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A STUDY OF STRATEGIC LEVEL SPIRITUAL WARFARE FROM A CHINESE PERSPECTIVE

Samuel Hio-Kee Ooi

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s terms like "strategic level spiritual warfare" (SLSW), "territorial spirits," and "spiritual mapping," with its "new strategy" imported in the name of spiritual warfare and evangelism, are spreading among Christian churches throughout the world, and this is no exception in Chinese churches in Southeast Asia, including Sabah, Malaysia where I live. I moved to Kota Kinabalu, Sabah to teach in a seminary more than two years ago. This city is filled with a mixture of indigenous people groups, including Kadazan, Dozon, Murut, etc, and Chinese, as well as Muslim Malay. That many of the indigenous groups are Christians does not mean a total discard of their traditional animistic worldviews and practices. Chinese popular religious practices[1] are common and different gods are worshipped in Kota Kinabalu as in other Chinese communities.[2] Spirit possessions are frequently heard of. And during Chinese New Year season this year, one of my students had a "battle" with the spirit of Guan-yin (觀音), a Bodhisava contextualized in Chinese Buddhism, who possessed her elder sister's body. Another

[1] The writer understands that scholars of Chinese religions nowadays prefer the designation "common religion" rather than "popular religion." In this article both will be used. The former will be used if it is to represent the view of the common study of Chinese religions, while the latter is used especially when connotation of superstition is hinted.

[2] Once in one of my lectures touching on Buddhism, I invited a Christian who used to be a follower of Tibetan Tantric Buddhism before he became a Christian two years ago. He shared how he carried out rites at home more than two-thirds of the days in one year for religious purposes, of which one is to attain to a level in meditation where one can see and communicate with gods, such as Buddha, Bodhisava and others.

student in my "World Religions" class shared about his friend and co-worker in a plantation camp some years ago. This friend was a planchetter (ji-tong, 乩童) and whenever the spirit came to him, he would quickly take off all the metals on his body, just before he was completely taken over by the spirit.

Chinese Christians, having converted from Chinese religions to Christianity and being introduced into a new belief system, are losing their old beliefs, but they are not able to hold on to a westernized Christianity which has dismissed what Paul Hiebert defines as the middle realm,[3] and which I would term as the "world of spirits." Nevertheless, Paul Hiebert himself does not approve of the practice of SLSW.[4] It is clear that one's relationship with the "spiritual world" ceases or is cut off as one enters into the kingdom of God in Christ. But for those who take a further step in trying to figure out how these two realities relate to one another, they often find the church owing them a teaching that is biblically sound and relevant to them. Apparently, a theological and contextual gap must be bridged, and a conceptual and experiential void must be filled up. This is how SLSW ideas find their way into Chinese Christian churches today and why a contextual theological reflection from a Chinese perspective is needed.

This article will not be an exhaustive study of all related issues pertaining to SLSW.[5] The writer will first introduce the teachings of

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[3] Paul Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," *Missiology* 10 (January 1982), pp. 35-47. See Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), pp. 54-55.

[4] See Paul Hiebert, "Spiritual Warfare and Worldview" (http://www.lausanne.org/Brix?pageID=13887), checked: August 19, 2005.

[5] Similar review of SLSW teachings from a Malaysia perspective is Jeffrey Oh Siew Tee, "Spiritual Warfare: A Challenge Facing the Malaysia Church," *Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary Theological Journal* 2 (April 2004), pp. 39-52. The article shows its sympathy on SLSW, but rejects its mechanistic view on spiritual world and equally mechanistic approach for intercessory prayers. For more detail discussion on the theology and presupposition in SLSW teaching from an Asian perspective see Wai Kiong Chung, "Territorial Spirits: A Study" [Chinese], *Pastor Journal* 10 (Nov 2000, Hong Kong), pp. 123-50. I agree with Chung's position, although my focus is more on how such a teaching inclines to resemble a Chinese monolithic-pantheistic worldview. Recent papers dedicated to the study of spiritual warfare or territorial spirits can be found on Lausanne Committee of World Evangelization, www.lausanne.org, especially the papers presented in the "Deliver us from Evil Consultation" held at Nairobi, Kenya in 2000. Two papers in the consultation are worth mentioning: "Gaining Perspective

SLSW, followed up by a brief introduction to the hierarchical pantheism system in Chinese popular religion, the practice of demon-casting performed in Chinese shamanism, namely by "planchetter" (ji-tong) and "shaman-master" (fa-shi, 法師), which will be concluded by making a few comments on the similarities and differences between these two systems.

2. Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare

The concepts of SLSW, "territorial spirits," and "spiritual mapping"[6] are advocated by George Otis,[7] Peter Wagner,[8] Cindy Jacobs,[9] and many others who associate themselves with the New Apostolic Movement/Reformation camp.[10]

The technical term SLSW first appeared in the books of the above three advocates in the early 1990s.[11] In their books they propose a

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on Territorial Spirits" by A. Scott Moreau, and "Some Issues in a Systematic Theology That Takes Seriously the Demonic" by Hwa Yung. Both papers show concern on SLSW. The former one has a moderate critique and does not approve of its "strategic" idea and techniques.

[6] The three quoted names are indeed interchangeable. See C. Peter Wagner, ed., *Breaking Strongholds in Your City: How to Use Spiritual Mapping to Make Your Prayers More Strategic, Effective, and Targeted* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1993).

[7] For example, *The Twilight Labyrinth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997).

[8] For example, *Warfare Prayer: How to Seek God's Power and Protection in the Battle to Build His Kingdom*, Prayer Warrior Series (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1992); *Churches That Pray* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1993).

[9] For example, *Possessing the Gates of the Enemy: A Training Manual for Militant Intercession*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 1994).

[10] See Clinton E. Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), ch. 3. These three figures are just the prominent among those who join the Spiritual Warfare Network (SWN). For my discussion of New Apostolic Reformation/Movement, see Hio-kee Ooi, "Old Wine in New Wineskins: A Preliminary Study on the New Apostolic Movement and the Challenge of Complexity Leadership," *Hill Road* 7:2 (Dec 2004), pp. 145-68.

[11] See also the summary of Charles H. Kraft, "Contemporary Trends in the Treatment of Spiritual Conflict," in *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission*, eds. A. Scott Moreau, et al. (Monrovia, CA: World Vision International, 2002), pp. 177-202, and for related bibliography, his footnotes.

spiritual warfare for effective evangelism based on testimonies they have heard, mainly from what happened in South America. In brief, the teaching of SLSW swirls around two basic concepts: "territorial spirits" and "strongholds."

2.1 Territorial Spirits

According to the teaching of SLSW, there are specific evil spirits that rule over a community, village, town, city or country. They are called "territorial spirits." The spirits of the particular areas always have power and authority over the people to keep them in bondage, sin and darkness, sometimes to the extent that even the gospel itself cannot penetrate before they are "identified," "bound," "overcome" and "rebuked" in prayer.[12]

According to another Christian website dedicated to this study, SLSW "is a popular charismatic method of casting out demons from geographical locations or territories."[13] The demonic control of the spirits over one geographical area can even be identified on three levels, namely: first, the "ground-level" demons, which possess people; second, "occult-level" demons, which empower witches, shamans, and magicians; and the final, "strategic-level" demons, which are the most powerful of the three. The last ones are said to rule over certain large regions or territories.[14] However, whether the area is large enough to be claimed by a "strategic level" demon is not clearly defined. It is pointed out that the demon's main purpose is to hinder people from coming to Christ.[15]

According to Peter Wagner in a symposium on power evangelism at Fuller Theological Seminary, "Satan delegates high-ranking members of the hierarchy of evil spirits to control nations, regions, cities, tribes, people groups, neighborhoods and other significant social networks of

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Kraft endorses a great deal of the spiritual mapping, prayer walk and SLSW teachings, as long as these are not a "fast-foods" evangelism.

[12] David Stamen, "Territorial Spirits" (http://homepage.ntlworld.com/russ01uk/clients/dstamen/terrspirits.htm), checked: June 4, 2004.

[13] See "Just Give Me the Facts New Apostolic Reformation," Age Two Age—A Discernment Ministry, 2000-2002 (http://www.agetwoage.org/ApostolicJustFacts1.htm), p. 13, checked: June 4, 2004.

[14] "Just Give Me the Facts New Apostolic Reformation," pp. 13-14.

[15] See Chung, "Territorial Spirits: A Study," pp. 127-29.

human beings throughout the world. Their major assignment is to prevent God from being glorified in their territory, which they do through directing the activity of lower-ranking demons."[16] Thus, we can infer that a troop of Satan's delegates—evil spirits and demons—"keep the people in their geographical area in darkness, bondage and sin."[17]

2.2 Strongholds

Although there are other Scriptures SLSW promoters use to support the theory,[18] among them 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 is the most direct passage that speaks about "strongholds." According to Cindy Jacobs, the strongholds could be 1) a personal stronghold, 2) a stronghold of mind and thoughts, 3) a stronghold of ideas and concepts, 4) a stronghold of occultism, 5) a stronghold in society, 6) a stronghold in a city and a church, and lastly 7) a stronghold where Satan is.[19]

It should be understood that all these strongholds are interrelated. A personal sin can become a stronghold for Satan in one's life, and that could in turn lead he or she to more lies and deceptions from Satan, and further on into occultism, superstitions etc. And if this experience does not only just happen to an individual, but overwhelmingly to many in a community, a city, or a nation, one can infer that the strongholds of Satan are really present and need to be smashed down through prayers. And that's where and when SLSW should be applied.

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[16] Excerpted from John D. Robb, "Strategic Praying for Frontier Missions," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, Study Guide (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1997), pp. 1-8. See Sandy Simpson and Mike Oppenheimer, compile, "C. Peter Wagner—Quotes & Notes" (http://www.deceptioninthechurch.com/wagnerquotes.html), checked: June 4, 2004.

[17] Stamen, "Territorial Spirits."

[18] Scriptures often used: Dan 10; Rev 12; Jer 1:9, 10; Ezek 4:1-3; Deut 12:2 (high places); Matt 12:22-30; 16:15-20; Mark 5:1-19; Acts 19, 13:4-12; 2 Cor 10:3-4, etc.

[19] Cindy Jacobs, "Facing Strongholds," in *Breaking Strongholds in Your City* [Chinese], ed. C. Peter Wagner, trans. trans., Xiao-fen Shen (Taipei: Elim, 1998), 1998), pp. 61-69.

2.3 Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare

With the ideas of strongholds and territorial spirits combined comes the idea of SLSW. To carry out SLSW, it is equal to taking some necessary steps to demolish or uproot the strongholds: first, seek the name of the ruling spirit and identify its territory; second, seek the function of demons in a particular area; third, if demons occupy a neighborhood, perform a "prayer walk;" and if the demon controls a city, a "praise march;" and if a demon exercises power over a region, a "prayer expedition;" and if a demon rules in a nation, a "prayer journey." The technical name for seeking and digging out the locations and powers of demons is "spiritual mapping." "Spiritual mapping" is the process of discovering the exact location of the demons' domain.

To complete the SLSW, "Identification Repentance" is also required. It is practiced in order to discover the sin and guilt that allow the demon to build footholds in an area. Repenting for that sin is necessary to break the grip of demons in an area.[20]

Therefore, it is understood that the theory's rationale for bringing people to Christ is to smash down these "strongholds," or to conquer and crash down the enemy.

3. Territorial Spirits: An Illustration from Two South American Cities

It seems clear that to Peter Wagner and others, levels of territorial spirits can be discerned, though they never clarify how one hierarchy in one city or area can vary from another; and also seem to have no problem with having one god or spirit positioned on one level, at one time and area, while categorized in another level at some other time and area. For example, in one article collected in the book he edited, *Breaking Strongholds in Your City*,[21] the story of a South American city, La Plata, is being told. It is diagnosed and discovered that the chief power of darkness in the city is the god of freemasonry—Jah-Bal-On. He is the "strong man" (Matt 12:29) in this city, together with a spirit of lust, spirit of violence, spirit of witchcraft, spirit of living death, and godmother Mary. Besides, the Egyptian god Osiris and goddess Isis also have a strong influence in the city. However, the record does not reveal if the

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[20] Jacobs, "Facing Strongholds," pp. 61-69.

[21] See C. Peter Wagner, ed., *Breaking Strongholds in Your City*, pp. 166-73 (The page number is according to Chinese edition).

god of freemasonry is given a higher rank only incidentally in this city or perennially in the court of Satan, when comparing this data to that which was found in another city, Resistencia, where San La Muerte (the spirit of death), Pombero (the spirit of fear), Currpi (the spirit of sexual perversion), and Piton (the spirit of witchcraft)—the four heavenly principalities—were at first found, followed by two other spirits: the spirit of freemasonry and the heaven mother Mary. With the exception of the spirit of fear and the spirit of violence each belongs to the respective city; all the other spirits are either similar or the same. The difference is that the spirit of freemasonry was thought to be the chief power of darkness in La Plata, while the spirit of witchcraft was actually giving commands to the evil powers in the city of Resistencia.

Thus, the two groups of spirits in the two cities do not reveal anything about how and with what criteria the ranking of different gods is assigned. We may ask, is there any criterion at all or is it not the dominant sin in the particular area which determines the "power" in charge of the respective area. Can Satan not freely delegate one "lackey" to rule in one city as a higher ranked spirit, and in another as a lower ranked spirit?

SLSW advocates claim that, although Jesus Christ has defeated the enemy Satan on the cross, and in principle all people are proclaimed delivered from the bondage of death and sin, in reality, one has to realize there are "strongholds" in many areas, either in the personal or community, or geographical, like a village, town, a city or a country. And to actually deliver someone from the bondage and the rule of Satan, one has to break the strongholds with the mighty power of God through prayers. From diagnosis to demon casting and purification of the land, the whole process of "exorcism" is colored with shamanism and what Harvey Cox terms as primal experience.[22] Is it a return to the primitive?

In the following, I will introduce the hierarchical ranking pantheon system in Chinese popular religion and show how demons are bound and cast by Taoist priests using talisman and abracadabra in rites, a practice which is accepted by common Chinese people. The similarities and differences between this Chinese demon casting rite and SLSW will be pointed out.

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[22] Harvey Cox, *Fire of Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Cassell, 1996), pp. 213-40.

4. Pantheistic Cosmology in Chinese Popular Religion

It is a fact that in the Chinese context, shamanism never ceases to exist. The practice can be traced to the ancient Shang Dynasty and even earlier. The worship of spirits and ancestors was actively practiced in Southern China, the so-called nan-man (the Southern barbarian, 南蠻), also called the land of Chu (楚). Literature, like Songs of the South (Chu-chi, 楚辭) and The Book of Songs (Shi-zhing, 詩經), reveals such respect of religious life to us.[23] Although the history of the religions of Chinese people went through an age of reason, symbolized by Confucianism, the shamanism was never extinguished. It survives especially among the folks in the form of legends, stories, folklores, and most significantly in religious practices of the popular religion, which is a mixture of shamanism and the ethical norms of the three religions, shan-jiao (三教), namely Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.

The study of Chinese religions by most scholars differentiates the prominent shan-jiao from the popular/common religions. It is also noted that there is a diffusion of shan-jiao and the common religions.[24] However, to the common people, with whom a traditional god is affiliated, such is not significant. Though there may be many generally claimed Taoist gods, they are in fact housed under shan-jiao, from where studies show, gods with respective hierarchical positions originate.

5. Hierarchical Pantheon in Taoism Tradition as shown in the Picture of True Deities in Positions

The predecessors of Taoism can be traced to the belief of mortal immortality in the middle Warring States period (戰國) after the fourth century B.C.E, the Huang Lao Tao (黃老道) in later Han dynasty, and further bloomed into the earliest religious Taoism: The Way of Great Peace (Tai Ping Tao, 太平道) found by Zhang Jiao (d. 184 C.E.) and The Way of Five Pecks of Rice (wu-tou-mi-tao, 五斗米道) by Zhang Ling, also named Zhang Tao-ling (34-156 C.E.).

Religious Taoism prospered in the turbulent period when China was divided into North and South China, around the fourth and fifth

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[23] Julia Ching and Hans Kung, *Chinese Religions and Christianity* (London: SCM, 1993), pp. 19-26.

[24] For a very brief explanation of how three religions diffuse into "one" Chinese religion, see Ching & Kung, *Chinese Religions and Christianity*, pp. 224-25.

centuries. Around that period in the Liu Sung Dynasty (420-479), T'ao Hung-ching (陶弘景, 456-536), the founder of the Mount Mao sect (茅山宗), diagramed one of the earliest diagrams, The Picture of True Deities in Positions (真靈位業圖).[25] According to Taoist scholar Zhao-guang Ge, the Picture shows how the historical figures and heroes were first deified as ghost gods (鬼帝), and again promoted and installed as heavenly gods. In the pantheon, less could become more, simple more complicated, complicated more well structured, and what is lacking can be supplemented.[26]

Again, according to the Picture of True Deities in Positions, the pantheon could be leveled into seven horizons. The first horizon is led by the First Principal (元始天尊); the second by the Lord of the Great Way (大道君); the third by the Lord of Golden Great Ultimate (太極金闕帝尊); the fourth by the Lord of the Most High (太上老君); the fifth by Zhang-feng (張奉); the sixth by the Lord of Middle Mao (中茅君); and the seventh by the Great Emperor of the Underworld (酆都北陰大帝).[27] It is understood that in each horizon there are many other gods under the leadership of the main god.

In Chung-Man Ng's study, dealing with the mythological cosmology in Chinese popular religion, he describes a three layer cosmology: the upper world where the gods live, albeit Taoists or Confucian, and Buddhist; the middle world where the normal people, the religious people, or the potential gods-to-be live; and the underground world or the hell where the judgment for evil men is passed on.

In the respective worlds, there are officials of different ranks in charge of different matters, such as, to decide that one who offends the heaven rule must be downcast to the middle world; or, who to be sentenced in the underground world must go through an eighteen-level hell; or who to return to the middle world by reincarnation, or to be reinstalled to heaven from the middle world. Of all the officials, some are overseeing the seasons and weather; some the sickness, some the

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[25] For the concise development of Taoist religion, see Xiaogan Liu, "Taoism," in *Our Religions*, pp. 231-89.

[26] See Zhao-guang Ge, *Taoist Religion and Chinese Culture* [Chinese] (Taipei: Tung Hwa, 1989), p. 76. For a fuller account of the expansion of Taoist pantheon, see Liu, "Taoism," pp. 55-77.

[27] See Ge, *Taoist Religion and Chinese Culture*, pp. 57-61.

morality, and some the passage to the three worlds.[28] Situated at the upper world, the central figure is Yu-huang-da-ti, The Jade Emperor, who belongs to the Confucian system. He sits in the middle heavenly palace and is in charge of everything in these three worlds, and his officials are sent to all three worlds. Besides the Jade Emperor, Tai-shang-lao-jun (太上老君) lives at the Dou-shuai-gong (Dou-shuai Palace, 兜率宮) and occupies the East zone; while to the North is the Yuan-shih T'ien-tsun (元始天尊), the First Principal, who has Yu-shu-gong (玉虛宮) as his palace. These two belong to the Taoist system. To the West and South are Buddhist zones where one will find Buddha Ru-lai (如來) seated at the Western Pure Land, while Guan-in Bodtshisava is seated at the South-Sea.

The hierarchical pantheon does not demonstrate such just in religious Taoism. It is absorbed, developed and transmitted in Chinese popular religion.

6. Hierarchical Monolithic Pantheon Developed in Chinese Popular Religion

Borrowing the words from Zhi-ming Zheng, a scholar of religion in Taiwan, this kind of hierarchical pantheon found in Chinese peoples' beliefs can be called "hierarchical monolithic pantheism."[29] According to this system, people do not believe in one god like the monotheists, neither do they believe in a fixed system of a hierarchy of gods, but in a multi-dimensional hierarchical pantheistic world. The pantheon can be rearranged and recomposed according to one's own affiliation of belief. According to Zheng, in this system, gods can be added according to needs and adjustments, such as when a group of people move to a new place, or when a village faces a catastrophe and it is finally resolved with

[28] See Chung-man Ng, "The Mythological Cosmology in Chinese Popular Religion" [Chinese], in *Tradition and Belief*, ed. Florence Tam and Walter Leung (Petaluma, CA: Chinese Christian Mission USA, 1995), pp. 91-117 (96-97).

[29] See Zhi-ming Zheng, "The Hierarchical Monolithic Pantheism of Taiwanese Folk Religion" [Chinese], in *The Origin of Taiwanese Gods* (Taipei: Chung Hwa Ta-tao, 2001), p. 171. The translation of the titles of Zheng's paper and book are temporary. He does not agree with the designation of pantheism for the religious system in Chinese common religion (pp. 180-81).

intervention or deliverance by some god never before known.[30] This is reaffirmed in Taoist tradition.

The designation of area or territory of which to be in charge, by one or another god in Chinese pantheon, would impress a western SLSW teacher with how much one resembles the other. Or, would they? There is also a resemblance in Greek mythology and pantheon, which they are either ignorant of or certainly have neglected. Nevertheless, before more reflection is given, we will turn to one more aspect of Chinese popular religion.

7. Demon Casting in Chinese Popular Religion: Planchetter and Shaman-Master

Exorcism was not innovated just recently in Christian history. However, with the idea of "territorial spirits," SLSW goes much further away from the tradition. We have discussed "territorial spirits," and we hope to shed light on the idea of "exorcism" or "demon casting" in SLSW by looking at the practice of demon casting in Chinese popular religion. Readers will see how it resembles the steps used by SLSW.

In this section, I will mainly refer to the study of Dong Fang-yuen, a scholar of religion in Taiwan.[31] In his article "Planchette and Shaman-Master: Shamanism in Taiwan," he introduces who the planchetter and shaman-master are. The former, according to Lin Yu-tang's *Chinese-English Dictionary for Modern Usage*, "planchette (乩) in fu-ji (扶乩) is a traditional form of divination whereby the spirit, when invoked, writes characters on a sand pan by means of a stick attached to a horizontal piece supported by two persons serving as mediums."

7.1 Ji-tong and Fa-shi in Demon Casting

According to Fang-yuen Dong, ji-tong is a spirit medium. It is believed that a ji-tong is a special chosen person. His work is to cause himself, by incanting the spirit, to move into a trance and ecstatic state, and to be possessed by the spirit. Then he can become a medium or

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[30] Zheng, "The Hierarchical Monolithic Pantheism," p. 171.

[31] See Fang-yuen Dong, "Planchetter and Shaman-Master: Shamanism in Taiwan" [Chinese], in *Taiwan Folk Religion*, rev. ed. (Taipei: Evergreen, 1984), pp. 247-66.

diviner to channel the living and the dead, to foretell, and even to tell luck. The normal way a ji-tong shows the revelation to the seeker is by writing on a sand pan with a particular stick. He can prescribe some healing therapy, cast out demons and evil spirits.

Besides ji-tong, fa-shi, a shaman-master is usually also an expert in talismanic and abracadabra writings used for protection, demon casting, peace, etc. In the above case, he usually works together with the ji-tong. Approached by fellow people, they will both collect information and background of the people concerned before a rite can be announced and done.[32]

Now, as the family member of the sick approaches ji-tong, he or she will be told that the deceased relative of the sick is suffering in the underworld, that it is he or she who has caused him trouble and made him sick. Being told the cause, the family member will ask the fa-shi to perform the rite. Fa-shi is to lead all the relatives and family members to present a memorial to Ksiigarbha Bodhisattva and dong-yue-da-di (東嶽大帝), Great Lord of the East Mount. The team first goes to the hell. It is said that the soul of the sick is captured by the deceased spirit and is lost in the hell. The shaman-master is supposed to negotiate with Yama-raja (閻羅王), the chief official of the hell to release the soul of the sick. And along the road to the hell, there are police officers and guards who require the burning of silver paper money for bribery, and of course, some golden paper money for Yama-raja. After the soul has left the hell, the family member will communicate with the spirit of the dead.

After this has been done, the shaman-master will go into trance, the family member is allowed to ask the spirit of the dead, how is life in the hell, believing that the spirit has already possessed the master. Nevertheless, what is uttered by the spirit is, as a matter of fact, very blurred; the master is to provide the interpretation. The communication stops whenever the family thinks that the matter is settled.

7.2 Four-step Ritual in Demon Casting by a Ji-tong

The process of demon and evil casting can be outlined into a four-step ritual, according to Fang-yuen Dong, namely, 1) cast the demon and fry it in the hot pan (捉妖炸油鍋), 2) seeking a successor (討嗣), 3) making a substitute (製替身), and 4) sacrifice to the offended gods (祭煞).[33] I will not go into detail to elaborate on these, but rather will

[32] Dong, “Planchetter and Shaman-Master,” p. 259.

[33] Dong, “Planchetter and Shaman-Master,” pp. 255-56.

concentrate on the next point, which really helps us to understand more about SLSW.

7.3 Fa-shi's Duty of the "Transfer of Troops"

Fang-yuen Dong has listed a few duties of a fa-shi. Worth mentioning is the third duty naming diao-ying (調營), "transfer of troops." According to Dong, this is to transfer the heavenly troops—the soldiers and the generals, and to command the shaman to cast away demons. The troops are divided into five camps: East, West, South, North, and Central, led by generals, each with hundreds of thousands of troops. The general of each camp is General Zhang of the East with green face, carrying green flag; General Liu of the West with white face, carrying white flag; General Hsiao of the South with red face, carrying red flag; General Lian of the North with black face, carrying black flag; and General Lee (the Prince) of the Central with yellow face, carrying yellow flag. The Central General in the highest god among all.

In Chinese religious Taoism and common religion, it is a tradition to appropriate the geographical azimuth compass: East, West, South, North, Central to symbolize the five elements, wu-xing (五行): metal, wood, water, fire, and soil. The body is a miniature universe, and the world as well. The gods are assigned to different posts according to the azimuth compass in the universe. Therefore, the heavenly troops listed above reflect the same idea.

As will be noted, these generals and troops reflect the idea of a spiritual world very close to that which is developed by SLSW teachers. Religious symbols and myths, according to different traditions, may be the cause of the difference. It is interesting that such a spiritual world is one of the areas which the scriptures have not mentioned as much, as compared to other themes; but here one can see a spiritual world that a SLSW teacher is developing that approximates the Chinese pantheon.

8. SLSW and Demon Casting in Chinese Hierarchical Monolithic Pantheism: A comparison and Critique

Readers have seen how close the Chinese pantheistic belief system resembles today's SLSW practice. Here I will summarize two similarities: the ranking in spiritual realm, and the clear steps used as ritual to cast out or expel the demons.

8.1 The Ranking in Spiritual Realm

The spiritual world, as taught by SLSW representatives, is nicely knitted with a Christian semantic to include angels and demons believed to be composed of different ranks. Therefore, with the increasing names and numbers of spirits, whether with higher or lower ranks, old or new, SLSW teaching resembles the teaching in Chinese popular religion. It is not a coincidence that the teaching regarding territorial spirits has been taught first in a South American context, where popular Catholicism with a mixture of animism and Catholicism are practiced.

Is the spiritual world found in Chinese religions in any way similar to "territorial spirits," or the casting and binding of evil spirits similar to what is taught in SLSW? Have the promoters of this SLSW teaching, by inventing new strategy for binding the powers of territorial spirits, in fact fallen victim to an old strategy of the devil; that is, fallen into the deception of this father of lies, as one of the critiques on the website has ridiculed?[34] It is quite sensible to point out that the demons which possess people and create deaths, can be classified as the "Ground-Level" demons, while ji-tong, the pranchetter and fa-shi, the shaman-master, can be classified with SLSW theory as the "occult-level" demons which empower witches, shamans, and magicians.

We have mentioned the cosmology miniature universe and its respective relationship to the symbols of wu-xing, hierarchical monolithic pantheon as proposed by Zhi-ming Zheng, the "Picture of True Deities in Position," and the three layers Confucian-Buddhist-Taoist pantheon illustrated by Chung-man Ng. Compared to these, SLSW is still very primitive in its form in terms of the hierarchical system. Any scholar or student of the Chinese religious system would acknowledge its drifting nature, namely the adding and promoting of new gods and removing of some old ones. The system is complicated and yet drifting; and SLSW should in no way come close to this complication, and should in no sense develop such a spiritual system. To make SLSW a Christian practice, its teachers should be aware of the forbidden steps the Bible has clearly stated. If the drifting and superstitious nature in the Chinese pantheistic system, albeit its ability for religious function to reward, compensate, etc., cannot find objective truth, why then should the SLSW teachers, with a very weak biblical foundation, venture into this "foreign" land.

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[34] Stamen, "Territorial Spirits," p. 26.

8.2 Clear Steps as Ritual to Cast out or Expel Demons

The strategy developed by SLSW by "prayer walk," "praise march," "prayer expedition" and "prayer journey" is under question if these steps are deemed necessary in order to literally shake the strongholds, exterminate, and wipe out the devils in particular areas. It is taught by the New Testament that the devils exist, but are spiritual beings. The fight against them is thus spiritual. The "kingdom now" theology is often criticized for its eschatology. It is not my intention to discuss it here in detail, but suffice it to know that this theology emphasizes a realized eschatology, loosing the two poles tension of the New Testament "already-but-not-yet" eschatology. The kingdom of God thus taught is a visible reign by the church on earth as the manifested sons of God and especially manifested by the apostles and prophets.

Deemed as such, the battles are visible, the process is visible, and the victory is visible. All the prayer walks and expeditions are visible forms of fighting the battles for the kingdom to come. But the spiritual world should not be understood in the three dimensional physical perspective. The spiritual world is in another dimension. Evil spirits can possess an object, for example, an idol; they can reside in it as in a human being. Buildings and sites that are dedicated to evil spirits can only signify anything and manifest any power because people are giving that authority over to them. Likewise, they can have power over people because there are rooms, like thoughts filled with sinful ideas where the evil spirits are legitimately qualified to dwell in.

The spiritual world should not be measured according to physical principles. Thus, the tramping down of the enemy is not necessarily done in the prayer walk. It can be done at home, targeting somewhere far away. And since we do not really understand whether their ranks are perennially assigned in the spiritual realm, we do not simply fire demons as if we know they are of the higher ranks. The hierarchical system in Chinese common religion does not show a consistent ranking, though there are some major gods, but the status has been fluctuating in history. The evidences quoted from Peter Wagner's book also do not support any consistent ranking of the gods.

9. A Theological Reflection

9.1 Gods in the Old Testament and Sovereignty of Almighty God

We can find similar cases in biblical narrative. For instance, Baal is named differently in different cities as Baal-hermon, Baal-hazor, Baal-gad, or Baal-peor. It is believed that Baal was the highest god in the Canaanite areas, which controlled the fertility of the land.[35] It is also a warrior god as well as a storm-god.[36] While there were other gods like Chemosh of Moab, Milkon of Ammon, Melgart of Tyre, and Eshmun of Sidon, the rankings of these gods are not known. Some gods were named, not after the names of the territories where they were situated, but after the duties they were in charge of. Ilib is, for example, in charge of ancestor worship; Hadd, of thunderstorm; Yam, of the sea; Mot, death, and Rephesh, of the plague. Like Chinese people, Canaanites could worship many gods at the same time.[37]

Clinton points out that in the Old Testament, idols are frauds, rebellious angels or evil spirits who want to be God. No matter how much these idols claim their rights and claim to have control over nations, cities, territories, and the sea, or to have possessed the power of death, fertility, and thunderstorm, they are not God.[38] The implied theology of the sovereignty of one God in the narratives unambiguously excludes the possibility of any actual sovereignty of these Canaanite gods as the strongholds of these cities.

9.2 Sin and Possession: A Psychological Link

It is taught in the Bible that sin is the crucial problem in people's lives. According to Paul's understanding, sin manifests itself in different forms: envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, hatred, slander, insolence, arrogance, boastfulness, disobedience, faithlessness, senselessness, heartless, ruthlessness, rage, anger, bitterness, greed, impurity, sexual immorality, lust, evil desires, idolatry, etc.[39] These echo

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[35] Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions*, p. 231.

[36] Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), pp. 42-44, 47, 49-52.

[37] Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions*, p. 231.

[38] Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions*, p. 232.

[39] See Rom 1:29-31; Eph 4:31; Col 3:5.

in Jesus' teachings. And Jesus points out that all these evils come from inside and make a man unclean.[40]

Is it possible that the spirits that possess different individuals are truly the spirit of rage, spirit of promiscuous, spirit of lust and so forth? Theologically, it is sound to state that spirit possessions are usually related to sin.[41] And whatever names the spirits may be given and whatever they are, they highly depend on the psychological and spiritual condition of the people they possess. A spirit of lust could possess one if he or she is indulging in the sin of lust, building a "house" for the spirit to live in and manifest itself as the spirit of lust. Our body is the house of the Spirit of God, and could also be the house for other spirits. But if the same spirit goes to another person who is bound by the sin of hatred, it will become the spirit of hatred. Therefore, it is understandable that an exorcist can cast out as many different spirits as one might have; but the truth is: as there are many sins, there are as many spirits. The former determines the latter.

The Apostle Paul elaborates sin in personified terms. He says that as sin comes into this world, it brings death. Likewise, as it comes into one's life, it brings death into that person. Now all who have sins are under the power of death, which is described by Paul as the king and lord in one's life. The body taken hold of and controlled by sin is called the body of sin. It looks alive, but it is only a slave of sin. It has no right over itself. Sin claims to have this body. And as long as the sin is not dealt with, the person cannot claim to have this body. This body belongs to the sin. To the sin, it is alive; but to God it is deemed dead. So the body does whatever sin wants it to do. Paul says that the body can only be redeemed when the power of sin is canceled. The only way to cancel that is through the death of Christ on the cross.

Moreover, whoever submits to sin is the slave of sin. And death reigns in one through the power of sin.[42] It is interesting to note that in the Epistle to the Romans, Paul does not attribute the bondage of human beings to Satan, or to "the powers of this dark world and the spiritual

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[40] See Mark 7:21-22.

[41] Compared to the western theological seminary, lecturers in Asia are more readily qualified in answering these sorts of questions. There is a contextual reflection from an Asian theologian showing similar tendency and concern. See Yung Hwa, "A Systematic Theology That Recognizes the Demonic," in *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission*, eds. A. Scott Moreau, et al. (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 2002), pp. 3-27.

[42] The above elaboration is taken from Romans 5-8.

forces of evil in the heavenly realm," as illustrated in Ephesians 6, but to sin.

10. Conclusion

The above attempt is preliminary. However, my aim is two fold: to point out the similarity between SLSW teaching and that in the Chinese common religion and to offer reflections from a theological and biblical perspective.

For many generations, exposure and contact with the spiritual realm was deemed a prohibited act by most Chinese evangelical believers, who believed that the gods, the spirits of the dead, the spirits of the ancestors, are all evil spirits in disguise; and having turned to Christ, converted Christians have entered the realm of God, from darkness unto light. Thus, once liberated from the grasp of the old gods, and having denounced the physical and visible idols, the power of darkness and Satan could no longer take hold on their lives. Christians do not need to re-enter into the spiritual realm to bind the "evil spirits" whom they once venerated, and certainly not to say they must look for the overlords of these spirits for a battle at a higher level. Christ has already won the victory once and for all. One has already participated in the victory when one accepts salvation.

Now as SLSW is being widely promoted, could it be possible that what is being taught is less of a biblical principle and more a result of exposure to the Eastern mysticism of transcendental meditation and others, leading the western society and some Christian churches into the Eastern spiritual worldview that embraces a concept of hierarchical ranking of spiritual beings, which is nothing new to Chinese people.[43] Is this direction a progression or a regression?

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[43] For analysis of how western society been exposed to eastern mysticism and has deviated from biblical Christianity, I refer to Dave Hunt's *The Cult Explosion: An Expose of Today's Cults and Why They Prosper* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1980). Hunt and McMahon's accusation of Cho on being supportive of Eastern mysticism is refuted in Allan Anderson, "The Contextual Pentecostal Theology of David Yonggi Cho," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 7:1 (January 2004), pp. 5-6. See also Dave Hunt and T. A. McMahon, *The Seduction of Christianity: Spiritual Discernment in the Last Days* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1985), pp. 20, 33, 102, 143-145 (pages as quoted by Allan Anderson). I came across A. Scott Moreau, "Gaining Perspective on Territorial Spirits" (http://www.lausanne.org/Brix?pageID=13884), checked: August 18,

While SLSW teaching is blooming around the world, should not one also take note of how some of its teachers have made room for the possible encounter with well-intentioned spirits--spirits of dead prophets, albeit Old Testament prophet Elijah and American prophetess Kathryn Kuhlman, and angels who are ready to "help" Christians? Benny Hinn, the recognized apostle and prophet in the circle of the New Apostolic Roundtable and the International Coalition of Apostles, has publicly shared his contact with Old Testament prophet Elijah and Kathryn Kuhlman in many visions.[44] Are these spirit encounter experiences any different from the Chinese encounters with the dead through the rite of the shaman-master?

Noticing these similarities, would not a study of the Chinese religious system shed some light to the contemporary understanding of the spiritual world? If SLSW is true, then designating different levels of spirits/gods in a city, a region, or a country, through its teaching would be more than welcome to Chinese people, for that would affirm their belief system as well. They would at least perceive it as a "Christian version" of a pantheistic view of the different levels of gods. Moreover, the same view would certainly also fit with the Hindu pantheistic view which sees all gods as manifestations of the Brahma, whereas one is at a higher or a lower level, as long as some people see it works for them.[45] But what then is so unique in Christianity?

2005, upon revision of my article, and found his reference to the similarity of SLSW and Hinduism shares my own viewpoint.

[44] See G. Richard Fisher with M. Kurt Goedelman, "Benny Hinn's Move into Necromancy: Faith Healer Claims Contact with the Dead Foretells New Direction for His Ministry," *The Quarterly Journal* 17:4 (1997) available at Personal Freedom Outreach website (http://www.pfo.org/bhnecro.htm), checked: Jan 8, 2006. Also "Hinn," in *Let Us Reason Ministry* (http://letusreason/hinn.htm, 2002), checked: June 4, 2004.

[45] About *Hinduism*, see Cybelle Shattuck, *Hinduism* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999); Arvind Sharma, "Hinduism," *Our Religions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), pp. 3-67; see also T. M. P. Mahadevan, *Outlines of Hinduism* [Chinese], trans. Huang-zhou Ling (Taipei: Tong Ta, 2001).