worldview. To make this point, this section will first demonstrate how the narratives of these three authors' literature portrays protagonists as challenging gender inequality, albeit not deliberately, but through their actions and thoughts. Secondly, it will argue that these protagonists' acknowledgment of a deterministic world makes them more certain of their ability to enact change in their societies than protagonists of other stories who do not identify as religious. This is because of the former group of protagonists' abilities to

resolve their sense of social alienation by turning to religion, thereby strengthening their mental states.

II. Women's Individual Liberty and Religious Identity

This section will detail the various ways in which narratives portray identification with or participation in religion as allowing protagonists to challenge social gender inequalities (whether the protagonists themselves are conscious of this), thus leading to opportunities for women to obtain greater individual liberty. First, Mahmood's theory of feminist agency within gender-traditional religions will be introduced as a way of explaining how the choice of Xu Dishan's and Su Xuelin's characters to submit themselves to gender-traditional religions is an act of freedom. Secondly, this section will demonstrate how literary narratives portray female protagonists in the stories of Xu Dishan and Su Xuelin as achieving social and intellectual freedom from men respectively through their identification with or participation in religion. Third, it will be argued that Bing Xin's "philosophy of love" challenges the male-centric discourse of the May Fourth Movement by emphasizing maternal love as crucial to the enterprise of strengthening individual characters. Recognition of the importance of maternal love in her literature frees both men and women to prioritize and internalize a trait whose very name indicates its association with women. Bing Xin's literature portrays a so-called "feminine" trait as a necessity for the everyman. These narrative displays of protagonists overcoming gender inequalities through identifying with or participating in religion serve as an important

example of how acceptance of a cosmic determinism deepens and extends their sense of personal liberty.

First, it should be recognized that in the case of Xingqiu as well as Xu Dishan's Yuguan, Shangjie, and Minming, their choice to convert to a gender-traditional religion is nevertheless a manifestation of their personal freedom. Anthropologist Saba Mahmood's research is helpful in understanding them as expressing individual liberty through their choice to believe in Christianity or Buddhism, even though these religions historically have called for the subordination of women to men.⁴⁶ Mahmood argues that Western liberal feminists assume that in order to express their individual freedom, women must demonstrate some kind of desire, either conscious or unconscious, to resist the patriarchal norms that constrain them (Mahmood 2001, 203). She further contends that such a definition of agency privileges the politics that these Western liberal feminists wish to promote throughout the world, thereby excluding women who have different goals, aspirations, and ambitions from the possibility of personal freedom, especially women born to very different historical and cultural traditions (Mahmood 2001, 206-207).

She argues that resistance is one possible form of agency, but that feminists should consider that many kinds of relationships between women and social power structures exist from which women can choose, of which resistance is simply one possible form (Mahmood 2001, 211-212). Another possible form, for example, could include choosing to undergo a disciplined regimen to conform with a discourse that a

⁴⁶ For a discussion of historical Christian texts calling for the subordination of women to men, see Daniel Boyer's essay "Gender" in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. For a discussion of patriarchy in Buddhism, see Rita Gross' *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (1992).

woman perceives will lead her toward self-fulfillment. Mahmood uses the example of a pianist who willingly undergoes a strict regimen of practice to become a piano virtuoso as an example of this kind of agency (Mahmood 2001, 210). The analogy is clear—women who choose to cultivate themselves within a gender-traditional religion should still be considered as expressing their personal freedom. They are choosing to submit themselves to a routine of thought or action they believe will enable them to attain self-realization.

One obvious protest to this argument is that perhaps the Muslim women at the center of Mahmood's study are somehow duped by the patriarchal power structure of which they are a part into believing that, by taking part in the subordination of themselves to men, they are in fact liberating themselves. However, Mahmood dismisses such an argument as subject to a great deal of suspicion in contemporary gender and feminist studies scholarship. Instead, she notes, contemporary anthropologists and other scholars of gender tend to base their research about groups of women who willingly submit themselves to gender-traditional religions on questions regarding "the conceptual and practical resources" that women can access within the religion to "secure their 'own interests and agendas'" (Mahmood 2001, 205). In other words, an underlying assumption of contemporary ethnographic methodology is that female participants in gender-traditional religions gain tangible or intangible benefits from them, rather than that these women must somehow be brainwashed. To be clear, however, this more recent ethnographic work is precisely that which Mahmood problematizes. This work always presumes in its methodological and theoretical approach that women are somehow trying to subvert or resist patriarchy through their participation in gender-traditional religions. Mahmood, on the other hand, suggests that a woman's choice to participate in a gender-

traditional religion is an expression of personal liberty even if it does not involve any degree of desire to resist or subvert that religion's patriarchal tradition (Mahmood 2001, 205-208).

Mahmood's argument may seem to have little to do with the literature of three authors from early 20th-century China, but understanding her redefinition of feminist agency helps to clarify how the seemingly self-limiting behaviors of Xu Dishan's and Su Xuelin's religious female protagonists are in fact expressions of their individual liberty. These two authors' literature is an acknowledgment of the diversity of women who exist in any given society. While some female protagonists in Republican Era literature exhibit their personal liberty by becoming educated, wearing their hair short, and casually engaging in dating and sex, Yuguan, Shangjie, Minming, and Xingqiu express their individual liberty through submitting themselves to the teachings of religions that personally fulfill them.⁴⁷ Mahmood's argument clarifies that this is not a form of internalized oppression, but rather one viable manifestation of personal freedom among many possibilities in a given society.

Though the choice of Su Xuelin's and Xu Dishan's protagonists to be religious is itself a form of feminist agency, it is also the case in these works of literature that protagonists obtain real social advances by identifying as religious. They do not deliberately pursue these advances, at least not that the reader knows of. Rather, the narratives in question portray them as naturally attaining these advances through their

⁴⁷ For examples of the first kind of feminist agency in Republican Era literature described above, see Mei 梅 of *Rainbow* [Hong 虹] (1929) by Mao Dun or Sophie 莎菲 of *Miss Sophie's Diary* [Shafei nǚ shì de rì jì 莎菲女士的日记] (1928) by Ding Ling.

participation in religious cultural phenomena. Specifically, participating in religious cultural phenomena allows women to develop the skills to overcome their sense of social alienation, allowing them to find ways to thrive in their relationships despite men's efforts to suppress them. Shangjie's identification as religious in "The Web-Mending Toiling Spider" gives her the tools to form a network of support around her, so that compared to her errant and emotionally-devastated husband, she comes across as a much stronger and steadier character. Her husband eventually begs her for forgiveness and goes off into seclusion to meditate on his remorse (Xu 1922 "Zhui wang," 91-93). It is clear which of the two of them is truly the head of their family unit. As for Yuguan, her decision to earn her and her son's keep through a religious institution means that she can live out most of her life as a single mother, thus possessing a great degree of autonomy in how she conducts her life and raises her son. In addition to increased social mobilization, participation in religious cultural phenomena allows Yuguan to challenge society's sexualization of women when she manages single-handedly to convince a group of soldiers to give up their plan of raping their female hostages. She achieves this because of her ability to connect with the soldiers through participation in religious cultural phenomena. She even manages, it is implied, to convert several of them (Xu 1939, 347-349). In all these stories, identifying with or participating in religion enables women to forge connections with others that allow them to find ways to thrive in their relationships.

In Su Xuelin's *Thorny Heart*, the liberation Xingqiu feels is more intellectual than social; she frees herself from a mode of thinking that devalues the role of exclusively-female relationships, as well as traits and labor associated with women, China's modernization efforts. Zhange Ni writes of the author:

...women were supposed to be liberated from Confucian ritual teachings and foreign missionaries, and part of the secular world, so that they might receive the tutelage of enlightened men. Xuelin saw that there was no place in this secular, intellectual world for her Confucian mother or her Catholic sisters, who had nurtured her in a way that male intellectuals tended to label as "imprisonment," but that she knew to be central to her own development (Ni 2016).

According to Ni, the May Fourth Movement was led primarily by male intellectuals who relegated women to the status of supporting characters in their literature, even as they advocated for equality between genders. Furthermore, very few works of Republican Era literature explore exclusively-female relationships. Ni's analysis suggests that Su Xuelin sees religion as a strategy for defending the idea that female relationships and traits are significant to China's modernization efforts.

Within *Thorny Heart*, Xingqiu admires the values of the May Fourth Movement (Su 1929, 154-155). She also believes that her mother's intelligence and belief in the importance of learning makes her somebody who, with a little more education and literacy skills, could have easily become an example of a May Fourth "modern woman" (Su 1929, 75;158-159). However, because her mother is a housewife, virtually illiterate, and a participant in an arranged marriage, she cannot be considered a "modern woman" as defined by the May Fourth intellectuals Xingqiu admires. In fact, when her mother comes to her seeking help to improve her reading ability, Xingqiu laughs it off, thinking her mother has no need for such knowledge and that she as a student has more important tasks to attend to. Looking back on that memory, Xingqiu is wracked with guilt that she was dismissive of her mother's desire to improve her knowledge (Su 1929, 77-80). Xingqiu's anxiety regarding her failure to tutor her mother is understandable. It clearly stems from her fear that in defining the ideal modern woman as educated and sexually

liberated, the May Fourth Movement relegates older, uneducated housewives to the realm of oppressive “traditional values” that need to be stomped out as part of Chinese modernization efforts. May Fourth Movement discourse seemingly suggests that these women must completely abandon the families and lives they have built, thus becoming “modern,” or else forevermore consider themselves hopelessly “traditional.”

Catholicism’s glorification of women’s work, however, particularly the suffering of mothers, allows Xingqiu to revere her mother’s social role without needing her to first abandon her family. Mother imagery, particularly images of the Virgin Mary, are prevalent throughout the novel. There is a statue of Mary outside of Xingqiu’s school in France, and she prays to a little statue of Mary in her room (Su 1929, 38; 91). Additionally, both she and her mother, who also eventually converts to Catholicism, take “Mary” as their confirmation name (Su 1929, 209). Every woman Xingqiu grows close to is described as a mother-like figure, not only her actual mother, but also Bailang and Sister Masha (Su 1929, 85; 94). Intertwined with this mother image throughout the novel is the relationship of the mother to suffering—all ideal mothers suffer, sacrificing everything of themselves for the sake of their children (Su 1929, 206). In fact, this is the source of the novel’s title *Thorny Heart*—Xingqiu expresses to the Virgin Mary as she prays that a mother has many thorns in her heart, referring to the suffering she endures for her children (Su 1929, 186). Bailang and Sister Masha’s suffering are connected to their mother-like dispositions, and Xingqiu’s mother is almost always portrayed as suffering or compromising for the sake of someone else (Su 1929, 83-85; 94). Xingqiu even describes her mother’s suffering for the sake of her husband’s family as the crucifix that she has carried for forty years, which elevates her sacrifice for her family to the same

status as Christ's sacrifice for mankind in Catholicism (Su 1929, 206). This religion's glorification of the work and suffering of women, particularly mothers, through its practice of Marian devotion enables Xingqiu to admire and respect her mother in a way that she could not with May Fourth values alone. She frees herself from a way of thinking that de-values the role of exclusively-female relationships as well as traits and labor associated with women to China's modernization efforts.

Bing Xin's early literature, unlike Xu Dishan's and Su Xuelin's works, does not directly illustrate how participation in religious cultural phenomena affects social or intellectual inequalities in women's social roles and how they are perceived. Still, within her very formulation of the ideal kind of religion for individual fulfillment, her "philosophy of love," she frees the role of "maternal love" from its status as important only for a narrow sub-group of people, that is mothers, to cultivate. In championing maternal, unconditional love as the one trait crucial to modernizing individual characters, she also frees both men and women to embrace a way of building relationships that is generally associated specifically with mother figures.

Li Ling 李玲 observes that Bing Xin was the first author to introduce motherly love as a behavioral and mental characteristic worthy of attention in literature (Li 2009, 71). In the context of the Republican Era, this is a significant feat. Zhange Ni, Louise Edwards, and Lianfan Yang have written about how a predominantly male group of May Fourth intellectuals created a vision of an ideal modern subject and society that was mainly centered around the male subject.⁴⁸ Of course, the work of Wendy Larson (1998),

⁴⁸ See Ni (2014) and Edwards (2000).

Haiping Yan (2006) and Li Guo (2013) demonstrating how female authors developed complex and nuanced female literary protagonists should not be ignored. Their scholarship demonstrates that female authors and strong female protagonists did form a component of the May Fourth Movement. Still, Yan writes that the project of women's emancipation in the May Fourth Movement was "...more often than not intentionally omitted in the course of the 'liberation of the human'" (Yan 2006, 9). In other words, concerns specific to women's subordinate social statuses tended in May Fourth discourse to be subsumed under discussion about issues of concern to "mankind" as a whole. Bing Xin does not draw such issues to the forefront in her literature, either, at least not in the same way as Xu Dishan and Su Xuelin. However, her literature challenges this male-centric discourse in a different way. By presenting "maternal love" as crucial to the process of raising individual consciousness, Bing Xin positions a trait whose very name indicates its association with mothers as a trait that *all* of humanity should possess.

Lin Jia 林佳 argues that Bing Xin's "philosophy of love" works on three levels in her *Letters to Young Readers*, the most foundational of which is maternal love. Bing Xin's yearning for her mother throughout the collection of letters causes her to look back fondly on the Chinese society and country with which she associates her mother. Thus, Lin Jia argues, the "maternal love" layer of Bing Xin's "philosophy of love" leads her to an even higher form of sublime feeling—patriotic sentiment for her home country. Finally, out of her love for her mother and her nation blooms the highest level of her "philosophy of love," which she develops after a near-death experience—her sense that every element of the universe is bound together with every other element and thus should be loved just as unconditionally as her mother and her country (Lin 2009, 306). For Bing

Xin, maternal love is the foundational first step toward forging strong connections with others. The liberation of “women’s work” from its subordinate social role is bound together with the overall freedom of humanity in several ways within Bing Xin’s “philosophy of love.” First, all individuals experience freedom through the cultivation of maternal love. Secondly, the casting of maternal love as a trait that is ideal for all individuals to possess, not just mothers or even just women, frees women’s social roles from the perception that they somehow play a less significant part than other kinds of roles China’s modernization efforts. In other words, Bing Xin’s literature casts “maternal love” as no longer an exclusively-feminine trait, but rather one for the everyman. Her “philosophy of love” frees both men and women to admire and cultivate this trait within themselves. In doing so, it breaks down the idea that the social role of being a mother, or more broadly of loving others unconditionally, should be considered unique to mothers, or at least women. It also brings maternal love to the forefront of discussions about what constitutes an effective way to modernize individuals, demonstrating that roles associated with women should not be overlooked in such discourse. In fact, Bing Xin’s literature suggests, maternal love is *necessary* for individuals to overcome their sense of alienation to forge strong connections with others.

In conclusion, identifying with or participating in religion in the literature of these three authors helps their protagonists to strive toward gender equality because of their increased ability to forge connections with others. This in turn serves as an important indication of how identifying as religious helps protagonists to express and grow their sense of personal freedom. The next section will showcase how the narratives of Bing Xin’s, Su Xuelin’s, and Xu Dishan’s short stories portray protagonists as expressing more

individual agency when they participate in religious cultural phenomena than when they do not. By treating religion as a conceptual category rather than as a substantive reality, there is no reason why the narratives of these authors cannot portray protagonists who participate in religious cultural phenomena as free agents. Furthermore, the sense protagonists obtain from participating in religion that they have overcome their sense of social alienation gives them greater optimism that the power to modernize Chinese society is within their reach than protagonists of other works of Republican Era literature who do not participate in religious cultural phenomena have.

III. A More Optimistic Outlook on Humanity's Potential for Change

Despite the deterministic representation of the world in the literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan, participation in religious cultural phenomena nevertheless allows protagonists to be optimistic that they will eventually be able to achieve social change. This can be understood using Sabina Knight's distinction between "subjectivity" and "agency," only the second of which she calls true freedom. She defines "subjectivity" as a capacity for reflection, an intellectual awareness and self-consciousness (Knight 2006, 19). "Agency," on the other hand, refers to an individual's ability to act on and change his surroundings (Knight 2006, 19-20). Leo Ou-Fan Lee (1987) and Marston Anderson (1990) have made arguments about how the literature of Republican Era authors, especially Lu Xun, Mao Dun, and Ye Shaojun, exudes pessimism about the possibility for real social change even as it advocates for it. Both scholars observe that this is because protagonists are presented as enlightened but unable to do anything about their unenlightened surroundings because of social constraints (Lee 1987, 71-76;

Anderson 1990, 76-118). Leo Ou-Fan Lee coined the phrase “loner and the crowd” to refer to this mentality as it appears in Lu Xun’s literature (Lee 1987, 76). To use Knight’s own terminology, the analyses of Knight, Anderson, and Lee suggest that protagonists in the literature of these two authors feel helpless to do anything to change their societies because they consider themselves to possess only “subjectivity,” not “agency.” This section will argue that the literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan is more optimistic because the religious identification or participation of their protagonists endows them with a sense that they possess both the “subjective” and “agentive” forms of freedom. It will first provide a brief overview of Knight’s, Anderson’s, and Lee’s discussion of the cynicism of Lu Xun’s and Ye Shaojun’s literature to demonstrate how protagonists therein only lay claim to possessing “subjective” but not “agentive” freedom. It will then illustrate how protagonists in the literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan are depicted as possessing both kinds of personal freedom, and thus are optimistic about the potential of society to truly change.

Knight uses her distinction between “subjectivity” and “agency” to argue that while the literature of Republican Era authors Lu Xun and Ye Shaojun emphasizes the free subjectivity of the protagonist, it tends to portray him as unable to act in the world, constrained by social and political forces beyond their control. In short, they are overwhelmed by processes of social determinism that ensure those who hold powerless positions will never be able to gain any real power or enact real change in society. The result is a mentality where they feel doomed to observe human wrongdoing without being able to do anything about it (Knight 2006, 73-103). When protagonists in Lu Xun’s “In the Wine Shop [Zai jiu lou shang 在酒楼上]” (1926) and Ye Shaojun’s early stories are

confronted by the reality of social determinism, “rather than admit that some things are beyond their understanding and then seek to identify what they can do within those limits, many protagonists throw up their hands and bemoan the cruelty of the world...” (Knight 2006, 95). They react to social determinism pessimistically, convinced that because their actions are constrained to an extent, they have no freedom to change their communities. Clearly, Lu Xun’s and Ye Shaojun’s literary emphasis on the existence of subjective freedom of thought and the simultaneous impossibility of acting on those thoughts leads to bleak representations of the world in which enlightened individuals, feeling that they are powerless to change their surroundings, fall into a depressive and cynical state. Knight’s analysis of the cynical outlook of these authors is not new, but echoes the conclusion of Marston Anderson’s earlier monograph on the pitfalls of social realism in Chinese fiction, as well as Leo Ou-Fan Lee’s delineation of the “loner and the crowd” mentality in the literature of Lu Xun (See “Social Anxiety and Alienation” in Chapter One above for an in-depth description of Leo Ou-Fan’s idea of the “loner and the crowd”). Both these scholars portrayed Lu Xun and Ye Shaojun as writing literature in which they portrayed their protagonists as cognizant of the shortcomings of their society, but powerless to effect any real change on it because of the constraints of social determinism.

In a footnote, Knight contrasts the behavior of these protagonists with those of Xu Dishan, who accept the religious and social determinism of his stories gracefully, with positive attitudes. Knight attributes this difference to the Buddhist or Christian outlook of his fiction (Knight 2006, 96). Presumably, she means that having accepted that the universe is ordered by forces greater than themselves, Xu Dishan’s protagonists are more

willing to accept that they cannot control many aspects of their lives. Her interpretation that they are more optimistic about the deterministic world in which they live is correct, but she over-simplifies the way in which Xu's protagonists envision the relationship between their own individual freedom and the deterministic world. Given the preceding analysis of this chapter, it makes more sense to interpret them as having, either intentionally or not, internalized a conceptualization of freedom in which they see themselves as becoming free precisely by conforming to the religious model of the world in which they choose to believe. In other words, it is not the case that they passively accept their enslavement to a deterministic world. Such an interpretation of Xu Dishan's literature would indicate that it does not represent individual freedom and liberty as important components of an ideal society. The centrality of individual choice in his literature to his protagonists' emotional, spiritual, and social wellbeing indicates that such a reading cannot be true, however, as demonstrated in previous chapters. Rather, identification with religious cultural phenomena enables his protagonists to feel that they have cultivated the tools to forge relationships with others, which in turn makes them confident that they will eventually be able to share their insights regarding the necessity for social change. This leaves them feeling more optimistic than their counterparts in other works of Republican Era literature. Their identification with or participation in religion is not an escape hatch from the toils and frustrations of their lives, but rather a tool with which they can actively combat the social forces that try to limit their freedom. In fact, this pattern holds true in the literature of Bing Xin and Su Xuelin in addition to Xu Dishan. Participation in religious cultural phenomena allows them to possess both "subjectivity" and "agency." They are not overwhelmed by the ways in which social

determinism constricts their behavior, because their participation in religious cultural phenomena allow them to overcome their sense of social alienation and become more confident that they will be able to effectively connect with people and share their insights regarding social change. Whether they will be able to effect such a change or not is beside the point—what is important is that by participating in religious cultural phenomena, they cultivate the skill set of prioritizing the needs of others, which enables them to grow optimistic at their chances of connecting deeply with others in the future. Thus, by participating in religious cultural phenomena, these protagonists overcome their sense of social alienation, growing more optimistic of their ability to effect change and thus improving their emotional mentalities.

In short, the literature of Xu Dishan, Su Xuelin, and Bing Xin presents protagonists who participate in religious cultural phenomena as possessing an optimistic outlook on their potential to eventually transform society. They do resign themselves to a deterministic world, but their participation in religious cultural phenomena allows them to become more optimistic about their ability to overcome social alienation and disseminate their insights to others. To use Knight's terminology, they believe themselves to be both "subjective" and "agentive." They have chosen of their own will to participate in religion, and participating in religion allows them to become inspired that it is possible to change their societies. Protagonists in the works of Lu Xun and Ye Shaojun are not so fortunate. They decry religions as promoting a deterministic conceptualization of the universe that they believe is contrary to the idea of individual liberty, which they see as crucial to China's process of modernization. However, the analyses of Knight, Anderson, and Lee demonstrate that these authors' protagonists are pessimistic that they

will ever escape the oppression of social determinisms. The result is that they feel like prisoners in their societies, enlightened to what kind of behavior and beliefs are important for China's modernization efforts but unable or unwilling to carry these behaviors out in practice.

IV. Conclusion

Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan all write literature in which their protagonists accept the reality of a deterministic world, as evidenced by their identification with or participation in religion. However, far from resigning themselves to a life in which they have no freedom to control their destinies, their protagonists continue to act freely despite their affiliation with religion. In fact, the above segments of the chapter have argued that the narratives of these authors depict participation in and identification with religion as extending and deepening protagonists' sense of individual freedom, not limiting it. Furthermore, the narrative shows participation in religious cultural phenomena to positively impact how protagonists approach gender inequality. This is especially pronounced from observing how the idea of women's relationships and roles as subordinate to those of men is challenged in the work of all three authors on both social and intellectual levels. Furthermore, identifying as religious gives protagonists in these three authors' literature the confidence to believe that they can connect with others despite the limits imposed on them by social determinism, which consequently makes them more optimistic that they will eventually be able to effect social change. Identifying with or participating in religion in the literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan

does not preclude protagonists from expressing individual liberty, but rather helps them to maximize it.

Conclusion

Far from being a cry to return to traditional methods of conceptualizing of freedom, the literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan also complements the focus of May Fourth intellectuals on individual freedom and gender equality. Their protagonists exhibit individual freedom in their choice to become religious believers. Identifying with or participating in religion also enables them to more readily strive for gender equality, albeit not deliberately--a clear marker of individual liberty. Furthermore, participation in religious cultural phenomena makes the protagonists in the literature of these three authors optimistic about society's potential to truly transform by allowing them to believe that they possess both "subjective" and "agentive" forms of freedom. Specifically, they are convinced that they have gained the tools for overcoming their sense of social alienation, which makes them optimistic that through reaching out to others they will eventually effect social change. Both characteristics of the literature of Bing Xin, Su Xuelin, and Xu Dishan demonstrate that it is possible to read the protagonists of their literature as expressing free will and simultaneously as participating in religious cultural phenomena. This is largely possible because of the strategy of reading "religion" in the work of the three authors as a conceptual category and narrative device, rather than as a representation of a substantive reality.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The argument of the previous discussion can be summarized thus: the decision of Bing Xin's, Su Xuelin's, and Xu Dishan's literary protagonists to identify as or participate in religion is not unrelated to focus of May Fourth intellectuals on modernization. As this dissertation has argued, these three authors' literature posits a distinctive formulation of modernization in which participation in or identification with religion is important to the creation of strong individuals. Their literature further illustrates that identification with or participation within religion is important for overcoming social alienation. It also presents identifying with or participating within religion as a venue toward greater individual freedom, including social and intellectual equality for women. Their literature represents a distinctive use of the category of "religion" in May Fourth literature.

Acknowledging the various ways in which the category of "religion" was represented in Republican Era literature also has important implications for the way in which academics discuss the evolution of modern and contemporary Chinese literature. The suppression of literature alluding to religiosity from historical narratives of the Republican Era may have been influenced by ideological movements in China during the twentieth century such as the Cultural Revolution (*Wenhua da geming* 文化大革命) (1966-1976), in which the Communist party suppressed most literary and film production. Literature alluding to religiosity would have been especially discouraged under a regime that defined itself as atheist and perceived religion to a maniacal tool of the bourgeois classes meant to keep the poor under their power. Indeed, Wang Chengxia

王澄霞 has suggested that the strong interest of Republican Era intellectuals in religion is obvious, and that it has received so little attention in scholarship because of the Communist Party's refusal to acknowledge that religion has played an important role in mainland China's cultural development (Cheng 2011, 78).

The relative lack of scholarship on literary religiosity in China may also have to do with deliberate efforts on the part of the Nationalist Regime in Republican Era China to suppress the voices of its religious dissidents. Prasenjit Duara's *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (1995) complicates over-simplistic narratives of the development of China in the 20th century that have been crafted by the nation-state to retroactively represent their national agenda as the natural result of historical events, rather than as a constructed ideology (Duara 1995, 6). One of the examples he dwells on at length is conventional narratives of the development of modern China as rejecting religious groups and institutions. He demonstrates that this narrative is not some kind of objective way that historical events played out in China, though it has been represented as such by the Chinese nation-state. Rather, the Nationalist government of the period was threatened by China's religious world because of the vast array of "dispersed practices, meanings, and ideals embedded in popular religion." This variety of "dispersed practices, meanings, and ideals" threatened the sense of national unity that the Nationalists viewed as necessary for the formation of a strong modern nation-state consolidated under their power (Duara 1995, 86). They thus tried to erase this world by creating a narrative in which religion was labelled as "superstition" and associated with China's "unwanted past," the opposite of the kind of ideology needed for China to become a successful modern nation. However, Duara points out that the religious groups

implicated by this Nationalist discourse pushed back, promoting their own discourse in which they painted past, more religious periods as more idealized in relation to the present (Duara 1995, 111). Duara's monograph thus represents a tension in discourse that existed in early 20th-century China between religious groups and the Nationalist government. It is not a stretch to imagine that this censorship against religious groups practiced by the Nationalist regime may also have impacted the extent to which writing and literature about religion and religiosity could flourish during the period. My research has the potential to counteract the censoring tendencies of both the Nationalist and Communist regimes in 20th-century China by drawing attention to the literary interest in religion and religiosity expressed during the May Fourth Movement.

Whether the historical events of China in the 20th century contributed to the lack of scholarship on Republican Era literary religiosity until recently must ultimately remain a matter of speculation. Still, it is worth noting that numerous authors writing in Chinese since the end of the Cultural Revolution have produced literature that alludes to and engages with various religious concepts. Examples of such authors include Gao Xingjian 高行健 (1940-) and poet Haizi 海子 (1964-1989). Further research may in fact uncover the possibility that contemporary literature engaging with religiosity has built on the work of authors interested in religiosity in Republican Era China. It may eventually be possible to establish a historical timeline of the ongoing influence of religiosity on the development of modern Chinese literature.

My research promotes a form of knowledge-making that privileges understanding the multiplicity of discourses that exist at any given time in any given place over simplistic renderings of these discourses that often serve nationalistic or other ideological

purposes. Delineating a variant of Republican Era literary discourse that experimented with incorporating identification with or participation in religion into its vision of how Chinese individuals could best modernize serves as a first step to understanding the role of religiosity more broadly in the development of modern Chinese literature in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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