

Fangsheng Landscape: The human-animal relationship in Nanjing

Yalin Wei

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David Bachman, Chair

Devon G.Peña

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Yalin Wei

University of Washington

Abstract

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Yalin Wei

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
Professor, David Bachman
China Studies

This thesis is an investigation of both human-animal relationship and a Buddhist ritual practice in modern China. *Fangsheng*, the Buddhist animal release, is very popular among lay Buddhists in Nanjing and other cities in China. In this thesis, I argue that the local history, environment, Internet social media, the pollution issues, and the ritual itself constitute the “landscape” for *fangsheng*. Within the landscape, I claim that the “pollution” should be understood as “matter out of place.” The standard of “pollution” among Buddhists does not refer to ecological knowledge, but moral orders from Buddhism. The *fangsheng* landscape is also the moral landscape.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Landscape

This thesis explores the human-animal relationship in Nanjing, China, through Buddhist animal release rituals, *fangsheng*. The *fangsheng* in Nanjing is shaped by local Buddhist history, environmental challenges, economic development and even information technology. All these aspects constitute both the visible and invisible space that makes the *fangsheng* and this everyday human-animal contact possible.

For Yi-fu Tuan, "Place is a special kind of object. It is a concretion of value, though not a valued thing that can be handled or carried about easily; it is an object in which one can dwell. Space, we have noted, is given by the ability to move. Movements are often directed toward, or repulsed by, objects and places. Hence space can be variously experienced as the relative location of objects or places, as the distances and expanses that separate or link places, and--more abstractly--as the area defined by a network of place." (Tuan 12) In short, space can be seen as a chain of "value" which shared by lives. In Nanjing, a series of space constructs the landscape for *fangsheng*, or *fangsheng* landscape, including "physical or experiential" space that makes *fangsheng* possible. In other words, Nanjing as a city provides the landscape for *fangsheng*, and *fangsheng* shapes the landscape of Nanjing. For John Berger, landscape is a "way of seeing." While landscape is not only the subject of "seeing," but also about "doing." "Landscapes articulate both culture and nature, seer and scene. But equally at stake in landscape are the embodied practices that transform the objects of a proprietary gaze." (Pandian, Moore and Kosek 11)

Within the landscape for *fangsheng* in Nanjing, humans are not the only agents who keep influencing the *fangsheng* itself and the landscape. Animals (usually fish in Nanjing's *fangsheng*), the other lives participate in *fangsheng*, how do fish exercise their agency on the landscape and human. Another important question for this paper is, how both the human and nonhuman agents shape the *fangsheng* landscape in Nanjing. Furthermore, why do modern Chinese people, less or more as Buddhist believers, choose to practice *fangsheng*? Which places and which set of ritual procedures do humans choose when they practice *fangsheng*? Where do fish choose to take part in (survive after) *fangsheng* rituals? All these questions must be answered in the broader context, the history, economy, and politics of China that is now in the "great acceleration."(McNeill and Engelke 5) The "great acceleration" deeply transforms the relationship between human and animals, lives and environment.

Another term to describe the context of these transformations everywhere on earth, is anthropocene. It first appeared as a scientific label to describe "the current epoch of unprecedented anthropogenic planetary change," anthropocene then becomes "a political label designed to call attention to this change and evolving notions of agency and responsibility in contemporary life." Also, some anthropologists call for "anthropocene anthropology."(Moore 27) In this paper, however, I don't specially focus on the so-called "anthropocene." Anthropocene does provide us with a context to think beyond humankind. But I prefer to investigate the human-animal contacts in *fangsheng* over a longer time period. Anthropocene reflections do not necessarily make the human-animal contacts in *fangsheng* possible. As a long tradition in Chinese/Han Buddhism and mentioned a lot in Chinese Buddhist sutras, *fangsheng* bonds both the human and animals since at least 1,000 years ago. Meantime, the landscape in Nanjing, and in other cities in China, appear much earlier than the anthropocene's appearance.

So, this paper will first start with the history of *fangsheng* in Nanjing. More specifically, I will talk about the history of *fangsheng* that still influences the landscape and is perceived by current *fangsheng* believers. The history of Nanjing *fangsheng* contributes significantly to this city's *fangsheng* landscape, including both "physical or experiential."

1.2 Construction of this thesis

In the Chapter Two, I will give a brief introduction to Nanjing City and my fieldwork experience in Nanjing. Following that, I will survey the current literature of *fangsheng* in Chapter Three, mainly in Chinese and English, from mainland China, to Southeastern Asian and Eastern Asian areas.

Chapter Four will start with the history of *fangsheng* in Nanjing. More specifically, I will talk about the history of *fangsheng* how this still influences the landscape and is perceived by the current *fangsheng* believers. The history of Nanjing *fangsheng* contributes a lot to this city's *fangsheng* landscape, including "physical or experiential" aspects.

In Chapter Five, I will discuss the connection between human and animals in *fangsheng* practice, especially those hosted by lay Buddhists. The connection including the geographical one, and the online one. The latter will be fully investigated. I argue that cyberspace is becoming an important part of Nanjing *fangsheng* landscape, but it is very vulnerable when facing state regulations.

Chapter Six will reflect the *fangsheng* landscape from the perspective of existed or produced "pollution" in the landscape. Why should we keep fish away from polluted water when practicing *fangsheng*? Is *fangsheng* itself a kind of pollution to local environment? More

importantly, what is the standard of cleanliness and pollution for Nanjing lay Buddhists? I argue that the Buddhist ethic, not killing life, is the main basic standard for “correct/scientific *fangsheng*.” In other words, the *fangsheng* landscape is also the moral landscape.

In this chapter, I also talk about the animal’s agency in *fangsheng*. The agency of animals also shapes the *fangsheng* landscape in the Buddhist moral context. The last chapter is the conclusion.

Chapter Two: Place and fieldwork

1.1 Nanjing

Nanjing is the capital of Jiangsu province of the People's Republic of China and the second largest city in the East China region, with a total population of 8,270,500 as of 2016. Situated in the Yangtze River Delta region, Nanjing has a prominent place in Chinese history and culture, having served as the capital of various Chinese dynasties, kingdoms and the republican government dating from the 3rd century to 1949, and has thus long been a major center of culture, education, research, politics, economy, transport networks and tourism, being the home to one of the world's largest inland ports. Nanjing, one of the nation's most important cities for over a thousand years, is recognized as one of the Four Great Ancient Capitals of China. It has been one of the world's largest cities, enjoying peace and prosperity despite wars and disasters. Nanjing served as the capital of Eastern Wu (229–280), one of the three major states in the Three Kingdoms period; the Eastern Jin and each of the Southern dynasties (Liu Song, Southern Qi, Liang and Chen), which successively ruled southern China from 317–589; the Southern Tang (937–75), one of the Ten Kingdoms; the Ming dynasty when, for the first time, all of China was ruled from the city (1368–1421); and the Republic of China (1927–37, 1946–49) prior to its flight to Taiwan during the Chinese Civil War. The city also served as the seat of the rebel Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (1853–64) and the Japanese puppet regime of Wang Jingwei (1940–45) during the Second Sino-Japanese War. It suffered severe atrocities in both conflicts, including the Nanjing Massacre. (Wikipedia)

Buddhism plays an important role in the Nanjing history. After the last three decades of religion revival and temple rehabilitation in the post-Cultural Revolution era, there are sixty-two Buddhist temples in Nanjing now. Buddhism *fangsheng* practice in Nanjing can be traced back

to the Tang Dynasty. More than a thousand years of *fangsheng* history have left Nanjing with a rich legacy, such as several ancient *fangsheng* ponds.

1.2 Fieldwork

My encounter with *fangsheng* in Nanjing started from my undergraduate study. I read a paper of *fangsheng* from one of my undergraduate advisers and planned a visit of Sunday *fangsheng* in Qingliang Temple. Later, I heard *fangsheng* happened every week, even every day in many other temples in the city. I talked with many lay Buddhist believers and Buddhist monks about *fangsheng*, but did not plan to do anything about it. As an undergraduate student in sociology, I saw those lay Buddhist groups as a type of social organization. And based on the American religion sociologist Rodney Stark's "religion market" theory, I thought the popularity of *fangsheng* group was the result of lacking official Buddhist worship places. In short, I did not notice the animals in the *fangsheng* practice.

In 2017, I finished my undergraduate Sociology thesis, "Student Buddhists in Colleges of Nanjing," based on interviews and fieldwork in several temples. Before my studies in the United States, I participated in *fangsheng* rituals in Buddhist temples every weekend and also treated it as a position from which to explore local Buddhist communities. While studying environmental anthropology and multispecies ethnography at the University of Washington, I began to rethink the question of animal agency in *fangsheng*. I became interested in comparing contemporary practitioners of Buddhism with ancient monks. I concluded that today's lay believers prefer to treat animals as non-sentient being, which limits the possibility of more open and transformative communication with the role of animals in the rituals.

In August 2018, I spent two weeks participating in *fangsheng* rituals conducted by different lay Buddhist groups. This presented invaluable opportunities for me to shift my perceptions and begin to perceive the water, animals, and the environment of *fangsheng* rituals as interrelated wholes that are “beyond [the merely] human” (Kohn 159). The investigation of the environmental factors that shape these interactions will provide a deeper insight into the human-animal relationship itself.

Chapter Three: Literature review

Animal release is a religious ritual which is popular in modern China. At the heart of the ceremony is the freeing of captive animals into their 'natural habitat'(Shiu and Stokes 2008). While the exact origin of religious animal release is not clear. It is not a traditional Indian Buddhist practice and it can find indigenous counterparts before Buddhism entering China(Shiu and Stokes 2008; Yang 2015). The meaning and practice behind the term "animal release" also have changed in China(Smith 1999). A formal animal release in Buddhist temples should be divided into seven steps(Yang 2015):

1. Proclaiming the reason for performing the animal release liturgy today.
2. Purifying the animals with water while chanting the mantra Da Yuan Man Tuo Luo Ni Shen Zhou Hui Ji Zhen Yan(大圓滿陀羅尼神咒穢跡真言).
3. Praying to Buddha for granting wisdom to animals and making them understand the truth of Buddhism.
4. Vowing to pay homage to the Three Treasures of Buddhism (Buddha, Sutra, and Sangha) on behalf of the animals.
5. Chanting the names of many Buddhas, such as Baosheng Buddha(宝胜如来), more than seven times.
6. Preaching the Twelve Nidanas (十二因緣) to the animals.
7. Leading the animals to confess the evil karma they have accumulated in their previous lives.

However, most of animal release is conducted by lay Buddhists and have simplified or no rituals(Yang 2015). The animal release happening in Chinese cities every week provides a distinctive way to observe human-animal relationship since animal release is the convergence of religious concepts, ecological knowledge, urban life, and colonialism.

There still are many contradictions and gaps in current research. First, are the animals released in the rituals native or invasive species? When people talk about animal release, they usually state that it has adverse effects for the environment, especially the species invasion problem(Shiu and Stokes 2008; Agoramoorthy and Hsu 2005; Agoramoorthy and Hsu 2007). So, some researchers have started finding the relation between species invasion and religious animal release(Liu et al. 2013; Liu, McGarrity, and Li 2012). However, they hold the premise that animals released are invasive ones and use two invasive species(American bullfrogs and red-eared slider turtles) as indicators. What they ignore in their research is to prove that all the temples they have interviewed release these two invasive animals. After analysis, they conclude that animal release and species invasion have a positive correlation. However, studies from two other Asian countries are opposite of this argument. In her thesis about animal trade in Taiwan, Su finds that prayer animals tend to be small-bodied, cheap, available and abundant. So, most prayer animals in Taiwan are native and pose no risk to ecology, because alien species are usually priced high in pet shops (Su 2016). This observation is entirely different from Agoramoorthy and Hsu's opinion that animal release is the cause of alien birds in Taiwan (Agoramoorthy and Hsu 2005; Agoramoorthy and Hsu 2007). Researchers in Cambodia also get the similar result. They find that the 57 different species which are sold in Phnom Penh, Cambodia for merit release are all considered native to Cambodia(Gilbert et al. 2012). So, if we want to know the relation between animal release and species invasion in China, we should first

know what kinds of animals people prefer to release in the ritual, and whether they are native or alien.

The preference of animal species(if it existed in Han Mahayana Buddhism tradition) maybe another exciting topic, for example, Tibetan Buddhists believe that performing tsethar ritual(liberalizing animals from the prospect of being slaughtered) for male animals makes more sense(Sulek 2011).

Second, if they are native animals, will these animals have negative impacts on the local environment? In other words, does animal release have other unintended terrible results? The first criticism comes from Buddhism itself. Smith characterizes that since Ming dynasty(around the seventeenth century), animal release is a way for literati to maneuver and redefine themselves in an increasingly complicated society and people release animals to benefit for themselves(Smith 1999). In the history of modern China, animal protection and animal release are always related to elite lay Buddhists. To push collective movements about animal protection, elites formed their network to influence official policies (陈明华 2010; 潘淑华 2015; 徐志德 2015). The similar lay Buddhist networks about animal release also appear in contemporary China. Yang finds that many lay Buddhist groups do their animal release every day, and don't need the help from Buddhist temples. The current animal release groups are based on Internet (Yang 2015). The next potential threat of animal release comes from the animals which are carrying the virus. In the health survey of birds for sale in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 10.36% birds carrying influenza A virus, 1.03% carrying Chlamyophilapsittaci, and 4.12% carrying Mycobacterium genavense. So the animal release may present a risk both to public health as well as to wild populations. Another unintended result of animal release is gene introgression. In the study of large-scale releases of mallard, a cryptic introgression of farmed mallard genes,

concerning bill morphology, can be found in wild populations (Söderquist 2015). The same thing may happen in religious animal release in China. Even if people release the native species, they may influence the gene pool of local wild populations. All in all, we are still unsure what negative impacts animal release have on Buddhism, local environment, and popular health. So,

it is interesting to look into why common people accept the idea that animal release results in species invasion.

Third, why does public opinions in China believe animal release is related to species invasion? The first and most important reason is that people indeed release invasive species into water, forests, and mountains. It is easy to find thousands of news items in Chinese that people released vipers, bullfrogs, red eared turtles, and channeled applesnails to the wild. Also, the interviews of animal release in China finds that some Buddhist temple release invasive animals (Liu et al. 2013; Liu, McGarrity, and Li 2012).

Another reason why people think the species invasion matters could be the influence of western ecological knowledge. In the traditional concept of human-animal relationship, Chinese people believe humans and animals are equal and make no difference between native and invasive animals. However, in late Qing dynasty (around the second half of the nineteenth century), some intellectuals accepted the theory of evolution and believed stopping killing animals could benefit the ecology, the world and our humankind (李雅雯 2007). The "invasive species" is absolutely a term from Western science. The problem here is, when we use "species invasion" to describe animal release, we have done the meaning-making of animal release again and imagine the possible harm to "ecology." None of the existing research rethinks of the Western, scientific terms we used to characterize the "problem" of animal release. Chan finds the

imperialism in the Shanghai International Settlement destabilized traditional dog-human relationship. In 1875, after receiving its first case of rabies in the SIS, the Shanghai Municipal Council devised a policy of killing all dogs that had strayed into the SIS from nearby rural areas (Chan 2015). So, it is crucial to decolonize the "invasive species" before we use it to describe animal release practice.

Fourth, is the "new-style animal release" in modern China indeed "new"? In Yang's inquiry of animal release in modern Nanjing, he uses the "new-style animal release" to make a distinction with the traditional one. The idea, participants, and ritual of new-styled animal release are different from the traditional one (Yang 2015). Even though Yang emphasizes the network of lay Buddhists in the new-styled animal release, he does not make a clear definition of what is "new." At least from the seventeenth century, the meaning of animal release has changed, and lay Buddhists play more and more important role within (Smith 1999; 李雅雯 2007; 陈明华 2010; 潘淑華 2015). To investigate the "modern" animal release in China, we need to answer what does "modern" refer to. Does the "modern" come from the seventeenth century of China, the imperialism of western countries, or both?

Fifth, did western imperialism and colonialism influence the human-animal relationship in animal release? Will modern urban life in China affect this relationship again? In the 1920s and 1930s, when Shanghai Buddhists promoted animal protection movements and animal release, they usually equated human beings with animals to arouse common people's compassion for animals. For example, Buddhist master Yinguang wrote in 1927, "Are people who are murdered in wars different from animals who are killed to satisfy human's stomach?" (陈明华 2010; 潘淑華 2015) It is common in Buddhism "life protection" tradition that human and animal are equal

and have the same right to get enlightenment (李雅雯 2007). However, the human-animal equality has more complex meanings in the first half of the twentieth century in China. Besides Yinguang's "both human and animal suffer violence and war," Chinese people also saw themselves as humble as dogs under western colonialism. The sign "Dogs and Chinese Not Admitted" has become a symbol of bias in Shanghai, although Bickers and Wasserstrom find that this sign did not exist in any official historical record (Bickers and Wasserstrom 1995). In the context of colonialism, the modern management of urban space in the Shanghai International Settlement also changed the traditional dog-human relationship in China (Chan 2015). So, after the rapid modernization in last century, the human-animal relationship in contemporary China must have great changes. However, the human-animal relationship in animal release is rarely mentioned in current studies. Yang considers that the role of benefactor to the released and the role of beneficiary to the releaser are overturned. In other words, animals become the releaser while human is the released (Yang 2015). However, Yang does not further the "modern" topic. "Modernity" in China should be one of the essential topics in my research.

The last concern is about methodology. Existing researches have included both qualitative and quantitative methods. They all have shortcomings and limitations. 1) Most qualitative research about animal release is based on records and history. The "people's" opinion of animal release and the human-animal relationship is the views of the minority elite. Written materials are not able to be used to explain the current human-animal relationship. 2) To make the data more accessible, most quantitative data are flawed. For example, Liu and his group interviewed thousands of people at temples to get more information about animal release. These temples are from official religious site list (Liu et al. 2013; Liu, McGarrity, and Li 2012). However, Yang points out that most of animal release rituals in Nanjing are held by lay

Buddhists, while official Buddhist temples only do animal release a few of times a year (Yang 2015). So, Liu and his group probably ignored most of the data about animal release.

Chapter Four: History

Modern Chinese Buddhist scholars trace *fangsheng* practice/the idea of *fangsheng* back to Confucius's life care thought. In fact, it is hard to identify the exact origin of *fangsheng* in China. Buddhist believers and professional scholars usually holds different views of *fangsheng*'s origin and meanings. I have no intention to re-investigate the history *fangsheng* in this paper.

On the other hand, history as a contributing part of Nanjing *fangsheng* landscape is important because of both its past, which grounds the current Buddhist believers' fever of *fangsheng*, and its modern representation, through which the ancient tradition is understood and practiced nowadays. Here I don't mean that the history of *fangsheng* or other kinds of animal release happened many years ago in Nanjing have no any important impacts on our understanding transformation of animal release.

In this paper, I pay more attention to how modern Chinese people understand the origin and history of *fangsheng*. Just like which places Nanjing Buddhists choose to release fish at the end of *fangsheng*, I am interested in which part of history, or which version of history about *fangsheng* they choose to interpret. When reviewing the academic studies of Tantric Buddhism, Christian K. Wedemeyer finds that "in identifying its origins (and thus, essential nature), the scholar simultaneously (if surreptitiously) constructs an ideal social context for Tantric Buddhism that then serves as an interpretative frame within which to make sense of transgressive discourses and practices." (Wedemeyer 35) It should be carefully surveyed that how people compile their narrative of *fangsheng* and *fangsheng* history in Nanjing. The narrative of "origin" serves as both framework and limit for making sense of Tantric Buddhism, and *fangsheng*.

The accurate historical description of animal release origin is important, but the potential "true meaning" of animal release existed among thousands of literature reference does not influence the construction of animal release meaning/belief in contemporary China. So, this thesis will not be a religion history study which tries to clarify animal release. On the other hand, I will concentrate more on the historical narratives of *fangsheng*. How did devout emperors, Buddhist masters, and lay believers make sense of their *fangsheng* behaviors?

In the following section I will survey some important *fangsheng* "texts" in Nanjing history, then discuss what is the material and spiritual legacy of this history. It is hard to investigate how the spiritual legacy influences modern Buddhists. So, I pay more attention to the material legacy in the *fangsheng* landscape. The last part of this chapter is the limitation of the historical discussion in the construction of *fangsheng* landscape.

4.1 *Wulong Tan*, Nanjing *fangsheng* history

Nanjing is an important city in Chinese Buddhist history. Buddhist belief entered Nanjing almost 1,800 years ago, when Buddhism had influenced central and northern China for about 100 years. According to *History of Nanjing Buddhist Temples (Jinling Fansha Zhi*, first published in 1607), there were 176 Buddhist temples in Nanjing in the Ming Dynasty. Now Nanjing officially has 62 Buddhist temples and worship places. (By comparison, Nanjing has 5 Daoist temples, 11 Christian churches, and 12 mosques.) The earliest written *fangsheng* in Nanjing started from 759 C.E., the Tang Dynasty. *Yan Zhenqing*, a famous official and calligrapher, advised the current emperor to establish 81 *fangsheng* ponds in the whole country to pacify the deep sorrow left by civil wars.

“In the Lunar March of the Second Year of *Qianyuan* (759 C.E.), the Emperor commanded the general, *Shi Yuanzong*, and the middle envoy, *Zhang Tingwang*, to build *fangsheng* ponds in the country, starting from Xingdao in Yangzhou, Shannan, Jiannan, Qianzhong, Jingnan, Lingnan, Jiangxi, Western Zhejiang, to the Taiping Bridge of Qinhuai, Jiangning in Shengzhou (current Nanjing). These *fangsheng* ponds are close to rivers or city walls. Their length and width are usually five Chinese miles. These eighty-one *fangsheng* ponds can express the mercy of the Emperor.

“As written in the I Ching, ‘trust should include pigs and fish.’ As written in the Book of Documents, ‘birds, beasts, fish and turtles are all like this.’ From ancient times to the present, except our Emperor, none of the great, wise people can prohibit killing life. Tang of Shang, the ancient great emperor, is known for his kindness, but still reserves one side of fishing net. Han Wudi, one of the great emperors in Han Dynasty, is known for his mercy. So a fish licked a pearl to repay him. But the river which Han Wudi built has already dried up. Because all these things are done then, and their benefits cannot be continued. Compared to those ancient kindness, the *fangsheng* ponds, providing shelters for animals and plants, aquatic and terrestrial animals, can benefit all beings in the world.”

Among the 81 *fangsheng* ponds, the *Wulong Tan* (Black Dragon Pond) is the only one that still exists. In this stele text written by *Yan Zhenqing*, he used the two most ancient Chinese texts, I Ching and Book of Documents (Shang Shu), to the emperor’s kindness to animals. Buddhists practice never stops *fangsheng* in Wulong Tan until establishment of People Republic of China in 1949. In 1923, during the Republic of China regime, the current governor of Jiangsu Province and the local general established a new stone stele for Wulong Tan:

“Near of the City of Stone, the pond is named as Wulong.

Who started *fangsheng* here, the famous Duke Lu. (as known as *Yan Zhenqing*)

Duke Lu's great kindness spreads to fish.

How broad and deep the water is, to contain and care for so many.

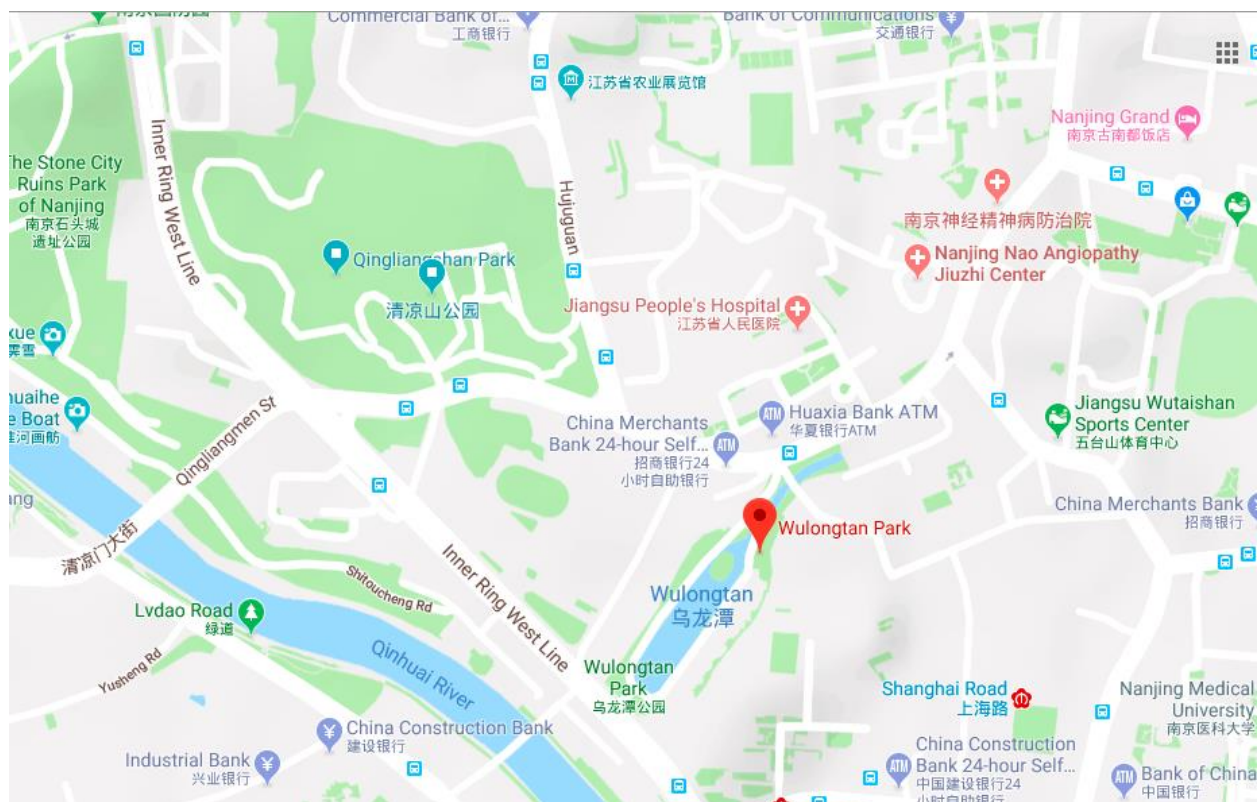
Those who come here will find this stele, should know things and we share the same spring.

If someone steals or catches fish here, disaster will come to his/her.

Human law is on the bright side; the ghost and god are on the dark side.

The stele is stood on the pond, to tell everyone.”

Now, Wulong Tan has become a public city park. *Fangsheng* no longer occurs at Wulong Tan, while its *fangsheng* in past 1000 years still leaves us a lot of legacy. Since its richness of different kinds of fish and turtles, the first fish and turtle museum in China, the Nanjing Fish and Turtle Natural Museum, established inside Wulong Tan Park in 1989.



In addition to the material legacy, Wulong Tan as a spiritual symbol, promotes modern Buddhist believers remain committed to *fangsheng*. In the following chapter, I will discuss a current important *fangsheng* temple, Qingliang Temple. Qingliang Temple locates on Mountain Qingliang. Qingliang Temple is very close to Wulong Tan, and is located about 1000 meters northwest of Wulong Tan Park. (See Map)

4.2 War and *Fangsheng*

In the early period of Republic of China, central and local governments were the positive supporters of variety of *fangsheng* practice. One year before the Nanjing government officially prohibited any fishing activities in Wulong Tan, the Zhejiang Province government accepted the suggestion from Hangzhou Buddhism Academy (杭州佛学会) and registered West Lake, one of the most famous lakes and natural attractions in Eastern China, as “permanent *fangsheng* pond” in 1922 (陈明华 49).

However, the so-called “permanent” status does not last very long. In 1925, when May Thirtieth Movement (the Shanghai massacre of 1925) happened, some local groups argued that Hangzhou government should sell the fish in West Lake to support the movement. One year later, some people again made a compromise proposal: sell the fish in the outer lake while keep the ones in the inner lake. Due to the strong opposition from current Buddhist masters and upper-class Buddhist believers, both proposals failed in the end. In 1927, the National Revolutionary Army entered Hangzhou, and organized new local government that was directly supervised by Nanjing Nationalist Government (April 1927 to November 1937). The primary task for current Nationalist Government was the Northern Expedition (1926 to 1928) to destroy the Beiyang

government and other regional warlords. So, both Nanjing central government and local governments faced serious financial pressure. At one time, the military spending accounted for 90% of total expenditure for Nanjing Nationalist Government. So, the Hangzhou government seriously started thinking of selling all the fish in West Lake to support public expenditure. In November, the Hangzhou government abolished the “permanent *fangsheng* pond” status of West Lake and announced the coming public auction of fish in the whole lake. This time, the government had made up its mind, and the lobbying from Buddhists failed (陈明华 50).

Finally, the representative of Buddhists bought the all West Lake fish with eight thousand silver coins. Buddhist masters and upper-class followers enthusiastically raise a fund, and paid all money to the government at the end of the May in 1928. As a condition of this transaction, Buddhists required the government to re-register the *fangsheng* pond status of the West Lake and prohibited totally or partly fishing in the lake. Thanks to current Chinese top leader, Chiang Kai-shek’s direct interval, Hangzhou government at last agreed to confirm a part of West Lake as *fangsheng* pond (陈明华 50).

Fangsheng ponds as the important part of many cities’ landscape are the perfect places to observe how state power manipulates religious beliefs through *fangsheng* rituals, and how local Buddhist believers resist the state interval. However, “the art of being governed” does not always work. The wars in modern China provide current Chinese government a good opportunity to stop *fangsheng* in the official way. As the counterpart of Yan Zhenqing’s *fangsheng* pond proposal written in mid-Tang Dynasty, the *fangsheng* practice in early modern China was also shaped by current warfare. Within early modern *fangsheng* practice, Buddhists, especially lay believers, played the more important role in promoting and protecting *fangsheng*, while the official state authority played the minor, even opposing role.

4.3 History and *fangsheng* landscape

The history of Buddhism and *fangsheng* in Nanjing fundamentally shapes the local *fangsheng* landscape. Modern Nanjing Buddhists still choose the same waterway to release animals. The local lay Buddhists and monks are proud of the long local *fangsheng* history. *Fangsheng* history also provides the unanticipated legacy for modern people, such as the Nanjing Fish and Turtle Natural Museum.

On the other hand, the landscape left by ancient Buddhists is not the whole modern *fangsheng* landscape in Nanjing. The most famous ancient *fangsheng* pond, Wulong Tan, as a public park, is no longer the top choice for *fangsheng*. Another distinctive feature of modern *fangsheng* landscape is that most of the *fangsheng* in everyday Nanjing is happened outside the Buddhist temples and hosted by lay believers rather than Buddhist monks. In the following chapter, I will focus on lay believers' *fangsheng* practice and how they construct the *fangsheng* landscape in the city and in the cyberspace.

Chapter Five: Lay Buddhists *Fangsheng*

5.1 Human-fish connection

Temples provide the holy space in a secular city. In other words, temples can provide various products and services in the religious market. (Stark and Finke 193) Compared to Nanjing's current giant population, 8.335 million in 2017, 62 Buddhist temples with other limited number of religious places obviously cannot meet residents' religious need. For example, New York City in which 8.6 million people live has tens thousands of religious places, including approximately 2000 churches and 4000 informal places of worship.

In the Tang Emperor's national *fangsheng* pond project, the one in Nanjing located in the southern city then. *Fangsheng* rituals are usually hosted by Buddhist monks and in the temples. Many contemporary historians and religion experts still focus on those *fangsheng* held in temples. Due to the change of urban planning or temple locations, most of modern temples do not have their own *fangsheng chi* (*fangsheng* ponds). So, monks will complete most of the ritual in the temples with their lay followers, then carry the tanks with fish to a specific water (their *fangsheng* pond) and finish the last part of *fangsheng*.

The *fangsheng* in temples can be described as authentic, solemn, weekly or bi-weekly, devout, and bustling. The first time I started observing *fangsheng* was a rainy Sunday in Qingliang Temple in Gulou District, Nanjing. I had planned that visit since I saw the activity post (date, place, etc.) from Qingliang Temple's WeChat official account (like Facebook public page). Qingliang Temple is located in a public park called Mountain Qingliang Park, which used to be a royal park about one thousand years ago. Although it has special reputation in Chinese Buddhist history, Qingliang Temple now contains only one main hall, several smaller affiliated

houses and one archaeological site between the halls. When I arrived Qingliang Temple, around ten white huge white water tanks, commonly used in the transportation of aquatic products, had been on the open square in front of the main hall. I paid twenty yuan, which is the same as that of the general public. After the ceremony began, the monks stood in front of the main hall and led the believers to chanting next to a few tanks of fish. When I didn't understand the rituals, I couldn't understand even the scriptures, but the verses on the table with ritual steps can be read. In fact, the *fangsheng* ritual inside Qingliang Temple is not a complete ceremony. As a hill located in the west of Nanjing City, there is no stable and sufficient water source for releasing the Qingliang Mountain where Qingliang Temple is located. Therefore, in fact, the release of the Qingliang Temple ends with the transport of the tank containing the fish to vans. Some believers came to help move the tanks. A dozen people circled around a water tank. It seemed that as long as they met, they had merits. Others continued to chant until all the tanks got on the vans. Several believers would get on the bus. Go with it, no one else will follow, but chanting, until the car leaves the line of sight.

The limitation of places is a reason for limits of human-animal material connections. Some lay Buddhist *fangsheng* also separates their ritual process, and there are a very little number of people will participate the final part of liberating fish back to water.

Compared to the set of *fangsheng* rites that happened inside the temples and hosted by Buddhist monks, the daily or weekly *fangsheng* rituals conducted by lay believers are usually simpler and shorter, but provide longer and more straight contact between human and the fish they liberate.

5.2 Online connection

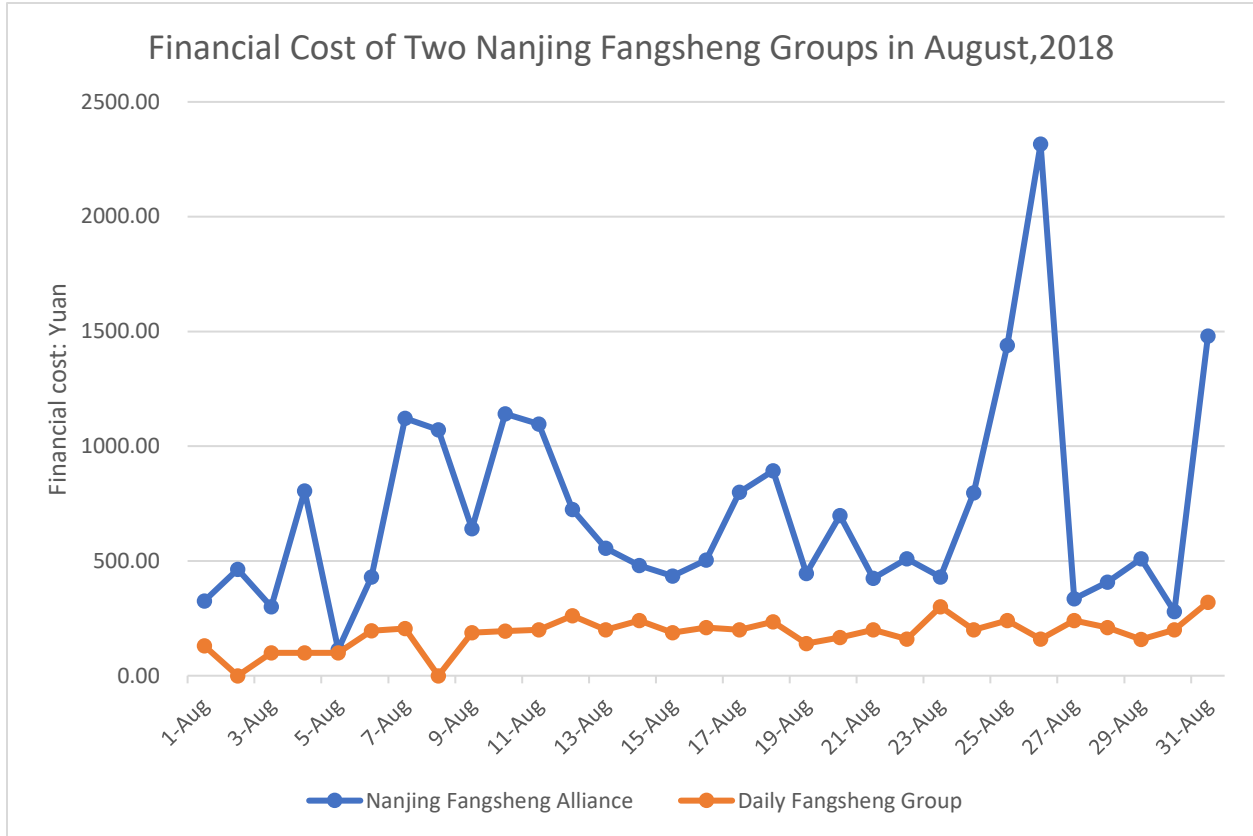
As what I have described about the modern lay Buddhist believers' daily *fangsheng*, they seem to have the stronger bonds with fish, the other lives in the rites. But this kind of intimate relationship is limited to only a very small number of lay Buddhists, but could be shared with the whole lay Buddhist groups, including from twenties to hundreds of people. The internet, especially the fast-developing social media, From the local BBS to WeChat groups, the bonds and ethic within *fangsheng* landscape lies beyond the material connects and spatial borders. In the following part of this chapter, I will show how a *fangsheng* group based on a WeChat App works. How do the members in this group collect money, buy fish, and liberate them? Furthermore, how can they share the mercy produced from *fangsheng* rites? Cyberspace constitutes an important part to *fangsheng* landscape and shapes ethic around *fangsheng* issues.

In August of 2018, the day before the first time my joining in a lay Buddhist *fangsheng* rite, the *fangsheng* group leader sent me the specific meeting time and location via a WeChat App. WeChat is a Chinese multi-purpose messaging, social media and mobile payment app developed by Tencent. With nearly 1 billion monthly active users, WeChat is the most popular social networking app in China and the third one in the world (after WhatsApp and Messenger). WeChat allows users to create group talks (up to 500 users in one group). The *fangsheng* practice I was going to participate in was conducted by a WeChat group called 'Nanjing *Fangsheng* Alliance.' There are nearly 200 people in the "Alliance." However, when I arrived that community market, I found I was the only one except Chen who would join in today's *fangsheng*. Chen, in her forties, was one of the founders and a main member in this lay Buddhist *fangsheng* group. She told me that the daily *fangsheng* practice sponsored by the group was often conducted by herself alone. Sometimes, somebody like me who wants to do *fangsheng* for themselves will

contact her and join the *fangsheng*. There were nearly two hundred people in the *fangsheng* group, but only two people in the “offline” *fangsheng* ritual. "It is hard to do *fangsheng* every day. Everyone is busy on weekdays. I usually go off work in the noon, then drive to buy fish and do *fangsheng* before my going back home," Chen told me. In order to get more group members to participate in *fangsheng* for themselves, group leaders will hold "large-scale" *fangsheng* every Sunday afternoon, and promote as many as possible people to join in it. "If you come, you will see more people then." The seller in that market was Chen's acquaintance and clearly knew the final destination of the fish Chen bought. They quickly determined the quantity, species, and prices for today's fish. A total of 235 Chinese Yuan (around 35 US dollars) for 8.88 kilograms of carps and 1.65 kilograms of Asian swamp eels.

When the seller was packing those fish for us, Chen had started reciting Buddhist sutras and taking photos of the fish. Literally, these photos were not for the fish but for the absent group members. Later, when I opened the plastic bag to let fish come back to Yangtze River, Chen also recorded it in videos and photos. Later the group leader would post them in WeChat group, and everyone else could share today's *fangsheng* with Chen and me. How to understand the sharing of a *fangsheng*? Did the absent members get the same feelings, even mercy from the *fangsheng* like Chen and me? Why is the sharing step indispensable for a modern lay Buddhist *fangsheng*? What kind of *fangsheng* landscape is created by the absent *fangsheng* and social networking *fangsheng* groups?

The direct and essential reason for the "sharing" action is money. Wuming, not the individual ethnic, but as a whole. Because it is not direct contact, so the connection can be through online groups.



Another connection is the mercy return due to *fangsheng*. Make wishes, and receive mercy to meet wishes.

5.3 The fragile cyberspace

These lay believer online groups organized mostly by strangers work stably every day, collecting donations, announcing *fangsheng* information, posting *fangsheng* photos and videos, sharing Buddhist articles, and discussing religious experience. These online groups play the role of *jushi* (居士, householders) organizations in Chinese Buddhist history. They “were neither the

monks and nuns who left their families behind to take up the disciplined spiritual life of the monastery, and nor were they the common worshippers who occasionally offered incense to the Buddha as they would to any other Chinese deity. By contrast, the householders made a formal commitment to Buddhism and its goals of salvation yet retained their status as regular members of society with families and careers.” (Jessup 1) In ancient China, *jushi* often appeared in various Buddhist stories. Since last century, *jushi* and *jushi* groups have made great contributions to political and social modernization in China.

Different from previous *jushi* groups, nowadays most lay Buddhist groups are established based on online social media. The significance of information technology development to modern lay Buddhists in China can be further investigated. But this online *fangsheng* landscape itself is very fragile and always under supervision from China’s government. In September 2018, the State Administration for Religious Affairs published an "Internet Religious Information Management Measures (Draft for Comment)." Some parts of this coming official regulation will influence, even eliminate Buddhist groups and other religious groups in Chinese Internet space. I have observed some changes in some *fangsheng* WeChat groups and some WeChat accounts choose to close themselves.

"Internet Religious Information Management Measures (Draft for Comment)"

“Article seven: To apply for Internet religious information services, the following conditions must be met:

(1) The applicant is a juridical person organization or an unincorporated organization established within the territory of the People's Republic of China. The legal representative or principal responsible person of the applicant is a mainland resident of the People's Republic of China;

(2) having specialized information reviewers who are familiar with the national religious policies and regulations;

(3) having sound Internet religious information service management system;

(4) having sound information security management system and safe and controllable technical safeguard measures;

(5) having places, facilities and funds that match the services;

(6) The applicant and its legal representative or principal responsible person have no criminal record in the past three years and have not violated the national religious policies and regulations.

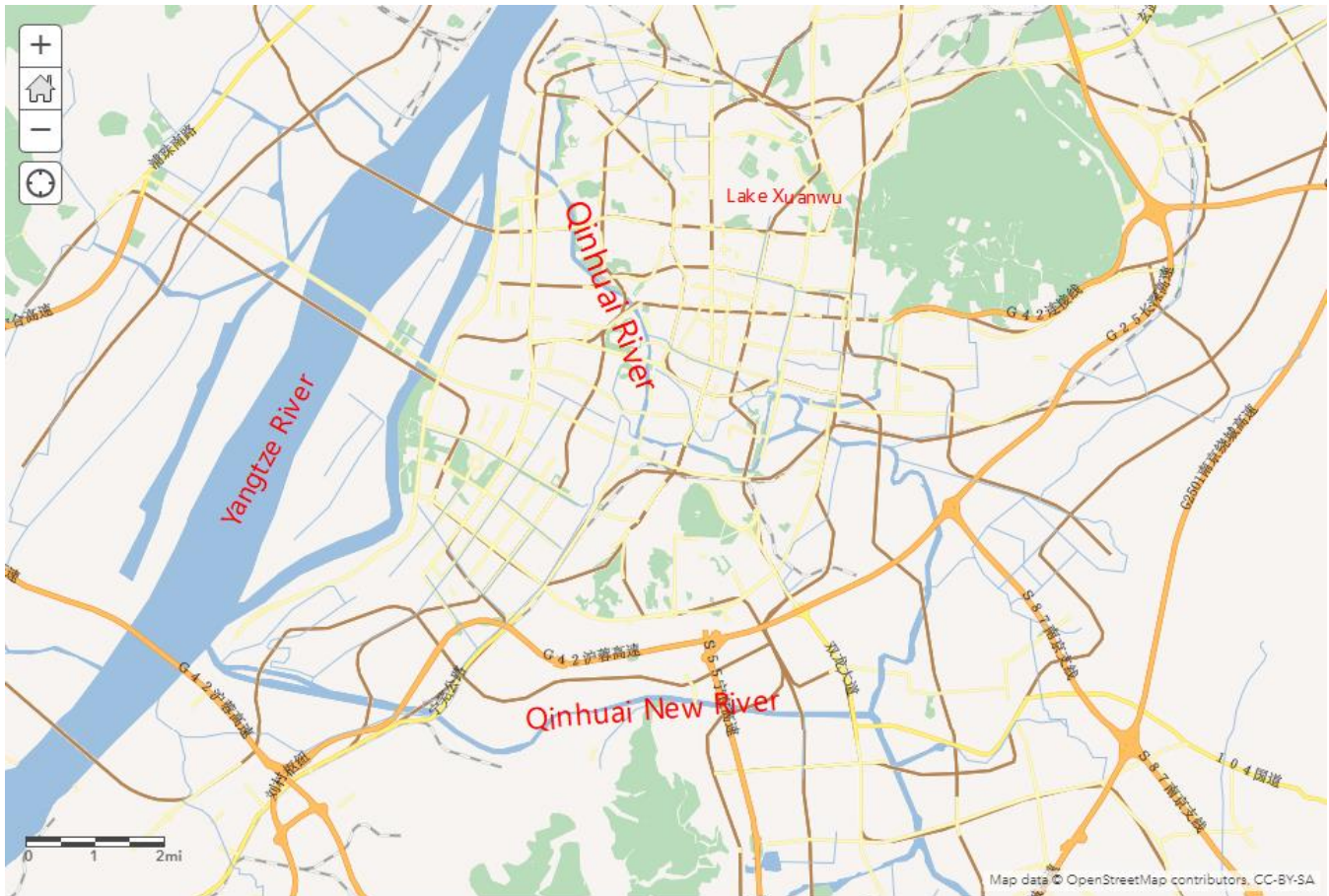
“Overseas organizations or individuals and organizations established within the territory may not engage in Internet religious information services within the territory.

“Religious groups, religious institutions and places of religious activity that have obtained the Internet Religious Information Service Permit may be limited to the preaching by religious faculty members on their self-built online platforms, and the implementation of real-name management by preaching. No other organization or individual may preach or forward or link related content on the Internet; religious institutions that have obtained the Internet Religious Information Service Permit may and shall not be restricted to religion on their self-built network platform, religious education and training for college students, religious staff, and real-name management of education and training. No other organization or individual may conduct religious education training on the Internet; no other organization or individual may use words, pictures, audio and video on the Internet to publish live or recorded religious activities such as

worshipping Buddha, burning incense, ringing, chanting, worship, mass, baptism.” (“五部门拟联合发布”)

With the publication of the Internet Religious Information Management Measures, Chinese state power directly reach the cyberspace of *fangsheng* landscape.

Chapter Six: Landscape of Pollution: “Matter out of place”



Pollution issues around *fangsheng* puzzle both devoted Buddhists, who try to avoid releasing animals back to “poisonous water,” and the opponents of *fangsheng* practice, who see releasing unidentified animals into local environment as a kind of “species invasion.” Chinese media usually emphasize the damage brought by *fangsheng* and the ignorance of ecological knowledge.

“And release is no guarantee of freedom. Most of the animals let go as part of *fangsheng* rituals were bred in captivity — and thus cannot survive in the wild. Unfortunately, the majority of *fangsheng* practitioners don’t seem to pay much attention to the fate of their offerings once they are set free. In 2016, *fangsheng* enthusiasts in the eastern city of Qingdao released thousands of captive sparrows into the wild. Used to being fed by humans, many quickly died of

starvation. Others have let robins native to southern China loose in the north, where they soon freeze to death.

Just as concerning, some *fangsheng* practitioners have released potentially dangerous predators into densely populated urban or semi-urban environments. In 2017, residents of the southern city of Guangzhou let a knot of snakes that altogether weighed about 75 kilograms loose in one of the city's rivers. The reptiles quickly slithered up onto the riverbank, where they terrorized passers-by. It could have been worse: The snakes could have been poisonous. Two years ago, in Xiamen, a city located on the country's eastern coastline, a man died after being bitten by the snake he planned to release into the wild.

Even when humans aren't being put in any immediate danger, *fangsheng* rituals can harm the environment. There have been a number of reports across China in recent years of sensitive ecosystems suffering from the release of invasive species, including red-eared slider turtles, alligator snapping turtles, and suckermouth catfish, all of which pose a threat to local wildlife. The Yangtze River is an example of an environment that has been particularly hard hit." (Li)

In this chapter, I will use the "pollution landscape" explain where and why Nanjing lay Buddhists choose to do *fangsheng*. The important point I try to make is that Buddhist believers do not lack any ecological knowledge, and they also make a lot of effort to decrease the protentional damage brought by *fangsheng* practice to released animals and the local environment. Finally, the pollution landscape is a part of the moral *fangsheng* landscape. Nanjing Buddhists are concerned about the ecological critiques and environmental problems. But these concerns come from the moral imagination of *fangsheng* and animals in *fangsheng*. From the perspective of Buddhist believers, they have done enough to balance the ritual and environment, although the professional ecologists may not agree with them.

6.1 Water in the city

As an Eastern city in mainland China, Nanjing processes a lot of waterways within and near the urban area. (See map) From the southwestern to northeastern, the Yangtze River crosses through Nanjing, and reaches the sea in Shanghai. The Yangtze River, the second longest river in China, slows its flow when closing the eastern China coast, and forms more than one-kilometer-long river surface. Within the city, the Qinhuai River, a tributary of Yangtze River, has a length of 110 kilometers and surrounds the old urban area of Nanjing city. In addition to the two main waters, Nanjing also possesses several reservoirs and innumerable large or small ponds. For Buddhists who want to practice *fangsheng* in this city, Nanjing could provide a lot of options for them.

However, not all options are suitable for the daily *fangsheng* practice. "The Qinhuai River is polluted and dark all the year. I once saw some dead crucian carps and river snails in the Qinhuai. Both are not native in this river, and they must appear via *fangsheng*." The wrong *fangsheng* location selection usually leads to the death of released animals. In most urban rivers and ponds in Chinese cities, water pollution is always an urgent problem for both the human and animal residents. "The shasheng (killing life) is caused by *fangsheng* (liberate life)." Many Buddhist monks and lay Buddhist organizations are promoting the danger of "wrong *fangsheng*." Master Xuecheng¹, the former president of the Buddhist Association of China (2015-2018), once stated that:

¹ Ironically, Xuecheng himself becomes the "pollution" of Chinese Buddhism in China's "Me Too" movement in 2018. Due to a 95-page report of various violations on Chinese social media, including the sexual harassment of several nuns, Xuecheng was investigated by the government and resigned the president of Buddhist Association. Till now, Xuecheng has not been arrested or on the court in public reports. The pollution around Xuecheng, like many

"*Fangsheng* is the love and respect for life, and it should be positively affirmed. In today's era, the social environment and ecological environment are very different from those in ancient times. Large-scale *fangsheng* practice is easy to bring damage to the current ecological environment and may cause more to damage animals. In this era, we should not only consider whether individual's kindness is good, but also consider the implication and diffusion effects of behavior itself in the social environment, and take care of the broader causes to make our kindness and good deeds more complete. We should think hard about what is more scientific and effective to inspire the people in the society to love the good deeds of life and avoid the harm caused by blind *fangsheng*." (学诚)

The practice of *fangsheng*, that saves lives from potential death, seems to be the antonym of the pollution, such as poisonous water, in everyday urban environment. However, in some modern public critiques of *fangsheng*, the *fangsheng* itself is a type of pollution to the local ecosystem. Several ecological and biological researches have claimed that *fangsheng* does cause less or more "species invasion" in their local areas. Others even point out that the birds traded for *fangsheng* have the greater potential of being sick, which may be harmful to human health and local ecological stability.

The counterpart of "wrong *fangsheng*" is the "scientific *fangsheng*." The "scientific *fangsheng*" (科学放生) in the Chinese world comes from the development of Buddhism in Taiwan after the Second World War. Some Taiwan sociologists argue that the becoming of

others around *fangsheng*, is not legal/scientific, but moral. In other words, the moral critiques of pollution are more effective and common in China.

“correct *fangsheng*” is in some sense the construction of ecological knowledge². (林本炫 and 李宗麟 218) In other words, the various guides to scientific *fangsheng*, which are popular among Chinese Buddhists, are correct ecological knowledge. This logic is also welcomed by scientists. An ecological study group from Chinese Academy of Sciences believes that ecological knowledge education is the main method to erase potential damage caused by *fangsheng* species invasions. (Liu et al 12) On the website of Nanjing Qingliang Temple, there is an article on bird *fangsheng*, which lists all suitable birds for *fangsheng* and some important points on bird *fangsheng*.

“1. The species of birds for *fangsheng* should be chosen from the native species.

2. The released bird species should be tried to choose from wild species. After many generations of artificial propagation, some birds have no wild independent ability to survive in the wild. If you need to release them, your birds must undergo artificial rewilding training. Otherwise, they are likely to die quickly without food.

3. When selecting released bird species to release, we should pay attention to the type of bird distribution and distinguish the type of migratory birds. Summer birds should not be released in winter, and winter birds should not be released in summer.

4. The best location of the release is a dense forest, near the rivers and lakes and other water sources.

² The relation between *fangsheng* and indigenous Taiwanese ecological knowledge still need more investigation. I am looking forward to reading Jeffrey Nicolaisen’s coming PhD dissertation on the networks of human and nonhuman agency and the ethics of multi-species interaction through Buddhism and other native Taiwanese traditions.

5. Before the birds are released, it is better to let the animal protection department quarantine the birds. After confirming that there is no disease, choose the appropriate place to release them, and ensure that the *fangsheng* does not harm other birds and people.

6. It is better to feed the birds before *fangsheng*.

7. The number of *fangsheng* at one time should not be too large, so as not to damage the ecological balance of the existing bird population.” (“鸟类放生注意事项”)

All the tips for *fangsheng* above are correct in the ecological context. However, the discourse of “scientific *fangsheng*” does not necessarily signify that Buddhist followers, especially the lay believers, will follow these ecological principles to do *fangsheng* every day. The categories of correct and wrong *fangsheng*, suitable and unsuitable animals, science and superstition, construct the discourse of scientific *fangsheng*. However, the categorical standards, for Buddhists and ecologists, is different. How do common lay Buddhists understand the “pollution” in their *fangsheng* practice and everyday life? How do animals participate in the process of shaping pollution landscape? Do animals have their agency in *fangsheng* rituals and scientific *fangsheng* construction?

6.2 Pollution

There are two kinds of pollution in the *fangsheng* landscape: the polluted environment and the released animals back to the wild. The classic “pollution” concept in Anthropology comes from Mary Douglas.

"To conclude, if uncleanliness is matter out of place, we must approach it through order. Uncleanliness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained. To recognise this is the first step towards insight into pollution." (Douglas 41)

For Douglas, the pollution is something "out of place," "not be included." The critique that *fangsheng* will cause species invasion implies that the animals released in *fangsheng* are not local species. The worry of pollution in Qinhuai River implies that Nanjing Buddhist believers look forward to a clean and healthy local environment.

In order to understand pollution, we need to investigate the standard of "cleanliness." The "scientific *fangsheng*" is a result of searching for a standard. But the "scientific *fangsheng*," or correct ecological knowledge, I think, is not the standard of cleanliness or pollution among Nanjing Buddhists. The standard for Buddhists is less about science and more about morality. To follow the "scientific" guide of *fangsheng*, for lay Buddhists in Nanjing, is to avoid the potential "killing lives" brought with *fangsheng*. As common people without professional ecological or biological knowledge, lay Buddhist believers are actually not able to ensure the successful survival of animals after *fangsheng*, or to completely avoid causing species invasion in local environment.

The most common fish species in Nanjing *fangsheng* is crucian carp, the most welcome fish in Nanjing family kitchens. In every *fangsheng* activity I participated in Nanjing, I found crucian carps in the water tanks. However, nearly none of participants and my informants told me that crucian carps, the most common fish in Nanjing, were a source of species invasion for Yangtze River. The domesticated crucian carps are never native species in Yangtze River. Other common fish in wet markets, such as grass carp, black carp, silver carp and bighead carp, are native species in the Yangtze River. According to the Regulations on the Management of

Aquatic Biological Proliferation and Release by the national Ministry of Agriculture, however, the release of native fish species still needs the authorization from local government. (于飞)

The survival of animals after *fangsheng* is another unreliable standard on whether *fangsheng* is scientific/clean. Although sometimes Buddhists can directly find the fish dead during *fangsheng* rituals or dead fish several days after *fangsheng*, most of the time, they determine the life status of fish through a set of semiotics system that similar to the interaction between the Runa and nonhuman in Ecuador's Upper Amazon (Kohn 5). Buddhists observe the shape of water waves, the bubbles, even the spiritual response from fish in human's dreams, to make sure that the released fish are still alive and will bring good fortunate to them. The interaction between released animals and human is called *ganying* (感應) by Chinese Buddhists.

All in all, the order behind the pollution in *fangsheng* context is not the scientific/ecological knowledge, but a moral system which mixed Buddhism with Chinese human-nonhuman philosophical knowledge.

6.3 Ganying

Chinese Buddhists often use *ganying* to represent their connection to the liberated animals. For example, "I got a *ganying* after participating animal release" or "more animal release, more *ganying*." The Chinese collocation *ganying* combines *gan* 感 'feel, sense; move, touch; (in traditional Chinese medicine) be affected (by cold)' and *ying*, traditional 應, or simplified 应, 'respond; consent, comply; adapt to; cope/deal with; apply, applied,' which is also

pronounced yīng ‘promise/agree (to do something); answer; respond; (auxiliary) should; ought to.’ (DeFrancis) In common use, *ganying* means “response; reaction; or, interaction.” However, *ganying* is much more complicated in the Chinese context:

1) Ganying in the Chinese tradition: *tianren ganying* (the ganying between heaven and human) Before the Buddhist conquest of China, ganying, especially *tianren ganying* (the ganying between heaven and human) already played an important role in Chinese cosmology. In *tianren ganying*, the meaning of tian, heaven, is varied, while ren, human, always refers to humanity. Zhang Dainian claims that *tian* (heaven) has three distinct meanings: the supreme god, nature, and the highest principle.

The concept of *tianren ganying* shapes Chinese understandings of humans and the world. To great extent, personal fate is determined by what an individual has done, especially for Chinese emperors who are the sons of heaven. This indigenous Chinese cosmology or Confucius world is built on the ordering of morality. Thus, some scholars claim that in Confucianism *tianren ganying* is a way to limit the power of emperors and make them cautiously implement their sovereignty (葛兆光 381).

In Buddhism, the “*ganying*” is human’s “*gan*” and Buddha’s “*ying*.” Literally, “common people with good nature have the chance of sensation, and Buddha react to it. This process is called *Ganying*.” In general, *ganying* can be interpreted as “mutual feeling and response.” Both the human, the subject of *gan*, and the Buddha, the subject of *ying*, are necessary for such mutual activities (宗慧 261).

Buddhist *ganying* is necessarily within the Chinese context of *ganying*. All religious actions become a part of the current Chinese system of moral order (葛兆光 522). Instead of a Buddhist conquest of China, Buddhism transforms itself to adjust China (Zürcher 2). One of the essential texts for the basis of animal release is the Brahmajala Sutra (梵網經, *fanwang jing*). In China Animal release is an extension of the Buddhist prohibition of killing. Furthermore, the Brahmajala Sutra states that prohibiting killing is filial piety. In other words, animal release is a way to express filial piety to parents (于君方 140).

An important aspect of *ganying* system that have been ignored by Chinese religion researchers is the interaction with animals. In the context of Buddhist *fangsheng*, people often get some responses from the animals they released and make sense of their *fangsheng* activities. Do the animals have agency in *fangsheng* practice? How do Buddhist believers get *ganying* from animals?

6.4 Agency of fish

Agency is never unique to human. "Agency is attributable to those persons (and things, see below) who/which are seen as initiating causal sequences of a particular type, that is, events caused by acts of mind or will or intention, rather than the mere concatenation of physical events."(Gell 16)

"An agent is defined as one who has the capacity to initiate causal events in his/her vicinity, which cannot be ascribed to the current state of the physical cosmos, but only to a special category of mental states; that is, intentions."(Gell 19) In traditional perspective, agents

which process agency must be human, and some smart animals. The social agency, which Alfred Gell proposes, is a way to attribute agency to things and animals. Gell does not really recognize that things and nonhuman animals have the equal agency or intention like human. The key feature of social agency is "relational and context-dependent."(Gell 22) In other words, "for any agent, there is a patient, and conversely, for any patient, there is an agent."(Gell 22) For example, when Buddhists doing *fangsheng* and thinking of the death of fish, the fish are agents who are influencing human through their acts, and Buddhists are patients who feel sympathy due to fish's pain. When Buddhists are chanting the names of Buddhas, they are agents who are praying for Buddhas' mercy to save the fish from hard life forever, and fish are patients who show their gratitude to human through staying still for a while and making bubbles.

This a way to solve the problem of agency inside things and animals. But Gell is still too conservative to recognize the agency beyond human. Eduardo Kohn, "My argument is that we are colonized by certain ways of thinking about relationality. We can only imagine the ways in which selves and thoughts might form associations through our assumptions about the forms of associations that structure human language. And then, in ways that often go unnoticed, we project these assumptions onto nonhumans. Without realizing it we attribute to nonhumans properties that are our own, and then, to compound this, we narcissistically ask them to provide us with corrective reflections of ourselves." (Kohn 21) For Kohn, the so-called "social agency" for nonhumans is another kind of "corrective reflections of ourselves." Gell's way to interpret agency in special context and relational standpoints essentially refuses to admit the possibility of a thing's agency.

On the other hand, the capacity of intelligence plays an important role in Gell's "primary agency." "The fish are smart. The anglers nearby cannot catch them." A lay female Buddhist told

me. Those fish who are liberated by Buddhists through *fangsheng* rituals will not be caught or killed by humans anymore. In other words, a transformation has happened on these animals who are not only the biological species, but into "a socioreligious category" since then.

"Ritual procedures prescribing the preparatory treatment and use of sacrificial animals could be described as a chain of physical and symbolical transformations. The segregation of animals from the herds for sacrifice transformed the animal into a victim. The ritual preparations that followed (fattening, cleansing, decorating), together with the special treatment of the victim, turned the animal into an ideal sacrificial victim. Finally, the slaughter and blood shedding of the animal transformed the animated victim into deanimated sacrificial meat, from an entity that was "animal" to one that becomes "edible." And every stage of this process was managed by a human officer: the herdsman, the fattener, the butcher, and the priest." (Sterckx 61)

At least two things should be noted in animal sacrificial rituals in early China. First, sacrifice is much different from *fangsheng*. Literally, the sacrificial animals who survive from the rituals should have been killed and in a circumstance that is much close to Agamben's "state of exception." (Agamben 2) While *fangsheng* animals come from old life to new life (, and perhaps there is no death anymore). In short, the transformation of their states is very distinctive. Second, sacrifice, like traditional *fangsheng*, is conducted by the professionals, and the lay ones have no direct contact with those animals in rituals. However, most of the animals liberated through *fangsheng* should be attributed to lay Buddhists, common people who may have less or more religious knowledge but are absolutely not the professionals.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I provide a different perspective to look into modern Chinese religious practice. *Fangsheng*, the Buddhist release of animals, is not a single religious ritual but a basic element of *fangsheng* landscape. Because *fangsheng* itself interacts with many environmental elements, such as the wet markets where buying fish, the water for releasing, and the online social media groups. All these construct the *fangsheng* landscape that is not only about seeing but also doing.

The history of Buddhism and *fangsheng* in Nanjing provides rich legacy for modern *fangsheng* landscape. The Buddhist temples and *fangsheng* ponds spread in the old city constitute the outline of Nanjing *fangsheng* landscape. However, most of the modern *fangsheng* activities occurs outside the temples and are hosted by lay Buddhists. Beyond the existing ancient temples and *fangsheng* ponds which are already famous natural and historical attractions, lay Buddhists must choose markets to buy living fish, and more importantly, appropriate water to release them. These community markets and water are the modern lay Buddhists' "temples and *fangsheng* ponds."

These modern *jushi*, householders, organize their own various *fangsheng* groups via social media applications. Sharing *fangsheng* information, discussing Buddhist thinking, and raising money for daily *fangsheng*. All these activities happened in WeChat groups every day constitute the cyberspace of *fangsheng*. Yet the cyberspace is vulnerable when facing state power. I argue that the state power shapes the *fangsheng* landscape since *fangsheng* appeared in Nanjing one thousand years ago. Furthermore, the modern state can spread its power end to everyday life and everyday *fangsheng*.

Another important term in the *fangsheng* landscape is “pollution.” Pollution is “matter out of place,” something not belong to a set of standards. I argue that the standard of cleanliness and pollution in *fangsheng* landscape is the basic Buddhist ethic, not killing life, rather than “scientific” or “ecological” knowledge. In the process of determining pollution in *fangsheng* landscape, the released animals have their agency to influence human decision making.

This thesis is a trial to explain modern Chinese religion practice in the boarder world with interaction with environment and nonhuman. Instead of mere investigation of *fangsheng* as a current social phenomenon, I inquire it as huge dynamics combined with history, environment, Buddhism, human and animals. However, I still lack the detailed research of the power relationship within the *fangsheng* landscape, the relationship between human and fish, state and animal, the state and common Buddhists.

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