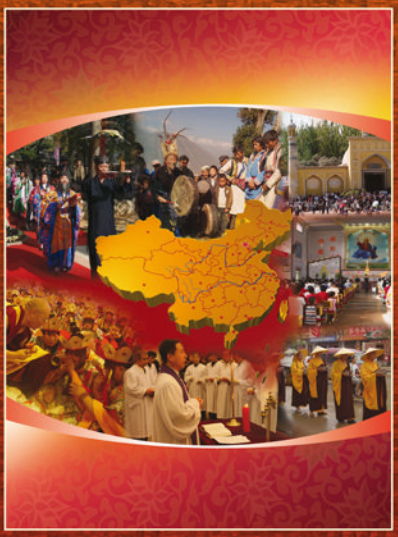
RELIGION IN CHINESE SOCIETIES

Social Scientific Studies of Religion in China

Methodology, Theories, and Findings



Edited by
Fenggang YANG & Graeme LANG

BRILL

Social Scientific Studies
of Religion in China

Religion in Chinese Societies

Edited by

Kenneth Dean, *McGill University*
Richard Madsen, *University of California, San Diego*
David Palmer, *University of Hong Kong*

VOLUME 1

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INTRODUCTION: THE RISING SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF RELIGION IN CHINA

Graeme Lang and Fenggang Yang

According to one survey, mainland China appears to be the least religious society in the world (Norris and Inglehart, 2004: 224). Some people might take this as indicating a resounding triumph of atheist propaganda by the Chinese Communist Party. However, empirical observations on the ground show a reality of religious revivals in many and diverse settings: rural religious festivals attract hundreds of thousands of people, urban temples and churches are packed with worshippers, and Christian house-churches proliferate in both rural and urban areas.

The low percentage of religious identity yet prolific religious practice in China may not be simply a result of political restrictions that discourage respondents to reveal their religious identity to the survey researcher. We also know that many people in Chinese societies such as Taiwan and Hong Kong say that they have "no religion" while cheerfully admitting that they occasionally visit temples to seek advice from gods, and believe in the possibility of supernatural retribution (Cheng and Wong, 1997: 322). The mixing of 'no religion' with 'religious belief' and 'religious practices' may occur in mainland China as well.

Indeed, the question gets to the core of the social scientific study of religion itself. What does 'religion' mean in the context of Chinese culture? Do 'Western' sociological concepts, theories, and survey instruments of religion apply equally well in Chinese societies? Can we use such concepts, theories and empirical measures to understand the proliferation of what appears to be religious activity in many settings in mainland China during the past three decades? Is the growth of religious activity in mainland China occurring only in the cracks and margins of the society, or is it spreading into the mainstream?

Scholarly research on religion in mainland China was impossible in the first thirty years of Communist rule (1949–1979). It has become possible again since the early 1980s to study religions in mainland

China, but some forms of religious activity and belief are easier to study than others. Unsurprisingly, anthropologists have done the most extensive research, because their methodology typically requires mainly talking to people in local settings (temples, festivals), and focuses on people who actually show up at or work in those temples and festivals. This kind of research is relatively unobtrusive, and there is no need to obtain membership lists, or to pursue people through sampling methods. The anthropologists, using such methods, have produced the best work on religious revival and religious activity, particularly in the countryside and among the so-called ethnic minorities. The sociology of religion as a discipline has also been revived, particularly for studies in urban contexts and for survey research. While the introduction of the social scientific theories and methods of religion developed in the west has helped to document and analyze religious change in China, the introduction of the China case will broaden the scholarly horizons and improve the theoretical and methodological developments in the social scientific study of religion in general.

The Emerging Social Scientific Study of Religion in China

The chapters in this volume are a select set of papers that were first presented at the Beijing Summit on Chinese Spirituality and Society in October 2008. The summit gathered a group of leading Chinese and Western scholars working on cutting-edge projects or in the forefront of theoretical development in the social scientific study of religion. In preparation for the Beijing Summit, the organizers asked the Western scholars to think about the China case in their own theorizing, and the Chinese scholars to envision research that poses relevant questions for the development of theories in the social scientific study of religion. In this volume, we present a selection of sociological and anthropological studies of religion in China with empirical data.[1] Unlike most previous volumes, we also review the revival of religious studies, and not just the revival of religion, and the conceptual reflections among scholars

[1] Another volume of selected papers of the Beijing Summit, which is to be published by Brill as well, focuses on Confucianism and other spiritual traditions in modern China and beyond.

about how to describe, understand, and explain religion in Chinese societies. This volume also presents examples of recent anthropological and sociological studies of religion by mainland-based scholars. Finally, the volume includes explorations of the impact of religion on society, a topic which has been much debated in China since the 1980s, as scholars and officials studied and accommodated the revivals of religion, but worried about the consequences. The theoretical and methodological reflections of these chapters may challenge the very conceptualization of religion and spirituality, and challenge empirical measures and instruments of religion.

An overview of the death and rebirth of religious studies is provided by He Guanghu, at Renmin University in Beijing, who likens it to the rebirth of a Phoenix from the flames of the Cultural Revolution (albeit still a small 'Phoenix'). He's chapter is an exceptionally vivid account of the fractured and disrupted history of writing and scholarship about religion in China since 1949. He goes back to the 19th century and earlier in order to note the contributions of religious professionals and overseas scholars to early writing about religion. But scholarly analysis suffered greatly from the imperative during most of the Maoist period of scorning and criticizing religion as a mere tool of imperialists and class oppressors, as a distraction from the goals of making revolution and creating a socialist society, and implicitly, as a threat to the hegemony of the Party. He notes that in the face of the Maoist imperative to condemn and repress religion, eventually many scholars lacked the courage to resist or even to be silent, and learned instead just to express the required views, while avoiding much critical thought about the nature and impacts of religion.

In the 1980s, as the central government and the Party focused much more on economic development than on social and ideological micromanagement, it became possible for scholars to begin to revive the study of religion, especially and most successfully by reframing it as a cultural phenomenon, worthy of study for its historical and contemporary contributions to the richness of local cultures. But scholars and writers again had to confront the problem of how to study and analyze religion without the easy guidelines of formulaic Maoist disdain, or the safe but boring method of reciting historical details about the histories of Chinese and world religions. More adventurous scholarship on religion was inhibited not only by state restrictions and the threat of censorship, but also by lack of access by many mainland scholars

to translations of overseas empirical and theoretical work on religion, which would have led, He believes, to more rapid development and innovation in interesting and even pathbreaking studies of religions in China. Historical but frequently uninteresting studies of religion proliferated, relying exclusively on texts and previous accounts of doctrine, while empirical studies of religions as actually practiced were rare, and difficult.

Sociological research began to be stimulated by the translations of classic and contemporary Western analyses by Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Peter Berger, Rodney Stark, and others. Since 2004, supported by a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation to Purdue University, Fenggang Yang, along with Dedong Wei of Renmin University, Xiangping Li of Shanghai University (now at East China Normal University), and other scholars based in China, has organized an annual Summer Institute for the social scientific study of religion. Each Summer Institute was attended by 70–100 young faculty members and graduate students from universities throughout China. Several renowned scholars in the United States and Britain, including Eileen Barker, Dean R. Hoge, Roger Finke, J. Gordon Melton, R. Stephen Warner, Byron Johnson, Nancy T. Ammerman, Grace Davie, etc., who were themselves not China specialists, gave lectures at the two-week summer institute, introducing up-to-date theoretical and methodological developments. Many Chinese well-known scholars of religious studies also gave lectures. In conjunction with the annual Summer Institute was a two-three day conference of the social scientific study of religion in China, at which Chinese and international scholars presented their empirical studies of religion in China and Chinese diasporas. In addition, the Luce Foundation grant also provided small research grants to scholars in China for conducting empirical studies of religion. Building upon the momentum of the advancement of the social scientific study of religion in China, supported by the John Templeton Foundation, Fenggang Yang and a team of Chinese scholars organized the Beijing Summit on Chinese Spirituality and Society, which was held at Peking University on October 8–10, 2008. The summit helped to bridge the humanities studies and the social scientific studies of religion in China, facilitated Chinese and Western scholars exchanging their scholarly views of Chinese religion and society, and created excitement among Chinese and Western scholars for the prospect of the social scientific studies of religion.

Socio-historical Contexts and the Conceptualization of Religion

Books about religions in China today generally begin with an account of the revival of religion in China since the late 1970s after periods of extreme repression during the preceding two or three decades, with attention to the continuing interactions between religion and the state in the 'reform' era since 1978 (e.g. Kindopp and Hamrin, 2004; Yang and Tamney, 2005; Yang, 2008; Ashiwa and Wank, 2009). Indeed, the historical perspective requires that scholars situate the religious change in the last thirty years in the long history of Chinese culture and society. While He Guanghu's chapter traces the history of religious studies in China back to the nineteenth century, J. Gordon Melton points out the importance to combine contemporary observations and historical studies. Critical-historical studies of religions have shown that religions change and develop as a result of the mixing of doctrines from various sources, with reinterpretations and creative responses reflecting the influence of new social contexts into which believers have migrated, or the social differentiations which have developed among believers. Such processes have been enhanced by globalized flows of people and ideas, and have periodically led to new groups advocating novel religions. How to make conceptual sense of this diversity and these developments has been a task of the sociology of religion since the 19th century. Melton proposes applications of some conventional distinctions used in overseas scholarship to the study of religious groups and identities in China. But implicit in Melton's analysis is the principle that it is also essential to look at religious belief and practice closely, in detail, and in the field, because they evolve and change according to local circumstances and local initiatives.

There are western scientific models and paradigms for the study of religions for which the exponents claim universal validity, suitably modified to absorb locally important variations. The so-called 'secularization' paradigm in the sociology of religion was widely accepted in western academia as a kind of universally applicable model of what happens to religiosity as a society becomes modernized and industrialized, until it became apparent that religion in many societies was not retreating into irrelevance in the face of scientific progress and economic development, but instead was resurgent in some 'developed' societies, and even increasingly influential. The 'religious economy' paradigm has been a much discussed alternative model, partly as a

theoretical response to the failure in some contexts of the 'secularization' paradigm. Rooted in a 'rational choice' model of the human actor, who assesses the costs and benefits of various religious options where choices are available, and chooses accordingly, the model predicts that where religious pluralism and state tolerance allow religious competition and innovation among the suppliers or purveyors of religion, religions will flourish. This model, developed by Rodney Stark and his collaborators, has also been much discussed among scholars of religion in China, facilitated by recent translations of key works such as *Acts of Faith* (Stark and Finke, 2000, translated by Fenggang Yang), and by workshops and symposia in China to discuss contemporary theories and methods in the study of religions. Those debates continue, and scholars in China will undoubtedly develop their own variations and innovations to grasp and explain the religious phenomena around them in Chinese societies.

Daniel Olson raises some of the issues which need to be addressed in trying to assess the usefulness of such models. The various ways in which religion is regulated or subsidized by state agencies from the national to the local levels will have a considerable impact on the development of religious activities. But state agencies and officials are also responding to local interests, as we know from studies of the revival of temples and folk religion, and the sophisticated ways in which local promoters of temples manipulate symbols, ceremonies, and performances to enhance the legitimacy of what they are doing, and to induce officials and scholars to acquiesce in religious revival (e.g. Jing, 1996). Olson suggests that we can learn a lot about such processes, and about the applicability of sociological theories of religious demand and religious supply, by studying how religions revive in China after the severe repression of the Cultural Revolution.

Fan Lizhu's chapter raises the issue of the applicability of western theories and concepts about religion to Chinese experience and practice as it has evolved over several millennia. She notes that many scholars in China have used what she calls 'reverse analogical interpretation', that is, the too-convenient application of western-derived models of religiosity without sufficiently deep analysis of the ways in which those models and concepts may or may not capture the realities of religiosity and practice in Chinese societies.

This problem can be raised even in regard to the concept of 'religion', a term imported into Chinese discourse as *zong jiao*. But that term was evidently a union of two older terms, *zong*, meaning 'piety, devotion, or faith', and *jiao*, something like a 'body of teachings'. The

Chinese concept of the *dao*, inadequately translated as 'the way', also demands some conceptual attention, since it is widely used by some believers in Daoism and sectarian religions to refer to something like an experienced appreciation of the cosmological integration of life and being. *Dao* also seems to have moral implications for some exponents of that term. In any case, the key question is whether 'religion' adequately captures the kinds of belief and practice found in Chinese societies and for the understanding of which these Chinese concepts may be essential.

Some Chinese and western scholars in the past decided that China did not actually have what in the west is called 'religion', or at least, that such belief-propagating organizations are relatively unimportant in Chinese society, at best, and definitely harmful, at worst. One of the most influential attempts to grasp the sociological and cultural realities of Chinese belief and practice since the writings of Max Weber was arguably C.K. Yang's book *Religion in Chinese Society* (Yang, 1961), which offered the concept of 'diffused' religion to try to accommodate the prevalence of supernaturally-oriented practice throughout the society, but also showed how the state in imperial times had coopted the worship of deities into its systems of imperial control (mandating, for example, the worship of exemplary officials, who subsequently could evolve into 'deities', and coopting local folk deities into the imperial pantheon of approved and state-supporting gods).

But the concept of 'diffused' religion has its own problems in English, implying that the religious practice is relatively inarticulate and disorganized. Other concepts widely used in Chinese discourse about life and the cosmos also do not have close counterparts in English, including *tian* (more complicated than its usual English translation of 'heaven'), *dao* (superficially, 'the way', but with no good counterpart in English) and *mingyun* (sometimes translated as 'fate' but with meanings evidently richer and deeper than the usual English meaning of that word). The concept of *mixin*, literally, 'blind faith', but usually translated as 'superstition', refers to many forms of supernaturally oriented practice which assume that deities or spirits have to be propitiated or at least, not unduly provoked. Anthropologists have produced innumerable detailed and subtle ethnographies devoted to elucidating these kinds of beliefs and practices in various societies, including many outstanding studies of religion in Taiwan (e.g. Jordan, 1972). But it is still a huge conceptual challenge to try to cope with these beliefs and practices using current theories in the sociology of religion.

Eileen Barker also takes up this theme of the importance of studying religions as actually believed and practiced. As a sociologist who has written extensively about the congregational and sectarian religious groups in western societies, Barker is impressed by the great diversity of forms of belief and practice in China compared to societies where the principal distinctions are between congregational groups such as 'churches' and 'sects'. In Chinese societies, as in other societies where various forms of supernatural devotions are widely diffused through social life, there are also greater difficulties in distinguishing 'religion' from taken-for-granted cultural practices, such as sending paper effigies of houses and cars to ancestors, resort to fortune tellers for advice, posting pictures of door-gods as household guardians, and so on.

The classifications of religions and religious groups, she notes, can also be highly contentious. She has spent a good part of her career dealing with the alleged distinctions in western societies between religions, sects, and 'cults', the latter supposedly capable of 'brainwashing' people who succumb to their methods of indoctrination. The concept of 'evil cult' (*xie jiao*) in Chinese societies, past and present, is also often a label used to express extreme disapproval, and providing grounds for suppression, rather than an objective description based on careful studies of belief and practice. Barker emphasizes that a reliable objective methodology is essential for the scientific study of religions, to avoid the kind of mistaken and misleading characterizations of religions which are too often implicated in attempts to suppress particular groups. Good fieldwork is essential in order to gain deeper understandings of what people say and do when they 'do religion'.

In-depth field research on religion in China has been carried out most notably in the past by anthropologists, and several chapters provide accounts of such research. Kenneth Dean has published extensive and rich accounts of the revival of sectarian and folk-religion temples and festivals in Fujian (particularly, in Dean, 1998). In his chapter in the current volume, he briefly recounts his recent survey of folk religion and temples among 700 villages in the Putian plain in Fujian, which together supported about 2,500 temples, housing about 10,000 god-statues representing about 1,200 gods, and then offers some extended reflections on the problem of understanding and conceptualizing the amazing proliferation of temples, festivals, and religion-related performances in that region.

In some ways, this kind of religion is imbued with images which originated in the state, as in Daoist rituals and deities which reflect the

imagery of the court and of rulers in imperial China. But the religious festivals also provide carnival and celebration, and represent major forms of organized social life for the participants, in which religion is a significant dimension of these events, but often represents only a small fraction of the motivation for and enjoyment of participation in these superficially 'religious' carnivals. Scholars who focus on 'religions' as if they are discrete social and doctrinal entities which produce ceremonies and rituals, with religious goals, cannot begin to explain or even capture what is happening throughout a region such as Putian, where hundreds of festivals occur each year and where the massive organizational and financial effort mobilized by participants and organizers dwarfs the far less impressive activities and performances which can be attributed to the local organs and representatives of the state.

The Social Significance of Religion in China

The recent revival of religion in Chinese society has brought significant challenges not only to the social theories of religion, including the very conceptualization of religion, but also to individual identities, communities, organizations, and society. Indeed, more and more Chinese scholars have engaged in discussion on the relationship between religion and social and political identities, civil society, and the state. Unfortunately, most of the publications and conference presentations on these issues inside China so far remain ideological and speculative. Empirical studies and theorizing based on empirical findings on the social significance of religion are still rare and difficult to carry out.

Survey research on religion has been quite difficult in the past, due in part to the politically sensitive nature of the topic and the potential consequences of religious self-identification for people's careers, promotions, and Party membership. In recent years, there have been several attempts to conduct survey research on religion in China, such as the World Values Survey that included China in one of the waves (see Norris and Inglehart, 2004), or the 2005 survey by East China Normal University that reported an estimate of about three hundred million religious followers. However, the sampling process and data collection procedure of these surveys have not been available for the community of scholars, so the validity of these surveys is in doubt. The current volume includes a chapter based on a ground-breaking survey of religion in China.

Victor Yuan's chapter provides exceptional data from a survey carried out in 2007 by his company Horizon Research Consultancy Group, a well-established survey research firm in China. The survey involved a representative sampling procedure which led to more than 7,000 face-to-face interviews in 20 cities, 16 small towns, and 20 rural areas across three major regions of the country. The data confirm what the earlier World Values Survey showed: that religion is not very high on the list of priorities compared to most other countries. Even among Japanese people, who surveys suggest are on the whole not particularly religious, the proportion who consider religion to be 'important' or 'very important' in their lives (about 20%) is substantially higher than the proportion who have such views in China (9–12%).

As in Hong Kong and Taiwan, Buddhism is by far the largest religious category of identity in mainland China, at about 18%. Daoism attracts only a very tiny fraction of the population to identify as 'Daoists'. One notable feature of the dataset is the result for age cohorts. There is very little difference in religious belief between those born in the 1940s and those born in the 1980s (Figure 11). However, the widely noted resurgence of religions has led to some small but perceptible changes, particularly, the rising proportions of urban believers who say they believe in Buddha (1995: 7.5%, 2007: 19%), God/Jesus (2.2%, 7%), Fairies (1.3%, 7%), Ghosts (2%, 7.4%), and the Soul (1.5%, 13%). A slowly growing proportion of the population in China's cities appears to be religious, comparing views in 1995 with those in 2007, even though believers are still only a small fraction of urban dwellers. Considering the hundreds of millions of urban dwellers in China, this change may be one of the biggest global shifts in the world toward increased religiosity during that decade. But we must keep it in perspective: although the numbers are large, the proportion of city-dwellers who participate in such services is still a small fraction of the urban population. Nevertheless, this perceptible shift has attracted increased and even rapt attention among many scholars and officials.

The religious identity appears to have become even more pronounced among many ethnic minorities in China. The Chinese government recognizes 55 nationalities (*minzu*) in addition to the majority Han people. Traditionally, many of the ethnic minorities have based their ethnicity on a particular religion. While the Party-state tried hard to delink religion and ethnicity in the atheist campaigns in the 1950s

and 1960s, the ethnic policies in the economic reform era may have directly or indirectly encouraged the strengthening of ethnic identity through religion. He Qimin, based at the Minzu (Nationalities) University of China in Beijing, describes some of the results of studies sponsored by the State Commission of Nationalities Affairs over the past decade, intended to document and explore the role and significance of religions among the ethnic 'minorities'. New insights and some striking examples emerged in some of their case studies. For example, the past mixing and intermarriages of ethnic Dai villagers and Hui Muslim migrants in Yunnan led to extraordinary local combinations of belief and practice which had been influenced by both Hui and Dai cultures and life-worlds. Such research shows that many religious activities and beliefs among ethnic minorities can be dynamic and creative. More recently, opportunities to take advantage of religion for economic development, and the impact of competition between religions and other secular activities in local societies, have led to further innovations among some groups.

He Qimin adds some interesting ideological angles to this analysis, including the idea that such mixing has the important result that what may appear to be 'foreign' and alien religions may actually be 'tamed' and localized in their indigenous contexts, and hence may not threaten the state with serious "foreign infiltration", as some previous analysts had believed or feared. She also claims that this research demonstrates the viability and durability of the national identity-project—that is, "pluralistic unity"—among the ethnic minorities. In other words, while ethnic minorities may be devoted to their own local religious customs and beliefs, their overarching identity is firmly established as Chinese citizens.

Of course, whether or not this is true in any particular setting is an empirical question, and deserves further study. It is important to distinguish prescriptive concepts from evidential descriptions of local realities. Indeed, as Kenneth Dean reminds us, there is considerable tension in many local forms of religiosity between deference to the national-unity requirements of the state, and explorations and affirmations of local identities and local cultural creativity or local constructed heritages. The locals have to walk a fine line in dealing with representatives of the state, and many have become skillful in manipulating ceremonies, appearances, and (we might add) scholars, in their efforts to put on festivals and ceremonies which please themselves but are

tolerable to the representatives of the state. Essentialist and document-based descriptions of religions would miss most of this complexity and dynamism.

But He is well aware of the distinction between essentialist descriptions and empirical realities, and shows that it is only through detailed research, using the methods of historians, sociologists, and on-the-ground anthropologists, that scholars and policy-makers can fully appreciate the multiple voices, interests, and life-styles to be found among the many nationalities in China. She concludes that such field research can make great contributions to global scholarship about religion.

Gao Bingzhong and Ma Qiang provide a rich example of the capacity of anthropological field research in China to illuminate local developments of civil society. This chapter describes the revival and evolution of the large and bustling annual Dragon Tablet Fair held in a market town in Hebei province, which attracts around 100,000 people for a festival in the second month of the lunar year. The fair is enlivened with performances by musicians, singers, chanters of scriptures, and drummers. People also visit the shrine at other times of the year to ask for advice or help in regard to travel, business, family affairs, weddings, and so on, but the fair is a much more extraordinary event than anything which occurs during the rest of the year.

The revival of this fair is similar to many revivals of temples and festivals in other provinces (see, for example, Chau, 2006), but this detailed account gives a very good picture of how this has happened at one now-famous festival in Hebei. As elsewhere, the local organizers gradually transformed the festival and its organizational arrangements to make it appear more 'modern' to the state and to intellectuals and officials. They introduced modern terminology and management (instituting the previously unknown title of 'President' and a 'Board of Directors'), and added three female 'Presidents', showing to outsiders that women could hold positions of responsibility in the management of the festival.

More important, they expanded the activities at the fair to include many secular cultural activities, making it much more than simply a 'god-festival'. Worship of a folk-god was at the core of the festival, and was no less 'superstitious' than in the past from the point of view of an officially atheist state. However, the organizers added so many worthwhile activities and promotions to the public spaces of the festival that tolerating it was much easier, and suppressing it much more difficult,

than if the festival focused solely on petitioning deities for benefits. Chess contests, folk arts groups, amateur musical performances, promotion of scientific agriculture, and many other displays and activities made the festival more colorful and interesting, and added to the appeal of the festival to locals in the surrounding districts, thus also ensuring its success, and prestige to the organizers and their supporters. They even found ways to link the Dragon-tablet to the dragon-imagery of the state and the Chinese nation.

This fair also attracted the attention of scholars who began to visit the event each year. Naturally, the visits of scholars and intellectuals attracted the attention of the organizers, who found ways to use the scholarly interest, attendance, speeches, and writings of intellectuals to provide further lines of legitimacy and support for the event.

One of the important conclusions in the chapter is that this festival and all of the organizational work which goes into it represents a burgeoning of what would be called elsewhere 'civil society'. Indeed, the organizers of such festivals in a particular region develop and maintain ties with each other including mutual visiting between festivals, in a complex social field which defies any easy categorization using the normal apparatus of concepts in the sociology of religion. But equally important, this large-scale effort in organization and festival activity has led to the development of links with higher-level institutions such as universities, academies, and regional bureaus, and so has linked the local people in many complex ways to the nation-state. Far from being a force for local-level identity at the cost of higher-level identifications beyond the locality, these developments have actually integrated the locality and local civil society into higher-level and broader social and political fields of engagement, interaction, and identity. Showing how this works in their account of the revival and evolution of a major festival in Hebei province is one of the notable achievements of this chapter.

What could be added to this kind of work, however, is a more extended investigation and analysis of the many different kinds of motivations and gratifications which are engaged by and contribute to participation in rural religious festivals. They can be used to affirm local identities and local heritage (e.g. Jing, 1996), but they also provide very lively occasions for local socializing, display, and fun, and the success of these events may have as much to do with their 'hot and noisy' character as with anything which the gods can provide, as Chau (2006), shows in his demonstration of the importance of *honghuo* or

hot-and-noisy sociality in god-festivals in Shaanxi. In other words, these festivals are only partly 'religious', even though the core meaning of the festival is related to worship of a deity. Indeed, this is a feature of all religious activity: it is only partly a matter of doctrine or exchanges with deities and their representatives. Religions also offer sensation, and sociality, and the enjoyments of music, ritual, and group performance. We think that there is a substantial need to excavate and analyze the ways in which these activities and gratifications are implicated in 'doing religion'. Or to put it another way, 'religion' is only partly about the supernatural, and we might even search for a better language to describe these events, in which 'religion' is not the dominant part of the conceptual apparatus. This is a task for both sociologists and anthropologists, but these festivals present great opportunities to think about what we need to develop in our concepts to really understand them.

Many temples and churches have in fact sponsored and supported various kinds of local charitable activities, and many mainland scholars recognize the benefits of expanding the space for and the legitimacy of such activities. Liu Peng's chapter addresses this problem, noting that some national leaders have evidently recognized the potential benefits of religious contributions to local social development, but that legal and institutional constraints, and lingering ideological conservatism in many areas, makes this still difficult. Where religious organizations successfully contribute to welfare activities—as in the extensive involvement of some religious organizations in relief work after the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008—their contributions are not acknowledged in the media, because it is too sensitive to report on activities which are not officially authorized. Religious organizations also cannot easily raise money for charitable purposes from donations, and even if they get such donations, they cannot issue receipts to donors for tax purposes.

It is possible for overseas religious organizations to contribute funds to local religious organizations for charitable purposes, but local officials must be very careful about such flows of funds, to avoid the appearance of 'foreign infiltration' and the use of such funds for 'religious propaganda'. Donations from overseas religious organizations, through local organizations, do occur, but typically only where overseas and local religious organizations have developed relationships of trust with some local officials and agencies of the state, usually on the basis that the officials perceive that the funds are put to good local use,

and not used in blatant ways to promote religion. The author argues that it would be much better to set up some legal regulations for such donations, with specific rules and public accountability for managing donations.

Liu Peng believes that a new regulatory apparatus allowing religions to engage openly in charitable activity will evolve in the near future, and will represent a drastic change in the relation between religion and the state, and between religious believers and the local society. We agree that this would represent a major change, and would feed back into the growth of religions within mainland China, but it is unlikely to be a smooth and continuous process of change, despite the pointed and poignant analysis of scholars such as Liu Peng.

Scholars of religions in Chinese societies are also wrestling with the problem of trying to understand and anticipate the *consequences* of religious belief and activity. Does religion detract from the national identity-project? Does it facilitate divisiveness, ethnic grievances or separatism, and resistance to the state? Does it make any positive contributions to charitable activity or to pro-social behavior which enhance the collective well-being of a society even beyond the expected support for their own members within their own ideological life-worlds?

Lang and Lu's chapter poses this question in regard to the environmental problems which developed and developing societies face in the contemporary world: does religious belief have any relevance, or do religions make any contribution, to the ability and willingness of a population to try to resolve serious environmental problems? Is there any relationship between religious belief and environmentalist activism? There is a substantial academic enterprise devoted to extracting ecology-relevant passages from religious texts in world religions and explaining their significance (most notably, in the work of Mary Evelyn Tucker in a series of edited volumes on 'Religions of the World and Ecology', published by Harvard University Press). Survey research overseas has also occasionally investigated the question of whether variations in religious belief are correlated with variations in environment-conserving attitudes.

There is some evidence to support claims that believers in religions which focus on the afterlife, and believe that God actively manages the world for the benefit or chastisement of humans, are less interested in making sacrifices for environmental protection than people who are oriented to this world, and take a non-dogmatic approach to doctrines, including agnostics and atheists. But such studies need to

control for education, and there are rarely simple answers to questions about the relation between religion, ideology, and environmentalism. If fundamentalist Protestants and Mormons are less environmentalist than highly educated Jews or Buddhists in the United States, is it religion, or is it education, which explains these differences?

In Chinese societies, the salience of religion ranges from high, in Taiwan, to very low (according to survey research so far) in mainland China. In Taiwan, there are a number of influential Buddhist organizations which have promoted various forms of environmentalist activism. Some of these efforts include the application of Buddhist concepts to environmental protection. For example, Buddhist leaders have proposed that 'merits' (*gongde*) can be gained by picking up or recycling trash, and that 'protecting the spiritual environment' (*xinling huanbao*) can be applied to the goal of reducing wasteful consumption and thus protecting the material environment. But are such applications of Buddhist concepts to environmental problems a predictable result of Buddhist ideology, or are they instead a result of creative adaptations of Buddhist concepts by Buddhist intellectuals to the intensive discussion of environmental problems throughout Taiwanese society?

There is not as much evidence of these processes in mainland China. But clearly, religious leaders in various societies can mobilize followers to pursue environment-conserving activity, and environment-conserving principles can be excavated from the sacred canons of most religions if religious leaders are motivated to do so. It may be the case that we are seeing the beginnings of such activism in mainland China, but there is nothing remotely comparable to the engagement of religious organizations with environmentalism in Taiwan.

Other potential impacts of religion on society are more obvious, and are beginning to be debated in China. One of the contributions to collective well-being and social support for which many religions are noted in other societies is charitable activity supporting social welfare, education, care for the elderly, services for the poor, and so on. In contemporary China, the state and its local administrative bureau are the key providers—almost the monopoly providers—of such services. Private organizations might implicitly discredit the state if they provide support to people to whom the state gives no real attention. Their activities might be self-serving, as ways of spreading religious ideology, or as covert ways of bringing in outside forces which could destabilize the country, according to some official discourses about the potential impacts and dangers of religious activism outside the boundaries of officially registered temples, mosques, and churches.

Richard Madsen's chapter describes the different approaches of the state in Taiwan and in mainland China to religious involvement in charitable activity, and the quite different trajectories of religion in the two societies. For most of the thirty years after 1949, the Communist Party in mainland China and the Nationalist Party in Taiwan took a similar approach to religious organizations, for similar reasons, even if repression was much more severe on the mainland—large religious organizations were potential ideological and organizational rivals, which might challenge the legitimacy and political security of the ruling party. At the same time, the regime in Taiwan favored Christian organizations, as part of the cultivation of good political relations with the U.S.

However, as Taiwan hesitantly democratized in the 1980s and 1990s, the state was no longer preoccupied with suppressing dissent, but instead was preoccupied with elections and the task of fighting for legitimacy in the face of increased assertiveness among the Taiwanese population and in competition with other organizations to which they chose to give their interest and allegiance. Religious organizations flourished, and Buddhist organizations such as Tzu Chi (Ciji) became particularly wealthy and influential as competition and increased freedom drove them to innovate and to market themselves in Taiwan and overseas. Meanwhile, the influence and appeal of Christianity waned in Taiwan, and Confucian ideology was modernized to accommodate the more egalitarian and anti-authoritarian ideals of emerging Taiwanese civil society.

With the proliferation of religious organizations and activity, increasing numbers of people in Taiwan wanted to study religious doctrines, leading many organizations to offer courses in Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and sectarian religions offering various combinations of such teachings such as Yiguan Dao. This intellectual ferment was stimulated by the increasing integration of Taiwan with the global economy, and the frequent travel of Taiwanese overseas for education, business, and family reunions.

Meanwhile, in mainland China, folk-religion revived throughout the countryside, and Christianity in various formats spread widely throughout the cities through networks of preachers and activists, despite periodic local repression and hostility from the state officials, while Buddhism as belief and practice attracted increasing interest.

Madsen observes that two secular and originally repressive secular regimes—the Nationalists in Taiwan and the Communists on the mainland—eventually presided over two very different outcomes over

the past twenty years in regard to religion. In Taiwan, the society democratized, and the ruling party eventually lost any credible claim to represent the Chinese nation, or even to represent, protect, and embody Taiwanese identity, and had to accommodate the proliferation and vigorous activism of religions and religious organizations. In mainland China, the ruling party succeeded in retaining authoritarian control even as the economy modernized and wealth grew rapidly in the cities, and the regime was able to retain and even strengthen its claims to represent and carry forward Chinese nationalism, and to embody the hopes for stability in the face of massive economic change.

Madsen proposes that Charles Taylor's distinctions between political, sociological, and cultural secularism can be useful in understanding these different trajectories of state-religion-society relations in Taiwan and mainland China. We agree more with his final point in the chapter: that these relations are extraordinarily dynamic, and have changed so strikingly and so recently in both societies that we cannot yet presume to see how religiosity and religious activism will develop in these societies in the future. We can, however, see quite clearly that competition among religious organizations for prominence, including through charitable activism, is much more pronounced in Taiwan than in mainland China, and that this is driving religiosity and religious allegiances in Taiwan in a way which is still greatly inhibited in mainland China. The analysis of this competition would be a useful addition to Madsen's analysis of the great increases in the wealth and expanding influence of some religious organizations in Taiwan. Needless to say, these organizations, skilled in teaching, publicity, and the organization of charitable activity, would be formidable players in the religious marketplace in mainland China if they are eventually able to compete openly and on an equal basis with mainland-based religious organizations.

Conclusion

There are so many issues raised in each of these chapters that each could quite easily evolve into a separate volume of discussion, debate, and further research. But these chapters are only a sample of the many forms of rising empirical and theoretical scholarship about religions in Chinese societies. At the same time, they do suggest some directions

for future debates and future empirical studies. It is particularly striking to us that the models and paradigms of religious belief and practice which have been dominant in English-language academic discourse about religion are being challenged and extended by the contributions of sociologists and anthropologists who study religions in Chinese societies. These debates are stimulated, and sharpened, by conferences such as the one in Beijing in 2008 in which the first versions of these papers were presented. It is particularly valuable to bring together sociologists and anthropologists, as occurred at this conference, even though the methods and theoretical perspectives of these disciplines are frequently quite different. Among the sociologists, some of us find the 'religious economy' approach useful in grasping some of what is happening in the field, as we explore and are fascinated by the proliferation of religious activity in many settings in urban and rural China (e.g. Yang, 2005, 2006; Lang and Ragvald, 2005; Lang, Chan, and Ragvald, 2005).

Future research will have to deploy more sophisticated concepts, perhaps including Chinese-language concepts without direct translations, to capture some of the nuances and varieties of Chinese religious thought and practice. At the same time, we remain committed to the quest to build a global set of ideas and concepts in the sociology and anthropology of religion. We believe that there must be comprehensible ways in which people in all societies and cultures can talk to each other about how religions, ideologies, and values are built into social life, how they are regulated and the impacts of regulation, how and in what ways they compete with each other in some contexts, and the reasons why some succeed and prosper while others decline, or disappear. We cannot understand and discuss the human condition without such a common language. We hope that this volume makes some contributions to these debates and explorations.

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PART I

METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL CHALLENGES

CHAPTER ONE

THIRTY YEARS OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN CHINA

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Introduction: A Small Phoenix Rising from the Ashes

When compared with the historical development of religious studies in Europe and its present flourishing in the United States, the Chinese study of religion may be depicted as a small phoenix rising from the ashes.

As early as the beginning of the 20th century, a number of accomplished Chinese scholars began conducting substantive academic studies on religion, with practical and historically relevant results. This research was undertaken shortly after the discipline's expansion in Europe, and prior to its post-war growth in the United States to include such fields as the anthropology, history, sociology, and phenomenology of religion.

However, whereas the Western field of religious studies would subsequently undergo periods of stagnancy as a result of the two World Wars and intermittent deficiencies in scholarly contributions, the study of religion in China would be subjected to the flame, remaining in ashes for 30 years until its resurrection from the ruins of the humanities and social sciences in 1978.

According to Egyptian mythology, the re-born phoenix could live for 500 years before once again being consumed in fire; the author has great hopes that the life of this small Chinese phoenix will this time extend far beyond 50 years!

I. *The Lessons of History*

A. *The Birth and Death of Chinese Religious Studies*

As used in traditional Chinese thought prior to the Revolution of 1911,[1] the term "*san jiao*" (三教, literally the "three teachings" of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism) contains many notions similar to those denoted by the Western word "religion."

The body of traditional Chinese writings considered analogous to works of religious studies may be further subdivided into the following three general categories:

1. Expositions and commentaries of the theories and doctrines of one of the three teachings;
2. Critiques of or attacks on other religions from the perspective of one of the three teachings;
3. Comprehensive analyses of the *san jiao*, utilizing the terminology of one of the three.

However, because these three types of scholarship neither employ descriptive and comparative methodologies nor adopt value-neutral, scientific approaches, they cannot readily be viewed as constituting works of religious studies in the modern sense, i.e. as defined since the publication in 1873 of Max Müller's *Introduction to the Science of Religion*. Thus, it may be said that the field of Religious Studies did not truly exist in China until the adoption by several Chinese scholars of modern academic methodologies in their studies of religion in late 19th century and early 20th century.

Two major changes occurred within the Chinese field of religious studies as a result of the Western invasion of China in the late 19th century: first, the small stream of Enlightenment thought that had arisen with such thinkers as Huang Zongxi (1610–1695) and Gu Yanwu (1613–1682), only to be drained by the Literary Inquisitions and other repressive 18th century movements, suddenly swelled to a great river with the support of Western thought; and second, the small

[1] The Xinhai Revolution (辛亥革命) began in 1911 with the Wuchang Uprising. A conflict between the Imperial forces of the Qing Dynasty and the revolutionaries of the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance, it resulted in the abdication of the emperor in 1912 and the subsequent collapse of the Qing dynasty.

window into Western learning that was opened by such Jesuits as Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and J. A. Schall von Bell (1591–1666), only to be closed by conservative Confucianists and official prohibitions, was unexpectedly thrown open to reveal a bustling lobby of Western missionaries and Chinese intellectuals.

Strengthened by Western Enlightenment thought and modern science, the Chinese shift toward Enlightenment thinking resulted in the adoption by intellectuals and educated youth of a skeptical or critical attitude toward the traditional religions. Thus, in the early 20th century, the overwhelming majority of discourse among Chinese scholars and intellectuals assumed a tone of rationalism and objectivity, if not of radicalism and criticism, reflecting the revolutionary ethos of the age. Although this mood of skepticism generated a suspicion of religious faith that has persisted to this day, it also gave rise to the birth of Chinese religious studies, which differed considerably from the previous Confucian, Buddhist, or Daoist apologetics. Moreover, this ethos not only provided the newly-established field of Chinese religious studies with a necessary foundation of rationalism, but also established one of the defining characteristics of the field, i.e., its critical disposition.

The spread of Western learning, enriched by contributions from the humanities and social sciences, resulted in the introduction of ideas, theories, and methodologies not previously encountered by Chinese scholars. Thus, from the early part of the 20th century, a number of prominent scholars, including Liang Qichao (1873–1929), Hu Shi (1891–1962), Chen Yinke (1890–1969), and Chen Yuan (1880–1971) began to utilize the modern methodologies of Western learning to extend their studies of religion beyond the scope of the traditional teachings.

Due to the far-reaching influence of the historical and textual research tradition of the Chinese classics, during its initial stages of development, Chinese religious studies possessed a second defining characteristic: the preponderance of research and scholarship focused on the *history* of religion.

A third major feature of this newly-established field was the important role played by scholars within religious circles. Just as many Christian scholars made significant contributions to the advancement of the scientific study of religion in the West, numerous Christian scholars and scholars of other religions in China contributed greatly to the establishment of the discipline in China, with many offering sincere and positive reflections on and reactions to the intense criticisms of

religion that characterized the period. In fact, numerous learned religious scholars, including church personages and missionaries, were themselves leading champions of Western learning, as well as of modern concepts, theories, and methodologies.

In short, from the early 20th century up until the ascendency to power of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1949, the field of Chinese religious studies followed a course of early development not unlike that of its Western counterpart, with numerous accomplished scholars and influential works emerging amidst a tumultuous environment of continuous revolution and warfare.

Following the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, all academic activities, as all other cultural and social activities, fell subject to the authority of Marxist-Leninist and Mao Zedong thought, and all academic institutions were transformed into organs of the CCP. During this period, every field of study, including the humanities and social sciences, was required to comply with the mandate to "exemplify Party spirit," that is, to conform to Party policy. Thus, as was the case with all academic disciplines and cultural sectors in China during the Mao Era (1949–1976), the field of religious studies was remolded into an instrument of Party policy or, in the popular terminology of the times, was forced to undergo the "trial" and "baptism" of "the raging fire of the proletarian revolution."

During the 1950s and 1960s, the Party incorporated loyal religious figures into the "United Front" (统一战线) while simultaneously continuing to promote atheist propaganda and restrict religious activities and expression to places of worship. Through a series of successive political campaigns orchestrated by the Party leadership, the ideological criticism of all non-Marxist-Leninist ideas gradually developed into a systematic abolition of the teaching and study of all disciplines, including sociology and demography, which were labeled "bourgeoisie pseudo-sciences." Because these campaigns resulted in the gradual deterioration of the social status and living conditions of those targeted, it became extremely difficult, if not impossible, to conduct academic research, even in private.

As a result of this policy, all serious research on religion vanished from academia, and universities discontinued all courses within the discipline. Very few publications on religion were in circulation during this period, and these were brimming with harsh attacks and derisive comments, denouncing religious teachings as feudalistic superstitions and counter-revolutionary ideas. Thus, apart from a few very rare exceptions, Chinese religious studies ceased to exist.

In his 1963 meeting with Professor Ren Jiyu, Chairman Mao commended the scholar for his Marxist approach to the study of Buddhism, remarking that well-written histories of philosophy, literature, and the world necessarily include a critique of theology. Mao's comment led to the establishment in 1964 of China's first research institute for the study of religions, the Institute of World Religions (IWR), which in later years would become China's largest center for religious studies. However, during the 1960s and 1970s, the use of the word "critique" in Mao's statement was taken to mean absolute negation, severe attack, complete suppression, and utter obliteration.

Moreover, less than two years after the founding of the IWR, even the critique of religion became irrelevant, if not impossible. With the eruption and subsequent expansion of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), all traces of religion within Chinese society were wiped out, and the researchers and scholars of the IWR, like those of other academic institutions, were branded bourgeoisie intellectuals and sent to the countryside to undergo "thought reform" through manual labor. Launched by Mao himself, this "revolution" targeted all forms of traditional culture, including religion, and shook the very foundations of social order. Thus, the waning of Chinese religious studies during this period may be likened to the fall of a leaf from a tree trembling in the winter wind.

B. *The Resurgence and Maturation of Chinese Religious Studies*

With the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, the culture-destroying "Cultural Revolution" also drew to a close. Following a two-year struggle over the continuance of established policy by Mao's successor, Hua Guofeng (1921–2008), a new policy of "Reform and Opening" was implemented by Deng Xiaoping at the end of 1978. This truly signified the rebirth of Chinese culture and society.

This new policy led to the lifting of the prohibition on religious activities, and a rapid revival of religions was witnessed during the following decade. As a result of the extreme, forceful suppressions of the past, a fundamental chaos in values, memories of past societal turmoil, the present spiritual crisis, and disillusionment with the revolution, all religions in China, particularly Protestant Christianity and Buddhism, underwent a period of astonishing growth. Chinese officials and intellectuals could not but notice this rapid growth and its effects. At the time, many intellectuals were experiencing a re-orientation of values, and thus, it was perfectly natural that some should turn to the study

of religion in their quest to discover something to satisfy the spiritual needs of the people. A number of these intellectuals would become scholars of religion in the years to follow.

At the same time, the gradual loosening and opening of the conditions for academic research allowed professional scholars of religion to critically confront the subjects of their studies, and in the spirit of the Enlightenment, they began to have "the courage to use their own reasoning" (*sapere aude*), an attitude which further emancipated thought. Many scholars began to base their studies of religion on relevant truths and proofs, rather than on rigid and dogmatic interpretations of the Marxist theory of religion. Taken together, these developments created the specific conditions necessary for the revival of Chinese religious studies in the 1980s and its continued growth in the 1990s and beyond.

Following the reopening of institutions of higher education and research organizations in 1978, the Institute of World Religions, now placed under the leadership of the newly-established Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), finally resumed its research program fourteen years after its founding. More than twenty graduate students from different fields entered the Graduate School of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Institute for Religious Studies at Nanjing University (the latter was founded by the newly-restored Nanjing Union Theological Seminary with the support of Kuang Yaming, then president of the University) to conduct research in such areas as Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Daoism, Confucianism, and even atheism. They were the first students in China to pursue training in the field of religious studies since 1949. In 1979, the Chinese Association of Religious Studies (sponsored and administered by the Institute of World Religions, CASS), China's first academic association in the field of religious studies, was founded in Kunming, providing a variety of opportunities for academic exchange among professional and amateur researchers at universities and institutions across the country. Additionally, the two aforementioned research institutes independently began publishing academic journals in religious studies: *Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu* (*Studies in World Religions*) and *Shijie Zongjiao Ziliao* (*Information on World Religions*),[2] founded by CASS in Beijing, and *Zongjiao* (*Religion*), issued by Nanjing University. Taken together, these three developments—

[2] Now *Shijie Zongjiao Wenhua, Religious Cultures around the World.*

the education of young researchers, the organization of academic associations, and the founding of academic publications—provided clear indications of the revival of Chinese religious studies.

Despite the various social factors restricting graduate student enrollment, academic association activities, and the publication of new academic journals in the years that followed, Peking University's Department of Philosophy, under the sponsorship of the Institute of World Religions, began offering several courses in religious studies. By the mid-1980s, two additional research institutes, each of which published its own academic journal, had been founded in the field of religious studies: the Institute of Religious Studies at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, publisher of the journal *Dangdai Zongjiao Yanjiu* (*Study of Contemporary Religions*), and the Institute for the Study of Daoism and Traditional Culture at Sichuan University, founder of *Zongjiaoxue Yanjiu* (*Research on Religious Studies*). The establishment during this period of the Institute for the Study of Religion at Renmin University in Beijing is also noteworthy, though the institute was staffed by only two scholars. During the following decade, however, the field of Chinese religious studies experienced considerable growth.

C. *Lessons from History*

From this brief account of the history of Chinese religious studies, we can observe a remarkable phenomenon: on the one hand, the birth and resurgence of China's religious studies was simply the collective result of the work of individual scholars, and on the other hand, the decline or demise of the discipline was merely the outcome of adverse social and political conditions.

Moreover, the efficacy of these scholars' efforts was contingent upon their courage—the courage to rely on their own power of reasoning (*sapere aude*)—or to use a popular Chinese idiom, their willingness to "liberate their minds" (思想解放). At the turn of the 20th century, this meant having the intellectual courage to break through the constraints of a conservative society and seek out new ideas and practices beyond the ancient traditions and vast expanses of the Chinese motherland. During the late 1970s, this entailed breaking through the repressive environment of authority (as well as of society) and assuming a much broader perspective in intellectual pursuits, courageously seeking external solutions to the various challenges confronting scholars and average people, including intellectual, moral, and spiritual problems.

There were, of course, many scholars during this latter period who, witnessing the fate of the thousands upon thousands of dissenters consigned to labor camps (e.g. those labeled "rightists" in 1957 and multitudes of others during the political campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s), lacked the courage to challenge Party policy. Rather than condemn those who did not speak out, it should be noted that during this period, many ordinary people chose to cooperate rather than resist, participating in political movements rather than remaining neutral in order to protect themselves. Given the social and political atmosphere of the time, it is not surprising that independent scholarship yielded to scholarly work that reflected the reigning ideology of Marxist-Leninist thought. As a result of these prolonged conditions, most scholars (and ordinary citizens) would lose the courage to use their own power of reasoning. Thus, it may be said that the demise of religious studies, as well as of the humanities, in mainland China during that period was the product of historical conditions, and the revival of China's religious studies was, in part, due to the resurgence of scholars' "courage to reason." It is evident that history offers Chinese scholars many valuable lessons.

II. *Theoretical Advancement*

A. *From "Opium" to "Culture"*

As previously mentioned, the revival and growth of religious studies in China required both subjective conditions: individual courage and emancipation of thought; and objective conditions, meaning a reformed and open society. While the achievement of the latter was dictated by political leaders within the CCP, the realization of the former was dependent upon scholars working within the discipline.

For Chinese scholars of religious studies, the process of thought emancipation was characterized by two major landmarks, the debate over "religion as opium" and the notion of "religion as culture." In truth, this process has defined the theoretical advancement of modern Chinese religious studies.

In the early 1980s, the primary obstacle to the advancement of Chinese religious studies was a general attitude of negativity toward religion, rooted in a one-sided, dogmatic interpretation of Marx's well-

known statement, "Religion is the opium of the people."[3] During this period, Marx held a position of incontrovertible political authority in China. However, somewhat emboldened by Deng Xiaoping's call for a more "comprehensive and accurate" understanding of Marxist ideology, a number of leading scholars from Nanjing and Shanghai and from within the Protestant Church, including Bishop K.H. Ting, Zheng Jianye, and Zhao Fusan, contended that this remark should neither be taken as the essence of the Marxist view of religion nor as a conclusively negative assessment of religion. Seeing religion as merely an illegal drug or "opium" would result in the relegation of believers to the status of "opium-eaters" or drug addicts and the vilification of religious leaders as drug dealers, amounting to a justification of the past twenty years of religious oppression.[4] Further statements in this and other essays, these scholars argued, indicated Marx's great sympathy for the masses of religious believers.[5] Moreover, the metaphor of "opium" could be understood as having more than a merely negative implication, for many prominent religious figures in Europe made this very same comparison before Marx, alluding to the widely recognized analgesic properties of opium during that era. Such a comparison differed drastically from the familiar Chinese view of the notorious illegal drug, which served as a reminder of the Chinese humiliation during the Anglo-Chinese "Opium War" (1839–1842).[6]

A number of other leading scholars, primarily those from the Institute of World Religions in Beijing, such as Ren Jiyu and Lü Daji, argued that the notion of religion as opium could be viewed as the

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[3] "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law," in *Karl Marx & Frederick Engles, Collected Works*, New York: International Publishers, 1975, Vol. 3, p. 175.

[4] Zheng Jianye wrote: "The misunderstanding of this famous remark by Marx offered the extreme leftist policy a theoretical basis…using this line of reasoning, they then inflicted various persecutions upon many patriotic religious people and laborers." From "A Discussion of Religion and Opium," by Qian Xue (Zheng's penname), in *Zongjiao*, No. 1, 1980.

[5] Zhao Fusan provided a context for Marx's comparison of religion to opium: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people." He explained, "These words are full of affection for religious laboring people." From "How To Understand the Essence of Religion" in *Zhongguo Shehui Kexue*, *Social Sciences of China*, No. 3, 1986, p. 5.

[6] See Ding Guangxun (Bishop K.H. Ting), "Hold to the Principle of the United Front in Dealing with Religious Issues," in *Zongjiao*, No. 1, 1985, p. 2.

cornerstone of the Marxist theory of religion.[7] Opium could, indeed, be an effective anodyne, they argued, but this was only because of its anesthetic or narcotic function.[8] Thus, within the context of class struggle, religion was viewed by the oppressed as having a reactionary function.[9] Of course, in a society beset by suffering, such a function may also be viewed as salutary by those in need of relief. In any case, spiritual opium, unlike material opium, was not to be eradicated. According to these scholars, the former extreme "leftist" attitude toward religion could not be merely understood as the product of Marx's statement but rather, had complex socio-political origins.[10]

The debate referred to by many as the "North-South Opium War" (because one side was based in Shanghai and Nanjing and the other was in Beijing) had an extremely positive impact on the field of Chinese religious studies during the mid-1980s. Although the two sides emphasized different aspects of Marx's statement in making their arguments, both groups unanimously rejected the extreme "leftist" interpretations of the past and advocated the right of each side to uphold its point of view and to participate equally in an impartial debate. This kind of scholarly exchange was unimaginable during the era of Mao Zedong. Following the debate, scholars increasingly abandoned the dogmatic interpretation of the Marxist theory of religion, adopted a more open attitude toward religion, and began to approach their own studies of religion from a broader perspective.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, both as a result of this more "open" attitude as well as of the prevailing trend within Chinese academia toward "the study of cultures," a relatively new concept emerged and

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[7] These scholars employed quotes from V.I. Lenin to bolster their position: "Religion is opium, narcotizing the people—this famous remark by Marx is the cornerstone of the Marxist worldview with regard to the question of religion." From *Selected Works of V.I. Lenin*, Vol. II, p. 375. Quoted in Lü Daji, "On the Role of Religion in History," in *Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu*, *Studies in World Religions*, No. 4, 1982. Lü has since changed his position, claiming that it is incorrect to view these statements as the cornerstone of the Marxist view of religion.

[8] Interestingly, Zhao Fusan discovered that the word "narcotizing" (*Mazui* in Chinese), which appeared in the Chinese translation of Lenin's remark, was, in fact, added by the Chinese translator!

[9] For example, Lü Daji wrote, "By 'opium of the people,'Marx meant obviously that religion is the opium, or spiritual narcotic, for the people alone; as for the reactionary ruling class, religion is mainly a tool that is used for their reactionary rule." See "On the Role of Religion in History," in *Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu*, No. 4, 1982.

[10] See Lü Daji, "A Scientific Guide to Correct Understanding of Religious Issue," in *Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu*, No. 3, 1981.

spread swiftly within the field of religious studies: the notion of "religion as culture." This notion was expressed quite accurately in the following statements: "Religion is a component of the spiritual culture of nations";[11] "Religious phenomena are intricately connected to the cultural phenomena of mankind";[12] and "In defining the relation of religion to each of the three levels that comprise world civilizations—physical production, institutional structure, and ideology—we find that at the first level there is mutual interaction; at the second level, there is mutual interaction and overlap; and at the third level, religion becomes the core while also interacting and overlapping."[13] However, this notion has often been expressed more simply as "religion is a type of culture" or "religion is an important component of national culture."

Although this concept is not new, and in its simplified form it may have led to some theoretical confusion, it had a considerable impact on China's political and social environment during the late 1980s. This impact was seen within the field of religious studies in the broadening of perspectives and the establishment of new areas of research, for it broke with the former convention of studying religion solely from an ideological or political standpoint. As more and more people embraced the notion of "religion as culture" (urged on by Zhao Puchu (1907–2002), then President of the Buddhist Association of China, and a number of other religious leaders), the concept of "religion as opium" gradually diminished in influence.

It is noteworthy that the religious backgrounds of the major contributors to the so-called "North-South Opium War," particularly those of the southern contingent in Shanghai and Nanjing, ranged greatly. In actuality, during the Mao era, when revolutionary ideology dominated all spheres of life, religious believers (most prominently, the leaders of religious associations) were more interested in conforming to Party policy in order to assure the survival of their religions. However, following the rehabilitation of spiritual and traditional culture under Deng Xiaoping, these same religious leaders and believers, recognizing the significance of the "religion as culture" theory as a strong

[11] Zhao Fusan, 1985.

[12] 方立天/ Fang Litian, *中国传统与佛教文化 / Zhongguo chuantong yu fojiao wenhua* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1988). (*Chinese Traditions and Buddhist Culture*).

[13] 何光沪/ He Guanghu, *月映万川 / Yueying wanchuan* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1988a, 2003) 241.

rationalization for religious practice, became staunch advocates of this theory in the late 1980s.

Following the popularization of this new concept, numerous renowned scholars and religious leaders began to emphasize the significance of religious studies to the understanding of cultural phenomena. As a result, the discipline rose in status within academic and political circles. This notion of "religion as culture" also served to broaden the field of study. It was recognized that culture, in a broad sense, does not merely include literature, art, music, philosophy, and science, but also morality, politics, economics, law, and numerous other areas of study. The realization that culture is not only immeasurably rich but also spectacularly multifaceted greatly enriched both the study of religion as culture and the study of the relationship between religion and culture.

Thus, beginning in the late 1980s and continuing into the 1990s, there was a great upsurge in academic research, translations, and popular writings on religions and their relation to various cultural forms. New journals and anthologies were published, including *Jidujiao Wenhua Pinglun* (*Christian Culture Review*), *Fojiao Wenhua* (*Buddhist Culture*), and *Zongjiao yu Wenhua* (*Religion and Culture*). Even the title of the periodical published by IWR was changed from *Information on World Religions* to *The Religious Cultures of the World*. Thus, many scholars would agree with the following observation by Lü Daji:

> Looking back at the road that religious studies has travelled since 1949, we can say that no other theory or idea restrained the thinking of scholars of religion so severely as the idea of religion as "reactionary politics," and no other theory or idea played as great a liberating role as the idea of "religion as culture."[14]

Of course, some scholars rejected the notion of "religion as culture," arguing instead that though the *tangible*, or formal, manifestations of religion may be a *form* of culture, the *intangible* components of religion constitute the *spirit* of culture.[15] Nevertheless, numerous scholars recognized the significance of the proliferation of this concept to the advancement of contemporary Chinese religious studies.

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[14] Lu Daji, "A Century of Modern Academic Studies of Religions in China in Retrospect and Prospect," in *Jiangsu Shehui Kexue, Social Sciences in Jiangsu*, No. 3, 2002.

[15] 何光沪/ He Guanghu, *何光沪自选集 / He Guanghu zixuanji* (Guangxi: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1999) 18–19. (*The Selected Writings of He Guanghu).* He Guanghu, *Yueying wanchuan*, 462–63.

B. *From Critique to Research*

As previously noted, such was the social and political atmosphere during the thirty years following the founding of the PRC in 1949 that all discourse on religion taking place outside of religious circles was limited to severe attacks and searing mockeries. Only two books on Christianity were published during this period: *How Did Imperialism Make Use of Christianity to Invade China?* and *How Did U.S. Imperialists Make Use of Christianity to Invade China?*

Around the time of his aforementioned meeting with Professor Ren Jiyu, Chairman Mao harshly criticized the official publication of the Buddhist Association of China as "non-Marxist." At that time, such a denunciation was taken very seriously and, regardless of whether directed at a Marxist or Buddhist, portended ominous events to come. Moreover, this particular accusation was made by the "Great Leader" himself. Thus, it was not the least bit surprising that the periodical was banned shortly thereafter.

Raised and educated in the politically-volatile environment of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the vast majority of China's religious studies scholars naturally accepted the critique of religion as their principal function. Until the mid-1980s, the Institute of World Religions, the largest and most influential of the few institutions in the field, contained only departments dedicated to the research of individual religions, such as Buddhism and Christianity; thus, it lacked a religious studies department in the modern sense, having instead a department of atheism.

From the late 1980s to the late 1990s, religious studies institutes were established within the Academies of Social Sciences of nine provinces, cities, and autonomous regions, i.e., Xinjiang, Gansu, Ningxia, Yunnan, Shanxi, Tianjin, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, and Tibet. During this period, more and more centers for religious studies appeared on university campuses across the country; Peking University, Renmin University, and Wuhan University established their own departments of religious studies. Even the State Administration for Religious Affairs and the Party School of the Central Committee of the CCP founded religious studies institutions in order that research on religion might be carried out under direct government supervision.

The establishment of these institutions signified the growing importance of religious studies in China and, in the case of the latter two, the significance of the study of religion to policy. However, only a limited number of religious studies institutions (most notably, the religious

studies departments established by universities) recognized the need to train and hire qualified faculty within the field.

At the same time, several government-sanctioned religious organizations began to emphasize and allocate resources to the study of religion, as well as to the education of their own professionals. Hence, the number of professional researchers increased dramatically, as did graduate student enrollment in the field, though few universities were authorized to recruit undergraduate students to their departments of religious studies (today, these include Shandong, Nanjing, and Central Minzu Universities).

During this period, Chinese scholars began to extend the scope of their research beyond the histories of Buddhism and Daoism to include new areas of inquiry, with considerable results. New studies were conducted in such areas as the histories and thought of Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Daoism, Confucianism, Tibetan Buddhism, and China's primitive and ethnic minority religions. Researchers even began to delve into the studies of Hinduism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Sikhism, Shamanism, Shinto, and new religious movements. Also, multidisciplinary studies of the philosophy, anthropology and sociology of religion as well as of the relationship of religion to various cultural forms were undertaken. Within these areas, a considerable quantity of theses, reports, translations, and monographs emerged. From 1978 to 1997, researchers at the Institute of World Religions published nearly 1,000 scholarly articles, 180 monographs, 70 translations, 15 dictionaries, and 132 individual issues of periodicals, in addition to numerous popular publications, investigative reports, and compilations of classic texts. Furthermore, this period witnessed the publication of a series of encyclopedias as well as numerous reference books, popular writings, and even cartoons, providing readers across the country with a much more balanced and objective understanding of religions.

Of course, included among these publications were many crude and careless works, and some authors simply reiterated or plagiarized the ideas of others rather than contributing new and original thought. Nevertheless, taken together, these works and achievements demonstrated that Chinese scholars of religious studies had, as a whole, gradually transitioned from their previously hostile and biased position toward a more objective and balanced approach to the research of religions. Naturally, the views of individual scholars varied, with some remaining quite negative and hostile toward religion while others

became extremely positive and sympathetic. Nonetheless, the general trend was from the former to the latter. This transformation was, to a certain extent, the result of an increased exchange between Chinese and Western scholars and their ideas during this period, impelled by international visits and conferences and the Chinese translation of important Western works in the field, including those of authors such as John Hick (1988), Christopher Dawson (1989), Arnold Toynbee (1990), Peter Berger (1991), Paul Tillich (1999), Hans Kung, F. Max Muller, Rudolf Otto, Ninian Smart, W. C. Smith, and Rodney Stark, as well works in the fields of anthropology, phenomenology, philosophy, psychology, and sociology of religion.

C. *From Negative to Positive*

It goes without saying that the unconditional rejection of religion as "opium," the condemnation of Christian missionaries as "Imperialist spies," and the denunciation of high-level Buddhist monks and Islamic leaders as "feudalist oppressors" led to an overwhelmingly negative appraisal of religion within every social arena and academic discipline. Influenced by the deteriorating conditions of religion in China from the 1950s through the 1970s, most religious studies scholars adopted a negative outlook in conducting research within the field during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Thus, it is no surprise that the works of researchers during this period generally reflected a negative or antagonistic attitude toward the subject of their studies.

However, as these scholars, through earnest study, gained a greater understanding of their field, they gradually abandoned their biased and negative views. In the years that followed, a number of scholars of religious studies began to adopt an increasingly positive attitude toward the subject of their studies; this transformation was manifested to such an extent in the works of scholars within the field that it might be said to constitute a trend within Chinese religious studies from "the negative" to "the positive."

By the mid-1990s, a number of scholars emerged who, though not themselves members of a Christian church, felt a strong affinity with Christianity; contributing a great deal to the public understanding of Christianity through their writings, translations, editing work, and cultural activities, these scholars became known as "cultural Christians." In recent years, the label "cultural Buddhist" has been applied to scholars who occupy a similar position in relation to Buddhism. The

emergence of such terms points to the significant role of scholars in the spread of certain religions within contemporary Chinese society. The emergence of a "religious culture craze"[16] during this period is a further testament to the contributions of these scholars.

However, since most Christians would decline to call one who has not been baptized a "Christian" and, similarly, many Buddhists would be unwilling to describe one who does not observe the "five precepts" (in Sanskrit, pañca-śīlāni) a "Buddhist," the author prefers to use the term "cultural religion" in describing the aforementioned phenomenon. This term refers to the numerous religious phenomena that are generated through various cultural activities and expressed in diverse cultural forms. For instance, a large number of the members (particularly young members) of urban churches, including those of "underground churches," "house churches," or "meeting points," became interested in Christianity through reading Chinese books on the topic. Indeed, within contemporary Chinese society, many new religious developments are brought about through cultural activities, in which religious studies plays a prominent role.

The term "religious culture" may also be applied to the growing popular, cultural, and even commercial celebration of Christmas Eve by thousands of young people in China's major urban centers. While most participants are not themselves Christians, many are, to a certain extent, interested in Christianity. Thus, it may be said that for many within contemporary Chinese society, participation in religious activity derives from an interest in the religious elements of cultural activities.

Finally, as negative attitudes toward religion have gradually yielded to more positive ones, China's political leadership has begun to take notice. Recognition of this trend was expressed by CCP General Secretary, Hu Jintao, in his frequently quoted speech to the Party's 17th National Congress: "[We should] draw upon the positive contributions of religious believers and leaders in the development of the economy and society as a whole." Hu's statement is generally regarded as an expression of a positive shift in the Party's policy toward religion. This further demonstrates the intricate relationship between religious studies and China's social development.

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[16] This term has been used by several scholars to describe the upsurge in Chinese citizens' interest in religious books, images, creeds, and practices during the 1990s.

III. *Confronting Current Challenges*

A. *Conceptual Confusion*

While the vast majority of public discourse on religion derives from academia, a number of conceptual confusions have already begun to emerge among both professional and amateur scholars in the field. The following examples were taken from a number of major discussions and debates concerning issues of fundamental theoretical significance in contemporary Chinese society.

1) *Concerning the relationship of religion to culture*: The prevalent position among scholars of religion still reduces religion to a kind of culture or cultural form, ignoring the differences between the tangible and intangible aspects of religion which constitute the fundamental difference between religion and culture. An example of this is seen in the confusion of Shaolin Gongfu with Buddhism and the resultant justification of the gradual transformation of the famous Shaolin Temple into a profit-seeking venture, an issue of intense controversy.

2) *Concerning the relationship of religion to politics (the church-state relationship)*: On the one hand, many scholars have failed to question the legitimacy of the interference of government in religion, claiming that "the separation of church and state" refers solely to the prohibition against the interference of religion in government and public education. Such a position clearly disregards the rights of religious organizations to autonomous operation and political expression. Yet, on the other hand, there are those who would go so far as to propose that Confucianism be established as the official state religion of China. This view is equally problematic.

3) *Concerning the nature of Confucianism*: Some have rationalized the aforementioned proposition on the basis that Confucianism embodies traditional Chinese culture, while never actually rejecting Buddhism, Daoism, and other traditions. There are those who both continue to deny that Confucianism is a form of religion and, at the same time, claim that Confucianism, as the state religion of the Qing Dynasty, collapsed along with that autocratic system during the Revolution of 1911.

4) *Concerning the nature of "Hanyu Shenxue" (Chinese Language Theology)*: Many scholars of Christian studies, including both proponents and opponents of the notion of "Hanyu Shenxue," misconstrue this concept as a special kind of Chinese theology represented by a small number

of "cultural Christians," e.g., Liu Xiaofeng and He Guanghu, as well as scholars of the humanities and social sciences who are interested in Christian studies. However, the notion of "Hanyu Shenxue," adopted by Liu and Daniel Yeung in the mid-1990s and recently popularized, was originally intended to emphasize the linguistic aspects of theology in order to distinguish it from "Zhongguo Shenxue" (China's, or Chinese, theology), which stresses geographical and political characteristics. Based on this limited definition of the term, the preponderance of theological works published by scholars in the Chinese language, from Matteo Ricci in the 17th century to T. C. Chao in the 20th century and from the Chinese Protestants of Hong Kong to the Chinese Catholics of Taiwan, should be *excluded* from the category of "Chinese Language Theology." Moreover, since we can identify very few works of substance, beyond several discussions of definition and characteristics, which are sufficiently consistent with the aforementioned classification, it would seem that the subdiscipline of "Hanyu Shenxue" lacks any concrete content.

The abovementioned issues are but a few of the conceptual challenges confronted by the Chinese field of religious studies. Additional issue include the connection between religion and extremism or terrorism as well as the relationships between native and non-native religions and past and present religious conditions in China. In short, in reflecting upon these complex religious issues, Chinese scholars of religion are confronting the considerable task of resolving multitudinous misconceptions and clarifying our theoretical positions.

B. *Deficiencies in Methodology*

Based on the author's own observations, the overwhelming majority of subdisciplines within the field of Chinese religious studies currently lack clear methodologies.

1) The subdiscipline of the *sociology of religion* was first established in China in the early 1990s with the translation into Chinese of works of prominent Western scholars, e.g., Peter Berger's *The Sacred Canopy* (Gao and He, 1991). In recent years, more and more Chinese scholars have begun conducting field research and publishing their results (Gao 2005, Chen 2005, Li 2005, Ng et al. 2005). A recent study conducted at Purdue University by Professor Yang Fenggang is of particular note; Yang completed his formal training in the sociology of religion in the U.S. and is very familiar with the theories of Rodney Stark and other

scholars in the field. Thus, he has been able to apply the research methodologies and techniques specific to the sociology of religion in his work. This is precisely what is needed for the development of the discipline in China since the majority of scholars in the field lack formal training in the methodologies and techniques of sociology.

2) The Chinese subdiscipline of the *psychology of religion* has not yet advanced beyond the stage of the introduction and translation of Western works and theories (e.g., Chen Biao's presentation of the works of Erik Erickson and Gordon W. Allport and his translation of a work of Michael Argyle). Chen Bing's, for example, *Buddhist Psychology* is merely a mixture of psychological terms and Buddhist doctrines. The works of Liang Liping (Liang 2004), Fan Lizhu, and Gao Shining (Gao 2005) may perhaps also be regarded as belonging to the subdiscipline of the social psychology of religion. However, this author has yet to identify any individual works on the psychology of religion published by Chinese scholars. This is presumably both because Chinese scholars of psychology are only now beginning to take an interest in religious studies and because few Chinese religious studies scholars have received formal training in psychology.

3) The Chinese *anthropology of religion* long lacked methodology appropriate to the subject of study. It was not until recently that several young scholars began to apply modern anthropological methodologies in conducting field research. Examples of such scholars include Wu Fei and Huang Jianbo, who have received training in the modern methodologies of anthropology (Wu 2001, Huang 2007, and Kang 2006). Ultimately, the greatest challenge facing this subdiscipline is the absence of suitable methodologies.

4) The Chinese study of the *philosophy of religion*, in the modern sense, also began with the translation into Chinese of the seminal works of renowned Western philosophers, including those of John Hick (1988) and Paul Tillich (1999). A number of Chinese scholars have contributed their works to the field, e.g., Zhao Dunhua (1994), Lu Guolong (1997), and Fang Litian (2000). Additionally, Zhang Zhigang's *A Study of the Philosophy of Religion* (2003) provides a general introduction to and critique of the modern Western philosophy of religion. He Guanghu's *Pluralized Ideas of God* (1991), is a survey of 20th century Western religious thought and promotes the adoption of a common framework within the discipline. Based on his research on the compatibility of Judeo-Christian and Chinese traditions, He Guanghu has striven to present a global philosophy of religion, providing a shared philosophical

basis for inter-religious dialogue (He 2008). Wang Zhicheng has also emphasized the connection between inter-religious dialogue and the philosophy of religion (Wang 2005). Nonetheless, the lack of original methodology still poses a significant challenge to the development of the philosophy of religion in China.

5) When compared with the other subdisciplines of religious studies, Chinese scholars have published most prolifically within the field of the *history of religion*. The majority of these works are descriptions of the histories of various religions, particularly Chinese Buddhism and Daoism; a number of others discuss the histories of the Christian church and Christian theology (Tang Yi 1992; Feng Jiafang 1992; Zhuo Xinping 1998a, b; Zhang Baichun 2000; Yue Feng 2008), Islam (Jin Yijiu 1992), and Chinese folk religions (Ma Xisha & Han Bingfang 1992). Of particular note are multi-volume works on *The History of Chinese Buddhism* (Ren ed. 1981), *An Outline of the History of Daoist Thought* (Qing Xitai 1980), and *A History of Chinese Confucianism* (Li Shen 1999, 2000). However, beyond these, few original works have been published in this field in China. The fact that many of the books on traditional Chinese religions are published by scholars who are unable to access relevant foreign language resources or who employ the research methodologies and draw upon the achievements of non-Chinese scholars makes it apparent that one of the major limitations to the continued development of this discipline in China is the absence of new and expansive methodologies.

C. *Restrictive Conditions*

The third challenge confronting Chinese religious studies derives from China's current system and organization of publication, education, and civil society and thus exists outside of the control of religious studies scholars themselves.

1) According to current policy, works on religion must be approved by the Press and Publication Bureau (新闻出版局) prior to publication. Thus, all manuscripts on religion, especially those concerning Islam and Christianity, are required to undergo a round of official censorship, usually conducted by the Religious Affairs Bureau, prior to submission to the publisher, who is responsible for paying the censorship fee. Furthermore, there is the possibility that the manuscript will not be approved for publication. Many publishers are unwilling to assume the high professional risk of submitting a "problem book"

to the press, for this could, ultimately, prove detrimental to both their career and their employees. Of course, it is not necessary to elaborate on the potential or existential restrictions and challenges that such a system of publication creates both within and beyond the field of Chinese religious studies.

2) Despite thirty years of development, few Chinese universities have established religious studies departments because only a small number of China's thousands of universities are authorized to enroll undergraduate students in the field of religious studies. Thus, only a few hundred of China's 20 million undergraduate students are currently engaged in the study of religions. This is the result of the persistently negative evaluation of religion by a small number of officials, who continue to confuse "religious studies" with "religion" and consider religion from an excessively political standpoint, thus fearing the development and expansion of China's religious studies programs. Of course, there are many more institutes and centers for religious studies which, garnering neither funding nor resources from such officials, are able to enroll graduate students. In the author's estimation, there are in mainland China fewer than 800 scholars, including amateur researchers and graduate students, currently conducting research on various religions within the numerous subdisciplines of religious studies. Within a nation as vast as China, with its great variety of flourishing religions and hundreds of millions of believers, the work of this small team of Chinese scholars might be compared to that of an army of ants confronting several elephants. Moreover, within the current centralized system of education, it is extremely difficult to expand or strengthen this team.

3) Even more problematic are the great obstacles facing religious studies graduates seeking employment in the field. As a result, many prospective and promising scholars have left the discipline and numerous students are unwilling to choose this field of study. In actuality, the current demand for new religious studies teachers in Chinese universities is extremely low due to the aforementioned limitations on the expansion and development of programs. Even Religious Affairs Bureaus at and below the provincial level, those institutions within which the demand for religious studies experts is particularly high, tend to employ demobilized soldiers rather than religious studies graduates.

Ultimately, such challenges will only be resolved through the restructuring of social institutions. Since several Buddhist organizations, such

as the Shaolin Temple, are already recruiting young graduates to staff their programs, we can imagine that if religious organizations across the nation were truly to become autonomously operating NGOs or civic organizations, such problems might be greatly alleviated. Of course, these reforms should be limited to non-profit, religious enterprises. While deserving of additional exploration, this proposition is beyond the scope of this paper.

Epilogue: A Long Journey Requiring Great Courage

In previous remarks concerning the future prospects of the field of Chinese religious studies, the author emphasized the great importance of the subjective conditions of Chinese scholars to the development of the discipline. The present account stresses the challenges and limitations beyond the control of religious studies scholars which, regardless of their approaches, these scholars must inevitably confront.

Once regarded as an impenetrable barrier, the Great Wall is now merely a historic site reminding people of the remote past. This change derives in part from the transformation of subjective conditions resulting, for example, from the invasion of the Manchurian warriors and from such modern inventions as the airplane and missile; i.e., it is due to the emancipation of thought and the courage of individuals.

For this very reason, this brief account of Chinese religious studies concludes with the following prognosis: the development of this discipline in China will be a long journey requiring great courage.

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CHAPTER TWO

HISTORY AS A FACTOR IN THE SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF CHINESE RELIGION

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In the modern study of religion, the disciplines of history and sociology are known to intersect at various points. It is the thesis of this chapter that such intersections should become more commonplace, i.e. that the writing of historically-informed sociology and sociologically-aware history should be the norm rather than the exception. Thus, we pose the question of just how insights from the discipline of history might assist our sociological inquiry. The immediate answer, of course, is that the insertion of a level of historical consciousness into sociological discourse adds an important dimension to our analyses of the data assembled in field research. History, as the larger picture of what has been happening to the people and institutions we study, provides an additional tool for contextualizing the data produced by our research; in the shorter term, it further transforms an understanding of *what is* into one of *what is becoming*. Any given instance of sociological research provides, as it were, a snapshot of the subject at a point in time. Adding a historical dimension, which may be done in any one of a variety of ways, transforms that snapshot into a moving picture and allows us to distinguish short-term fluctuations in religious communities from long-term trends.

Let us consider as a preliminary illustration the larger picture of 20th century China. We see the early transition from an empire to a republic, the disruptions of World War II and the 1911 Chinese Revolution, and the subsequent establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC). This century of change, ultimately capped by the Cultural Revolution, suggests a larger context for the understanding of current religious institutions. Worshipping communities, both local assemblies and national organizations, experienced change, chaos, and even an organizational hiatus during the Cultural Revolution, yet in

ensuing decades, underwent a period of relative vibrancy. The fast-paced history of 20th century China provides the context for understanding the religious life that we now study.[1]

Due to the rapid changes in China's religious landscape during the past generation many of the religious communities we now study were either re-established in the 1980s or, even more likely, are functioning within newly-established religious structures (e.g. Buddhist temples, Christian churches, or Islamic mosques), though some participating individuals may carry a memory of earlier participation in a previously-existing religious community. Thus, if we were to attempt to develop a current profile of any particular local community, our historical consciousness would lead us to ask how that profile had changed over the past generation. At the same time, the present profile provides a foundation for anticipating changes that will occur in the future.

Like other disciplines, history is an evolving field of inquiry. At present, three themes in historical inquiry seem particularly suited for integration into the process of sociological inquiry relative to the life of religious institutions and offer the greatest possibility for enlarging the amount of valuable information derived from such research.

I. *Critical Historical Studies*

Critical historical studies is generally viewed as originating with the penning of the *Declaration on the Forged Donation of Constantine* by Lorenzo Valla. An employee of the King of Naples (who was, at that time, at war with the Papal States), Valla (1407–57), took it upon himself to examine the credentials of a document widely accepted as having given Pope Sylvester I (r. 314–335) political hegemony in the West. Rather than assuming in his interpretation of the document that it was, as everyone believed, the assignment of authority to the pope (and, by implication, his successors), Valla incorporated a variety of approaches

[1] My own views on modern Chinese history has been significantly shaped by Luo Zhufeng, ed., *Religion under Socialism in China* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1991); Donald E. MacInnis, *Religion in China Today: Policy & Practice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989); Anthony C. Yu, *State and Religion in China: Historical and Textual Perspectives* (Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing, 2005), and Alan Hunter and Kim-Kwong Chan, *Protestantism in Contemporary China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

to support the argument that the document was forged in the 8th century and constituted, in effect, an attempt to falsify history.

Central among these methods (though commonplace today) was Valla's insistence upon independent verification of the document's issuance. If Constantine had granted Sylvester political hegemony in Western Europe early in the 4th century, what actions had the Pope taken to manifest this new authority? Where was the announcement to the people of Rome of his new status? Which laws did he subsequently implement? Which officials did he appoint? Where were the monuments or coins documenting this transfer of power? What evidence existed to authenticate Sylvester's rule? Where were the laws, charters, and other documents issued in his name, the lists of officials he had appointed? Equally important, which among Sylvester's successors acknowledged the existence of, or even mentioned, the document upon which their authority was allegedly based? This lack of independent evidence formed the major pillar of Valla's devastating attack. After Valla, history would never be the same. For historians, the case against the forged document was not nearly as important as the *methods* Valla employed to arrive at his conclusion.

The development of critical methodologies within the field of history would, in subsequent decades, proceed at an ever-increasing rate, and in the 19th century, these same methodologies would make the considerable leap from secular to religious history as historians, particularly in Germany, began to apply critical methods to the study of the religious advancement of the West. Drawing upon both philosophical and critical tools, scholars such as Frederick C. Baur (d. 1860) began to reexamine the ancient church, using both the text of the New Testament and contemporary documents as historical texts. Critical methods were subsequently applied in the reanalysis of Jewish history, beginning with the work of Julius Wellhausen. Central among the ideas at stake was what had been termed *heilsgeschichte*, or holy history, an approach to writing history that assumed supernatural forces were an ongoing causative factor in the historical process. This approach to historical writing was also employed in hagiographies, or accounts of the lives of holy people into which were intricately woven various invisible forces and personages not otherwise accessible to the average person. A new generation of German historians argued that despite its value within the religious realm, *heilsgeschichte* was not suitable for the university. They argued for a "scientific" history, one which focused on the more mundane and generally-accessible causative factors propelling history

forward. They insisted upon a rule of uniformity, a recognition that the same forces driving history in the present were also operating in the ancient world. They demanded that the supernatural occurrences (that seemed to defy physical laws) of previous centuries be treated in the same manner as those of the present era.

The development of critical historical methods during the 19th century was received by many at the time as an attack on religious belief and an assault upon those religious institutions whose authority rested largely on the ancient documents. The initial use of these critical tools did lead some to abandon religion. Yet, the primary and most impressive outcome of the early application of these methods was the apparent undermining of the historical integrity of some sacred texts. Within Eastern religions, for example, these historical critical tools were widely applied in the analysis of the older Buddhist texts, such as those initially transmitted to China in the early centuries of the Common Era.

The great majority of scholars, however, chose to engage the issues being raised. The debates that raged, and in some arenas continue to rage, led to rewritings of history, even as the tools themselves experienced a period of rapid evolution. These tools proved more destructive to the methods previously used in the writing of history than to the subjects of these writings. For the purpose of our example, these critical historical tools produced a host of new insights into the emergence and development of religious communities. They highlighted the historical flow within which religious institutions operate and underscored the modifications that these institutions undergo over time as believers adjust to the same cause-effect forces that are operative in the secular world. We see that these were not timeless organizations that occasionally produced outstanding thinkers, who provided, as it were, a new paint job on an old building. Generation after generation these institutions (as well as their members and leaders) were thrust forward into a new era, continually required to alter that which they had received from the past to meet the demands of the present. Not only the façade, but the entire building, was constantly undergoing renovation. The process of change to which religious institutions were subjected intensified exponentially over the course of the 20th century.

Critical history forces us to recognize the malleable nature of religious communities, constantly changing in response to internal demands and reaction to external pressures. A certain degree of understanding of the changes experienced by the religious organism removes the barriers in our efforts to identify the structures and forces operating

within a given community. Because we understand that we are viewing an ever-changing entity, we recognize that, over time, rituals will subtly evolve, the message of lectures and sermons will transform, and the people to whom the institution appeals will change. Ultimately, of course, we become aware that *we*, through our studies of these institutions, become an additional change factor in the lives of those we study, as they react and adapt to our scholarly endeavors.

Within the modern world, even the most traditional religious institutions (including those rural ceremonial centers that survived the upheavals of the 20th century) and ethnic communities, seemingly protected from external interference by law, participate in this continuous evolution, though often in ways not immediately apparent to the outside observer. Integral to our work is the documentation of changes over time within both the institutions and the communities that support them, as well as the identification of the operative agents of change. If change is a significant feature of the more traditional aspects of religious life throughout the countryside, it must be that much more integral to the life of religious institutions in the hubs of urban development.

Thus, the critical historical approach calls our attention to change, even when change is seemingly of little importance in our subject's life, highlighting particular kinds of change to which we should be alert. It does so by constantly driving the researcher beyond the obvious structures to the underlying causative factors at work in religious life. It continually mandates the investigation of commonly-accepted assumptions. In the case of the *Declaration of Constantine*, Valla challenged the legitimacy of a widely-accepted historical document. In the 19th century, scholars challenged some of the basic theoretical assumptions that had given structure to the writing of religious history. In our observations of living institutions, as well as our examination of historical documents and artifacts, we utilize a set of questions directed toward the object of our research while simultaneously reexamining the adequacy of the specific framework out of which our inquiries proceed.

II. *Globalization*

From critical history, we turn to another area of historical endeavor that has significant relevance for our sociological research—globalization. Globalization is, of course, a category employed principally

in analyzing the transformations of global economic structures since World War II. More relevant to our studies, however, is the recent appropriation of globalization by cultural analysts and historians as a means of understanding watershed social changes resulting from advances in transportation and communications during the 20th century and up to the present day. As a result of these changes, the relevance of geographical considerations, especially national boundaries, to the creation and maintenance of international, and even intercontinental, human relationships has been radically reduced. In the wake of these changes, a new global community, one that nurtures primary relationships and allows an unprecedented level of exchange of cultural and intellectual commodities, has emerged. Historically speaking, this global community consists of individuals who have realized that although we do not share the same past we have now entered the same present.[2]

It is of some interest to explore the question of precisely when and how this global community was constituted. Was it merely the end product of a long process of global shrinking coupled with an ever-growing number of people who came to consider themselves world citizens? Certainly, some truth exists in this long-term outlook. Of greater interest, however, is our abrupt entrance into this new era and the apparent brevity of the transition, during which masses of people seem to have shifted their self image. Assuming that this shift did, in fact occur, when did it take place and by what factors was it defined?

The links connecting the web-like structures from which this new community emerged may be found in airport terminals, television studios, telephone offices, tourist companies, the headquarters of multinational corporations, and most recently, in the rapid expansion of the Internet. This new global community has become the primary instrument for the exchange and diffusion of culture. A concert in London, a speech in Nairobi, or a soccer match in Rio can be viewed simul-

[2] My understanding of globalization as present history has been particularly enhanced by the work of Wolf Schäfer, the director of the Center for Global History. See his essays: "Global Civilization and Local Cultures: A Crude Look at the Whole," *International Sociology*, 16, 3 (2001): 301–319 and "The New Global History: Toward a Narrative for Pangaea Two," in *Erwägen, Wissen, Ethik*, 14, 1 (2003): 75–88. These, as well as a number of other equally-helpful writings, can be found at the Center for Global History's website: http://www.stonybrook.edu/globhiscntr/publications.shtml.

taneously by those attending the event and people around the world. This is not only true for art, ideas, and sports, but also for religion. We can now have a front row seat at the Pope's speeches, walk with the pilgrims in Mecca, or engage in theological discussions with people halfway around the world. The reality of the global community was vividly demonstrated in the hourly broadcasts of millennial celebrations from around the globe to every nation of the world.

Particularly relevant as symbols of this ever-growing world community are the large expatriate communities now found in all of the world's major cities. While some of these communities have been created by refugees, most are composed of immigrants whose quests for advancement have carried them to the modern frontier of the global township. In the globalized world, these expatriates are able to stay in daily contact with their home community whilst enjoying all of the benefits of their new one. Operating under the laws and within the language of their new domicile, they are able to perpetuate the culture and customs of their homeland. Expatriate communities thus exploit the open boundaries between nations and cultures and further stimulate the swift interchange of intellectual and religious ideas.

For new religions, the structures of the global community are nothing less than a godsend. Each new generation has benefited from advances in communication and transportation—Martin Luther and 16th century Protestants from the printing press; 19th century missionaries from the steamship, Jehovah's Witnesses (one of the relatively-few religious communities with a truly global presence) from inexpensive paper and the speed press; and a host of 20th century religious communities from radio, television, and airplanes.

This quantum leap in our ability to communicate has, in the last generation, provided new, innovative religious communities an instant global audience. These groups are no longer restrained by lengthy incubation periods in their community of origin or the slow, laborious process of dispatching missionaries. Reiki, the 20th century Japanese spiritual healing movement, amply demonstrated the relative rapidity with which a new religious grouping may be transformed into a large, international religious community. In this instance, the group's unexpected expansion was largely overlooked by the mainstream media, lost among the thousands of other spiritual communities vying for the attention of the world's billions of inhabitants.

Reiki was founded in the early 20th century. Subsequently, the movement's Japanese founder conveyed its teachings to a small number

of successors in Japan, one of whom imparted them to a teacher in the Japanese expatriate community in Hawaii. There they remained until the late 1970s, when the Hawaiian teacher suddenly decided to train non-Japanese teachers in various communities across America. The effects were stunning. Within a decade, utilizing the full range of developments in global transportation and communication that had occurred since its founding, Reiki teachers surfaced in countries around the globe, and Western-trained teachers even returned to Japan to open new centers in the movement's birthplace. Following six decades of limited development, Reiki became a global phenomenon within a decade.

Two indigenous Chinese movements possess similar histories. Both the True Jesus Church and the Assembly Hall movement of Watchman Nee underwent a similar period of incubation following their founding in the early 20th century. Prior to World War II, both movements spread from their originating points in northern China to Hong Kong and various Chinese expatriate communities in Southeast Asia. Within China, both movements were integrated into the Chinese Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement[3] after the Chinese Revolution, while outside China, each group continued to spread; both have ultimately become large international movements with global presences.

Religion is often thought of as "nesting" within a particular context, becoming identified over the centuries with those who have nourished and developed it. These same people build worship centers, develop peculiar ways of expressing their faith, and hold familiar ceremonies in a repeating annual cycle. At the same time, however, religion remains a fluid and mobile reality. It travels on pilgrimages, is forced to migrate by invading armies, and is swapped back and forth by cultural and political elites. An example of this is seen in the different forms of Buddhism that have been introduced to and developed in China later to be exported to Korea and Japan. During the Medieval Period, various Chinese religions were conveyed to Southeast Asia and Indonesia, and in the nineteenth century, immigrants carried Chinese religions to Australia, the United States, and even to Europe. Following the

[3] Following the Cultural Revolution, the Assembly Hall movement became the inspiration for two other Chinese groups not connected to the original movement or its founder—the Eastern Lightening group and the Shouters.

initial establishment of cultural beachheads in different countries, these tended to be periodically reinforced century after century.

During the 20th century, China emerged as a major religion-exporting nation, as innovative religious ideas were transmitted around the globe by the Chinese diaspora.[4] At the same time, China's major religious bodies developed strong ties with the international religious community through organizations such as the Buddhist World Federation and the World Council of Churches. Hence, a constant exchange of information now exists between religious communities within China and those elsewhere around the globe. It is against this globalized cultural backdrop that our observation of China's religions proceeds.

III. *Social History*

During the last decades of the 19th century, even as sociology was struggling to establish itself as an independent academic discipline, scholars within the various disciplines which would later evolve to become religious studies began to absorb insights from this emergent field and initiate fresh inquiries of a sociological nature. Among the most significant of these inquiries was that undertaken by German church historian Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923) during the first decade of the 20th century. Originally published as a series of articles, Troeltsch's ground-breaking insights would later be compiled into what has become a classic text claimed by both religious historians and sociologists of religion, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*. Troeltsch's work continues to prompt scholars to consider historically the social realm of religious life, the manner in which religious structures are embedded in society, and the ways in which social settings affect religious teachings.[5]

Most every student of religious studies has encountered Troeltsch's identification of the three types of religious organization that evolved in Europe—the church, the sect, and the mystical group.[6] Though few

[4] The diaspora is now concentrated in some 50 countries around the world. See Lynn Pan, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas* (Singapore: editions Didier Millet, 2006).

[5] Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*. 2 vols. (New York: Harper, 1960).

[6] See the distinction between the church and sect type in Troeltsch, see: Ibid., p. 331ff.

today would attempt to defend Troeltsch's initial categorization and definition of these types, his attempt to identify distinct types of religious groups and explore the social structures they revealed initiated an inquiry that continues to the present.

The author's own cooperative inquiry with sociologist David G. Bromley offers for further application four basic types of primary religious groups—*established religions*, *sects*, *ethnic religions*, and *new religious movements*. These types are distinguished along axes of social and cultural alignment.[7]

Integral to this new typology is a historical element, an acknowledgement that religious groups change over time. Religious groups identified at a given point in time as one type may, a generation later, evolve into another, and most groups embody complex mixtures of diverse, even contradictory, characteristics indicative of differing types.

The first type, *established religions*, has the highest degree of both social and cultural alignment, though the implications of this alignment within different cultures may be significantly affected by social setting, as well as by the host society's views of religion. Established religions demonstrate their majority cultural alignment through, for example, the favorable public recognition they receive as organizations and the acceptability of their beliefs and practices to large segments of the population. In like measure, they exhibit their social alignment through the legitimization (official recognition) they receive from secular authorities and the respect they offer members and officials of other established religions (often demonstrated through participation in various interfaith activities).

In China, the five official religions serve as perfect examples of *established religion*s and are represented by the following, officially-recognized organizations:

China Islamic Association
Chinese Buddhist Association
Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association
Chinese Daoist Association
Chinese Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement

[7] David G. Bromley and J. Gordon Melton, "On Reconceptualizing Types of Religious Groups: Churches, Sects, New Religions (Cults), Ethnic Churches," a paper presented as the annual meeting of the Association for the Sociology of Religion, Boston, Massachusetts, July 31–August 2, 2008.

As a result of its size, China also has a dominant religion, with Buddhism being the largest of the five recognized religions in terms of numbers of adherents.[8] While Chinese Buddhism is the largest religion in most areas of the country, it exists alongside the specially-designated regions in which Islam and Tibetan Buddhism are privileged at the exclusion of other religions.

The second type, *sectarian groups*, includes religious communities that share in the culture of the *established religions* but offer some dissent on particular matters of belief and/or practice. On occasion, their descent may concern emphasis on a particular item of belief (sabbatarianism, church polity), but more often than not, it involves the strictness with which belief is held or the rigor with which group behavior is maintained. Large *established religions* tend to be inclusive and possess a parental-like concern for the society as a whole. *Sectarian groups*, conversely, tend to be more exclusive and focus their attention on life within their own community, rather than on the larger society. While sects resemble their more-established counterparts in most respects, the differences demanded by *sectarian groups* cost them socially, and they develop either a neutral or, on occasion, hostile relationship with the secular authorities.

The many unregistered Christian churches (sometimes called "house churches") in China are almost textbook examples of sectarian bodies. On cursory examination, it might be difficult to identify the distinctions between the congregations of the Chinese Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement and those of the unregistered churches, but for believers, these differences are very real. Members of the independent "house churches," those unwilling to cooperate with the mainstream Three-Self Protestant church, sacrifice much in social status and public recognition. Equally interesting in this regard are China's Sufi Muslim groups, such as the Jahriyya of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and the Kubrāviyya and Qādariyya based in Gansu Province.[9]

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[8] The Buddhist community is, of course, eclipsed by the far larger community that continues to adhere to the traditional Chinese indigenous religious culture, sometimes referred to as Daoist folk religion. Though considered religion by most scholars, it is often referred to simply as "traditional culture" within China and is assigned a rather ambiguous status relative to religion.

[9] Cf. Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism of the People's Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1996).

The third type, *ethnic religions*, is comprised of groups that are separated from *established churches* not so much by religious issues but, rather, because they serve a distinct ethnic minority. While these groups may or may not have a distinctive religion, they do possess distinctive ethnic practices (including a spoken language that is different from that of the majority of the country's residents) that have become difficult to differentiate from participation in a religious community. Examples of China's *ethnic religions* include the Chinese Orthodox Church which serves the Russian minority residing in the PRC, the unique Buddhism of Tibet and Inner Mongolia, and the ethnic Muslim groupings residing primarily in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Ten of the recognized Chinese ethnic minority groups are Muslim in faith.[10]

Though considered minority groups within China, the self-identity of these *ethnic religions* is usually rooted in their dominant religion status elsewhere or, in the case of some of China's *ethnic religions*, prior to their traditional homeland's absorption into the PRC. While this ethnic alignment may translate into a friendly relationship in which the ethnic minority is given official recognition and status by secular authorities, it may also devolve into a hostile relationship when members of the minority groups set themselves in opposition to the secular authorities and resist secularized governmental regulation. Within China, typical *ethnic religions* include that of the Russian Orthodox Church, Tibetan Buddhism, and those practiced by China's spectrum of indigenous ethnic minorities.

Finally, there are the *new religions*. These are religions that follow a pattern of belief and practice significantly different from that of the *established religions* and, simultaneously, lack any sanctioning ethnic identification upon which to draw as a rationale for their religious uniqueness. They stand both alienated from any of the options within the religious community with which they might align and estranged from the more powerful social structures that exist within the larger culture. At the same time, new religions possess particular characteristics which, on occasion, lead to their denunciation by both *established religions* and secular authorities and may, consequently, result in social ostracism and official repression (the latter being most notable when members of the group have openly flaunted the law).

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[10] Ma Yin, comp., *Questions and Answers about China's National Minorities* (Beijing: New World Press, 1985).

More than a dozen groups have been officially labeled as "destructive" or "evil cults" in China. These groups are not only subject to government attention but also face the opposition of a national anti-cult association. Included among these are the Eastern Lightning group and the Shouters, both derived from the Assembly Hall movement founded by Watchman Nee; the "Three Grades of Servants," or Church of Truth, which has purportedly come into violent conflict with the Eastern Lightning group; and the South China Church.[11]

The alignments of the various Chinese religious groupings are depicted in the following table.

Any number of factors may, at various times, affect a group's assessment as a particular type. *New religions* may abandon those characteristics that have previously placed them at odds with other religions and secular authorities. Over time, *sectarian groups* may (and generally do) downplay their distinguishing characteristics and move to identify with the *established religions*. Ethnic groups may lose those characteristics of ethnic identity that most isolate them as a group, particularly through the adoption of the dominant language (in this case Mandarin). Similarly, any group may develop characteristics, such as widespread scandal or involvement in violent activities, which may rapidly change its classification.

The emphasis placed on distinctive types of religious organization often obscures Troeltsch's second and equally-important conclusion that religious thought is dependent on sociological factors. It is the action of the community on the core of belief that tends to suggest the direction of its historical development. Over time, a correlation will develop between social structure and the broad outlines of theology.

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[11] The four types of religious groups identified correspond roughly with the three types identified by Yang Fenggang in his seminal paper "The Red, Black, and Gray Markets of Religion in China," *Sociological Quarterly* 47 (2006): 93–122, which employed the market place participation analogy for religious groups originally developed by American economist Larry Iannaccone. The *established religions* participwate in what Yang identifies as the red market, a place for officially permitted religion. However, this analysis emphasizes not only the permission to exist but the official relationship and support offered by the government to these religions despite an official policy that is openly hostile to religion. The *new religions* participate in Yang's Black market, within which exists a spectrum of degrees of government hostility, from systematic suppression to occasional public denouncement. The categories of *ethnic religions* and *sectarian religions* correspond roughly to religions participating in Yang's Gray market, though very different trajectories are likely to be followed by groups that limit participation to a single ethnic minority and those operating within the general population. Both approaches to classification highlight important insights that broaden perspectives on religious dynamics.

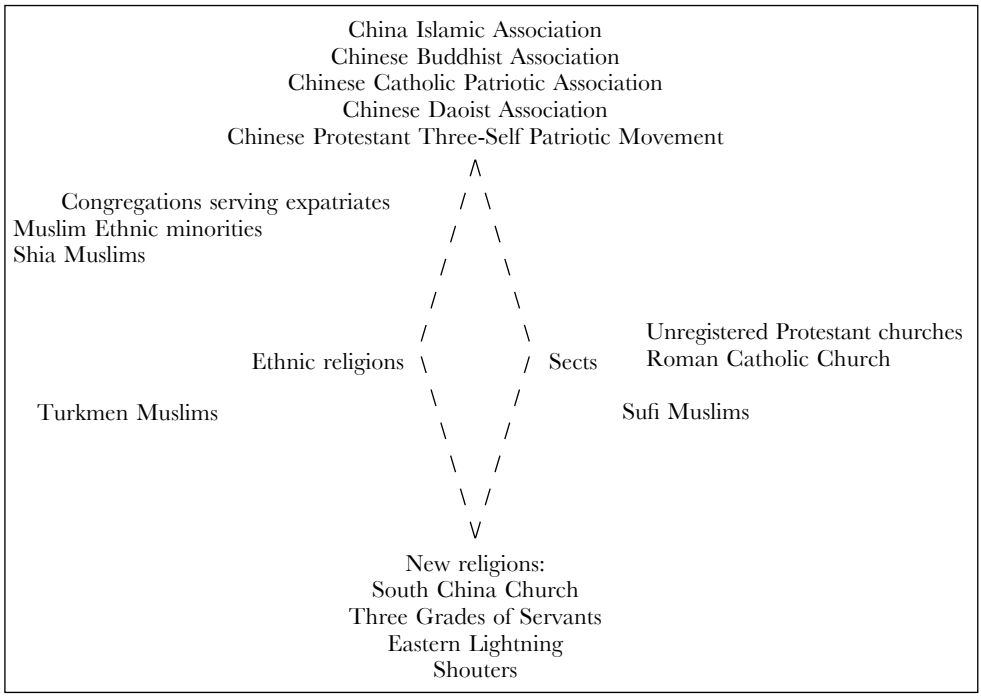


Figure 1. The four classifications of Chinese religions.

Within *established religions*, for instance, there is the need to develop an understanding of the world and the place of the community within it, whereas within sectarian movements, the world is seen as the other, and as such, there is the need to resist, rather than understand, it. In this regard, *ethnic religions* tend more closely to resemble *established religions* than sects, while *new religions* tend to resemble sects.

IV. *Conclusion*

This paper suggests three important ways in which a historical consciousness can positively influence sociological research on religion. These are, by no means, the only ways, and the space has permitted only a cursory look at the three issues raised. It is hoped, however, that this brief mention of (1) the use of critical historical methodology, (2) a growing appreciation of the process of globalization, and (3) some understanding of the evolving social situation of the religious groups we study will serve to add further depth and sophistication to future studies.

CHAPTER THREE

EXPLANATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN RELIGION THAT MAY APPLY TO CHINA

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I. *Introduction*

Until fairly recently, most sociological explanations for the growth and/or decline of religion and religious influence (e.g., secularization) have been developed by scholars living either in Western Europe or North America, and the theories of religious change developed by these thinkers have primarily drawn upon data from these same two areas of the world. However, the situation in modern China, particularly since the Cultural Revolution, provides scholars with the opportunity to test a broad range of theories regarding religious change in a setting unlike those in which these theories were first developed.

In fact, some might even view China as a "natural experiment" in, first, what happens to religion when it is vigorously suppressed (as it was during the Cultural Revolution) and, second, what happens when the most severe of these restrictions are relaxed and a country experiences rapid economic development. For instance, supply-side theories of religion, such as the religious economies theories of Rodney Stark and Roger Finke (2000), argue that a relatively-constant, innate human desire for religion exists in all populations. Fluctuations in religious participation are the result of vacillations in a society's supply of religious organizations. As the Chinese state allows the "supply" of religious groups to recover in China, religious participation ("consumption" of religion) should, according to these theories, also increase. In contrast, demand-side theories, such as secularization theories (e.g., Bruce 2002, Norris and Inglehart 2004), argue that the "demand," or desire, for religion can increase (as when insecurity increases due to wars, famines, and economic inequality or instability) *or* decrease (as when societies become more economically developed and stable, and physical needs are provided for). In contrast with supply-side theories,

certain demand-side theories predict that participation in and identification with religion in China will decline, or at least not rise, as economic development increases.

The author claims no special expertise on China or, more specifically, Chinese religion. However, as a sociologist of religion with an interest in research and theory on religious growth and decline, the author will, in this paper, draw from a variety of sources and theoretical approaches (some of which make competing claims concerning religion) to identify key variables that could have a significant impact on religious change in China. That is not to say that all of these elements will ultimately be relevant to China. Rather, what follows is less a specific set of negatable propositions than an orienting framework from which others more knowledgeable on Chinese religion may draw potentially-useful theoretical resources.

Within each of the following sections is elucidated a particular variable that has received significant attention within the literature on religious change. In some cases, the author expands upon past research to suggest new ways in which these concepts can be used. At the end of each section, the author discusses the ways in which these concepts might be applied by scholars in analyzing the current and near-future situation of religion in China.

II. *The Dependent Variable*

What do theories of religious change attempt to explain, and what is the "dependent variable?" A cursory examination of past scholarship on this topic indicates that theories sometimes viewed as making contradictory claims regarding religious change are, in fact, offering predictions relating to different kinds of religious change and, thus, may not be contradictory at all. For instance, many, but not all, secularization theories identify the main dependent variable as the degree to which religion influences the major institutions of society, the state, the economy, politics, education, etc. These same secularization theories are less concerned with the religious involvement of individuals, often assuming that as the influence of religion recedes from the major institutional spheres of society, individual religious practice also tends to decline. Yet, this has not been true of the U.S.

Conversely, the dependent variables receiving the most attention in explanations arising from the religious economies model (e.g., Stark

and Finke 2000) are generally individual-level phenomena, e.g. the degree to which individuals pray, participate in worship, donate time and money to religious causes and organizations, engage in ritual activities both public and private, and profess supernatural beliefs.

Since different theories focus on explaining different kinds of religious changes, a fuller account of the ways and locations in which religion may be present within a society is valuable. Here, following Karel Dobbelaere (e.g., 2000) and Mark Chaves (1994), the author will draw a distinction between the *macro, meso*, and *micro* levels of a society. The *macro* level refers to the major institutions[1] of a society, including (but not limited to) the state, the economy, politics, the military, medicine, education, media, art, the sciences, religion, family, etc. (recognizing, of course, that in certain societies, some of these institutions may be combined with others and, thus, do not exist separately). The *meso* level includes specific organizations of varying scope and scale (most of which participate in one or more macro-level institution). Examples within U.S. society might include the U.S. Supreme Court, the Chicago Police Department, IBM, a local hardware store, the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., a local Baptist congregation, The U.S. Navy, The American Medical Association, or a local hospital (as well as the Associated Press, the New York Times, the Red Cross, the National Rifle Association, a local YMCA, the National Education Association, a local high school, a community youth baseball league, etc). The *micro* level of society encompasses particular individuals and the immediate face-to-face social networks of people with whom they interact, including relatives, coworkers, neighbors, fellow church attendees, teammates in a recreational sports league, and the people with whom they interact in other settings (many of which are located in meso-level organizations).

Religion can exist in various forms at each of these levels of society. As Chaves (1994) has noted, one of the most significant ways in which religion exists is determined by the extent to which laws, rules, policies, and norms at all levels of society are justified or legitimated by reference to some religious standard or supernatural claim. Chaves refers to this as "religious authority." Examples within the different

[1] Here, I use the term "institution" to refer to a set of organized beliefs, rules, and practices as well as regular, expected, patterned relationships among organizations that center around the ways that a society attempts to meet its basic needs.

levels of society might include religious tests for holding elected office or obtaining a job, statutes that require businesses to close on religious holidays, tax exemptions for religious organizations, journalistic norms that discourage critical reporting on religious leaders, norms against charging interest when lending money, rules requiring that board members of educational or medical organizations be members of a particular religious group, neighborhood norms that informally penalize people who mow their lawns on a religious day of rest, norms that discourage people from marrying or making close friends with a non-religious person or a person of a different faith, and parents who require their children to attend religious services.

Other forms of religiously-based authority exist through religious practices, rituals, or messages that occur *outside* of formal religious organizations, as when a legislative session is begun with prayer, a sporting event includes a religious ceremony at the beginning or close of the competition, religious subject matter is incorporated in art, theater, or film, a newspaper voluntarily includes religious messages or content, a political party embraces the furtherance of particular religious beliefs as part of its political platform, or schools teach religious doctrine or use religious songs in teaching music.

A more comprehensive depiction of the extent of religious authority within a society would, of course, also include such obvious measures as the number of formal religious organizations, the extensiveness of their money, property, and personnel resources, the numbers of their adherents, and the many other measures of individual religious involvement and belief that constitute the bread and butter of sociological research on religion.

Why is it important to assess religion at all of these levels and in all of these ways? The principal reason is to highlight the various ways in which societies can be religious. This is important to an understanding of religious change in both Western and non-Western settings. The U.S., for example, has considerably high levels of micro-religious involvement when compared with other industrialized nations, yet is quite nonreligious at the macro and meso levels (with the obvious exception of a very robust church, denominational, and parachurch organizational sector at the meso-level). As Chaves (2004) points out, in many ways the current religious situation in the U.S. is the reverse of that of the American colonies in the 1700s, when micro-level religiosity was comparatively low (Finke and Stark 1992) but religion was well established in the macro-level institutions of most colonies. At

the same time that the *Churching of America* (Finke and Stark 1992) was taking place at the micro-level, America was also undergoing a *Secular Revolution* (Smith 2003), as federal and state governments were disestablished and the elites within major institutions (e.g., higher education, law, journalism, and science) struggled to separate themselves from the control of religious ideas and influence. Both the colonial and current religious situations of the U.S. are considerably different from those of contemporary Saudi Arabia and Iran, where religion pervades all levels of society,[2] and these situations are different still from those of the countries of contemporary Scandinavia, where religion has only a minimal presence at all levels of society.[3]

A second reason for emphasizing the different ways in which societies can be religious at different levels is that it creates greater awareness of the ways in which the causes of religiosity at the macro-level may be different from those at the meso and micro levels. For example, it may well be true, as secularization theorists led by Max Weber have long argued, that as a society increasingly engages in modern forms of economic exchange and production, the desires to rationalize production and increase profits will tend to diminish the influence of religious considerations and practices at the macro and meso levels of society. Hence, religiously-legitimated rules and procedures, what Chaves (1994) calls "religious authority," are progressively removed, first from organizations participating in the economic institution and later from other institutions, e.g. science, education, media, etc. However (as argued by Rodney Stark and Roger Finke), the processes that lead to the secularization of the macro and meso levels may have little *direct* effect on religion at the micro-level, provided meso-level religious organizations are given adequate space to prosper.

A third reason for being aware of the different ways that religion may be present at different levels of society is that it highlights the possibility that changes in the extent of religious influence at one level may lead to changes in the extent of religion at other levels. For example, the growth of conservative Islam at the meso and micro levels of Turkish society may be on the verge of desecularizing the macro levels

[2] Some of these examples are suggested by Chaves (1994).

[3] While some Scandinavian countries still have a state-supported church, religious authority is weak at all levels of society. Although formal church membership is still quite high, it has been falling for some time and religious belief and practice at the micro-level are among the lowest in the world.

of Turkish society. Conversely, secularization of the macro-level institutions of society may lead to declines in religion at the micro level, as has been evident in communist states that have directly suppressed religious practice. Similarly, some secularization theorists (e.g., Bruce 2002) describe a macro-to-micro influence, whereby all else being equal, the decline of religious authority and influence at the macro and meso levels of industrializing societies tends to undermine the relevance and practice of religion at the micro levels of society by making religion appear to be strictly a private matter of personal belief with no significance to most daily behavior in public settings.

How might this expanded awareness of the ways in which a society can be religious relate to an understanding of religion in China? Many Western scholars, especially those drawing on supply-side, religious economies perspectives, might tend to limit their measurements of religion to calculations of official and unofficial churches, temples, etc. (the "suppliers" of religion) and religious believers, practitioners, etc. (the "consumers" of religion). Moreover, the supposition that "religion" exists primarily among religious groups and their adherents might lead one to assume that religious change in China will inevitably come from the bottom up, probably not through direct confrontation with the state but, as evangelical Protestants might argue, by converting key state leaders one-by-one until sympathy for religion pervades the decision-making apparatus of the state. However, taking a broader perspective, one would examine the ways in which religious or supernatural beliefs may be present at various levels of society in norms and practices, laws, policies, and celebrations as well as in those activities or organizations that are not generally considered religious. A growth in such activities and organizations (and their acceptability) might open the way for the kinds of changes that favor explicitly-religious organizations and practices. While the author's lack of familiarity with Chinese society prevents him from providing numerous examples, it appears that one source of religious change might be those organizations, ideas, and norms that border on, or only partially overlap with, the religious domain and, thus, may not be considered religious, e.g., Confucian philosophy and certain spiritual health/exercise organizations. Another imaginable source might, as secularization theorists have claimed, be the emergence, through economic development and the desire to increase profits or reach national economic goals, of macro- and meso-level laws, norms, and rules based on means-end rationality that limit discrimination against employees, customers, or

business partners on the basis of their ethnic, religious, or other ascriptive characteristics. While, on the one hand, this might seem to further limit the influence of Chinese religion at the macro level, it might also open up the potential for greater religious diversity and freedom at the micro level. Thus, in addition to focusing on the recognized and underground religious groups, scholars of religion in China might also carefully observe how the Chinese state treats quasi-religious or cultural activities and organizations that make reference to supernatural spirits, deities, or forces. Likewise, the policies of the state toward ethnic diversity, especially those ethnicities that are entwined with religious differences, could foreshadow the future treatment of religious diversity in China.

III. *Demand for Religion*

Perhaps the most important difference among theories of religious change originates in assumptions concerning the demand for religion. The apparent flowering of religion in China since the Cultural Revolution suggests that there is some inherent upward pressure on the scope of religion in society. Proponents of the religious economies model, best represented by Stark and Finke in their book *Acts of Faith* (2000), argue that humans innately desire things that only religion can provide and, thus, there will always be a demand for religion. This view contrasts starkly with that of secularization theorists such as Steve Bruce (2002) who, while admitting that religion may never entirely disappear, suggest that the demand for religion is not a human universal. David Voas (2007), for example, has proposed that people living in economically-advanced, democratic, welfare states might well shed their need for religion in much the same way that they have shed their desire to have large numbers of children. Voas (2007) suggests that industrialized countries have undergone (and will continue to undergo) a secular transition much as they have experienced a demographic transition to lower birth rates, a trend that was in doubt only forty years ago. These differing assumptions lead to considerably different predictions of religious change.

Although it is difficult to definitively determine the extent to which a desire for religion is a human universal, the preponderance of evidence so far suggests that it is a very widespread trait. Thus, following the proponents of the religious economies model, the author believes

that it makes sense to assume that a desire for religion is an innately-human impulse. For the purposes of building a model of religious change, it matters not whether this impulse is viewed as an aspect of the way divine beings created humans, as some religious apologists argue (e.g. Lewis 1952), or whether the desire for religion is seen as the outcome of an evolutionary process of natural selection in which religious and moral impulses enhance group cooperation and altruistic behavior, and thus, human survivability (e.g., Wilson 1975). The origins of this desire matter less than an acceptance of the assumption that the demand for religion will never completely disappear.

However, the assertion that humans innately desire religion does not imply that such desires are constant across time and space. The demand for religion tends to be under-theorized within both religious economies and secularization theories. Instead, religious economies theories focus on the changing supply of religion as the main variable influencing religious practice and belief. This emphasis on changing supply is partly a reaction to the lack of attention that the supply of religion receives in secularization theories, but it is also partly the result of the borrowing of ideas from economic theories, theories that are greatly simplified by assuming unchanging underlying preferences and utility functions (c.f. Iannaccone 1995). Conversely, secularization theories concentrate more on changing demand, but they tend to focus mostly on factors that diminish demand and less on those that might increase it.[4]

If, as the author claims, a desire for religion is endemic to the human condition, what might cause the demand for religion to fluctuate? Part of the answer may lie in an understanding of the human desires that religion seeks to satisfy. Andrew Greeley (1972), along with many others, has suggested that people seek two things from religion: meaning and belonging/identity. In light of the recent contributions of Norris and Inglehart (2004), I would add a third desire, security, to this list. This list of three is not exhaustive, nor are these three categories neatly

[4] Major exceptions to the lack of attention by secularization theorists to factors that increase demand for religion may be seen in Bruce (2002) and Martin's (1978) arguments that demand for religion grows when religion is allied with and comes to symbolize a social identity that is being oppressed by external social groups. More recently, Norris and Inglehart (2004) have described ways in which the demand for religion increases (see below).

mutually exclusive; e.g., one may find meaning and purpose through an increased sense of belonging to something greater than oneself.

Key in explaining the fluctuations in the demand for religion is the recognition that there are non-religious sources of meaning, belonging/identity, and security that compete with religion to satisfy these same needs. However, non-religious suppliers may not be able to meet these needs in the same way, or at the same level, as religions. Stark and Finke (2000), for example, argue that while the rewards that people seek may be available from multiple sources in society, only religions can provide otherworldly rewards. For example, many social groups (e.g., families, communities, political parties, ethnic groups, nations) provide people with a sense of *belonging* to others and to something greater than themselves (e.g., a cause of global historical significance or a nation state with a long historical tradition), but religions claim to connect people to even more fundamental realities. Evangelical Christians do not, for instance, simply become members of a church or a denomination; rather, they come to believe that they are beloved children of God and that their identity is connected in a fundamental and eternal way to the creator of the universe, not just to a temporal human grouping. Similarly, many idea systems strive to provide *meaning* in that they attempt to make sense out of reality and explain why things happen as they do. Yet, without reference to the supernatural realities affirmed by religions, it is more difficult for these ideas to provide a sense of purpose and meaning for one faced with human injustice, suffering, and death (especially one's own death). Likewise, many social structures and idea systems provide *security*, especially with regard to tangible things such as food, clothing, shelter, health care, and protection against violence and crime. Yet, even when these tangible measures of security are unavailable, religions may provide their followers with a sense that ultimately "everything will be alright," because their god is present with them and will be with them whatever happens. Although such beliefs do not provide physical nourishment or wellness, they can motivate people to carry on in the face of great adversity.

How does this help us to understand why the demand for religion might vary in different times and places? One important reason is that social settings may vary with regard to the availability of non-religious ideas, organizations, and practices as this-worldly sources of meaning, belonging, and security. While religions may be the only source of otherworldly rewards, nonreligious sources may or may not

adequately provide this-worldly forms of meaning, belonging, and security. For instance, as Norris and Inglehart (2004) argue, modern welfare states may provide for basic security needs to such an extent that the frequency with which people turn to religion to pray for good health or economic well-being is significantly reduced. Thus, micro-level religious participation is highest in those countries where health and economic security are the least reliable and economic inequality is most evident.[5] A similar mechanism lies behind Stark and Bainbridge's (1985) claim that people of higher social status and economic means may seek out less supernaturalistic religions because they already have access to non-supernatural ways of satisfying many of their desires for this-worldly rewards. Finally, although it has been established that no necessary incompatibility exists between religious belief and science—many top scientists hold religious beliefs (e.g., Ecklund and Scheitle 2007)—scientific advancements have provided non-supernatural means for explaining aspects of the physical world that for thousands of years were only explainable through religion. Religion still provides explanations and meanings that science cannot, but the development of science has diminished significantly the range of explanations for which religion is needed and demanded.

Just as the demand for religion may *decrease* with the greater availability of non-religious sources of meaning, belonging/identity, and security, demand for religion can *increase* as the availability of nonreligious sources of these things diminishes or becomes inadequate to confront the new challenges people face. Most dramatically, new religions may arise when whole societies and cultures are threatened by collapse, as in the case of the cargo cults of Melanesia (Wallace 1956) and the Ghost Dance religion of the Native American peoples of the North American plains (La Barre 1970). Less severely, when a nation, ethnic group, or subsector of society experiencing oppression or exploitation at the hands of an external group uses religious symbols to represent its identity, the demand for religious belonging/identity may increase until the external threat ceases (as was the case for Catholicism with the fall of the communist state in Poland) or until other non-religious

[5] Norris and Inglehart's explanations of how national-level inequality contributes to individual-level insecurity are not, in the author's opinion, very complete.

forms of belonging displace religion as the source of common identity (as in the case of Catholicism in Quebec following the formation of the *Parti Quebecois* in the mid-1960s).

What might be some of the possible sources of such fluctuations in China? First, it is possible that the desire for traditional religions might fluctuate based on the extent to which the veneration of Mao Zedong or the Chinese nation was, or is, able to partially displace and satisfy the needs for belonging/identity and meaning. If the general acceptance of such ideologies and identities grows, there may be less need, or space, for traditional religion; however, if these same identities were to be discredited or come to be viewed as passé, more traditional forms of supernaturalistic Chinese religion might expand to satisfy unmet needs.

Second, it is conceivable that China's rapid economic development could potentially lead to both a lesser and a greater desire to seek security through religion. If, as Norris and Inglehart (2004) suggest, greater economic development (and accompanying improvements in life-expectancy, nutrition, health, and security in old age) results in a greater overall sense of security and predictability, the need for religion to provide assurance (at least in this-worldly matters) might decline. However, if rapid economic development results in major economic instability and inequality, with some rapidly acquiring wealth while others fall deeper into poverty, the consequent disillusionment and insecurity concerning the future might cause citizens to turn to religion as a source of hope and security. At the same time, the newly-affluent, fearing the precariousness of their good fortune, might seek religious explanations and justifications for their recent wealth. Moreover, the new social settings created through this rapid change (urbanization, the expansion of new businesses, the creation of new types of occupations, etc.) may lack the moral norms necessary to restrain the worst forms of greed and exploitation. Under such circumstances, people might be inclined to turn to religious or quasi-religious ideas and philosophies as sources of meaning, purpose, and morality in an unpredictable world. Thus, we find that different elements of demand-side theories will make contradictory claims regarding potential religious changes in China. According to these theories, much will depend upon the consistency and prevalence with which increasing prosperity is experienced across the nation as economic development continues.

IV. *Supply of Religion*

Whereas secularization theories tend to focus on the causes of the changing demand for religion, religious economies theories focus instead on determinants of religious supply and, thus, are sometimes referred to as supply-side theories. In particular, religious economies approaches, best exemplified by Stark and Finke (2000), argue that religious participation and involvement at the micro level is best explained by variations in the number and diversity of the organizations available at the meso level to supply religion to the members of society at the micro level. In general, they argue that as the quantity and quality of the supply of religion (i.e. the number and diversity of religious groups and the vigor with which they are marketed) increases, the rates and levels of participation in (or "consumption" of) religion will also increase. All else being equal, when more and better opportunities for religious participation exist, more people will, in fact, participate.

According to the religious economies model (e.g., Stark and Finke 2000), supply is determined by two principal factors: the regulation of religion and religious competition. The regulation of religion is viewed as the extent to which the state either places legal restrictions on religions and their activities or subsidizes (provides financial or cultural support to) some particular religious groups but not others. Restrictions directly limit religious supply. At first glance, it might be assumed that subsidies would boost religious supply if, for instance, the state financially supports the construction of places of worship, the payment of religious leaders, or religious education in public schools. However, according to religious economies theories, such subsidies ultimately lower the quality of religious supply (Finke and Stark 1988, Stark and McCann 1993, Stark and Iannaccone 1994). When religious leaders receive state-subsidized salaries regardless of whether they provide quality religious services, the incentive to meet the needs of the population is diminished. Likewise, if the state grants official status to a single religion, that religion may slacken its efforts to supply religion to the population.

Religious competition, the other variable affecting religious supply within the religious economies model, depends partially, if not principally, on the regulation of religion; religious competition within a society is greatly diminished when the state favors or bans religions. Religious competition is viewed both an aspect of religious supply (in that it is related to the number and diversity of religious groups pres-

ent within an individual area or society) and a factor affecting the *quality* of that religious supply. According to religious economies theories, increased competition among religious groups provides a greater incentive for these groups and their leaders to meet the needs of religious adherents or "consumers" more actively and creatively (Finke and Stark 1988, Stark and McCann 1993, Finke, Guest, and Stark 1996). This improves the quality of the supply and, consequently, increases the overall consumption of religion.

Although religious competition is one of the key independent variables in the religious economies model, it is, unfortunately, not well defined. In *Acts of Faith*, for instance, Stark and Finke (2000) systematically present their model without ever defining religious competition. Religious pluralism, as a measure of both the number of religious groups in an area and the uniformity of the sizes of these groups, has been, most frequently, used to gauge religious competition (Finke and Stark 1988, Finke et al. 1996, Voas, Olson, and Crockett 2002). However, methodological problems (see Voas et al. 2002) have invalidated most of the findings that either supported (e.g., Finke et al. 1996) or negated (e.g., Olson 1999) the relationship between pluralism and greater religious participation. Although other measures of religious competition have been proposed and tested, e.g., religious market share (Stark and McCann 1993), these either have not proven as useful in predicting overall rates of religious participation within a given area or society (because, as is the case with market share, they are more predictive of the organizational strength of particular religious groups considered individually) or may be viewed as the fairly-direct result of religious regulation (as when the state limits religious competition by allowing only one or several religious groups to exist). For these reasons, the author focuses here on the regulation of religion, a concept that, when compared to the notion of religious competition, is both easier to define and measure (separate from religious consumption) and which, the author believes, will ultimately prove to have more theoretical and predictive relevance.[6] Additionally, in the case

[6] The author's own current research suggests that a variety of measures of religious competition (religious pluralism, market share, and market share of other religious groups) have no relationship to the recruitment efforts of religious congregations in the U.S. or to the number of hours that religious leaders work. Some congregations and spiritual leaders work harder than others, and such variations in efforts *are* related to higher member-commitment levels and congregational growth. However, these variations in effort are not related to any of the measures of religious competition the

of China, the main determinant of the supply of religion (religious groups, places of worship, centers of training, availability of religious publications, etc.) is likely to be the Chinese state and the ways in which it restricts and/or subsidizes various religious or quasi-religious groups and philosophies. Hence, we turn directly to the discussion of the regulation of religion.

V. *Religious Regulation*

In accordance with the goal of developing a list of potentially- relevant variables that ought to be considered in attempting to understand religious change, the author's discussion of religious regulation expands upon the discussion of this topic within the religious economies literature in two specific ways. First, religious restrictions are considered separately from religious subsidies. Subsidies include the use of government money (e.g. tax revenues) to pay clergy salaries, maintain and improve religious structures, support curricula in state-sponsored schools that teach religious doctrine, or give tax breaks to religious groups. Conversely, restrictions include the limitation, ban, or punishment of particular religious groups by the state, e.g. when the state permits only those who identify with the state-supported religion to hold public office (thus restricting other religious groups). In early discussions of religious regulation, both restrictions and subsidies were regarded as evidence of regulation (e.g., Stark and Iannaccone 1994, Chaves and Cann 1992), since it was argued, both constitute departures from a free religious marketplace and thus have a net negative effect on rates and levels of religious participation at the micro level of society. However, later analyses have tested the effects of restrictions separately from those of subsidies (e.g., Barro and McCleary 2006) and concluded that while subsidies may boost participation, restrictions lessen religious involvement. Through measuring religious subsidies and restrictions separately, we are able to determine whether both

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author has thus far tested. The efforts expended by congregations and leaders appear to vary independent of the religious competition faced. The well-established relationship of small market share to higher average member commitment levels is probably the result of processes beyond the motivation of religious competition. See Olson (2008), where the author develops and tests an alternative explanation for the negative relationship between religious market share and member commitment levels.

result in diminished religious involvement or whether subsidies may actually boost participation (as might be intuitively supposed).

The author again diverges from the treatment of religious regulation within the religious economies literature in proposing that the notions of subsidies and restriction be expanded within the theories of religious change to include the analogous non-state positive reinforcements of and negative sanctions on religious behavior, practices, and religiously-legitimated rules and policies that occur at all levels of society, macro, meso, and micro. At the micro level, those who otherwise might not be particularly religious may, nevertheless, engage in religious behavior when those in their close personal network (spouse, parents, relatives, coworkers, friends) observe and positively reward their religious participation (Ellison and Sherkat 1995, Sherkat 1991, 1997). Thus, people might sometimes attend church to please a spouse or parent or set a good example for a child (Sherkat 1997). Likewise, one might participate in religion, or at least claim religious affiliation, simply because it is the normative expectation of one's community, an expectation one violates only at the risk of losing the acceptance and goodwill of one's community, friends (Ellison and Sherkat 1995), and potential business partners.

Micro-level norms and expectations can also depress religious participation below the levels that might otherwise occur. For example, widely-held, negative cultural attitudes regarding religion (or particular religions) reflected in micro-level opinions and meso-level organizational rules and policies (both formal and informal) could limit the growth of new religious organizations and individual religious participation as effectively as state regulations. An example of this is seen in the more-secular countries of Western and Northern Europe, where widespread suspicion toward those displaying excessive public religiosity, and particularly toward proselytizers, may lead to social ostracism, constituting an informal "regulation" that could greatly depress displays of religious commitment below the levels that might otherwise be observed. Within certain societies, the informal impact of such attitudes on hiring and promotion practices at the meso-level, (e.g. within universities and other places of employment) might discourage open displays of religiosity. In such societies, parents might even be discouraged from including religious training in the socialization of their children at the micro-level if religion is viewed as a burden rather than a benefit to their childrens' future success in society (Crockett and Voas 2006).

Macro- and meso-level, state and non-state organizational policies and institutional norms can also either enhance or limit religion. Using educational policies as an example, the recent implementation of rules preventing the wearing of *hijabs* or other religious symbols in French classrooms may reduce the ability of such symbols, when they are prevalent, to reinforce the impression of the normalcy and acceptability of religious identity. A lack of religious symbols or religiously-motivated rules and policies at the macro- and meso- levels of society might reinforce the impression that religion is irrelevant to the operation of macro- and meso-level social behavior, contributing to the privatization, and even trivialization, of religion (Luckmann 1967). Non-state religious "regulations" may also serve to "subsidize" religion, or certain types of religion, at the various levels of society. Using, once again, the example of public educational policies, for many years, the inclusion of Protestant prayers in public high school graduation ceremonies reinforced the apparent prevalence and acceptability of Protestantism in the U.S. and, as argued by critics of this practice in U.S. Supreme Court cases, the minority status and lesser acceptability of other religious traditions.

The failure to account for the most important of these non-state regulations in empirical investigations could distort the effects of state-based restrictions and subsidies. Thus, for example, if the regulation of religion is measured only by examining official state policies, the gradual expansion of religious participation in Sweden, following the disestablishment of the Swedish Lutheran Church in 2000, might be predicted. However, such an expansion would not only have to overcome the current dearth of religious suppliers brought about, according to Stark and Iannaccone (1994), by past state interference in the religious marketplace, but also, as mentioned above, widespread micro-level suspicion of excessive public religiosity. This cultural "regulation" of religion at the micro and meso levels may retard the growth of religion and religious organizations more effectively than state laws.

The expansion of the notion of regulation to consider the positive rewards and negative sanctions on religion at all levels of society also provides for the broader consideration of inter-level religious influences. Inter-level influences can flow upward as well as downward. The argument, for instance, can be made that state regulations limiting or favoring various forms of religion are oftentimes a response to pressures from elites within meso-level organizations as well as from public opinion at the micro-level (especially in democratic societies). In an effort to preserve their own power, governments may implement

religious laws to placate the religious or antireligious interests of the most powerful constituencies in a society. Thus, the deregulation of the U.S. religious economy (the removal of religious tests for federal office in the U.S. constitution and the later disestablishment of religion in particular U.S. states) has, for instance, been interpreted by some (Butler 1990) as a response to the combined pressure of the many, diverse religious groups already present in the U.S. colonies. None of these religious groups was willing to support a national constitution which might privilege some other religious group in government. Hence, the solution ultimately removed religion from government and government from religion.[7]

However, the pressure of meso-level religious organizations on the state can also have the opposite effect: greater religious regulation. For almost ten years following the dismantling of the Soviet Union, for instance, Russia experienced a comparatively-open religious marketplace. Pressure from the Russian Orthodox Church (the largest religious group in Russia) as well as from secular and communist elements within Russia, however, facilitated the passage of the *Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations* in 1999, a law that greatly restricted non-Orthodox religious groups, particularly those from other countries seeking to exploit the newly-opened Russian religious economy. Similar pressures have since led to the teaching of Russian Orthodoxy in the public schools (Anderson 2007).

The point here is not that researchers should abandon the potentially-fruitful examination of how government policies affect religion in other macro-level institutions or at the meso- and micro-levels of society. Rather, in addition to these investigations religious, researchers should consider the manner in which positive rewards and negative sanctions for religion exist throughout all levels of society and influence the presence of religion at other levels.

While the implications for China are quite clear, they are also difficult to predict. Perhaps more than any of the variables discussed in this paper, the actions of the Chinese state in regulating, restricting, permitting, or even subsidizing, various kinds of religious or quasi-religious groups and ideas will determine the supply of religious groups and beliefs available to Chinese citizens. Although the Cultural Revolution did not entirely eradicate religion, it severely restricted the

[7] Of course, there are many ways in which government and religion still influence each other in the U.S.

Chinese supply; further, it appears that the Chinese state retains the potential to restrict swiftly once again the Chinese religious "supply." Supply-side theories, such as that of Finke and Stark, suggest that any form of religious regulation, whether restriction or subsidy, ultimately damages religion. According to this view, the Chinese supply of religion will expand most within a "free" religious marketplace. Given the rapid and (from an external perspective) unexpected changes to China's economic policies during the latter half of the 20th century, it is not entirely implausible that the Chinese state might, at some point, determine that the creation of a free religious market is in its own best interests. At present, however, such changes seem unlikely at best.

For those who view religious subsidies or state-supported religion as a source of greater religious supply (e.g., Barrow and McCleary 2006), the Chinese state's current admittance of only five officially-recognized religions has somewhat-ambiguous implications—this officially-sanctioned status may both partially subsidize and limit these religious groups. Specialists on Chinese religion will be able to judge best the extent to which these subsidies are merely another form of control. At the very least, however, they do offer certain religious activities and organizations a degree of recognized legitimacy, which may favorably influence micro- and meso-level norms and rules concerning religious activities and identities.

The above analysis suggests that, in addition to watching the actions of the state, observers of Chinese religion should be aware of changes in attitudes, norms, and formal and informal rules at the micro- and macro-levels of society. These include, for instance, such measures as the degree to which religious affiliation or participation impact an individual's ability to find employment. While such attitudes and norms can be shaped by the state through official statements, laws, and propaganda, they can also change from the bottom up as religious participation grows or as more and more respected members of society begin to identify themselves publically with religious groups. Thus, scholars of religion should also pay attention to regulation taking place at micro- and meso-levels of society.

VI. *Religious Human Capital*

Great inertia exists in human societies and individual behavior. Laws, rules, policies, norms, attitudes, beliefs, patterns of interaction, and

behavior tend to remain stable unless acted upon by an external force. Religious human capital is one of the "forces" that maintains inertia in religious behavior. Iannaccone (1990) describes religious human capital in primarily individual terms, as the totality of an individual's socialization, training (formal and informal), knowledge, possessions, and social relationships that allows them to obtain satisfaction and pleasure from religious participation. Much of this is included in what non-economists would describe as past religious socialization. According to this notion, one who has attended Catholic schools and received Catholic religious training will gain much greater satisfaction from attending mass in a Catholic church than one who has never experienced such socialization. The former is not only familiar with the verbal responses that are expected at various points in the service but also knows when to stand, sit, kneel, etc. Due to past religious socialization, this individual appreciates, and may be emotionally moved by, the Ceremonial Consecration of the Host; has memories and associations that may arouse strong emotions when viewing the Stations of the Cross; and may have forged social ties with many members of the congregation. Conversely, an individual who lacks such "religious human capital" would not receive the same enjoyment from attending the same mass.

Because the value of religious human capital is best maintained through the continuing practice of the religious tradition in which one has already invested, religious human capital leads to inertia in religious behavior. Iannaccone (1990) describes the ways in which religious human capital act upon individuals and households. Those raised in one religious tradition are more likely to remain in that tradition than they are to switch to another. Switching is costly because additional investments of time are required to gain the experience necessary to appreciate fully and acquire the same level of satisfaction within a different religious tradition. Those who possess a great deal of religious human capital within one tradition are more likely to marry someone from within the same tradition, for in this way both partners can maximize the value of their religious human capital through continuing in the same tradition. Those who have acquired less religious human capital forfeit less when they marry outside of their faith. All else being equal, these individuals are also more likely to socialize their own children within the same (or within a similar) tradition as the one in which they were socialized. Investments in individual religious capital made in the early years of socialization persist over time and shape future

religious behavior. Similarly, individuals who have been raised without any appreciable religious training or to be suspicious of religion are less likely than others to be involved in religion later in life.

Iannaccone's predictions primarily apply to individual and household behavior. However, the notion of religious capital may also be applied at the meso level. Here too, past investments in religion tend to persist over time. This is certainly true for religious organizations whose buildings and property as well as doctrines, ritual practices, policies, norms, and procedures can be considered forms of meso-level religious human capital that, all else being equal, tend to persist over time and replicate themselves unless acted upon by an external force. The investment of a great deal of time and effort by interested parties (e.g., missionaries, religious prophets, religious leaders, leaders of a religious inquisition, or political leaders) is necessary to change (particularly to increase) the relative sizes of religious groups in society. A similar propensity exists among non-religious organizations, whose formal and informal policies concerning religious matters tend to remain stable until the effort is exerted to change them, often in response to external pressures. Similarly, macro-level state and non-state institutional laws, rules, policies, and values concerning religion generally remain constant until interested parties are willing to invest the energy, time, and political capital to change them. The point here is not that religion in society never changes, but that it usually tends to change very slowly and often with great resistance.

The tendency toward stability in religious matters has important implications even when rapid change occurs, as it did during the Cultural Revolution. Thus, it may not be surprising that (as previously discussed) the Russian Orthodox Church is resuming its dominance of the Russian religious economy: past investments in Russian Orthodoxy that resulted in its association with Russian identity prior to the Communist Revolution remained rooted in Russian culture to the extent that, following the fall of communism, the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church were able to convince the Russian state to support the teaching of Russian Orthodoxy in schools (Anderson 2007) and restrict the activities of other religious groups.

Similarly, the revitalization of religion in China following the Cultural Revolution is likely to be shaped significantly by the kinds of religious "capital" that existed prior to 1949. Some (Mooney 2007), for instance, have suggested that due to the historically-close relationship between Confucianism and the Chinese state, the revival of Confu-

cian ethics and teachings (if not Confucian rituals) may more readily gain the support of state officials, even though Confucianism is not one of the officially-recognized Chinese religions. Of course, the fact that Confucianism is often not considered a religion at all has likely increased its palatability. Similarly, the major "investments" of Protestant missionaries in China prior to World War II constitute past investments in religious human capital that, like long-dormant seeds, are now coming to fruition in the form of new growth in both the recognized Protestant churches of the "Red" market and the "underground" churches of the "Gray" market (Yang 2006). In actuality, this new growth of visible religion in China may be as much a testament to the residual religious human capital left over from the diverse and vibrant religious economy of 19th and 20th century China as it is the evidence of a basic human need for religion that causes religion to develop wherever religious needs are left unmet.

VII. *Concluding Speculations*

The author concludes with a recapitulation and extension of the speculations regarding religious change in China located at the end of each of the above sections, beginning with the most relevant and potentially-immediate variables and concluding with those which are less readily applicable or more likely to have a long-term impact.

The most prominent and obvious factor affecting the future of Chinese religion is the action of the Chinese state. Were the state to, once again, suppress religious practice, the consequent negative effects would be felt at all levels of society. As suggested above, such suppression occurs not only through the implementation of formal religious laws, but also through the state's influence on meso-level organizations that might, for example, prevent religious practitioners (or the adherents of a particular religion) from obtaining business permits or gaining admission to a university. Conversely, the state could attempt to reduce hostilities rooted in religion by allowing the establishment of a free (or relatively-free) religious economy in which the government has a limited role (as it has with economic matters). Alternately, the state might expand support for the five officially-recognized religions in hopes of controlling and overseeing the resurgence of interest in religion. Any of these courses of action would have a profound and fairly-immediate impact on the religious supply in China.

In considering the actions of the state, it is also necessary to take into account the manner in which the Chinese government is likely to respond to pressures from within Chinese society, particularly those generated by religious diversity. In countries possessing only one or two dominant religions, the state might be expected to offer support to the dominant religion(s) alone. However, China's religious marketplace is already relatively diverse. Assuming that the Chinese state is unlikely to suppress all religions, the state may benefit in the long term from expanding the numbers and types of permissible religious groups to avoid alienating large sectors of society. It is conceivable that a path of peaceful coexistence might be pursued, one similar to that charted in the U.S., wherein, to a large extent, different religious traditions have been allowed to flourish as different ways of "being American" (Herberg 1955, Warner 2005) in return for their allegiance to the state in political matters. In China, such a model might most plausibly include Buddhist (with some exceptions noted below), Confucian, and Daoist traditions as well as those of local religions that combine rites from various traditions in the veneration of lineages and local deities. It would appear that the borrowing, exchange, and combination of ideas and ceremonies within these traditions have historically taken place without conflict. To a somewhat lesser degree, evangelical Christianity may be permitted to flourish as one among many ways of "being Chinese," but this depends on the extent to which evangelical Christianity remains relatively apolitical, as it has in most, but not all, times and places.

To the extent that religious groups maintain strong ties of support with non-Chinese sources of not only funding and personnel but also a non-Chinese identity, this model of multiple, co-existent religions all supporting a Chinese identity becomes problematic (as has been the case for Catholicism in China). Additionally, those religious groups that have become identified with particular ethnic groups viewed by the state as resisting full incorporation into Chinese state control (e.g., Tibetan Buddhism and Islam in China's northwestern provinces) may confront considerable obstacles in seeking to establish a course of peaceful coexistence with the state. Such groups will remain problematic to the extent that their religio-ethnic identities are viewed as standing in opposition to Chinese state control. Although ethnically-based religious identities have elsewhere been the basis for civil war and secession, the strong suppression of ethnically-based religion can,

in the long run, lessen the ability of the state to achieve the allegiance of the very ethnic minorities it seeks to more fully incorporate.

Assuming that a freer religious environment will continue to develop in China, a second area of interest is the extent to which increasing social inequalities and urban-rural differences will come to correspond with religious differences. According to the demand-side theory of Norris and Inglehart (2004), religiosity will increase throughout Chinese society along with growing social inequality. Alternately, based on the analyses of religious markets and niches by Stark and Bainbridge (1985) and Stark and Finke (2000), those at the bottom of the Chinese economic ladder will be inclined toward more supernaturalistic religious traditions while the socio-economically privileged will tend toward religions which stress ethical teachings, rather than those that emphasize miracles or magic. While the author will not attempt to predict which kinds of religions will be best suited to China's rural and urban communities, it is noteworthy that evangelical Christianity has historically thrived in newly-industrializing societies and particularly among workers migrating to urban areas and leaving behind rural social ties. Islam, on the other hand, appears to do well among merchant classes and was purveyed across much of Asia by travelling merchants.

A third area of interest, based again on the assumption of a relatively-free religious environment, is the degree of favorability toward religion reflected in the policies, rules, and informal norms of meso-level organizations, particularly within institutions of media and education and, businesses and workplaces. While some of these are obviously directly influenced by state policy, others arise and change without state intervention and reflect other changes in society. Organizational policies and norms, both formal and informal, can function both as a barometer of religious influences elsewhere in society and as determinants of future changes in attitudes at the micro and macro level. If religious practice is discouraged and/or openly-religious individuals are prevented from assuming positions of authority within important meso-level organizations, the growth of religion at the macro and micro level is likely to be much slower than if prominent organizational elites, e.g., top communist party leaders, openly acknowledge religious commitments.

A fourth area of consideration is the extent to which religious groups are allowed (and able) to create non-state civic organizations that

address community needs not met by state or economic organizations (e.g., additional assistance in disaster relief). Just as non-religious groups may reduce the demand for religion by supplying non-religious sources of meaning, belonging/identity, and security, so religious groups can increase the demand for religion by addressing non-religious needs unmet by other institutions and organizations. By finding niches of social need not met by state-based and economic organizations, religious groups may increase their own acceptability in society as well as that of religion and religious organizations in general. An example may be seen in the participation of both domestic and international religiously-based charities in the relief efforts following the May 12 Sichuan earthquake. Of course, it remains to be seen whether the state will allow Chinese religious groups to expand to form a rudimentary "civil society" (admittedly a Western term) in China.

Finally, a long-term consideration is the impact of China's rapid economic development on religion. According to secularization theories, the modernization of the Chinese economy will retard the introduction of religion to macro-level institutions and meso-level non-religious organizations and/or facilitate its removal where it has gained a foothold, which may lead to religious neutrality rather than anti-religiousness at the macro and meso levels of society. Similarly, Norris and Inglehart (2004) suggest that if greater economic development expands the health, wealth, and existential security of the Chinese people, the demand for religion will decline. Alternately, as described in the section on demand for religion (see above), rapid economic development could lead to the expansion of religious demand in China, particularly if it results in greater social inequality and is associated with rapid social upheavals and change.

Religion in China has, particularly in the latter half of the 20th century, taken a course quite unlike that of the histories of Western democracies upon which most current theories of religious change are based. The severe repression of religion during the Cultural Revolution was matched only by that within the former Soviet Union. When compared with the histories of most modern Western democracies, China has a long history of centralized control. Whereas within Western democracies economic development has been largely associated with the removal of religion from the macro- and meso-levels of society, religion had almost no place in the macro- and meso-level sectors of Chinese society at the end of the Cultural Revolution. Thus, any changes in religion at the meso- and macro-levels of Chinese society

can only occur in the direction of an increase. Finally, the economic development that in Western democracies has primarily led to a decline in religion has occurred much more rapidly in China, particularly during the past thirty years. Hence, the future course of religious development in China will provide interesting insights regarding theories of religious change.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE DILEMMA OF PURSUING CHINESE RELIGIOUS STUDIES WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF WESTERN RELIGIOUS THEORIES

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Due to the cultural differences that exist between China and the West, a number of disparities and dilemmas have appeared in the academic research on religion in China. In his seminal work on *Religion in Chinese Society*, which first appeared five decades ago, C.K. Yang wrote: "For many years I have been perplexed by the problem of the place of religion in traditional Chinese society."[1] Contemporary Chinese scholars have frequently attempted to employ Western viewpoints and theories in interpreting traditional Chinese culture and belief. Yet, numerous problems and dilemmas have inevitably arisen from this approach to the study of Chinese religion. In the 4th century CE, the first Chinese interpreters of Buddhism employed Daoist concepts in their illumination of this foreign faith. As a result of this hermeneutical strategy, referred to as *ge yi* (格义, or the practice of drawing upon corresponding concepts), unfamiliar Buddhist notions, such as Dharma, were matched with more locally recognizable notions, such as the Dao. The reverse practice was often employed by early 20th century Chinese interpreters of religion, who used unfamiliar notions, i.e. Western definitions of religion, in explaining the familiar Chinese world of belief. This strategy, termed "reverse analogical interpretation 反向格义,"[2] has led to unfortunate misunderstandings regarding the role of religion within Chinese culture and has significantly influenced the standard

[1] C.K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1961.

[2] See Liu Xiaogan ed., Reverse Analogical Interpretation and Global Philosophy, in the first volume of *Chinese Philosophy and Culture*, edited by, Guangxi: Guangxi Normal Press, 2007.

methodology employed in the social scientific study of religion in China. The following article examines the existence and influence of reverse analogical interpretation in Chinese religious studies with the goal of strengthening the social scientific basis of the study of religion in China.

For nearly twenty years, the author has undertaken the research of Chinese religions as well engaged in the study of Western religious theories. Although an impressive range of comprehensive studies on Chinese culture and religion has been produced through the application of Western research and theory, occasional inconsistencies have arisen through the interpretation of Chinese cultural and religious characteristics within the framework of Western religious concepts and theories. Transplanted to China, the Western theoretical framework for the study of the sociology of religion has provided the fundamental research methodologies and standards for the study of China's religious heritage; many have viewed this as inevitable, assuming, as did sociologist Ambrose King, that "Sociology is a Western flower."[3] Yet, when Western theories of religion are applied in the academic study of religion in China, scholars' understanding of Chinese religion is inevitably influenced by Western models and categories, and the culturally specific role of religion within Chinese society may be too easily overlooked or undervalued. Indeed, the academic record indicates that this approach has even given rise to debates regarding the very existence of religion in China. In addition, this Western-oriented study of Chinese religion neglects the potential, substantive contributions of Chinese religion to the larger field of religious studies. Reverse analogical interpretation allows even the Chinese researcher to overlook the distinctive features of Chinese religion.

Beginning with an analysis of the application of the term *religion* within Chinese academic research, this paper explores the dilemma of employing Western theories of religion within the Chinese cultural environment. It is the author's hope that the following discussion will contribute to a heightened awareness of both the benefits and difficulties involved in such cross-cultural intellectual exchange.

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[3] See King's essay, "The Development and Death of Chinese Academic Sociology: A Chapter in the Sociology of Sociology," *Modern Asian Studies*, 12.1, (1978), p. 37.

I. *The Term "Religion" and Relevant Concepts*

Harvard theologian Francis Fiorenza has rightly posed the following question:

> How do we study religion in ways that do not substitute or privilege our own categories and thereby misunderstand and devalue the beliefs and practices of other cultures, past and present?[4]

A Chinese translation of the English term "religion" (i.e. 宗教, or *zongjiao*) first appeared in mainland China at the beginning of the 20th century. This new term, as well as the corresponding term for "superstition" (迷信, or *mixin*), was "adopted from Japanese neologisms crafted a few years before and was used to express Western notions which had not existed in the Chinese discourse until then."[5] The establishment of these terms meant that

> Religion was now understood in the Western post-reformation sense of a system of doctrine organized as a church separate from society; the word was first equated with Christianity, and debate began (and is still going on to this day) regarding what, in the Chinese tradition, might be put under this category.[6]

Intent upon adapting Chinese society to the onrushing dynamics of modernity, early 20th century Chinese scholars sought to understand "religion" based upon a definition that emphasized institutional structures, well-developed doctrines, the organizational roles of trained clergy, and a distinct dichotomy between the sacred and profane. Of course, none of these characteristics was of particular use in analyzing the religious dynamics alive in their own deeply spiritual culture.

A. *Dilemma One: Is there "Religion" in China?*

While this question may seem simple—even overly simplistic—it is an issue that must be addressed on several theoretical levels. Does "religion" as used here carry all of its Western specifications? A better question might be: what words best describe religious belief as it exists

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[4] Francis Fiorenza, "Religion: A Contested Site in Theology and the Study of Religion," *Harvard Theological Review*, #93.1 (2000), p. 20.

[5] See Vincent Goossaert's essay, "Religious Traditions, Communities and Institutions," in *Religion and Public Life in the Chinese World*, (forthcoming).

[6] See Goossaert, Ibid.

in China? In the early part of the 20th century, Wang Zhixin (王治新) searched for appropriate indigenous terms to convey the essence of religious belief. Wang suggested that the basic concept of "religion" in China was best expressed as "moralization by sacred ways," a term derived from the following passage in the Zhou Yi (周易, or Book of Changes): "'Based on the sacred ways, the running of four seasons never goes wrong.' The sages devised guidance by the way of gods, and the (people in the) empire became obedient."[7]

A number of scholars have argued that the term *zongjiao* (religion) has been long used to describe the three moral traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism and has been applied to numerous Buddhist texts without the distinctive connotations of Western writings on religion.[8] Although the term "religion" has little significance within Chinese culture, this and other Western concepts and ideologies have, nonetheless, been transplanted to Chinese soil and have had a considerable influence on Chinese scholars in their studies of Chinese society, culture, and religion.

B. *Asking the Right Question*

Anthropologist Li Yih-yuan (李亦园) has suggested that misunderstandings arise when the wrong question is posed. If asked by a Westerner, "To which religion do you belong?" a Chinese person is likely to respond, "It's hard to say!" Such an exchange reflects the significant differences that exist between the Western and Chinese notions of religious belief. Within the Western cultural context, it is customary to assume that the possession of religious belief implies membership in a religious organization; hence, in discussing religion, a Westerner may inquire as to an individual's membership in a religious institution. According to Li Yih-yuan, a more productive conversation might follow if the query were phrased in terms of belief, rather than institutional membership: "Many Chinese would find it easier to respond to the question 'what do you believe in?'"[9] Renowned China scholar Vincent Goossaert reframes the greater question in the following manner:

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[7] In *Outline of Chinese Religious Thought*, Wang Zhixin, Shanghai: Sanlian Press, 1933, p. 6.

[8] See Peng Guoxiang, *Confucian Tradition: Between Religion and Humanism*, Beijing: Peking University Press, 2007, pp. 5–6.

[9] Li Yih-yuan, in *Collected Works of Religion and Mysteries*, Taibei: Lixu Press, 1998, pp. 168–169.

"[Chinese] people generally do not consider themselves members of a religion, but of a community: household, clan, professional guild, etc."[10] Hence, it is in these ordinary, everyday gatherings—rather than in formal religious organizations—that many Chinese give expression to their deepest beliefs.

C.K. Yang also attempted to identify a Chinese term for "religion" more suitable for use within the context of Chinese culture and society. He recalled the deeply Chinese notion of the Dao (道)—a transcendent way, or cosmological principle, that governs the universe, including the human world.[11] Yang also noted the religious resonance of the Chinese word *men* (门), meaning door, or the passageway leading to enlightenment and salvation.[12] He acknowledged the common use of the term *jiao* (教), or "teaching(s)," with its moral and religious connotations, as used in the Chinese term for Buddhism, *fo jiao* (佛教) or the (religious) teachings of the Buddha. The word *zong* (宗), meaning piety, devotion, or faith, also carries significant religious overtones. The modern neologism *zong jiao* is, in fact, a union of these two traditional terms.

We might, moreover, reflect on the existence of religion in China at the institutional level, for even when the term "religion" is accepted by Chinese scholars, it is still difficult to determine the existence and appropriate means of assessment of religion within Chinese society and culture. Prior to the publication of C.K. Yang's groundbreaking work, scholars often questioned the very existence of religion in China, and skepticism pervaded scholarly discourse regarding the extent to which Chinese folk beliefs was tantamount to genuine religion. Wang Zhixin argued that religious belief in China had been influenced by Confucian humanism to such an extent that it amounted to little more than moral education and the transmission of cultural values. A number of other scholars proposed that the Three Teachings (三教) of

[10] Goossaert, Ibid.

[11] Robert Campany favors this traditional term in his reflection on the discussion of religion in the context of Chinese culture. See his essay, "On The Very Idea of Religions (in the Modern West and in Early Medieval China", *Journal of Religion*, 42.4 (2003), pp. 289–319.

[12] C.K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1961, p. 20.

Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism were, in essence, vehicles of moral education and, thus, should not be regarded as religions.[13]

As the 20th century dawned on China, many intellectuals became enthralled with the rationalism of the European Enlightenment. Consequently, the study of religion by Chinese scholars was profoundly shaped by this Western "scientific" perspective. If the Confucian tradition was questionable as a religious system, then their country's heritage of folk belief was deeply embarrassing. Following a comparison of Chinese practices and Western religious institutions, the influential intellectual, Liang Qichao (梁启超), contemplated the nature of Chinese belief:

> The history of religion consists of the story of theology and the changing of religious organizations. Theology goes beyond the physical world to the discussion of paradise and the soul after death…On these two points, the question of whether or not religion exists in China merits serious study.[14]

The philosopher, Liang Shuming (梁漱溟), noted, "The religiousness of the Chinese people is the weakest in the world…The preponderance of traditional, Chinese philosophy focuses on human life, and this is also the case of modern philosophy."[15] Referring back to ancient times, he observed, "Religion did not exist [in China] before the Qin Dynasty, and the addition of Daoism to the history of religion has been a great shame, for the contributions of Daoism over the years have not been positive; it has only served to bewilder the people and break the peace.[16] Liang's views were representative of the academic consensus of his time. Hu Shi (胡适) affirmed that the educated classes in China were indifferent to religion,[17] arguing that, as a whole, "China is a country without religion, and the Chinese people are not bound by religious superstitions."[18]

The philosopher, Qian Mu (钱穆), was raised in an environment alive with traditional beliefs and rituals. In *Soul and Heart*, Qian wrote:

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[13] Wang Zhixin, *Introduction to Chinese Religious Thought*, Shanghai: Sanlian Press, 1933, p. 6.
[14] Liang Qichao, *Methods of Chinese History Studies*.
[15] Liang Shuming, *Eastern and Western Culture and Philosophy*, p. 198.
[16] Liang Qichao, *Methods of Chinese History Studies*.
[17] Hu Shi, *The Chinese Renaissance*, Chicago, 1934, p. 78.
[18] Hu Shi, Ming Jiao (名教), in the first volume of *Three Collections of Works of Hu Shi*.

> I was born in the countryside, where people lived in big families. Nearly one hundred people throughout the county shared the same surname. Moreover, they would all gather together on the occasion of a wedding or funeral. It was a great opportunity for all residents to offer sacrifices to the ancestors.[19]

His early memories were of a pervasive spiritual atmosphere:

> Year after year, the elders would tell the young people the stories of the ancestors, as well as other family legends. Thus, the human world and the world of the ghosts were closely entwined.[20]

After studying Western culture, Qian discovered "a sharp difference between Western religious philosophies and our own views on topics like the universe and human life."[21] For Qian, Buddhism differed starkly from Western institutional religion:

> The spirit of Buddhism is similar to that of Chinese culture. Although it may be called a religion, its object of faith is an internal Buddha or Bodhisattva, rather than an external God. On this point, Buddhism is consistent with the Chinese spirit of admiring sages. Therefore, Buddhist belief seems to begin and end with human beings. We might say that Buddhism is a religion based in humanity.[22]

These assessments of Chinese religion reflect the influence of Western values. C.K. Yang recognized these attitudes—regarding China as non-religious and devoid of traditional beliefs—as resulting partially from the global tide of modernization, in accordance with which science was viewed as the most forceful means of improving human life and providing tangible benefits. This early generation of Chinese scholars, under the influence of Western culture, believed that China's lack of religiousness might well be an advantage in an era of secularization and modernization. At the same time, these scholars were struggling to accentuate the excellence of the Chinese culture amidst the onslaught of Western science, politics, and economics.

Yang also recognized that:

> The modern Chinese scholars' argument for the insignificance of religion in Chinese society was partly a reflection of the world's trend

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[19] Qian Mu, In Introduction of Chinese Cultural History, in *Complete Works of Qian Binsi*, Taibei: Lianjing Press Company, p. 365.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.

> toward secularization. Modern Europe emerged from a violent reaction against the medieval church. Science has given man the most powerful weapon yet known for unlocking the secrets of nature and for providing hitherto undreamed-of tangible benefits. Intellectually, this is an age of rationalistic orientation which waves off religion with defiance and even with contempt.[23]

This led Yang to conclude, "It is quite natural for modern Chinese intellectuals, who have followed the West in exalting science, to catch the spirit of the times and to shun religion."[24]

Yang also recognized other motivations at play in the negative evaluation of religion in China:

> But perhaps an even stronger motivation for the assumption of an "unreligious" or "rationalistic" society for China lies in the Chinese intellectual's necessity of emphasizing the dignity of Chinese civilization in the face of the political and economic superiority of the nationalistically oriented Western world.[25]

Within these discussions of Chinese religion, there was the need to be scientific and to advocate the suppression of superstition. During this era, religion and related areas of study confronted the direct challenge of the New Culture Movement (新文化运动),[26] the popular pursuit of science and democracy, and the transplantation of the traditional education system. Prior to the 1980s, few studies were conducted or works published in the areas of theology, religious theory, religious history, or religious practice which adequately reflected fundamental academic attitudes on religion. While the labeling of Chinese folk beliefs as "superstitions" may have originated with Western missionaries, this attitude of prejudice was subsequently adopted by both Western and Chinese scholars. As a result, scholars of later generations were reluctant to attribute any value to China's traditional beliefs.

In 1961, C.K. Yang demonstrated that it was the lack of institutional and organizational structures common in Western religions such

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[23] C.K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors*, Berkeley: CA, University of California Press, 1961, p. 6.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] A reactionary movement launched by Chinese intellectuals denouncing traditional Chinese culture and Confucian values in favor of Western democracy and science that took place in the years following the founding of the new Republic of China in 1912.

as Christianity, rather than the absence of religion itself, that presented a challenge to the research and analysis of religion in China. Yang responded to this dilemma by developing a more inclusive concept of religion as the basis for the study of Chinese religious phenomena and beliefs: "From a broad viewpoint, religion should be viewed as a continuum from ultimate atheistic belief with passion to theistic belief with transcendent values symbolized by supernatural being and sustained by organization."[27]

When Yang's work, *Religion in Chinese Society*, was first published in the early 1960s, social circumstances precluded its easy acceptance and appreciation by scholars in mainland China. Initially, Yang's work also received little acclaim in the West, as evidenced by British scholar Maurice Freedman's lukewarm review of the book in a 1962 edition of the *Journal of Asian Studies*. However, Freedman's estimation of the value of Yang's work had changed considerably by the 1974 publication of his article, "On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion":

> [Yang's] book is, after all, the latest of the very few works of its kind: an attempt to characterize Chinese religion as a whole and in relation to the society within which it was thought and practiced.

Freedman further placed Yang's work in the sociological tradition of Max Weber and Marcel Granet: "In what I have said so far I have tried to show that there is a sociological tradition, culminating for the moment in Yang's book, which takes Chinese religion to be one entity."[28] American anthropologist Robert Redfield lauded Yang's work as "the first functional study of Chinese religion" and "a large achievement."[29] One might say that Yang's study constituted the triumph of sociological interpretation over other interpretations of Chinese religion.

During this same period, anthropologist, Li Yih-yuan, based on considerable field research, demonstrated that Chinese religious belief, rather than being distilled into the organizational structures and systematic doctrines common to the West, was immersed in the usual activities of daily life and expressed through the various elements of

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[27] Ibid., p. 39.

[28] Maurice Freedman, "On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion" in *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* ed. by Arthur P. Wolf, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1974, p. 36.

[29] Ibid.

Chinese culture. Li concluded that, as a result of the culturally specific nature of Chinese religious activities, they cannot be adequately defined or described within the context of the Western notion of distinct religious organizations.

Li outlined the manner in which Chinese religious beliefs find expression in broad but persuasive concepts such as the "harmony between the heaven and human" and "the adjustment to the four seasons and the harmony of the whole of nature." These beliefs find practical, daily expression in Chinese traditional medicine, the Chinese surname system, ancestral veneration rituals, augury, geomancy, and other local rituals, all of which reflect the nature of Chinese religion as diffused throughout the culture and dedicated to the concerns of daily life.

The formal, academic study of religion did not commence in mainland China until after the Cultural Revolution. Subsequent progress within the field during the past thirty years has been steady but slow. Not until the 1990s was there a concerted effort among Chinese scholars to tackle the rich heritage of popular belief. In his analysis of this recent surge of academic interest, Daniel Overmyer observes, "What we find here is not only a new academic direction, but the fact that a great culture with long history begins to recognize and approach the expression of religious traditions shared by its majority people."[30]

C. *Dilemma 2: Employing Transplanted Concepts in Interpreting Chinese Religion*

Having discussed the influence of Western religious terminology and theories on the Chinese study of religion and the confusions that arise when these are applied uncritically in the evaluation of China's religious heritage, a number of dilemmas relating to the understanding of religious terminology remain. As Liu Xiaogan has noted, Western theories have regularly and repeatedly influenced Chinese philosophy.[31] The same is true of Chinese religious studies: rooted in Western concepts of society and culture, social scientific theories of religion

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[30] Daniel Overmyer, "From 'Feudal Superstition' to 'Popular Beliefs': New Directions in Mainland Chinese Studies of Chinese Popular Religion," *Cahiers d'Extreme-Asie*, #12 (2001), pages 125.

[31] See Liu Xiaogan, ed., Reverse Analogical Interpretation and Global Philosophy in the first collection of *Chinese Philosophy and Culture*, Guangxi: Guangxi Normal Press, 2007.

often fail to resonate with the Chinese cultural experience and heritage when translated into the Chinese language. Thus, in employing these terms, Chinese scholars may neglect to recognize their specific, historical connection with the European Enlightenment and their development within the field of Western social science.

An example of this may be seen in the prominent role of the notion of "secularization" in Western religious thought. Having developed within the context of Western modernization, this distinctive social dynamic is intimately rooted in the history of Western Christendom. Hence, the indiscriminate application of this notion to Chinese society is likely to give rise to misunderstanding and confusion.

Another example is seen in the supposed "agnosticism" of Confucius. The term, "agnosticism," carries deep historical connotations within Western Christianity, i.e. with regard to the debate over what constitutes authentic, or orthodox, belief, and the historical challenge of the Enlightenment to religious faith. Thus, the unsystematic employment of the term, "agnosticism," within the Chinese context results in such confusions as neglecting Confucius' deeply held reverence for the transcendent forces of Tian (天) and Dao (道). Again, we see the challenges that arise from the careless application of Western concepts to Chinese culture.

C.K. Yang's contributions to the academic study of religion in China have been considerable, yet even Yang initially set out from the basis of a Western understanding of institutional religion prior to his discernment of China's "diffused" religion. Moreover, while the term "diffused" provides an insightful description of the non-institutional belief system of China, the English term is viewed by some scholars as carrying pejorative nuances. For instance, Daniel Overmyer argued that "diffused" implies a kind of disorganized, even incoherent religion. In the translation of Yang's work into Chinese (it was originally written in English), the term "diffused" has been frequently interpreted as *sankaide* (散开的). However, Professor Qu Haiyuan (瞿海源) prefers the term *kuosanxing zongjiao* (扩散性宗教); Professor Chen Na (陈纳) suggests that the term *mimanxing zongjiao* 弥漫性宗教 is most appropriate; and the author employs the term "distributed religion," or *fensanxing zongjiao* (分散性宗教), in her own Chinese translation of Yang's classic work.

Terminology specific to Chinese religion—including *Tian* (天), *Li* (礼), *Yuanfen* (缘分), and *Mingyun* (命运)—has been slow to gain acceptance in the social scientific study of religion. Chinese scholars have

likely learned, if only indirectly, that such terms bear pre-modern connotations and do not fit comfortably within the accepted Western framework of research. Yet, as the product of the ancient Chinese worldview, these terms permeate every level of Chinese culture, carry a rich cultural heritage, and reflect the distinctive features of the Chinese religious tradition. Fortunately, scholars have recently begun to recognize the distinctive and, thus, untranslatable nature of these terms. Professors D.L. Hall and Roger T. Ames have, for example, pointed to the hazards of simply translating *tian* (天) as "heaven"—a term that carries innumerable and unavoidable Christian nuances. China scholar, Benjamin Schwartz, reminds us of the rich range of meaning of the term *li* (礼), transporting this notion well beyond the narrow confines of the English term "ritual":

> Li (礼)…refers to all those…prescriptions of behavior, whether involving rite, ceremony, manners, or general comportment, that bind human beings and the spirits together in networks of interacting roles within the family, within society, and with the numinous realm beyond.[32]

The Chinese term *mingyun* (命运), which carries rich, historical nuances regarding the simultaneous external determination (命) and flexibility (运) of each life's journey, is often simply translated as "fate," a term accompanied by specific Western connotations. We see, then, that the use of Western terms such as "heaven" and "ritual" in the interpretation of Chinese phenomena implies meanings that are notably absent from this considerably different cultural context. Some scholars have responded to this dilemma by "preserving" within their studies a number of critical terms—such as *tian* (天), *dao* (道), *li* (礼), and *mingyun* (命运)—which are best expressed in the original, Chinese language and, thus, do not require translation.

Just as "reverse analogical interpretation" created challenges within the Chinese study of philosophy, so dilemmas abound when we rely exclusively upon Western concepts in explaining Chinese religious phenomena. Through this practice, much of the intellectual heritage and worldview that has influenced Chinese culture over thousands of years is excluded from academic studies. Fortunately, contemporary

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[32] See Benjamin Schwartz's study, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, p. 67.

scholars are, with increasing frequency, recognizing the value of terms that reflect the daily religious practices of the Chinese people.[33]

In describing the characteristics of Chinese folk religion, Overmyer noted:

> Chinese local religion also shares a common set of theoretical assumptions, its own "theology," which is based on the belief that the living and the dead, gods, humans and ghosts are all connected by bonds of mutual influence and response; bonds of mutual obligation that are based on a sense of a moral universe in which righteousness, respect and destructive behavior eventually bring their own retributions.[34]

Only through emphasizing the concepts, expressions, and symbols fundamental to Chinese beliefs can we appropriately convey the significance of Chinese religious activities. Through attaching greater importance to native religious practices and beliefs, we may resolve the dilemmas induced by relying solely on Western religious theories and models in the interpretation of Chinese religion.

II. *Chinese Religious Studies within the Framework of Western Religious Theories*

The aim of much of modern social science has been the development of a universal theoretical framework within which to interpret human civilization, and this is also true of religious studies. Many researchers within the field today continue to embrace this goal. Social scientists, influenced by the physical sciences, frequently seek to discover general laws that may be applied to all human societies and propose that certain common religious phenomena are shared by all human beings. Their objective is to identify characteristics that may be applied to all religious phenomena. In satisfying this need to establish cross-cultural commonality, the study of religion becomes highly theoretical and abstract and may, ultimately, become isolated from actual,

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[33] See Fan, Lizhu, James D. Whitehead, and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead. "Fate and Fortune: Popular Religion and Moral Capital in Shenzhen," *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 32 (2004): 83–100.

[34] Daniel Overmyer, "From 'Feudal Superstition' to 'Popular Beliefs': New Directions in Mainland Chinese Studies of Chinese Popular Religion," *Cahiers d'Extreme-Asie*, #12 (2001), pages 125.

lived religion. A great many religious terms cannot, in fact, simply be abstracted from their distinctive cultural roots.

In their forward to the Chinese edition of *Acts of Faith*, authors Stark and Finke write:

> If it would be foolish to try to formulate a physics that only applied to the United States, or a biology that held only in Korea, it is equally foolish to settle for a sociology of religion that applies only to Western nations. In our theoretical work we have attempted to formulate propositions that apply everywhere—that explain religious behavior as adequately in China as in Canada.[35]

Their words illustrate the hunger for an all-inclusive paradigm, or "grand narrative," that explains all religious phenomena. The author has argued that such schemes ultimately absorb non-Western phenomena into Western paradigms of religious belief—or exclude those that simply do not fit with the all-embracing schema. Yet another peril threatens the field of religious studies: measurement strategies that operate effectively within the realms of physics and biology are insufficient in the study of human beliefs and ideals. The manifold, mathematical calculations of the market economy can never do justice to the incalculable movements of the human heart.

A. *Dilemma 1: Challenges in Establishing the Integrity of Chinese Religion*

While the scholarly contributions of C.K. Yang are certainly not confined to the study of Chinese religion, his work, *Religion in Chinese Society*, stands out as remarkably insightful and distinct. It is worth noting that the challenges Yang confronted and the interpretations he provided concerned not only Chinese religion but also the study of Chinese society and religion as an integrated whole.[36]

The greatest of Yang's challenges was the development of the concepts and theories necessary to depict Chinese religion. Yang attempted

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[35] Stark, Rodney and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 2000. Chinese edition, *Xinyang de Faze*, Beijing, Renmin University of China Press, 2004.

[36] Ambrose King, Fan Lizhu, "A Sociological Paradigm in the Study of Chinese Religion: A Reading of C.K. Yang's Religion in Chinese Society," in *Social Change in Contemporary China: C.K. Yang and the Concept of Institutional Diffusion* by Wenfang Tang and Burkart Holzner (Eds.). Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007.

to construct an interpretive framework within which to express the complex conditions of Chinese religion:

> An important reason for the obscurity (in Chinese religions) is the lack of structural prominence of a formal organized religious system in the institutional framework of Chinese society, which leads to the frequent interpretation that the numerous popular cults are unorganized and are of little importance in the Chinese social and moral order.[37]

For Yang, it was critical to resolve the issue of the vagueness of Chinese religion, and he ultimately did just that. Through his theory of "diffused" religion, Yang constructed a concept of Chinese religion that both satisfied Western academic standards and provided the basis for the academic study of Chinese folk beliefs within the field of religious studies.

Yang's exploration of China's "diffused" religion, heavily influenced by structural-functionalism, offered a theoretical framework for the clarification of the multilateral, complicated, and even seemingly disordered religious phenomena of China. Unfortunately, despite Yang's considerable contribution, the young Chinese scholars who succeeded him failed to carry on his work, becoming instead preoccupied with Western religious theories and methods. Moreover, a number of scholars elected to concentrate on providing detailed descriptions of religious phenomena rather than establishing relevant religious theories.

B. *Dilemma 2: Obstacles Preventing an Academic "Breakthrough" in Chinese Religious Studies*

The economic impulse of Western capitalism has, from the outset of the modern era, exercised considerable influence within many academic fields. As the source of the materialist, utilitarian, and rationalist attitudes characteristic of modern life, it has posed a direct challenge to the social influence of religion. The birth of the social sciences coincided with the spread of capitalism in (and the resultant industrialization of) Europe and North America. Hence, the theoretical study of religion in modern society is often associated with interpretations of the rise of capitalism and the consequent fate of religion within the modern world. All of the so-called founders of sociology produced influential studies on issues related to religion. While their specific viewpoints

[37] Ibid., p. 20.

may have differed, their works were unified by the tendency to view religion within the framework of the development of modern capitalist society. This trend ultimately influenced Chinese scholars in their understanding and study of religion.

Marxist theories on religion have also undoubtedly had a considerable influence on Chinese scholars. Of course, Karl Marx was convinced that only through the elimination of religion could humanity achieve practical and lasting happiness. According to Marx, the criticism of religion enabled humans to divest themselves of the illusion of religion in order to think and act rationally. Only in this way could human beings construct their own reality.[38] While this paper does not attempt to discuss and assess Marxist theories on religion, it is necessary to an understanding of the modern Chinese study of religion to note that a dogmatic interpretation of Marxism often constrains Chinese scholars in their study and understanding of Chinese religion. To this day, a number of scholars have persisted in proposing hollow theories that, while claiming to be rooted in Marxism, expose an incomplete understanding of the thinking of Karl Marx. Meanwhile, certain other scholars focus their studies on issues relating to atheism and theism and discuss in some detail the notion of religion as the "opium of the people." Yet other scholars have adopted an ideological approach to the study of religion and, as a result, their work is not well respected.

The perspective of Max Weber on religion and society differs markedly from that of Marx. While Weber clearly understood that the spread of modern capitalism ultimately necessitated the movement toward secularization, he also recognized the disenchantment that accompanied this historical process. He acknowledged that "In a mature capitalistic world, religious organizations are supplanted and rational sciences are supreme."[39] Therefore, Weber delved deeply into the study of the relationship between the rise of capitalism and that of Protestant Christianity. In his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber noted that the inner worldly asceticism of the Protestant ethic, particularly that of the Calvinist tradition, supported the spread of capitalism. Weber's recognition of this distinctly religious trait of

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[38] Contributions of the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction, in the 1st volume of *Ethnology of Marx and Engels*, Beijing: Renmin Press, 1965.

[39] Anthony Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*, Taibei: Yuanliu Press, 1994, p. 223.

discipline gave his theory considerable weight within academic circles, and it has since been employed in explaining the absence of capitalism in East Asia, particularly in China.[40]

Weber's works on religion, particularly those concerning the development of capitalism, have greatly energized Chinese religious studies. As noted by Chinese-American historian Yü Ying Shih, Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* has had an impact on the study of non-Western societies comparable to that of the works of Marx on history.[41] In his *Modern Chinese Religious Ethic and the Merchant Spirit*, Yü explores within the context of Chinese history a question similar to that posed by Max Weber in his study of the Western Protestant Ethic. As apparent from the title of his work, Yü undertakes an explicit investigation of the Chinese religious ethic in order to discover the extent to which it may have produced a phenomenon similar to that of the "inner-worldly asceticism" of Calvinism. To this end, Yü employs Weber's concept of "inner-worldly asceticism" as the standard against which to compare Chinese historical data.[42]

During the 1980s, numerous sociologists and economists discussed the cultural factors in the economic development of East Asia within the context of Weber's model, taking into account the intimate relationship between cultural factors and religious ethics. Consequently, Weberian concepts and theories, including that of "inner-worldly asceticism," appeared in the discussion of China's modernization and religious ethic.[43] However, this line of inquiry, rooted as it was in Weberian proposals, failed to provide any significant breakthroughs in the study of Chinese religion and constituted little more than a supplement to other studies of the time.

Following the implementation of the Reform and Opening policy in China, religious studies gradually emerged from the abyss of academic prohibition, and a resurgence of religious ideas accompanied the ensuing economic development. Despite these advancements, Chinese religious studies still has much ground to cover before traditional religious beliefs and practices can be fully understood. Even less imminent is

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[40] See *Modern Chinese Religious Ethic and the Merchant Spirit*, in *Shi and Chinese Culture*, Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Press, 2003.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] See *Ideology and Behavior of Chinese People: Collection of the 4th International Symposium on Modernization and Chinese Culture*, Tianjin: Tianjin Renmin Press, 1995.

the possibility of a theoretical breakthrough in the study of Chinese religion, for a careful assessment of the still-modest repertoire of religious research undertaken by Chinese scholars within the field of the sociology of religion reveals a preponderance of Western terms and modes of thought and a reliance on religious concepts deeply rooted in the Western academic tradition. It is, indeed, an embarrassment that the study of Chinese religion has not been freed from its dependency on Western concepts and theories.

During the early decades of the PRC, a period during which China isolated itself from the world, significant developments occurred within the Western field of religious studies, including the evolution, rejection, and replacement of numerous theories. Naturally, Chinese scholars were not, at the time, privy to many of these changes. This was also true in the evolution of secularization theory from the early conviction of the irreversibility of disenchantment to more sophisticated discussions, including the discussion (in which even Peter Berger has participated) of the surprising trend of de-secularization and religious revitalization that is occurring in many parts of the world today.

A number of Chinese scholars have undertaken the arduous work of interpreting and analyzing Western religious theories, yet some of these works reveal an incompleteness of understanding. While it has become customary to apply Western theories directly to Chinese realities, this remains a risky undertaking due to the culturally specific nature of the Western theoretical framework, methods of interpretation, and conceptual criteria.

Despite the present flourishing of the social sciences in China, the academic study of religion continues to face copious dilemmas. As noted by He Guanghu (何光沪):

> There are still few translated books available today. Religious studies are thriving in advanced countries and there are many recognized scholars and publications. However, we do not even have sufficient statistical data on our own nation yet. Due to a lack of previous research, we have little data to inform our own studies. As a result, the progress of our present research is thwarted.[44]

While there is no logical reason that the research on Chinese religions should be based on Western models, Chinese scholars continue

[44] He Guanghu, Preface, *The Translation Series of Religious Studies*, Beijing: Renmin University of China Press, 2003.

to lack confidence in their own studies and, thus, frequently rely on the achievements of Western scholars. An example of this dependency on Western models and concepts is seen in the recent widespread influence of the application of rational choice theory to the study of Chinese society. In the words of Fenggang Yang:

> While fully aware of the deficiency of Stark's theories, I still propose that principles of religious market theory are comprehensively applicable with certain revisions. It is hard to find an alternative theoretical framework when treating Chinese religious practice. For example, secularization theory is not helpful in interpreting Chinese religious resurgence.[45]

III. *Conclusion: Studying Chinese Religion as a Whole*

As early as the publication of his *Religion in Chinese Society*, C. K. Yang observed that among the three civilizations of Europe, India, and China, Chinese religiosity was the least clearly defined. He further noted that none of the existing Western theories could fully explain the dynamics at play within the Chinese culture. This, he claimed, was by no means due to shortcomings present within Chinese religion itself but rather to the deficiencies of the interpretive models available at the time. The differences in the religious practices of China and the West could not be eliminated through the introduction of Western academic concepts. Numerous examples have demonstrated that the logic inherent within Chinese religious practices is, to a certain extent, disregarded by Western theories of religion. An example of this is seen in the difficulty confronted in gathering data on the precise number of religious adherents in China. Rather than indicating the absence of religious belief in China, this phenomenon points to a major difference between the cultures of China and the West: the exclusivist orientation and emphasis on institutional membership so prominent in the West lack cultural significance within Chinese society. While scholars have come to take for granted the dissimilarity of Christianity and Islam, or the seeming incompatibility of Protestant and Catholic Christianity, religious adherents within the Chinese cultural context—whether they be Buddhist or Daoist or Confucian—remain quite comfortable with

[45] Fenggang Yang, "The Red, Black, and Gray Markets of Religion in China," *The Sociological Quarterly* 47 (2006) 93–122.

the beliefs and rituals of others. Moreover, within Chinese religious beliefs are preserved many ancient views of the universe, some of which have developed into a kind of shared cultural heritage comprised of a fusion of distinctively Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist beliefs.

This is not to say that modern Western theories should be abandoned entirely in the study of Chinese religion. Rather, scholars should recognize and avoid the seductions of "reverse analogical interpretation" in their research. We must not ignore the dilemmas that arise from a sole reliance on Western theories, and we should recognize the opportunities provided through comparative studies to enlighten and enliven our own research. Weber's insights concerning the mutual influence of societal and religious forces lay the foundation for much subsequent research on the sociology of religion, including religion in China. At the same time, the distinctive practices of Chinese religion provide unique resources for dialogue with other civilizations. Significant contributions to humanity's appreciation of the religions of the world may yet be made through the study of Chinese religion.

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CHAPTER FIVE

RELIGION IN CHINA: SOME INTRODUCTORY NOTES FOR THE INTREPID WESTERN SCHOLAR

Eileen Barker

The relative opening up of China following the "Ten Lost Years" of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) has offered Western sociologists of religion an unprecedented opportunity to observe and study new (to the West) ways of being religious (and non-religious) within a particular kind of atheistic regime.[1] Those most likely to benefit from this opportunity are, obviously, sinologists with an understanding of the languages and cultures of China. This does not, however, mean that scholars with little or no knowledge of China cannot learn much from studying, either directly or indirectly, the Chinese population and their religions. An exploration of its people and its religions may, moreover, serve to enrich Western scholars' perceptions of the religions with which they are more familiar by providing valuable insights into what these religions are *not*—which can, perhaps paradoxically, help them to obtain a deeper understanding of what they *are*. As Rudyard Kipling (1891) once wrote: "And what should they know of England who only England know?"

As a Western sociologist of religion, I claim no expertise on the topic of Chinese religions. Rather, as one who does not speak the Chinese language and has visited China on no more than eight, relatively-brief occasions, I have found myself on a steep learning curve, becoming aware of some of the issues related to China and its culture that might be taken for granted by those better acquainted with the scene. Hence, it is from this perspective as a *non*-expert that I shall attempt provide other Western scholars, possibly even less familiar with China, a context within which to understand the practice of religion in China. The chapter begins by presenting some introductory background information on China's historical and cultural development and then goes on

[1] In this chapter, "religion" will be used very loosely to refer to almost any phenomenon that might be considered "religious" by either Westerners or Chinese.

to discuss several basic methodological points regarding comparative approaches to the concept of religion.

I. *The Diversity of China's History and Culture*

Essential to an understanding of China (and its religions) is the recognition of its enormous diversity and remarkable cultural history, in contradistinction to frequent Western depictions of Chinese conformity. In the Western mind, China is most often symbolized by such popular images as Confucian scholars, the Great Wall, the giant panda, Mao Zedong, and more recently, the defiant students who faced down tanks in Tiananmen Square, the looming skyscrapers and smog of Beijing, and the peasants in coolie hats toiling in the fields. But there is, of course, far more to China than these images could possibly convey.

The immense size of the Chinese population alone should alert us to the great variety to be found within the People's Republic of China (PRC): China's 1.3 billion inhabitants account for approximately one fifth of the world's population. Whilst the Han comprise by far the largest ethnic group (or 92% of the population), China's 55 ethnic minorities total over 100 million individuals. Although Mandarin is the official national language (except in Hong Kong and Macau), approximately 100 different indigenous languages belonging to six language families are currently in use across China, most of which are mutually unintelligible. Introducing an element of further complexity are the largely self-governing "special administrative" territories of Hong Kong[2] and Macau[3] and the existence of the Republic of China (ROC).[4]

The vibrancy of China's demographic composition is matched by the richness of its history. Contemporary China is descended from one of the world's oldest continuous civilizations. According to some archaeologists, Peking man was using tools and fire half a million years ago. China's written history dates back to the Shang Dynasty, with the introduction of one of the world's oldest writing systems in the second millennium BCE. The Terracotta Army bears witness to

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[2] England returned Hong Kong to the PRC in 1997.

[3] Macau was restored to the Chinese by Portugal in 1999.

[4] The ROC consists of Taiwan (formerly known as Formosa) and several additional small islands to the southeast of mainland China.

the sophistication of the recently-unified Chinese empire of the early third century BCE, as does the construction of the Great Wall. Joseph Needham's voluminous tomes (1954+) on *Science and Civilisation in China* testify not only to the remarkable accomplishments of Chinese science and technology from the Confucian era through to the Middle Ages and beyond, but also to the pervasive influences of Chinese religions and philosophy on the rest of society throughout the various dynasties.[5]

II. *The Diversity of China's Religions*

As early as 500 BCE, Confucius was elucidating the moral, social, and political philosophy that has influenced, and continues to influence, the lives of millions in China and around the globe.[6] Buddhism was first introduced to China some time during the first or second centuries BCE, and in the ensuing millennia, various schools of Buddhism were integrated into Chinese culture at all levels of society. During the early centuries of the Common Era, Daoism (sometimes written in English as Taoism), which is frequently referred to as the third major "religion" in China, emerged out of the various traditions and beliefs already present in ancient China. As is the case with all of the great religions, Buddhism and Daoism exist in diverse forms, and numerous schools, sects, and "heresies" may be found throughout contemporary China.

One of the most significant observations that can be made concerning Chinese religion is, perhaps, the lack of mutual exclusivity among China's three main religions, i.e. Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. It is by no means uncommon for individual Chinese to identify themselves to a greater or lesser degree with all three of these traditions, whilst incorporating various aspects of what is generically referred to as "Chinese folk religion." Westerners familiar with the more exclusivist religions of the Abrahamic tradition might assume that a relatively-straightforward answer exists to the question "To which religion do you belong?" Yet, in China, such an assumption would be mistaken.

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[5] Sommer (1995) provides an introductory reader of texts covering a wide range of religious and philosophical works from antiquity to the modern era.

[6] His sayings and actions are purportedly recorded in *The Analects of Confucius.*

That is not to say, of course, that Western sociologists of religion are unfamiliar with syncretistic religions. They may, for instance, be familiar with Candomblé, which incorporates veneration of the Virgin Mary with worship of Yoruba Orishas, or with the Ecumenical Ministry of the Unity of All Religions and other such innovative spiritual and religious movements centered in Ojai, California. Considerably more complicated, however, is the kaleidoscope of Chinese folk religions, which may encompass elements of shamanism, animism, divination, fortune telling, alchemy, astrology, traditional medicine, martial arts, feng shui, and ancestor worship, and which may be manifested in all manner of rituals, festivals, and other public and private celebrations.

While traditional Chinese religiosity may not embrace the "One God" of the Abrahamic traditions, this certainly does preclude the veneration or worship of supernatural beings, which may take the form of deities, saints, immortals, trees, animals (the Chinese dragon is particularly significant) and other aspects of nature, fairies, spirits, demons, or ghosts (the last of which occupy a special place between humans and the pantheon of assorted gods). Yet, despite a growing awareness among Western sociologists of religion of certain varieties of polytheistic and pantheistic belief due to the study of New Age, Pagan, and Eastern religions (such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and to a lesser extent, Shinto) that have migrated to the West, scholars should be wary of assuming the interchangeability of such beliefs with those found in China, even when a similar vocabulary is employed in the translation of various entities.[7]

However, just as it would be inaccurate to assume that Chinese religiosity is fundamentally similar to that of the West, it would be equally erroneous to suppose that Chinese religious belief is categorically *different* from that of the West. Western sociologists of religion have become increasingly aware of the extent to which their subject matter may no longer be limited by the confines of conventional, institutionalized religion. It is, for instance, not uncommon for Westerners today (particularly young Westerners) to claim that they are "spiritual, but not religious," although precisely what is meant by this is not fully under-

[7] Sometimes there is no obvious equivalent, as in the case of the "local deity" (土地公), whose powers are restricted to a particular location, such as a home, a street, or a bridge. Subject to the city god or spiritual magistrate, the local deity might be an historical person who, having been beneficial in life, has been deified in death; yet, at the cessation of these apparent benefits, the local deity may be cursorily replaced.

stood by sociologists—or, perhaps, even by those who thus describe themselves (Barker 2008). The ethnocentrism (and, often, Christocentrism) of Western sociology of religion has been exposed through comparative analyses of data from anthropological, ethnographic, and historical studies, and the great range of human religiosity has become increasingly apparent in an increasingly globalized world.

III. *From the Silk Road to the Internet*

The mutual exchange and influence of Eastern and Western civilizations date back to (and even precede) the establishment of the Silk Road(s) (Foltz 1999). Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were first introduced in China well over a millennium ago, as successive waves of missionaries conveyed not only their respective "truths" but also, for better or worse, various other influences through trade and Western education. Jehovah's Witnesses first set foot in China in the 1880s (Barrett 2001: 195), and other 19th century sects, such as the Mormons and Seventh-day Adventists, have now been joined by a host of newer religious movements, although most of these have, as far as possible, remained hidden from the Chinese authorities.

The traffic has not, however, been one-directional. The colorful traditions of Chinese religion are observable in the China towns of London, Melbourne, Chicago and Paris, where Buddhist temples and shrines to the ancestors have been erected, and dragon and lion dances are performed each Chinese New Year. Chinese immigrants around the globe have established their own Chinese churches (Yang 1999), and Chinese missionaries are not only evangelizing Christianity throughout China but also re-importing to the West the teachings that they or their ancestors first learned from Western missionaries (Cao, N. 2007; Chan 2006). Furthermore, the West has been the recipient of a steady stream of new religious movements that originated in the East, primarily from India but also from Japan, Vietnam, Korea, Taiwan and mainland China.[8]

[8] Among the movements with a high profile in the West are the True Buddha School from Taiwan, and the New Kadampa Tradition and Falun Gong from the PRC.

From a broader perspective, a number of Western scholars have written about the "Easternization of the West," pointing to a motley array of beliefs, philosophies, and concepts that have infiltrated and radically altered North America and Western Europe over the past decades (Campbell 2007; Heelas (2008). Indeed, it is not difficult to identify within the religious and spiritual "supermarkets" of Western society elements of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Such imports may be incorporated into already-existing belief systems or, alternately, may simply exist as a resource in the "cultic milieu" to be drawn upon as desired (Campbell 1972). Notions utterly alien to the overwhelming majority of Westerners less than half a century ago (e.g. reincarnation and the complementarity of yin and yang) have now entered the vocabulary of many and the *Weltanschauungen* of more than a few.[9] The extent to which this "Easternization" has, and is, taking place is debatable, but the topic is undoubtedly deserving of attention. It is, however, possible that the "Eastern sacred canopy" depicted by these authors is not experienced as uniformly in the East as is sometimes supposed.

IV. *The Political Context*

It may appear that the most obvious differences between the ways in which religion is practiced in the West and in China derive from the different political contexts within which they are expressed. A number of major historical occurrences have affected China both internally and in its relation to the rest of the world, particularly Christendom. Prominent among these are the Opium Wars[10] and the Taiping[11] and

[9] The European Values Survey found that around a quarter of respondents claimed to believe in reincarnation, many of whom, interestingly, also believed in the resurrection of the body.

[10] In 1839, the Chinese government confiscated 20,000 chests of opium from British merchants (who had been attempting to compensate for a growing trade deficit by exporting opium from British India) and, subsequently, terminated trade between the two countries. The Chinese were defeated in the consequent Anglo-Chinese or Opium Wars (1839–1842, 1856–1860), resulting in the imposition of the "Unequal Treaties" under which the Chinese were forced into various trade concessions, and Hong Kong was ceded to Britain.

[11] The Taiping Rebellion (1850–64) was a peasant rebellion led by Hung Xiuquan, who combined Protestant Christianity with ancient Chinese beliefs to establish the "Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace." Eventually, the rebels were defeated by the Imperial forces, but not before 20 million had lost their lives. Ninian Smart (1983: 1,49) has commented that "The problems of the Taipings were brilliantly solved in Maoism as a new religion to replace the older traditions of the Central Kingdom."

Boxer Rebellions,[12] which contributed to the 1912 collapse of the Qing Dynasty, putting an end to dynastic China. Additional international confrontations that have undoubtedly influenced Chinese culture and religion during the past century include various conflicts with Japan[13] and the Second World War.[14] There is little doubt, however, that among the most significant events in China's recent history have been the replacement of the Qing Dynasty by the Republic of China in 1911,[15] the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921, and the Long March(es) of the Red Army that resulted in the ascendance of Mao Zedong (1893–1976) and the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Subsequently, the Cultural Revolution not only involved the (1966–1976) widespread persecution of the "enemies of the people" but also resulted in the destruction of temples, monasteries, churches, and mosques by the Red Guards, whilst severely undermining ancient Chinese culture and attempting to stamp out all forms of religion.

Despite the considerable relaxation in recent decades of the political environment in relation to religious matters, the fact that the PRC remains an atheistic, one-party state inevitably affects the ways in which religion may be experienced in China—as well as how it might be understood by Westerners. Freedom of religion is guaranteed in the 1978 Chinese Constitution, and since the mid-1980s, the government has supported recognized religions in a number of ways, including approving the rebuilding of numerous temples, promoting ventures such as the World Buddhists Forums and an International Forum on the Dao De Jing,[16] and forbidding the mining of Buddhist mountains. At present, five religions are officially recognized by the Chinese state:

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[12] The Boxers were a secret society, practiced in the martial arts and opposed to the interference and influence of foreigners, particularly from the West. The Boxer Uprising (1899–1901), which led to the massacre of hundreds of Western missionaries and thousands of Chinese Christians as well as to the destruction of foreign property, was eventually quashed, largely through the intervention of the "great powers," including Britain, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the USA.

[13] Of particular note are the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–5 and Japan's seizure of Manchuria in 1931.

[14] China had sided with the Allies during the First World War, and more crucially, fought with them in World War II against the Japanese, who had, for some time, been carrying out invasions on Chinese territory.

[15] It is now Taiwan that refers to itself as the ROC.

[16] The *Daodejing* (also translated as the *Tao Te Ching*) is traditionally believed to have been written around the sixth century BCE by Lao zi (Lao Tse) and is central to the thought of Daoism (and other facets of Chinese culture).

Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. However, this by no means implies that all manifestations of these religions are recognized. For instance, the *Roman* Catholic Church is banned in China,[17] and the state robustly denounces the Dalai Lama.[18]

The precise status of those religions that are not recognized by the State is difficult for the Chinese, let alone the Westerner, to understand. Several unrecognized religions manage to operate quite openly and freely in the PRC. Some of these actually cooperate with (usually regional or local) branches of the state, sometimes providing educational facilities and other charitable contributions. Other religions are explicitly outlawed. Yang Fenggang (2006: 97) has referred to this tripartite division as constituting the red (officially-permitted religions), black (officially-banned religions), and gray (religions with an ambiguous legal status) markets of religion in China.

The Westerner may initially find the involvement of the atheistic state in the appointment of priests within the "patriotic" Catholic Church and in the selection of the eleventh Panchen Lama in 1995[19] (after the Dalai Lama had himself identified a different child) quite curious. In fact, this apparently-paradoxical juxtaposition of secularity and religious involvement would seem, to some extent, to be related to the efforts of the state to ensure that its citizens are not influenced by foreign powers. Drawing no distinction between temporal and spiritual loyalty, the government is unwilling to permit Catholics to seek spiritual guidance from the Pope or the Tibetans from the Dalai Lama as, it is feared, this could signify disloyalty to the Chinese state. However, it is not the fear of foreign or multi-national religious influence alone that influences the government's reactions to religions (widely defined): any organization with the potential to mobilize a sizable number of its members independently of the state may be seen as a potential threat. An obvious example here is the Falun Gong movement, which was outlawed in July 1999 shortly after ten thousand practitioners had gathered for a protest in Beijing in April of that year. Branded as an "evil cult," its members now have to undergo a

[17] The Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association has oversight of the Chinese Catholic churches, which are required to renounce the primacy of the Pope in Rome.

[18] Possessing an image of the Dalai Lama is a criminal offence in Tibet.

[19] The Panchen Lama is the second highest ranking Lama after the Dalai Lama in the Gelugpa (Gelug) sect of Tibetan Buddhism.

regime of "re-education" by the state (Ministry of Civil Affairs 1999: 1; Ownby 2008: ch. 6; Palmer 2007: 266–77).

V. *Religious Practices in Contemporary China*

Although the problem of assessing the extent of a society's religiosity, or exactly who within a society is religious, is not unique to China,[20] certain factors do appear to complicate the study of religions in China. Statistics measuring religious belief and practice in China vary considerably. One official publication stated in 2001 that "More than 100 million Chinese people have acknowledged religious beliefs" (New Star 2001: 80); various other sources suggest that several hundreds of millions more could be considered religious. Some of this confusion is, undoubtedly, due to state restrictions on academic research and the reluctance (not altogether surprising) of "underground" religions to disclose their membership to approved investigators.[21] Surveys can become unreliable in the presence of a general suspicion of the government, with low response rates and conclusions frequently drawn from non-random samples.[22] Yet, in China, there exists the additional problem of the *kinds* of religion that predominate. Despite an abundance of festivals and other forms of celebration, Eastern religions tend not to hold weekly services to observe a "Sabbath" as do Jews and Christians; nor do Buddhists, Daoists, and Confucians belong to congregations in the ways that members of the Abrahamic faiths belong to synagogues, churches, and mosques.[23] Moreover, as previously mentioned, it is not

[20] In the English/Welsh 2001 Census, 72% of respondents reported that they were Christians, yet less than 8% attend church on a weekly basis; a further 390,127 respondents (0.7% of the population) claimed that they were Jedi Knights.

[21] Jehovah's Witnesses, who are generally well-known for not only the accuracy but also the openness and comprehensiveness of their world-wide statistical data, have reportedly "stated, without elaborating, that it would be imprudent to disclose information about the number of Jehovah's Witnesses and congregations in China, or about their geographical representation across the country." It should be added that they also stated that they were not aware of any arrests or detention of Witnesses in China (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2006).

[22] In random samples each member of the population being investigated has an equal chance of being selected. Because non-random samples can draw on a biased selection of respondents, they are liable to provide information that is both incorrect and misleading.

[23] It might, however, be noted that a trend toward "believing without belonging" has been remarked upon in the West (Davie 1994).

uncommon for the Chinese to identify themselves simultaneously with two or more religions.[24]

Turning from statistics to a more qualitative approach, the Western scholar may again confront unanticipated challenges. Those fortunate enough to visit China may find themselves somewhat bemused by the bustle, the smoke, and the smell of the incense in shrines and temples as they observe, without entirely understanding, spirit-writing on trays of sand; fortune tellers and diviners busy at trestle-tables; altars crowded with offerings of flowers, oranges, plucked chickens, and cans of beer; walls covered with the names and photographs of departed relatives; stalls where one can purchase goods for a more comfortable afterlife; and the glowing furnaces in which one can burn "spirit/ghost money," paper clothes, and papier-mâché cars and houses. The visitor might well find such scenes both strange and exotic and, at the same time, be struck by the apparent "ordinariness" of these rituals for the worshippers, who drop in on their way to and from the market with seeming casualness—a stark contrast with the atmosphere of solemn sacredness or "holiness" one might experience in, say, a European cathedral.

Western visitors to China are likely to find Christian services more familiar; however, if they are invited to a "house church" meeting it is more probable that they will find themselves in a spacious room housing 200 or so in a large office block than in a private home with a few believers gathered together with a guitar.[25] While the congregation may consist of Evangelical Christians, the service is unlikely to replicate either the "happy-clappy" scene of Western Pentecostalism or the

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[24] Even "reliable sources" on the number of Chinese Christians can vary enormously: An official publication in 2001 stated that the number of Chinese Protestants had exceeded ten million and Chinese Catholics four million (New Star 2001: 80–81); an officially-approved website states that there are six million (Christian) believers in China http://wiki.china.org.cn/wiki/index.php/Christianity_in_China/[last modified 5 August 2001]; a Western journalist, writing in 2003, estimated that "the number of Christian believers in China, both Catholic and Protestant, may be closer to 80 million than the official…figure of 21 million" (Aikman 2003: 21); and I have been informed by church leaders that the figure is currently (2010) thought to exceed 100 million.

[25] "House churches" are those Christian churches that are not recognized by the PRC. Official Christian churches include recognized coalitions such as the China Christian Council, the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association and the Three-Self Patriot Movement—Protestant churches which adopt the principles of self-governance, self-support (financial independence from foreigners) and self-propagation (indigenous missionary work).

exuberant enthusiasm of the African churches; rather, these Chinese services are more likely to resemble those of Presbyterian churches in the West. The (mainly young) members of the congregation are neatly, though not elaborately, dressed, and although they exhibit an obvious commitment, this is contained and orderly.

In other words, whether attending a Christian service or touring a traditional temple, the Western visitor to China may initially be struck by an apparent lack of separation between religion and daily life, and how Chinese religious practice is not as "special" as Western religiosity would frequently appear to be.[26] The visitor would, however, be well advised to probe beyond his or her first impressions by seeking further explanations from Chinese speakers and available literature, so as to avoid jumping to the wrong conclusion about the meaning for the participants.[27]

VI. *Religious Concepts and Concepts of Religion*

As previously noted, the very concept of religion is a tricky one. As social animals and as scientists, scholars of the sociology of religion require concepts to organize the natural and social worlds; a language of some kind is necessary not only to make sense of what we see, hear, taste, touch, and smell but also to communicate with others and, indeed, with ourselves. But *how* we cut up the world—*where* we draw the boundaries that unite certain phenomena and separate these from other phenomena—is arbitrary, or at least relative to the social situation in which the boundaries are drawn (Douglas 1966). Those who inhabit different communities may not only use different sounds and signs but may also organize the world in different ways; not only can the positioning of boundaries vary, but the boundaries themselves can differ according to the strength with which they are drawn and their

[26] I was given a somewhat different experience of Chinese "religiosity" when a Chinese government official whom I had met previously in London took me to a night club in Beijing. My surprise was prompted not so much by the fact that the entertainment included a scantily clad woman dancing with a large python, as by the fact that alcoholic drinks were flowing freely and the club was owned, I was told, by devout Muslims from a region in the northwest of the country.

[27] According to Max Weber (1947: 88), an understanding of the subjective meaning attached to action is, by definition, at the very core of the sociological enterprise.

degree of permeability and/or negotiability (Douglas 1970).[28] Furthermore, because the repositioning of a boundary can have significant consequences, those with a vested interest in the *status quo* will fight to preserve existing distinctions and prevent the introduction of change.

So far as the concept of religion is concerned, there are both advantages and disadvantages to being recognized as a religion. The law and its administrators may adjust definitions of religion to include popular or powerful religions whilst excluding smaller, less popular religions, and the latter may be referred to as new religious movements, cults, or sects (Richardson 2004). In the West, official (legal) status as a "religion" may carry considerable financial benefits. The Church of Scientology, which would not qualify as a religion according to some definitions (which also exclude some forms of Buddhism), has fought in the courts to prove that it is a religion and thereby eligible for tax concessions (High Court of Australia 1983).[29] Conversely, Transcendental Meditation has fought to prove that it is *not* a religion in order that it may be taught in US prisons and public schools (Scott 1978: 5–6).

The French sociologist Émile Durkheim, believing that that which was true of the "elementary forms of the religious life" would also be true of more complex religions, incorporated both functional and substantive components into what he hoped could be a definitive definition of religion.[30] However, the extent to which his definition may be applied to Chinese religions is questionable. Firstly, Durkheim defined religion as:

> a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church all those who adhere to them (Durkheim 1915: 47).

It is not, however, clear that what we call religious beliefs and practices always serve to unite adherents into one single moral community

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[28] The complementarity of the yin and yang in Chinese thought is frequently juxtaposed with the dualistic distinctions of Western thought.

[29] The complexity of the situation was illustrated by Bryan Wilson (1989: chapter 13) who listed 20 different characteristics, some, but not all of which, he argued, would have to be present for a movement to qualify as a religion. He found eleven of these clearly present in Scientology, five clearly absent, and the presence of the remaining four characteristics arguable.

[30] Substantive definitions declare what a religion *is* (belief in a Supreme Deity, for example); functional definitions assert what the religion *does* (such as providing answers to questions of ultimate concern) (McGuire 1992: 9–15).

(whether or not it is called a Church). Secondly, Durkheim's insistence that "The division of the world into two domains, the one containing all that is sacred, the other all that is profane, is the distinctive trait of religious thought" (ibid.: 37) may not, in fact, be true of the Chinese.

When social scientists indicate the meaning of a word, they may be *reporting* what *others* mean by the word, or they may be *stipulating* what *they* are going to mean by it (Hospers 1956: 32–3). *Reportive definitions* provide an account of how a concept is used by those being studied. S*tipulative definitions*, on the other hand, are among the methodological tools of sociologists and can be *more or less useful* (rather than more or less true) in aiding in the discovery and description of the social world; rather than making a statement about reality, or even about what anyone else means by religion, they simply stipulate how a concept will be used. Obviously, in order for scholars to utilize a concept in an interview or questionnaire, or observe behavior in which the concept is being used by the subjects under study, there must first be a shared understanding of the concept's meaning.

I first became aware of the extent to which a gap might exist between occidental and oriental understandings of religion when, to my surprise, I was informed by a member of the Vietnamese government's Committee for Religious Affairs in Hanoi that the overwhelming majority of Vietnamese did not practice religion. In response to my query concerning several beliefs and practices (such as ancestor worship and burial rituals) common to most Vietnamese, the minister noted that these were nothing to do with religion but, rather, were part of the Vietnamese culture. At first, I assumed that this characterization was simply the result of a need to redefine religion in order to conform to the image of the atheistic communist state. However, after subsequent visits to China it became increasingly apparent that it had not been the official but I who needed to recognize that what Westerners called religion could, and perhaps should, legitimately be referred to as culture rather than religion.

In elaboration of this point, let us consider the concept of the afterlife. A central component of traditional Chinese culture is the belief that the living and the dead co-exist. Taken together with the teachings of filial piety associated with Confucius and Lao zi,[31] this implies that

[31] A philosopher who may have lived during the 6th century BCE, Lao zi (Lao Tse, Lao-Tzu, Lao-Tsu) is revered as a deity in most forms of Daoism. He is said to have

elders, particularly parents, should be respected, heeded, and cared for not only during their lives but also following their deaths. Traditionally, descendents are expected to install an altar in their homes so that they may pay daily homage to their ancestors.[32] In short, the veneration of one's ancestors, including one's living parents and grandparents, is an integral part of everyday culture, not merely an aspect of institutionalized, organized religion.

Yet, ancestor worship can be a legitimate component of the sociological study of religion, and much can be learned through exploring the different salience that apparently-similar concepts possess for believers within different social contexts. The Confucian concept of Heaven (天) is, for instance, quite unlike the Christian notion of Heaven. For the Chinese, Heaven may be conceived as an omniscient entity, endowed with personality but no corporeal form. Earth (the "Middle Kingdom") may be subject to the "Mandate of Heaven," not as a discrete belief attached to a particular religious dogma, but, rather, an integral part of a culture—constituting not so much *a* world view but a this-world-*and-the-other-world* view.

This is not to say that the notion of the influence of heaven on earth is entirely absent from Western civilizations. Some similarities may be recognized in the images evoked by the sculptures of the Parthenon, the painted churches of Northern Moldavia, or the Sistine Chapel. The Lord's Prayer (*Pater Noster*), repeated daily in millions of homes and churches throughout Christendom, contains the words "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10), and the adherents of many of the religions practiced in the West profess a firm conviction that their lives are strongly influenced by occurrences in the Christian Heaven, the Islamic Paradise, or some kind of spirit world (Beverley 2005; Nelson 1969). Nonetheless, it could be argued that these beliefs are not as "ordinary" or commonplace for contemporary Westerners as they are for their Chinese counterparts—in the West they are more likely to be contained within a religious package, whilst in China they are more frequently found as part of the everyday, taken-for-granted culture.

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written the *Daodejing (Tao Te Ching)*, a book that is not only fundamental to Daoism but has also influenced other aspects of Chinese religions and culture.

[32] It is also the custom to pay tribute to one's ancestors on occasions such as the Ghost Festival, which takes place on the fifteenth day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar.

Recognizing the different ways in which members of different religions and cultures understand and partition their worlds is difficult enough, but sometimes further, avoidable, problems are introduced through methodological errors (Barker 1995; 2007). The remainder of this chapter is devoted to identifying some of the unnecessary mistakes which may be found in both Western and Chinese accounts of religion, concentrating particularly on "religion" and related concepts.

As a fairly basic principle, if a stipulative definition is to be acceptable for scientific research, it needs to be operationalizable. That is, the content of the definition has to be empirically recognizable so that other scientists may check the presence or absence of the phenomenon in question. Defining a religious person as someone who is "filled with the Holy Spirit" may be appropriate for the theologian, but not for the social scientist concerned with discovering what happens to be the case but which could empirically be shown to be otherwise.[33] Possessing no means of judging the truth or falsity of theological claims, sociologists of religion must be methodologically agnostic and cannot use supernatural beings as independent variables in their explanations. Thus, the President of the China Christian Council may refer to movements such as the Disciple Union, the Anointed King, the Lord God, and Eastern Flash as heretical, destructive cults and, as such, "the biggest hindrance to the development of Christianity in China" (Cao 2009: 204). Those who share her theological position may further agree that:

> Religions have the obligatory responsibility to resist cults through training believers with correct doctrine, to protect them from the harmful heretical teachings and activities [and] Academia should pay more attention to investigate and study heresies, and to guide public opinion (Cao, S-j. 2007: 238).

Social scientists would, however, be stepping beyond the confines of their disciplinary expertise were they to obey her injunction.

Furthermore, scientists should refrain from prejudging an outcome by defining one or more key variables so a characteristic later claimed as a *discovery* is assumed as part of their definition. Thus, if religion is *defined* as the belief in a supreme being, nothing has been learned if we are told that it has been "discovered" that religious people believe in God. At times, it is assumed that a group cannot be considered a

[33] "The criterion of the scientific status of a theory is its falsifiability, or refutability, or testability" (Popper 1963: 37).

religion as a result of certain of its characteristics. According to one of the PRC's officially-sanctioned publications, for instance, it has been proven that Falun Gong "is not a religious organization at all, as they seduced people, amassed dirty money and killed people" (Jia 1999: 5). It is likely, however, that very few groups could qualify as a "religion" if proselytizing, getting rich, and/or killing people constituted the basis for exclusion from this classification. Certainly, none of China's officially-recognized religions would be eligible.

VII. *Cults, Sects and Xiejiao*

As previously mentioned, the Chinese state has officially labeled Falun Gong an "evil cult." Although several technical definitions of the terms "cult" and "sect" exist within the sociological tradition (McGuire 2002, chapter 5; Stark and Bainbridge 1987: 328), these have, in popular parlance, come to be understood as pejorative terms; hence, since the 1970s, sociologists of religion have resorted to the more neutral term "new religious movement" (Barker 2004; Melton 2004).[34] INFORM receives frequent enquiries from individuals wishing to ascertain whether a particular movement is a "genuine religion" or a "cult."[35] It may seem that the enquirer is seeking purely factual information, but the description of a group as a "cult" is likely to reveal more about the speaker's subjective approval or disapproval than about any properties of the movement itself. Within the context of Chinese scholarship, Barend ter Haar abandoned the use of the term "sect" (1999: 12) because, as he argued, its close association with existing negative views of the White Lotus Teachings would risk the automatic adoption of many of the assumptions that he was actually investigating, and, thereby, prejudice his conclusions.[36]

The Chinese word *xiejiao* (邪教), often translated as "destructive cult" or "evil sect," carries similarly-negative connotations. More precisely translated as heterodox (邪) teachings (教), the term was originally

[34] In French, the word *culte* is used to refer to respected religions, while the term *secte* is reserved for religions disapproved of by the speaker.

[35] More information about INFORM (Information Network Focus On Religious Movements) can be found at www.Inform.ac.

[36] The term "White Lotus" used to refer to certain monks and lay Buddhists as far back as the fifth century but later became a derogatory label applied to a number of sectarian organizations.

applied to *teachings* that were opposed to the correct (正) teachings of Confucianism and was only later used as a label for *groups* of persons following such teachings and/or behaving in a manner perceived as threatening by the labeler.[37] It has been argued, however, that whilst the English word "cult" is used to imply that a movement or group is in tension with ecclesiastical or denominational religion, *xiejiao* now constitutes a political category and its meaning has become more closely associated with harming social stability than with distorting religious doctrine. In other words, the historical concept of *xiejiao* has been replaced by "a modern legal concept with operability" associated with the aim of cracking down on "the criminal behaviors of destructive cult[s]" (Xi 2007: 159–161). The implications of the state's official definition of this concept are evident in Article I of the "Interpretation of Article 300 of China's Criminal Law," which states that *xiejiao*, an "evil religious organization," refers to illegal organizations that are established using religions, qigong or other things as a camouflage, and which deify their leading members; confuse, poison, and deceive people; recruit and control their members; and endanger society by fabricating and spreading superstitious heresies (Qu 2007: 320).

According to the organization itself, Falun Gong is "an ancient practice" that includes qigong exercises and meditation, the object of which is "refining the body and mind [and] moral and spiritual elevation in accordance with the universal principles of Truthfulness, Compassion and Forbearance."[38] Both its founder, Li Hongzhi (1998), and its representatives insist that Falun Gong is neither a religion nor a cult, let alone a *xiejiao* (Xie and Zhu 2004), but an investigation of Falun Gong's literature and websites may lead one to detect a certain ambiguity regarding the extent to which it might be classifiable as a religion, and a number of Western social scientists have discussed in some detail the shifting challenges involved in its classification (Ownby 2008; Palmer 2007). However, in a perusal of official PRC literature on the group one might be more struck by the variety of ways in which dubious methodological means are used to demonstrate the movement's iniquity.[39]

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[37] An early example was the Yellow Turbans, a secret Daoist sect involved in a peasant uprising in 184 CE.

[38] http://www.falungong.org.uk/[accessed 18 February 2010]. See also Li (1998).

[39] It is not being argued here that Falun Gong is either a religion or a cult nor that it is either a "good" or "bad" movement; rather, merely that non-scientific arguments have been employed in presenting such conclusions.

It is not uncommon in China for claims to be made that Falun Gong has been deemed an evil cult by universally-acknowledged authorities, yet these authorities are not always identified.[40] Moreover, the movement has, at times, been condemned through "guilt by association." Several articles have, for instance, drawn attention to the collective suicides and/or murders of the People's Temple, Branch Davidians, Solar Temple, and Heaven's Gate as well as the release of gas by Aum Shinrikyo members (Ji et al. 1999: I, 26; II, 38; IV, 4) in an attempt to demonstrate the similar dangers of Falun Gong, despite the fact that it has remarkably little in common with these movements.[41]

Prevalent assertions include "The followers of a cult are re-educated, have their brains washed and start with a clean slate" (Zhen Yan 1999: 2). Such metaphors are not, however, scientifically acceptable, since no one has removed the brain of a cult member and then washed it, and no adult convert has been known to start with a totally clean slate after "re-education." One might further inquire as to whether the process of re-education might be applied equally to universities, cults, and correction centers. Moreover, the same process might be called brainwashing by one person and conversion or education by another. The term that is selected seems frequently to reflect the speaker's evaluation of the *end state* of the process, rather than the *process that produces* that state.

The concept of "brainwashing," from the translation of the Chinese *xi nao* (洗脑, or wash brain), was first introduced by an American journalist (Hunter 1951) in describing Chinese indoctrination techniques at the time of the Communist takeover, but soon became employed in depicting the influences of phenomena ranging from the training of the US Marines to everyday advertising slogans. In the 1960s, the research of a Harvard psychiatrist, Robert J. Lifton (1961), on 'brainwashing' in China was adopted by anxious and confused parents in explaining their children's conversion to new religious movements—particularly those that had originated in the East. A number of the parents, per-

[40] The most influential "cult-watching group" in America issued the following statement in 2004: "reports in the Chinese press and elsewhere that AFF [ICSA] has branded Falun Gong a cult are false, as are reports that AFF [ICSA] has said Falun Gong is *not* a cult" (Langone 2007: 237).

[41] One obvious difference is that Falun Gong practitioners have not committed mass suicide or poisoned innocent commuters. Other, possibly less obvious, differences include the fact that members of the "suicide cults" lived together in tightly controlled communities.

suaded that their (adult) child had been subjected to irresistible and irreversible brainwashing techniques, hired "deprogrammers" to kidnap the converts of movements such as the Unification Church, whose members were dubbed "Moonies" after their Korean founder, Sun Myung Moon (Barker 1989: 101–10;157–164).[42] However, although Lifton's study usefully illuminates a number of persuasive techniques employed by the Chinese communists, its overly simplistic application by some commentators to the process of conversion into the new religions is tenuous. Research has shown that only one in ten of those who went through the Unification Church's so-called brainwashing process actually converted to the movement; the majority of those who did join left the movement of their own free will within two years (Barker 1984; Galanter 1980). Furthermore, the vast majority of the first cohort of second-generation Unificationists, despite being brought up and socialized in the movement, have now left it. In other words, contrary to widespread claims, the process of recruitment into Unificationism is clearly neither irresistible nor irreversible.[43] This is not to say that "undue influence" may not be brought to bear in certain circumstances, but it is necessary to be more precise in distinguishing between "normal" and "undue" influence—after all, almost by definition, social life involves influence of one kind or another in almost every interaction.[44]

A control group may not, on occasion, be as representative of the "normal" as is implied. In a study that is interesting from a number of perspectives, the Institute of Psychology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, organized a specialized "Mental Control Research Group" to investigate "the reasons for practicing 'Falun Gong,' its influences upon its practitioners, and measures for helping them out of the evil cult" (Wenzhon et al. 2007: 282).[45] The study concluded that Falun Gong "influences its practitioners' brain waves, weakening their mental

[42] Although hundreds of "victims" were forcibly deprogrammed during the 1970s and 1980s, this illegal practice has only rarely occurred in the West since the mid-1990s, but it has continued, albeit increasingly contentiously, in Japan (Antal 2003).

[43] Other works questioning the brainwashing hypothesis include Anthony and Introvigne (2006); Ginsburg and Richardson (1998); Richardson (2003).

[44] For classic statements regarding the influence of the social context on the individual, see Weber (1947, p. 88ff); Marx (1973); Durkheim (1952); Berger and Luckmann (1967).

[45] The study was conducted in cooperation with the China Association for Science and Technology and the Beijing Association for Science and Technology.

response to normal stimulations while strengthening their brain activity with 'Falun Gong'-related stimulations" (ibid.: 295). Some social scientists might be surprised to learn not only that the research began from the conclusion that Falun Gong was an "evil cult" but also that the methodology involved the comparison of 15 Falun Gong practitioners who had "already transformed"[46] with (as a control group) 15 judicial policemen who had been "engaged in watching and educating law-breaking 'Falun Gong' practitioners for over four years" (ibid.: 286).

As in the West, a number of inaccuracies arise because the comparative method, which lies at the very basis of *all* science, has not been employed and, as a result, incorrect generalizations have been drawn from perfectly-accurate accounts of specific behaviors. It is, for example, a fallacy to assume that because all members of a class exhibit a particular characteristic that this characteristic is peculiar to that class when, were a comparison made with a control group,[47] it might be discovered that the characteristic in question is related to a larger population and is in no way related to the group *per se.* Barend ter Haar has pointed out that the accusation that "heterodox" religious leaders collect money from their followers is perfectly true, but that it is also true of the leaders of any other religious group; hence, the accusation does not distinguish the heterodox leaders from those of other religious organizations. As ter Haar notes, "The accusation is selected not so much to describe, as to condemn these leaders" (ter Haar 1999: 15). It might, indeed, have been more informative to have discovered that the heterodox leaders had *not* collected money from their followers. Likewise, it is all too easy not to recognize that the media are much more likely to report the misconduct of a member of an unpopular religion than to report the similar misdemeanor of a "normal" member of the population. For instance, the press may, on a number of occasions, accurately report the suicide of a "cultist," causing the reader to wonder what it is about "cults" that makes their members liable to commit suicide. The same reader may not notice the absence of reports of the suicides of "ordinary" members of society. If, however, the *rate* of suicide in the group were compared

[46] They had "transformed" by rejecting Falun Gong after "education."

[47] A control group is a group of people matched as far as possible with the group under study except for a specified variable, the presence or effect of which the researcher is investigating.

with that in the population at large, it might be found that the latter was twice that of the former, leading us to ask what it is about cults that *prevents* their members from committing suicide. Of course, further investigation would be required. It may be that the movements attract an atypically suicide-resistant set of converts. The point here, however, is that it should not be assumed that that which is assiduously reported is more typical than what which is not reported.

Another common error arises when it is assumed that a religion, or any other kind of group or movement, exhibits the same characteristics at different times or in different places. Although common threads will exist, it is necessary to recognize that any particular religious movement will change according to the social context in which it is found. The fact that Falun Gong is significantly different in England, Australia, Canada, and Hong Kong than it is in the PRC will be due in part to the actions of the practitioners, in part to the actions of the respective states, and perhaps especially, to the interactions between the movement and the different societies.[48]

VIII. *Concluding Remarks*

Much more could, of course, be written about both the similarities and differences to be discovered between the religiosity of the West and that of China, and much more could be written about the methodological challenges that face Western scholars as they approach the subject through their own research and that of others. This chapter can offer no more than a suggestion of some of the discoveries, questions, and obstacles that greet the Western sociologist of religion fascinated by the richness and diversity of China and its culture and religions.

A comparison of the impressive variety of ways in which men and women are capable of being religious enables us to move beyond our own taken-for-granted understanding of the common-place as the "normal" and, thus it might be assumed, as the "natural." In this way, we gain a Monty Python-type opportunity to observe the familiar in the unfamiliar and the unfamiliar in the familiar, and thus, to expand

[48] An excellent example of differences related to time and place is provided in Lu Yunfeng's (2008) account of the changes undergone between the 1930s and the early 21st century by the Chinese sect, Yiguan Dao, in both mainland China and Taiwan.

our understanding of both "them" and "us." The rapid changes that are occurring at all levels and in all regions of the People's Republic of China promise many further opportunities for learning—and surprises—for the curious scholar of religion.

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CHAPTER SIX

LOCAL RITUAL TRADITIONS OF SOUTHEAST CHINA: A CHALLENGE TO DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION AND THEORIES OF RITUAL

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The communal rituals of the Putian plains of Fujian province in southeast China are colorful, noisy, crowded, and exciting. They are exceedingly *renao* (热闹, or hot and tumultuous). The largest ritual-events during the Yuanxiao (元宵) festival of the first full moon of the year involve a wide array of ritual practices. These include spectacular processions of the gods; spirit mediums in trance; opera and marionette performances; Buddhist, Daoist, and/or Three in One rites;[1] great displays of food offerings in the temples (along with prepared tables of offerings in each household); processions escorting the gods comprised of a vast array of costumed performing arts troupes and a long line of decorated ponies bearing petitions to the gods on their saddles; visits to the temple by a ceaseless stream of individual worshippers and delegations from nearby allied villages; musical performances by competing groups of performers, including military brass bands, traditional instrumental ensembles, and all-female drum cart and cymbal troupes; loudspeakers broadcasting all kinds of music and announcements; clouds of incense smoke; and a cacophony of fireworks of all shapes and sizes. Multiple liturgical frameworks interact within these rituals.[2]

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[1] The Three in One is a local ritual movement combining Confucian self-cultivation, Daoist inner alchemy and Buddhist meditation. See Dean 1995.

[2] On several occasions, the author has attended large rituals in which simultaneous, parallel rites were conducted by Daoist ritual masters and Buddhist monks. One such ritual-event was the consecration of an ancestral hall in Dongshan in 1994. Another ritual-event was performed by both Daoist masters and Three in One Scripture Masters for the celebration of the 90th anniversary of the Linshangong temple near Fengting, Xianyou County, in 1995. Parallel rites addressed to different (and sometimes overlapping) sets of deities raise intriguing questions for a theory of ritual

These ritual-events involve the mobilization of the entire village community, or the populations of multiple villages—within which each individual plays a particular role. These roles change over the course of an individual's life from carrying lanterns or bowing with incense as a child, to carrying the sedan chairs of the gods or preparing household offerings as a teenager, to (for the men) taking a turn as a member of the temple management committee once one has married and had a child, to a position as a village elder after reaching the age of 55 or 60; along the way some also become spirit mediums or ritual specialists, opera stars or marionettists, temple accountants or masters of ceremonies.

Some, such as young to middle-aged business leaders, may appear too busy to participate directly, but they are likely to contribute additional individual funds beyond the set per-capita amount that is collected by the temple committee prior to each ritual. These accounts are posted on red sheets of paper on the temple walls shortly after the ritual for all to check and confirm. As these younger businessmen age, they will be rotated into leadership positions in the temple management committees. Indeed, many members of the Communist Party and former officials of the local government join these temple committees after retirement, contributing their social connections and management skills. These temple networks form a kind of "second government," dedicated to local political and economic tasks. Such projects include improvement of the village infrastructure of roadways, electricity, sewers, and public sanitation and dredging of irrigation canals as well as organization of local community activities, e.g. arranging ritual-events and operatic performances, sponsoring scholarships for promising students, gathering funds for charity, and providing a cultural center for elderly community members to gather and play majong while children play in the temple.

(see the discussion at the conclusion of the paper). Other ritual specialists include the spirit mediums (sometimes in large organized groups) and the masters of Confucian rituals (Lisheng or Yansheng—masters of the banquet) who direct the setting up of the altar and the arrangement of offerings and guide individual worship. Each of these specialists contributes their own liturgical framework to the event, but no one framework contradicts or supersedes another.

Part 1: An Amazing Resurgence of Popular Local Religion

Since 1979, with the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution and the commencement of the economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping, a massive resurgence and re-invention of local ritual traditions, perhaps the greatest in history, has taken place across China. The author estimates that between one and two million village temples have been rebuilt or restored, and ritual traditions long believed to have been lost are now being re-invented and celebrated in many of these temples. These are the temples of Chinese local popular religion, although as will be demonstrated below, this term is problematic. This very rough estimate does not include the tens of thousands of large scale Buddhist monasteries, Daoist monasteries and temples, Islamic mosques, and Christian churches (Catholic or Protestant) that have been rebuilt or restored over the past three decades. In other words, these village temples are not associated with the five officially-recognized religions of China (Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism). In many areas, these village temples have, for lack of a better term, been classified as Daoist by the local offices of the Religious Affairs Bureau.

China's towns and cities have been the main centers of political control, rapid economic transformation, and secularization over the past fifty years. Hence, the once-active temples and ritual activities of these towns and cities have, for the most part, been closed down or transformed into museums, generating a growing gulf between the experiences of urban and rural Chinese.[3] In the rural sector, however, if we estimate that each of China's approximately 680,000 administrative villages has roughly 1000 residents and assume an average of two or three temples per village, we can conclude that approximately 680 million villagers are involved in some manner with well over one million temples and their rituals. The number of temples and the extent of their ritual activities have grown rapidly over the past thirty years. A substantial amount of the money remitted to the home villages of the 200 million strong "floating population" (流动人口) of rural workers in urban construction sites and factories around China supports the

[3] A research project headed by Kristofer Schipper on the Sacred City of Beijing estimated that, during late imperial times, Beijing boasted over 1000 active temples,and that these temples operated as the real city government of Beijing.

ritual activities described above. As the stereotypical images of China under the Cultural Revolution slowly fade from the minds of external observers, replaced by images of the hyper-development of urban centers like Beijing and Shanghai, the everyday life of rural China and its ritual underpinnings remain scarcely understood. This paper examines the role of local ritual traditions in the daily life of rural Chinese. Prior to discussing these ritual-events in greater detail, however, it may be useful to review the impact of specific definitions of "religion" on our understanding of these activities.

Part 2: Definitions of Religion in China[4]

A number of the early pioneers of Chinese ethnography/anthropology produced subtle and nuanced ethnographic accounts of Han Chinese communities during the 1930's and 1940's in which certain local ritual practices were discussed. After 1949, Soviet-style models of ethnographic minority studies were imposed and carried out under the auspices of the National Minorities Institute and its associated system of training colleges for minority cadres. In this mode of ethnography, "religion" is defined in a functionalist fashion as a fundamental, if not reactionary, aspect of "minority" culture. This mode of analysis was not, however, applied to Han Chinese society, which was judged to have been largely secularized by the Chinese Revolution as well as by the revolutionary processes of modernization underway since before the beginning of the 20th century. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Chinese ethnography of "national minorities" was primarily concerned with researching and, to a certain extent, "fixing" the religious beliefs and ritual practices of a number of "minority peoples." At the same time, one of the world's largest social surveys was being carried out across China as part of the land reform movement, which assigned each family to a class rank while also assessing the holdings of lineage trusts, monasteries, and temples across the country. This

[4] Anthony Yu points out (2005:2–25) that the Chinese term "zongjiao" (literally, ancestral teachings) which is usually translated as "religion" was introduced in the 6th century CE in reference to the foreign teachings of Buddhism. The term was later adopted in the 19th century by scholars in Meiji Japan in the translation of another foreign conception, i.e. the western notion of "religion." This re-defined phrase was soon taken up, along with a host of newly-coined modern neologisms and re-defined classical expressions, by late Imperial and Republican period Chinese writers.

incredible archive has yet to be fully accessed, but it promises eventually to provide extensive insights into many aspects of 20th century Chinese society and culture.

During these years, anthropologists conducted research on Chinese culture in Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. In 1974, Maurice Freedman proclaimed the unity of Chinese religion "as a system," basing his claims in part on his reading of the work of C. K. Yang (1961) and the earlier ethnographic work of J. J. DeGroot in Batavia and in Xiamen (*The Religious System of China* (1892–1910) as well as on the theoretical writings of Marcel Granet in Paris (as exemplified by *The Religion of the Chinese People*, 1922).

DeGroot and Granet pointed the way to an understanding of how, in modern times, the vast hierarchized society of China might be seen to display "a single underlying religion taking many guises." (1974: 34).

Developed by Freedman and other Western anthropologists, this concept of a system of Chinese religion was a structural-functionalist one. Great emphasis was placed on the timeless sphere of religion/culture within Chinese society—this notion of the inseparability, or near-equivalence, of religion and culture was furthered by notions, developed by Geertz, of religion as a cultural system. The problematic nature of this anthropological discovery of "the unity of Chinese religion" will be further discussed below. The close connection of these static and unified concepts of religion and/as culture in anthropology to colonialist and orientalist modes of knowledge production was noted by a number of critical anthropologists, including Johannes Fabian (1972), Talal Asad (1993), and Stephen Feuchtwang (2006). This mode of post-colonial critique, along with objective changes in the conditions of anthropological research, led to a critical reflexive crisis of representation within anthropology as a whole (Clifford and Markus 1986, see also Feuchtwang et al., 2006). The effects of these critical movements within the field of anthropology, however, took a rather long time to impact Chinese anthropology. Here, the author will discuss a few of the more significant responses.

One such response was the articulation of a call for an indigenous "native anthropology," one which sought the development of theoretical paradigms from within Chinese experience, rather than merely applying anthropological concepts elaborated in Africa and elsewhere to the Chinese case or generalizing findings from one place (Taiwan) to all of China (Chen Chinan 1998, Murray and Hong 1994, Zhou 2003, Feuchtwang, et al., 2006).

Stephan Feuchtwang had long argued for the dual (official vs. popular), if not multiple and potentially-contradictory, dimensions of Chinese ritual practice (e.g. local gods as simultaneously protective and demonic). He argued for a model of local decenterings of power within discrete traditions of "contested authority claims" and "historical references." However, this perspective was not easily disentangled from the model of an internally-contested, but still unified, cultural system (Bell 1989). Feuchtwang and Wang Mingming have gone on to conduct a series of comparative studies of local politics and placemaking (what Feuchtwang refers to as the establishment of "minor sovereignties") in Taiwanese and Chinese communities (Feuchtwang and Wang 2001, Feuchtwang 2004). Wang Mingming's own work on popular uses of space within Quanzhou City in Fujian Province has highlighted the issue of local forms of cultural resistance to hegemonic projects of national unity (Wang 1995).

Robert Weller's work, initially conducted within a framework of cultural unity, attempted to reveal the disunities as well as the unities of Chinese religion and culture. His later work on alternate civilities (1999) rejects the imposition of Western models of modernization and civil society, imagining an alternate trajectory for local communal ritual traditions and emergent modernist religious movements in new forms of construction of the social and the national unique to Chinese societies. In general, his work may be viewed as extending beyond the notion of the systemic unity of Chinese religion or culture to imply a fragmented, multidimensional China, or the coexistence of multiple Chinese cultures.

Alan Chun (2000) attacked the foundation of Freedman's notion of the unity of Chinese culture and religion through his deconstruction of the sacred cow of the lineage form in his study of Chinese village property relations in Hong Kong. He also made the considerable observation that membership in the *jia* (家, or family) is first a ritual role and, only secondarily, a biological kinship role.

Within China itself, anthropology has focused primarily on the issues of urbanization and the modernization of the peasant way of life. These studies of developmental anthropology were provoked by the incredible speed of hyperdevelopment in China, which coincided with the re-establishment in China of anthropology as an academic discipline in the early 1980s. During the 1990s, a number of Chinese anthropologists worked to translate, introduce, and apply a broader range of socio-cultural anthropological approaches. Still, the vast

majority of the work in China was, understandably, focused on the applied anthropology of development. Hence, there exists a striking absence of extensive, in-depth cultural anthropological research on the local communal ritual traditions of the Han Chinese.[5]

Within the newly cross-fertilizing fields of socio-cultural history and anthropology, a number of new perspectives emerged on local ritual practices in China. In *Culture, Power, and the State* (1988), Prasenjit Duara introduced the concept of a "cultural nexus of power" within the traditional Chinese village networks of Shandong Province. While Duara identified many of the elements of this cultural nexus of power in the area he studied (lineages, temples, irrigation maintenance groups, crop-watching associations, etc.), he did not trace the historical evolution of these elements. Instead, he indicated that this cultural nexus was doomed to unravel under the pressure of the modern nation state. Two additional groups of scholars, one conducting research in the Pearl River Delta and in Chaozhou of Guangdong Province and another working in Xiamen City of Fujian Province, have sought to combine anthropological approaches with historical research. The first of these groups includes David Faure and Helen Siu, Liu Zhiwei, a student of Liang Fangzhong of Zhongshan Univeristy, and Chen Chunsheng (Faure and Siu, 1995, Chen and Zheng, 2005). In Xiamen, the students of Fu Yiling of Xiamen University, including Zheng Zhenman, carried on Fu's emphasis on the collection and study of local historical materials, broadening their investigations to include local ritual traditions in addition to socio-economic questions. Recent studies by Liu Yonghua, Huang Xiangchun, and others continue this trend.[6]

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[5] Some interesting work has begun on ritual excess in China (see Yang 2000), but further empirical work is needed to back up the theoretical claims advanced in these studies.

[6] John Lagerwey, Yang Yanjie and Tam Wai-lun, et al. have edited a series of reports in Chinese, contained in over 30 volumes, on the town and village temples and village rituals of the primarily-Hakka regions of southwest Fujian, northeast Guangdong, and southern Jiangxi provinces, as well as of northern Fujian Province. These volumes provide extensive and valuable insights into the lineages, temples, festivals, rituals, processions, and Daoist ritual traditions of the villages described. However, these are primarily a compilation of the historical recollections of village elders and do not provide specific historical dates. Thus, it is somewhat difficult to assess if the activities described continue to be practiced, or if and when they ceased. See also Paul Katz's two-volume edited collection of village temple and local ritual studies from Zhejiang and Daniel Overmyer's four-volume study of ritual activities in northern Chinese villages. The 120 volumes of the *Min-su ch'u-yi congshu*, edited by Wang

This kind of local or regional history has been criticized as irrelevant to the larger themes of national history. In his second book, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, Duara directly challenged these demands for a national, homogenous historical narrative (1995). Although powerful nationalistic and institutional forces continue to demand the unification of historical narratives, scholars within this new school of local history, with its methodological links to both the fields of history and anthropology, have continued to work productively, focusing on the lives of common people and basing their studies on local historical documents gathered during fieldwork in local communities. The school itself is, in fact, somewhat internally divided, with certain scholars (most notably Faure (2007) and Liu) recently arguing for models of cultural integration and identification with the state (a position recuperable by nationalism) while others, such as Zheng Zhenman, Liu Yonghua, and the author himself, are more concerned with local cultural experiments and the spread of elite ritual techniques into different local communities and their local appropriation for very different purposes.

Despite, or perhaps because of, these debates a significant challenge to nationalist historiography has emerged in these studies. Zheng's work on the *Family-Lineage Organization and Social Change in Ming and Qing Fujian* (2001) has demonstrated the highly-malleable nature of the Chinese lineage, which could go so far as to transform into a transnational joint-stock corporation in which unrelated individuals could buy shares. This model explodes the earlier A-Z scale of lineage forms proposed as modifications of the Freedman model of the Chinese lineage. One example of this kind of "super-lineage" is that linking the spirit medium traditions of Putian City of Fujian Province with Southeast Asia (discussed further below).

The same difficulty faced in establishing the academic discipline of anthropology in China has been confronted in the field of religious studies (see Yang 2004, Yang and Tammey, eds., 2005). While religious studies ranks high within the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, just below Marxist-Leninist thought, this was originally due to the importance assigned to analyzing ideological formations that

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Ch'iu-kui, include many detailed reports on local ritual activities in fifteen Chinese provinces. The projected 20 volumes of Wang Chiu-kui's edited series on *Traditional Chinese Liturgies*: provide detailed introductions of local Daoist ritual specialists in several different parts of China and include extensive and invaluable photo reproductions of their liturgical manuscripts.

were, by definition, alienated and potentially reactionary. The merging of theory with practice took the form of the implementation by the Bureau of Religious Affairs of policy emerging from this critical analysis of religion. There still exists a relative scarcity of religious studies programs in China. The earliest of these programs (those at Sichuan, Renmin and Nanjing Universities) were established in the 1980s. Although this academic field has grown exponentially over the past fifteen years, including the translation of many overviews and monographs of Western religious studies, very few empirical studies of contemporary Chinese ritual traditions have been conducted.

A recent movement within the Western field of religious studies has undertaken a critical reflection on the ideology of religious studies and an interrogation of the processes of the invention of world religions and the study of comparative religions (McCutcheon 1997, Dubuisson ([1998] tr. 2003, Fitzgerald 2000, Masuzawa 2005). This critical movement questions the universalization of the notion of religiosity, which is traced back to Western theology. A number of these critics have instead suggested a more self-conscious sociology of religion, based on paradigmatic changes to the field introduced by Rodney Stark and others who elucidate a pragmatics of religion as a set of rational choices within differing ritual marketplaces (Stark and Finke 2000). An extended sociology of comparative religion may not, however, escape completely the critique of the founding notions of the field as a whole.[7] Within anthropology, Asad (1993) also calls for the rejection of the term "religion" in place of the study of specific ritual traditions and disciplinary practices. In his subsequent work, he has also urged the exploration of the impacts of modernization theory, notions of secularization, and the institutionalization of Western definitions of religion on non-Western societies.

Western studies of Chinese religion have also foundered over the question of defining the field of study. While Buddhist studies (generally focusing on Buddhist philosophy rather than ritual practice) has a place in many departments of religion in North America and Europe, Daoist studies positions are still extremely rare. Most religious

[7] See, however, the thoughtful reflections of Hent de Vries in his "Introduction: Why Still "Religion", in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, the first volume in a projected five volume series entitled *The Future of the Religious Past*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2008. De Vries concludes that the term "religion" cannot be rejected and must instead be constantly redefined and re-invented.

studies programs are prepared to introduce the religious dimensions of Confucianism, but many universities delegate Confucian studies to the fields of philosophy or East Asian studies. All the more evident for its complete absence from departments of religion is the realm of Chinese popular religion, also termed local communal religion, or those practices, referred to by Asad as "local ritual traditions"—the ensemble of which in any particular region would constitute an object of study. If, as Maurice Freedman claims, Chinese religion is a unity, it has yet to become an object of systematic research. If, as the author would argue, it is instead a vast array of different ritual traditions, some of considerable longevity and complexity, all intertwining in different ways and in different places in relation to other local historical forces, it is, perhaps, understandable that few universities have dared to approach the study of such a complex range of phenomena. The failure to do so, however, has unfortunately meant that a vast realm of human experience has gone unstudied.

Within China, the institutionalization of a particular definition of religion drawn from Marxism over the past fifty years has led to many unintended consequences. This definition insists that each religion must possess a distinct religious organization, religious leadership, religious doctrines and beliefs, and religious practices reflecting these doctrines. Promulgated in 1982, *Document 19*, "The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our County's Socialist Period," mandated "respect for and promotion of the freedom of religious belief." This reaffirmed earlier laws protecting freedom of religious belief issued in 1949 and in the first Chinese Constitution of 1954. As was the case with these earlier laws, *Document 19* limited the freedom to believe to five major religions: Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. Article 36 of *Document 19* limited state protection to "normal" religious activities, without further definition of this term. In 1991, *Document 6*, "Circular on Some Problems Concerning the Further Improvement of Work on Religion," mandated that every religious organization be registered with the authorities. Unregistered group were, by definition, illegal. New regulations were included on the internal organization of these groups, covering issues such as personnel management, financial accounting, etc. In 1994, the State Council issued new regulations on procedures for registration. The State reasserted its power to distinguish orthodox from heterodox beliefs and classify groups such as the Falun Gong as illegal cults in

1999. A new set of *Regulations on Religious Affairs* promulgated by the State Council on March 1, 2005 primarily concerns the bureaucratic issues of the registration and internal organization of religious groups and their official supervision by state agencies. These *Regulations* no longer include any mention of religious belief, but they preserve the ambiguous language about "normal religious activity."

One earlier, but influential, formulation of the limits of "normal religious activity" was provided in a nationally-circulated note from the Zhejiang Provincial CCP Committee's Rectification Office in 1986:

> In his speech at the National Conference of Party Delegates, Comrade Deng Xiaoping gravely noted that "In recent years production has gone up, but the pernicious influence of capitalism and feudalism has not been reduced to a minimum. Instead, some evil things that had long been extinct after liberation have come to life again." This issue warrants our close attention. Some time ago, due to laxities in ideological and political work, feudal superstitions and patriarchal activities gained ground in some localities in our province, particularly in some rural areas, seriously poisoning the minds of the masses, particularly the younger generation, and affecting the building of socialist spiritual civilization. Some Party members and cadres also joined in the activities. Effective measures should be taken in line with Party rectification in order to resolutely curb and rectify this unhealthy trend. It should be made clear that the "normal religious activities" protected under the Chinese Constitution refer to the religious ceremonies of Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Christianity performed in religious places in accordance with their respective traditions and customs of religious activities and conducted by religious followers in their own homes. These include prostrating oneself before the image of the Buddha, reciting scriptures, burning joss sticks, going to church, saying prayers, expounding Buddhist sutras, giving sermons, hearing Mass, receiving baptisms, being initiated into monkhood or nunhood, fasting, celebrating religious festivals, performing last rites, and conducting funeral services. Indiscriminate construction of temples without the approval of the Department concerned and feudal superstitious activities exceeding the limits prescribed by the religious policy must be stopped. Building clan temples, drawing genealogical charts, joining persons of different ancestors to make them bear the same family name, and performing rites in honor of the ancestors are feudal, patriarchal activities, impermissible under our Socialist System. Invoking immortals to exorcise evil spirits, praying for rain, divining by the eight trigrams, telling fortunes by analyzing the component parts of Chinese characters, and practicing physiognomy and geomancy are feudal superstitious activities which should be resolutely banned. All activities which seriously infringe on the interests of the State and jeopardize the

> lives and property of the people must be resolutely suppressed (March 1, 1986, *Guangming ribao*).[8]

Such definitions of religion adopted in China do not closely correspond to the range of ritual practices found in local communities across China. Instead, they cleave contemporary practice into pieces, with some aspects considered acceptable and others not (for example, spirit possession and ancestor worship). This is especially clear when such definitions and their associated policies and institutions are applied to the field of popular local ritual traditions, which possess no clearly-defined religious organization, religious leaders, religious doctrine, or "religious" practices (in the sense of practices reflecting specifically-articulated doctrinal beliefs). The ubiquity of spirit possession in this realm of ritual activity suggests an openness to revelation and alterity quite distinct from the "religions of the book." The importance of lineage, whether within the context of ancestral worship or as a key element underlying multiple modes of local organization of popular god worship, indicates the continuity of the fundamental ritual role of the *jia* (家, or family) in everyday life.

One of the ways in which this problem has been handled during the past fifteen years in China is through the re-classification of popular ritual practices as "folk customs," not only making them more acceptable but also recuperable for projects of nationalism under the broader umbrella of Chinese culture. Here, too, there is a long legacy of nationalist plans for the improvement of culture and the quality of the people, and in an extreme but still-common version, for the transmission of modernist culture to people who are said to have "no culture" (有文化). One extraordinary result of the spread of such discourses is the frequent assertion by villagers engaged in complex ritual activities that they "have no culture" or that they "are practicing feudal superstition." Clearly, the terms of the prevailing discourse are undergoing intense strain, as evidenced in the tendency of villagers to enquire of visitors "isn't our feudal superstitious activity magnificent?"

Let us here discuss a particular aspect of these definitional or conceptual problems that will set the stage for the subsequent account of current ritual activities in Putian. Within Chinese academic and policy circles, the study of "Chinese popular religion" has traditionally referred

[8] This section of the paper is drawn from Dean and Zheng, Vol. 1, 2010. See also Dean 1993.

to the study of religiously-inspired peasant rebellion, i.e. millenarian cults and secret societies, as seen in the monumental study of Ma Xisha and Hang Bingfang entitled *A History of Chinese Popular Religion* (中国民间宗教史) (1992). Hence, the field of Chinese popular religion is, in effect, the study of heterodoxy and superstition (迷信), or actions defined as illegal and heretical. A number of scholars, including Daniel Overmyer (1976, 1999), Hubert Seiwert (2003), and Barend ter Haar (1992), have labored to document the limitations of this scholarly perspective by demonstrating 1) that the vast majority of popular religious movements across Chinese history have been peaceable and not involved in rebellion, and 2) that those that did rebel more often than not were driven to do so by the actions of the state. Barend ter Haar (1992) has been particularly clear in documenting the impact of pejorative labels and unexamined presuppositions in this historical process. Well-known developments in the late 1990's have, however, only exacerbated this trend within Chinese scholarship, as can be seen by the proliferation of publications on historical secret societies and a new literature on comparative approaches to cults (in the current negative sense of the term). Of course, many Chinese scholars have, in response, attempted to develop a more-comprehensive and inclusive, but not necessarily harmonious, approach to religious studies. Nonetheless, even the most recent major compilation of essays on "Chinese popular religion" still deals almost exclusively with "secret religions" (Ma Xisha, ed., 2008).

In some ways, these trends are a continuation of the dismissive attitudes of earlier Chinese elites toward local ritual traditions. In this, the Confucian elite was, to some extent, aided by higher-level Buddhist monks and Daoist masters who sought court patronage or the support of landed gentry and local officials. At court, these groups often maintained a distance from local ritual traditions.[9] But even Confucian literati had to maintain a relationship with their own village temples, and mid- and lower-level Buddhist monks and Daoist masters were deeply involved in local ritual traditions. Most likely, it was the close connection between Celestial Master Daoism (天师道) and local communities across China (especially in the south) that provoked the suspicion of the Qing court and led to the diminution and eventual denial of

[9] The exception being those ritual specialists who were brought to court specifically due to their links to local ritual traditions. This was especially the case with Daoist ritual masters.

court patronage to this branch of Daoism. However, local communities continued to sponsor Daoist rites, providing the economic support necessary for the preservation and expansion of the many local ritual forms of Daoism, which evolved independently in relation to local communal ritual traditions. Under PRC models of the state and the citizenry, the new theory and practice of religion led to far more invasive and systematic forms of control than the sporadic attacks of the late imperial state. These were different kinds of state paranoia. The mission of the imperium was to extend imperial cosmological power through ritual means and through education and emulation to each community and family, but the ritual agents of the emperor encountered a remarkably-diverse field of local cosmological powers and ritual specialists, challenging their efforts to impose a continuous model of cosmological power. Following the collapse of the Qing Dynasty, the totalizing and individualizing demands of the modern state created the need for a different style of enlightenment, setting in motion a dialectical struggle between the forces of rationality and progress and the mysteriously-resistant powers of what state agents could only conceive of as "feudal superstition." Thus, the seeming continuities in the approaches of the imperial state and the Nationalist and Communist governments to popular ritual practices belies a significant change in definitions and tactics related to the rise of a modern nation-state with new bio-political powers.

Within early 20th century Western scholarship, Daoism was treated as an ancient and noble philosophic movement on the decline or, at best, as a form of personal magic with little connection to communal life (Weber). It was only after the "discovery" by Kristofer Schipper and Michael Saso of the ongoing Daoist ritual tradition in Taiwan in the 1960s that a gradual rethinking of the complex interconnection of Daoism and local ritual traditions occurred. As, over the past twenty years, the research into different Daoist ritual traditions across China has slowly proceeded, a somewhat-clearer picture has emerged of the interaction between the multiplicity of liturgical frameworks within distinct mixes of localized Daoist ritual traditions and the evolving local ritual traditions and their unique local pantheons. These local traditions, and their appropriations of the elite ritual traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, defy easy generalization within a unified system of Chinese religion. This exuberant multiplicity recalls the complexity of Greek local ritual traditions prior to their systemati-

zation under a unified pantheon of Olympian gods. Underlying this multiplicity are manifold forms of complex local organization.

In terms of sheer size, this is, and always has been, a massive phenomenon, even when ignored by both traditional and modern scholarship. Of course, one's perceptions of China are much affected by what one sees. The hyperdevelopment of the Chinese economy is visible in every city and town, as well as in many villages, across the country. Nonetheless, the gap between rich and poor continues to grow at an alarming pace. Despite the spread of modern telecommunications, the experiential gap that exists in the daily lives of China's urban and rural citizens expands with equal rapidity. In many rural communities, the revival of ritual practices appears to be taking hold, especially in those areas that though close to expanding urban centers are yet far enough away or sophisticated enough (due to historical reasons) to preserve some local cultural autonomy. Due to the nature of the issue, an objective count of those involved in these local practices will never be achieved, though the number is clearly in the hundreds of millions.

Inside Chinese academic and religious policy circles, there has been a clear recognition of the advancement of secularization among the urban population as well as a greater openness toward the activities of the official religions. Minority and ethnic affairs are now included within the purview of the local offices of the Bureau of Religious Affairs, which would seem to indicate some pragmatic acknowledgement of the broader cultural dimensions of local ritual practice among Han Chinese as well as among the "national minorities." Unfortunately, or perhaps predictably, this has fostered a bureaucratic "bean-counting" approach, in which local temples are often officially registered as "Daoist" in order to gain official acceptance.[10] Such classification also allows for closer supervision and regulation of the finances and management of local ritual organizations. In certain respects, this process mirrors the developments that have taken place in the official policy toward "popular religion" in Taiwan over the past 50 years. An interesting degree of local flexibility in the application of these categories

[10] Note that in Singapore and Indonesia, Daoism was not recognized as an official religion, which led the majority of the Chinese populations of those states to define themselves as Buddhists.

and concepts has been demonstrated by the designation of Three in One temples in the Xinghua area as "sites of local religious activity." The concept of a "local religion" moves beyond the limitations of the state policy of five official religions, showing a greater awareness of the complex lived experience of rural communities. This breakthrough is a mutual accomplishment, as the Three in One movement has petitioned for this kind of official recognition for decades.

One way to explore these issues is to start from the ground up, by examining contemporary ritual life and organization. The author suggests an alternative view of local ritual traditions as the intensification of everyday life, rather than the establishment of a separate, sacred space or a private domain of individualized worship. The argument that ritual is an intensification of the everyday not only emphasizes the highly-ritual foundations of everyday social interaction, but also points to the space of play, pleasure, and friendship (Lefebvre, 1991) within the everyday that are intensified in ritual events. Of course, Lefebvre has made a point to document the overcoding of these spaces by capitalist relations. The contemporary ritual-events in Fujian Province are especially intriguing in their ability to enfold the forces of capitalism and nationalism, accelerating and reflecting back on these forces, yet still preserving the power to generate new worlds of experience for their local communities. In order to gain a better appreciation of the nature of these ritual-events, it is necessary to provide a brief historical background.

Part 3: Historical Background

This section provides a brief introduction to the contemporary ritual activities conducted by the inhabitants of the irrigated alluvial plain that was reclaimed from the Xinghua Bay of Putian County in Fujian Province of southeast China[11] over the course of a thousand years. This plain extends from Putian City in the east to Xinghua Bay in

[11] The Xinghua region is comprised of the counties of Putian and Xianyou. Its three million residents speak Puxianhua, a dialect of Minbei, which is quite distinct from the Minnan dialect spoken just south of the Xinghua region and the Fuzhou dialect spoken to the north of the region. The mountainous Xinghua region leads up to the Putian coastal plain. The Lai River, also known as the Mulan River, runs along a narrow valley through Xianyou County, and then crosses Putian County on the way to the Xinghua Bay.

the west and to the north and south of the Mulan River, covering a total area of 464 sq. km. The author, together with Professor Zheng Zhenman of Xiamen University, recently completed a survey of the populations, principal lineages, temples, and ritual celebrations that occur within the 153 ritual alliances of the 724 villages situated on this plain. Principal among our findings has been the extraordinary complexity and vitality of the ritual traditions and village-based rituals of southeast China. The author argues that this unexpected role of ritual in the everyday life of contemporary Chinese is a result of the development of a multi-layered, syncretic ritual field that can be analyzed historically (Dean and Zheng 2010).

The development of these overlapping and interacting layers may be traced historically, beginning with the changing physical environment due to the reclaiming of land from the sea and the establishment of four, interconnected irrigation systems. The development of another ritual layer may be traced to the rise of Buddhist monastic estates in the 10th century with their rites for the dead ancestors of prominent local lineages. The rise of lineages, ancestral halls, and ancestral worship in the late Song Dynasty and the spread of the lineage form in the early Ming Dynasty introduced another important ritual plane of activity. The mutation of early Ming official li*shê* altars of the soil and the harvest into the kernel of a new mode of local regional ritual alliances, centered in the temples of the popular gods, added yet another plane of ritual action. The rise of regional ritual alliances was also the result of "ecological feedback" from an increasingly complex and interconnected irrigation system which enforced modes of collective cooperation among "irrigation communities" drawing water from the same system of canals. Late Ming tax reforms commuting labor services and grain tax into silver, along with the pirate raids and interdynastic disturbances of the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, led to the delegation of responsibility for the maintenance of local infrastructure to local elites. These elites became increasingly involved in the management of temples, regional ritual alliances, and higher-order ritual territories as a basis for the mobilization of the human and physical resources necessary for system-wide maintenance of the irrigation system. The network of ritual alliances of hundreds of village temples formed an unstable but expanding zone of relative local autonomy during both the late Ming and much of the Qing dynasties.

Thus, unlike other local historians of China, the author would argue that neither the state and its agents nor the lineages and the

scholar-literati elites were the sole or most dominant factors in local social change and control in the Putian plain. Instead, the author emphasizes adaptations that took place below the level of state institutions and lineage ideology as sources of ritual change at the local level. There is also abundant evidence of local collective experimentation with new ritual traditions, some of which are based in local myths, legends, and ritual practices. Local social organizations absorbed and were transformed by the rise of mercantile capitalism and overseas and coastal trade and, above all, by the ecological limitations and challenges of the intricate irrigation system that placed unique constraints on local power. By the late Qing Dynasty, a tendency had emerged toward the transformation of the lineage form from within through its merger with capitalist forces, creating a kind of contractual lineage, a sort of joint-stock corporation. Even while some lineages continued to grow in power, the overall trend in the Putian plains was the dispersal, or merging, of the lineage into territorial ritual groupings. The latter development was part of a general trend from kinship ties to territorial ties, expressed in ritual alliances.[12] Due to the complexity of the interaction of many factors, cultural ritual innovations could occur incrementally, or as a process of trial and error with continual unintended results, and yet spread rapidly across the entire evolving, open cultural system.

The middle of the Qing Dynasty was marked by growing population pressures, new levels of commercialization, and the spread of local, voluntary ritual movements such as the Three in One (which combines Confucian morality, Daoist inner alchemy, and Buddhist meditation) and various Buddhist lay groups, despite growing official suspicion. During the late Qing period, the irrigation systems began to break down and a pattern of feuding village banner alliances divided the Putian plain into a checkerboard of local conflicts. Interestingly, at this very point a new form of collective spirit medium training began in the northern part of the irrigated plain, providing a vehicle for the creation of new networks and connections between local villages. Another defining trend during the late 19th century was the

[12] Later lineages experimented with new forms of organization more closely resembling transnational joint-stock corporations in which membership, or "shares," in the lineage could be purchased, and the lineage could invest in "adopted sons" who could be sent overseas as a form of speculation (Zheng, 2001).

emigration of local residents to Southeast Asia. Many of these emigrants established branch temples of their Putian plain village temple within their new community. The attack on village temples and the ritual activities of villagers during Republican and post-1949 era campaigns aimed at promoting the modern nation-state had a profound impact, eliminating almost half the temples across China (Goossaert). Although little ritual life exists today in some parts of China, ritual activity has survived to a much greater extent across southern China. A near-complete revival (or reinvention) of the temple networks and ritual activities of the Putian plains has taken place since the 1980s. The transnational temple networks of overseas Chinese spirit mediums, many of whom are successful international businessmen, have also become extremely active in the past thirty years.

Each new historical level of ritual form (early god cults, Buddhist and Daoist rites, spirit possession, ancestral worship, multi-village processions, Three in One self-cultivation and ritual practice, collective spirit medium group dance, etc.) has interacted with earlier levels to create a complex and growing set of cultural and ritual resources, as well as a range of techniques for the mobilization and management of village communities and the invocation and application of cosmological forces. Rather than superseding, negating, or contradicting earlier layers of ritual forms, these different techniques for the performance of social and cosmological power continued to construct new, mixed forms and potentialities for local social and cultural change. The village temples and their ritual-events became the site for the elaboration of a new form of local power, mobilizing the entire community into larger regional alliances. Specific mechanisms, such as the rotation of *fushou* (headsmen of good fortune) into management roles within the village temple committees and the public posting of temple accounts at each ritual-event, have to a certain extent, guarded against the abuse of these powers.

Due to the spread of the ritual alliances from the mid-Ming Dynasty onwards across the entire Putian irrigated plain and the development of rituals specific to these organizations, the author argues that a new power formation began to evolve in the 16th century to interact with, and in some cases surpass, the power of elite-dominated lineages. The author terms this the "ritual power formation," as distinguished from Foucault's outline of a pastoral power formation in late medieval Europe. The ritual power formation that arose in the Putian plains

during the Ming and Qing eras provided a local version of what Prasenjit Duara has referred to as the "cultural nexus of power" of late imperial China.

The author's recently-completed study of the Putian plains demonstrates the importance of ritual to contemporary Chinese life in this region and raises several hypotheses concerning the ability of ritual to cope with the forces of modernity, whether emanating from the state or from capital flows. The author also highlights the role of overseas Chinese, returning to re-invent local tradition and to invest in the rebuilding of temples and the performance of spectacular rituals. Although overseas Chinese continue to play a significant part in some village rituals, the vast majority of ritual events performed in the region are now organized and funded locally.

The gods worshipped in these temples include a wide range of deified historical figures, some of whom are nationally recognized but many of whom are known only in the village in which they are worshipped. Also prominent are a broad range of nature deities and gods absorbed from popular myth, legend and fiction, along with many Buddhist gods, Daoist deities and immortals, or Confucian sages. Each distinct cultural region of China (often distinguished by a unique local dialect, style of architecture, cuisine, musical and theatrical tradition, etc.) possesses its own unique local pantheon. While the local pantheons of northern China are generally selected from among some 300 deities, many of classical origin, the local pantheons of south China are far more open to local innovation. The villagers in the area discussed worship over 1000 gods, over half of whom are local inventions.

For the Western reader, the closest analogy is perhaps to ancient Greece prior to the standardization of the Olympian pantheon of gods, when the same god was often understood and worshipped very differently in different Grecian cities and cult sanctuaries. Another point of reference would be the cults of the medieval Christian saints, some of whom were regarded as having special protective powers over their cult centers. As will be seen, the festivals of the gods of rural China are times of carnival and celebration. These ritual events are an intensification of both the ritualized basis and the joys and pleasures of everyday life. Rather than constituting a sacred time of transcendence set apart from the daily profane order, these village rituals involve an acceleration of the flow of money and gifts.

On average, we found the populations of the 724 villages of the Putian plains to be over 1000 people (1020), with some villages having

as many as 10,000 residents. Of course, an "average" village does not exist; far more important locally are the relationships (historical, economic, political, and cultural) between larger villages and the surrounding smaller ones. Hence, we sought to discover, from the vantage point of each village, whether this was a larger, locally-dominant village with a long history and one or more powerful lineages that produced many scholar-literati, or whether it was instead a smaller, dependent village, with mixed surnames, a shorter history, and few if any scholar-literati in its past. The populations of the 724 villages surveyed totaled 746,495.

The survey found over 100 different surname groups within these 724 villages; while the average village had between three and four surnames, some villages had as many as fourteen surnames, and under a third were single surname villages. The survey also found that most villages had three or more temples (an average of 3.25), (while some villages had as many as eighteen temples, many of them had only one temple). These temples (2,586 total) housed many thousands of god statues (a total of 10,433), representing over 1,200 different deities. A total of 3,966 god statues were found in the Nanyang southern irrigated plain, 5,229 in the Beiyang northern irrigated plain, and 1,238 in the Jiuliuyang irrigated plain. Thus, village temples contained an average of four (or more) gods, and some housed as many as thirty-five gods. Due to the presence of these gods, many of whom are worshipped on their birthdays in communal rituals, a considerable amount of ritual activity takes place in the villages throughout the year, in addition to major annual festivals. We were told that ritual events and opera performances were held on 250 days out of the year in villages within a short walk of the Jiangkou area.

Such figures do not support the image of traditional practices in flight before an encroaching, encompassing modernity. On the contrary, this survey documents conclusively the resurgence and growth of popular religious ritual activity in this part of China since the end of the Cultural Revolution. What is more, the survey reveals the contemporary flourishing of ritual activity to be part of a long history of local control and management of local resources, dating back at least as far as the mid-Ming period. The author referred earlier to the temple committees and regional ritual alliances of the Putian plains as "China's second government," indicating that they fill many functions of local self-governance (Dean 2002).

The survey identified and mapped 153 ritual alliances on the irrigated Putian plain. Mapping these boundaries raises difficult questions concerning representation, knowledge, and power. The boundaries of ritual alliances are not defined by physical markers but are, instead, generated by the repeated physical movements of the participants of ritual-events, i.e. these boundaries are created and continually re-created through the routes taken by the processions of the gods as they first trace out the physical limits of their own village and then continue along the boundaries of the ritual alliance to which they belong. These ritual alliances were drawn from the ground up, rather than being imposed by the state in the form of an administrative spatial hierarchy. As shown in other papers (Dean 2008), the village temples and local ritual traditions of certain parts of the irrigated Putian plain are linked to a broad network of branch temples across Southeast Asia. Mapping these transnational and yet resolutely-localist ritual alliances enables a comparison of the many different kinds of space and senses of place constructed through the ritual-events of the Putian plains.

Part 4: Theoretical Implications: The Syncretic Field of the Ritual-Event

From the brief descriptions of the Putian plains rituals provided above and the even briefer references to the introduction and adaptation of many different kinds of ritual traditions to Putian culture over time, one can see that contemporary ritual-events are complex, collective actions including many different participants in different roles. These ritual-events are characterized by multiple and mixed liturgical frameworks, and events unfold in multiple centers of activity. These rituals display competing tendencies toward order and chaos. They seem to be able to evade ensnarement within any single frame (capitalist, nationalist, and even localist), instead generating multiple frames of reference.

Over the centuries, the syncretic field of Chinese ritual practice was built up through innovations in ritual practice into a multi-layered field of forces (symbolic, cosmic, political, and socio-economic). Each layer, or plane, of ritual experience was generated by a particular ritual tradition—from spirit possession to Buddhist rites and from Confucian ancestral rites to Daoist collective rites for regional alliances—and each of these traditions was the central, most powerful ritual form of a particular era. All of these layers/planes were constructed by ritual

forms that demand specific ranges of bodily experience, require collective labor and resources, and mobilize cosmological forces. Multiple planes/layers of ritual form co-exist within the syncretic field. Any one individual may take part in rituals on many different layers of the field through attending events in a Buddhist monastery, a village temple, a lay Buddhist or Three in One hall, or a regional procession. Of greater importance to an understanding of the ritual field, however, is the fact that the co-presence of these different layers/planes of ritual forms allows for the continuous creation of new hybrid ritual forms through the interactions between layers of the field, i.e. through processes of infinitesimal imitation, opposition, and adaptation. Each ritual form borrows elements from the others. Individuals are a part of many such hybrid forms. Hence, one can be a ritual specialist in more than one tradition. Moreover, as a result of the multiple liturgical frameworks found within the contemporary rituals of Putian, elements of all of the earlier layers are found to play an active role in the specific events of today. Thus, each ritual event enfolds all of the layers of the syncretic field and unfolds them through a sequence of actions taking place simultaneously in multiple centers.

The syncretic field may also be analyzed in terms of two opposing tendencies, which, drawing on indigenous concepts, can be termed *sheng* (saintly power of self-cultivation) and *ling* (spontaneous cosmological power). *Sheng* activities include the careful laying out of a cosmologically-oriented altar; visualization of the invited deities; invocation of these deities through swiftly-shifting mudras, spells, and commands; and courtly ritual actions, such as offerings and preparation, recitation, and transmission through burning of memorials and other bureaucratic documents, etc. The *ling* pole is evidenced in the spirit possession of mediums, the spontaneous transmission of trance states through a crowd, and even in the moment of the transformation of certain ritual specialists into higher deities (bianshen). The ritual-field is stretched between these bi-polar attractors. At different moments in the course of their discrete liturgies, ritual specialists may move away from one pole toward the other. Worshippers in the community are also drawn back and forth between more orderly forms of worship and the exuberance and excitement of the event.

The multiplicity and hybrid nature of the liturgical frameworks, together with the multiple centers of action of the ritual-events, make it difficult (and unhelpful) to interpret the ritual from a single perspective (as the embodiment of a particular belief or value system, or as

the sincere expression of one person's beliefs). Doubling the underlying framework (mediated relations to cosmological forces vs. unmediated relations with local deities) does not get one much further. An approach consistent with a multitudinous ritual event experienced from multiple nodes of perception is required, rather than the insistence upon individual agency (consciousness, or rational choice) as the single point of departure for an analysis of ritual.

A theoretical resource for such analysis may be found in the work of Gabriel Tarde, an early sociological thinker. Tarde emphasizes the laws of imitation, opposition, and adaptation at all levels of society and presents a particularly inclusive definition of society (it extends to any grouping of beings or even molecules). More importantly for our purposes, Tarde introduces a microsociology into his theory of social laws. He stresses the different levels of perceptions, reactions, and actions within each individual (as a society of molecules), while also examining each individual as a constituent of a set of larger social groups. The individual, in Tarde's view, is comprised of many levels of perception/awareness, and different viewpoints may emerge at different levels within the same individual. Adopting the terminology of Gottfried Leibniz, Tarde describes the individual as composed of monads—different points of view—from self-conscious mind to proprioceptive awareness, to layers of mood and affect, to pre-conscious sensitivity, to unconscious levels of awareness. Each of these different nodes of perception, or monads, possess distinct appetites and degrees of perception—each level, from unconscious to conscious, is the result of different aggregates of monads, with some more dominant than others.[13] In effect, Tarde argues that the individual exists as a multiplicity, composed of multiple levels of perception/reaction and extends this form of analysis to group subjectivities (e.g. crowds, armies, monasteries, corporations, etc.). Tarde's microsociological approach offers a fresh viewpoint of the simultaneous emergence of the individual and the social group. The exploration of the monadic action-mind as an infinitesimal differentiation of the social ream allows one to consider the social from the angle of the event and to tackle the emergence of

[13] Note that, in contrast with Leibniz's model of closed-off monads, Tarde's monads are nodes of perception, or points of view, which are continually open to and interactive with one another.

social forces at the micro-level, as well as the occurrence of change and innovation.

Unlike Durkheim, Tarde does not presuppose the existence of the social as the ultimate determination of the individual (who achieves unified identity by absorbing the social) but, instead, works to analyze the concrete mechanisms whereby specific social groups or networks are formed. This aspect of Tarde's approach is akin to recent versions of ANT (actor-network theory) advocated by Bruno Latour and others (Latour 2005). ANT examines the systemic interaction of all of the elements within a network, including non-human elements such as objects, physical processes, natural resources, ecological features, etc. The author has found this approach helpful in tracing the effects of the ecological constraints of the coastal irrigation systems on the socio-ritual formations (regional ritual alliances) of the Putian plains. Similarly, for Tarde, "every thing is a society, every phenomenon is a social fact,"[14] even the mind. Thus, psychology is central to sociology, and social action emerges from the actions of monadic, multi-layered minds. Indeed, the mind *is* a social action.[15] No separation or opposition exists between individual human monad and society or collective group. Rather individual and society emerge together, and that which appears to be the psychic state of an individual is ultimately viewed as an integration/differentiation of small social variations.

Tarde's laws of imitation, opposition, and adaptation are ontologically prior to social hierarchies and the imposition of social facts. If, sociologically speaking, one considers laws of imitation at the same level as institutions, molecular movement is completely overlooked. Thus, microsociology also resonates with Foucault's microhistories, which positioned subjective technologies and bodies ontologically prior to modes of production in order to remap modernity. Imitation, opposition, and adaptation work at all levels and on all scales, both

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[14] Gabriel Tarde, *Monadologie et société Oeuvres de Gabriel Tarde* vol. 1 (Paris, Institut Synthélabo, 1999), 58.

[15] Gilles Deleuze comments that "it is completely wrong to reduce Tarde's sociology to a psychologism or even an interpsychology…What Tarde inaugurates is a microsociology, which is not necessarily concerned with what happens between individuals but with what happens within a single individual…" from *Difference and Repetition*, (1994): 312–13, n. 3. Crucial to a microsociology that would avoid psychologism is an understanding of the individual as a monad (made up of many monads, or points of view, at different levels), much as announced in Tarde's *Monadologie et Sociologie* (Paris): 1999.

in broad strokes and in infinitesimal ways. While imitation (repetition) can work to repeat the same, it can also, through the most infinitesimal of interferences (opposition) or inventions (adaptations), open up difference. Rather than searching for complete opposite, as in dialectics, Tarde examines the consequences of the smallest forms of opposition, such as acts of hesitation. Instead of examining only the imitation of great people and great ideas, Tarde discusses cultural invention as the infinitesimal adaptation of techniques and ideas. Different scales of analysis bring out startlingly-distinct qualities of (ritual) activity. At one level, Tarde sees "imitation as the repetition of an innovation." Within the context of ritual, this denotes that the mass of participants are seen simply to imitate the innovations of some great innovator. On a deeper level, however, "(imitation) is repetition which serves difference." This is also the level at which Tarde turns away from "impersonal givens or the Ideas of great men" in favor of "the little ideas of little men," becoming concerned with "little inventions and interferences between imitative currents."[16]

Microsociology is a particularly-promising approach for the study of ritual activities in southeast China, because these ritual activities have typically been construed in exceedingly-Durkheimian terms, i.e. as a site of the reproduction of the social and the elimination of difference, in which the articulation of local differences or autonomies always appears tenuous at best. By the very terms of this model, local difference is fated to capitulate to the imperial center, with its presumed Confucian order. There exist, within other fields, additional accounts of ritual activities that stress the spontaneous emergence of practices as well as a thoroughgoing renegotiation of the social order, but the sociological study of Northeast Asia is generally biased toward the reinscription of immutable national or proto-national identities. This is a result of the legacy of modernization theory in the formation of area studies, entrenched and unexamined.

Because micorsociology examines the social from the angle of the event, it foregoes the dubious logic of modernization theory, in which the duality of individual and society is transposed onto that of modernity and tradition, thus imposing a scenario in which the modern individual's struggles against the constraints of traditional society in an effort to Westernize and modernize are preordained to fail regardless

[16] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, (1994): 312–13, n. 3.

of how far modernization advances. This is not, however, a problem that belongs exclusively to area studies. While the refusal to question modernization theory appears most virulent within the context of area studies, it is not unusual for thinkers schooled in the very philosophies of difference that issued a challenge to modernization to replicate it as soon as they step outside of the Western enclave.

Tarde's concepts of imitation, opposition, and adaptation can also be applied in broad strokes to the history of ritual forms in the Putian plains. For example, it might be said that early lineage groups sought to imitate the ritual actions of the aristocracy at a very basic, institutional level. Other surname groups showed their opposition to constraints within (or their exclusion from) the classical ancestral worship system by expanding the objects of worship beyond the prescribed five generations of ancestors. Finally, these new, expanded ancestral worship rites were broadly adapted through continual modification by an increasing number of emergent lineages across the Putian plains.

Daoist ritual also clearly imitates court audiences, and Confucian masters of ritual (Yanshi in Putian) assist lineage members and temple worshippers in rites also clearly imitative of court ritual and classical rites. As seen above, Buddhist monks and Three in One scripture masters also perform rituals that are clearly parallel to (or imitative of) those of the Daoist ritual masters. Forces of opposition and adaptation can also be seen in the elaboration of the different pantheons (cosmological powers) addressed and invoked by these various ritual traditions (opposition) and in the mutual borrowing (adaptation) that has characterized the evolution of their respective liturgies.

All of these examples tend to portray ritual as the machinery of empire, with the imitation of the ritual forms of an orthodox court spreading across the land, allowing for minor opposition and local adaptations. In this view, ritual, as imitation, is the repetition of the same and the repeated re-inscription of the individual into the cultural unity of the state. This perspective ties in neatly with work on Chinese cultural hegemony and ritual orthopraxy, as it even makes allowances for local interpretations and modifications (variation).

Tarde, however, suggests that the laws of imitation (repetition), opposition (hesitation) and adaptation (invention) exist on another deeper level, which is best explored at the bodily level of individual experience (what might be termed microsociology). What, one might ask, is imitated in the highly-stylized trance movements of the possessed sprit medium? Who is doing the imitating when action becomes

close to involuntary? In any case, Tarde points out that imitation at a more profound level can be understood as the repetition of difference itself (that which continues to self-differentiate) and, thus, as the opening up of new worlds of experience at the molecular, individual, and group levels. This openness of imitation to difference is the "apparent paradox of ritual, which is designed to repeat the unrepeatable."

Through approaching the development of the ritual forms of the Putian plains in this way, ritual may be seen as an engine of social change, rather than merely as a mechanism for the imposition of the same (cultural unification, identification with the state, etc.). From this perspective, ritual is viewed neither as a general social glue mediating different state and local institutions, nor as a pressure valve outlet for social dissent, nor as a primitive structural indetermination that can only be displaced. Rather than recognizing the independent value of ritual, all of these approaches (including the cultural hegemonic approach) characterize ritual as a conduit for something else or as the means to an end—whether it be cultural unification, individual identity, or social harmony. Based on a comprehensive examination of the entire range of experiences involved in a ritual-event, one can instead argue that ritual-experience is the collective actualization of (potentially new) worlds, rather than (merely) the re-imposition of predetermined ideas or social relations.

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PART II

IDENTITIES, ORGANIZATIONS AND SOCIETIES

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONTEMPORARY CHINESE BELIEFS AND SPIRITUAL PURSUITS

Victor Yuan
Horizon Research Consultancy Group

I. *Research Context*

We live in an era characterized by both material advancement and spiritual searching. Rapid improvements in science and technology have resulted in greater daily conveniences as well as increased dependency on these developments. At the same time, evolving social circumstances and diminished social stability have inspired greater reliance on religion, as the growth of individualism has generated a yearning for spiritual solace.

The role of religion within this fast-paced, rapidly changing social environment is also evolving. No longer concerned solely with divulging the meaning of life and the universe or prescribing principles for ethical living, religion is assuming a growing secular function, addressing global issues such as world peace, environmental preservation, and human rights and providing input in the areas of politics and economics. Moreover, religion often serves as a bridge between the government and the public. These changes are evidence of the modern innovations of religion, rather than the concessions of religion to secularization.

In China, deepening economic reforms have triggered institutional evolution and social diversification, resulting in the diversification of accessible ideologies, including religions and spiritual belief systems. The Horizon Research Consultancy Group, an independent, Chinese research and consultancy firm founded in 1992, undertook its first survey of religion in China in 1995. It carried out a more comprehensive survey of China's religious beliefs nationwide in 2007. Multistage random sampling was employed in the classification of all cities and towns (county-level cities) within the Chinese Urban Residents

Sampling Database (including 31 provinces and municipalities at the administrative level directly below the central government as well as prefectures and county-level cities across the country, exclusive of Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan) according to economic development (GDP per capita), geographical distribution (eastern, central, and western), and population size. An appropriate number of cities and towns was extracted from each class to create an urban sample. At the same time, rural areas (those below the county level) were classified based on the total year-end population and GDP per capita of towns (county-level cities) within the Chinese Urban Residents Sampling Database, and a suitable rural sample of county-level cities was extracted. Utilizing multistage random sampling, a sample of twenty cities (including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Wuhan), sixteen small towns (including Zoucheng of Jining City, Shandong Province and Yuyao of Ningbo City, Zhejiang Province), and twenty rural areas (including Conghua of Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province and Dingzhou of Baoding City, Hebei Province) were selected. Finally, in May of 2007, trained interviewers conducted in-person surveys of 7,021 eligible permanent residents aged 16 to 75. The resulting data were weighted to represent the local population, with a ±0.80% sampling error and a 95% confidence level. The principal findings of this survey are reported in this chapter.

II. *Research Findings*

A. *Social Forces Play a Greater Role in Shaping the Values and Level of Contentment of the Chinese Public than Do Religious Beliefs*

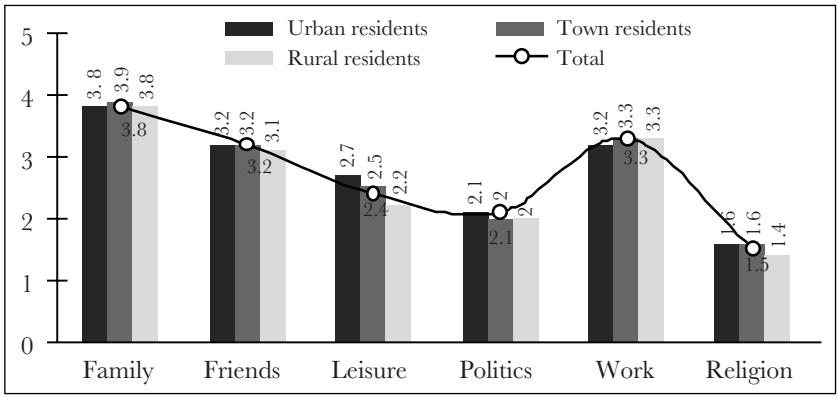
The data indicate that the Chinese public attaches greater importance to social forces than to spiritual pursuits, with family, nation, and work, rather than religion, comprising the core of the Chinese value system. This trend toward the prioritization of social over spiritual forces may be attributed both to the indoctrination of atheism within the modern Chinese educational system and the traditional emphasis of eastern (particularly Confucian) philosophy on social participation over individual concerns regarding death and the afterlife.

1. *The Chinese Public's Low Prioritization of Religion*

According to the Horizon survey, family, friends, and work rank among the highest daily priorities of both urban and rural residents, while religion is viewed as possessing much lower daily life significance (with a rating of only 1.5 on a 4 point scale).

Question I: Please rate the following based on their importance to your daily life?

a) Family
b) Friends
c) Leisure (entertainment)
d) Politics (e.g. elections, Party/League activities)
e) Work
f) Religion



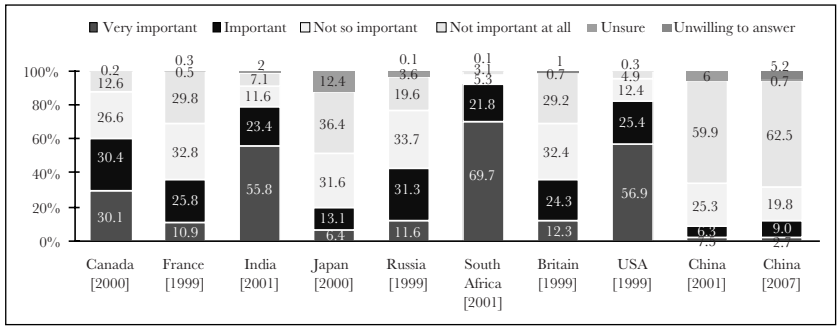
Note: Importance was rated on a 5-point scale, with 1 being "not at all important" and 5 being "very important."
Source: Horizon Research Consultancy Group, *Survey of Chinese Residents' Religious Beliefs*, 2007.

Figure 1. Comparison of the relative importance of various factors in the daily lives of the Chinese people.

A comparison of the findings of the Horizon study with those of a global study of values conducted by the World Values Survey further indicates that the Chinese people place less value on religion than do the citizens of other countries. As may be seen from the statistics below, the percentage of Chinese respondents who regarded religion

as an important factor in their daily lives was notably lower than that of both their Western and Eastern counterparts. In 2001, only 8.8% of the Chinese surveyed rated religion as important, while in 2007, 11.7% of Chinese respondents considered religion significant. Surveys of Western religiosity found that 82.3% of U.S. participants and 60.5% of Canadian respondents considered religion important in 1999 and 2000, respectively; even in Japan, which shares China's East Asian cultural heritage, 19.5% of the population ranked religion as important in 2000. The same domestic studies found that 59.9% and 62.5% of Chinese respondents considered religion "not at all important" in 2001 and 2007, respectively.

Question II: How important is religion in your life? [Single-choice question]
a) Very important
b) Important
c) Not so important
d) Not important at all
e) Unwilling to Answer
f) Unsure



Source: Overseas data: World Values Survey;
Domestic data: Horizon Research Consultancy Group, *Survey on Chinese Residents' Religious Beliefs*, 2001, 2007.

Figure 2. Comparison of importance of religion to the residents of various countries.

2. *The Importance of Health and Family Harmony (over Religion) to Happiness*

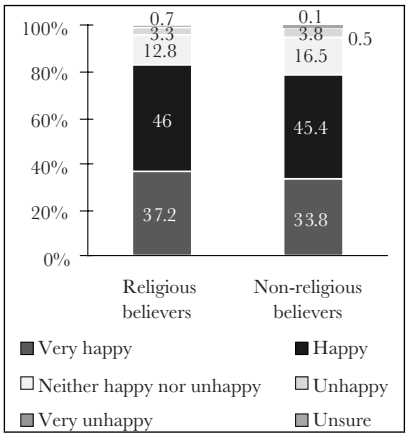
Based on crosstab analysis, it would appear that religion (2%) has little impact on the happiness of the Chinese public. Instead, secular factors, such as family health (74.8%), family harmony (60.7%), and successful work (24.9%) constitute the main sources of happiness in Chinese society.

Question III: How happy are you with your current life? [Single-choice question]

a) Very happy
b) Happy
c) Not so happy
d) Very unhappy
e) Unwilling to answer
f) Unsure

Question IV: Which of the following contribute most to your overall happiness? [Choose up to three of the following]

a) Children's accomplishments
b) Family's health
c) Personal health
d) Professional success
e) Career accomplishments
f) Family harmony
g) Religion
h) Close friends
i) Satisfactory income
j) Satisfactory house or car
k) Satisfactory social status
l) Ability to travel
m) Social harmony
n) Unwilling to answer
o) Unsure



Source: Horizon Research Consultancy Group, *Survey on Chinese Residents' Religious Beliefs*, 2007.

Figure 3. Comparison of the relative happiness of religious believers & non-religious believers (%).

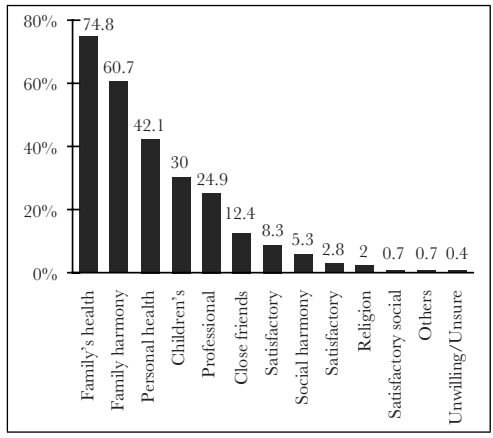


Figure 4. Sources of happiness for the Chinese public (%).

B. *A Diverse Amalgam of Religious Beliefs Impact the Daily Lives of the Chinese in a Cultural, Rather than Religious, Manner*

Secularization has, to a great extent, provided the Chinese public with more individual free space. Rather than rejecting religious beliefs outright, the Chinese embrace a variety of beliefs, which are incorporated into their social and cultural lives. Although the survey findings indicate that religion is not generally deemed important, a number of unconscious religious acts may still be found in the daily lives of the Chinese people. These are, however, regarded as components of culture, rather than religious practices.

1. *The Incorporation of Various Religious Beliefs into the Social and Cultural Lives of the Chinese People*

A great variety of religious beliefs and practices exist within contemporary China; these include both institutional and "diffused" forms of religion. Of those surveyed, 18.1% identified themselves as Buddhists, constituting the largest group of religious adherents. Self-indentified Christians (Protestants) and Daoists comprised only 2.9% and 1.2% of survey participants, respectively. Diffused religions (often referred to as "folk belief") possess no systematic doctrines, rituals, or organizations; rather, the content of belief blends with daily life. Hence, diffused

religious belief is manifested in a variety of everyday ritual activities and ideas, including those concerning ancestors, good fortune, auspiciousness, evil spirits, etc. The survey findings suggest that over 20% of respondents believed in *yuanfen* (缘分, or fated connection),[1] *mingyun* (命运, or destiny), *baoying* (报应, or retribution),[2] or ancestors/deities. This finding highlights a unique aspect of Chinese religious belief as part of, rather than distinct from, traditional Chinese culture.

Within political sociology, it is seen that atheists and those who are open to a variety of religious beliefs tend to become proponents of significant change, e.g. revolution or reform. At the same time, the adherents of institutional religions tend to endorse strict codes and rules and prefer stability. Given China's current social reforms and evolving social order, the present pattern of belief is unsurprising. The coexistence of atheists, religious converts, and people who embrace multiple religious beliefs is both reasonable and positive, and indicates the need for greater religious space.

Question V: Which one of the following religions do you adhere to? (regardless of actual religious participation or attendance) [Single-choice question]

a) Buddhism
b) Daoism
c) Confucianism
d) Christianity
e) Catholicism
f) Islam

Question VI: Which of the following do you believe in/are real? [Single-choice question]

a) Gods
b) Devils
c) Soul[3]
d) Sages[4]

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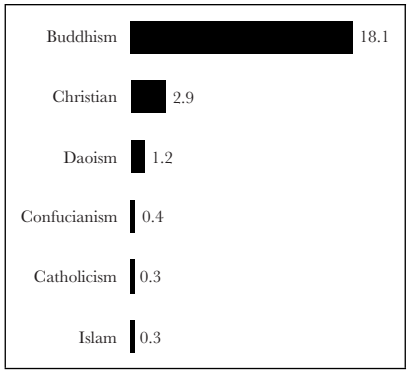
[1] *Yuanfen*, or "缘分" in Chinese, is an abstract concept within Chinese culture, referring to the intangible connection that exists between people and the subsequent inevitably of their meeting.

[2] The Buddhist notion of "retribution," or "因果报应" in Chinese, implies that good deeds bring rewards and bad deeds carry punishments.

[3] It is generally believed that the soul resides in the human body, or other entity, and dominates it. According to most beliefs, the soul can leave the body and exist independently.

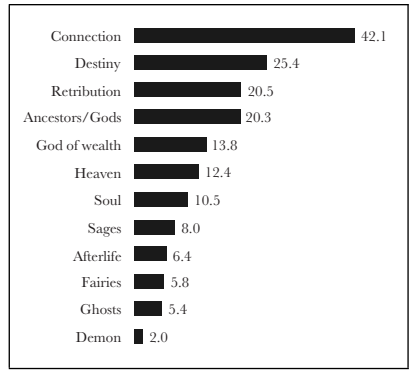
[4] Sages (*shengren* 圣人) are like saints whose moral superiority is believed to entail extraordinary power.

e) Retribution
f) Afterlife
g) Fairies[5]
h) Ghosts
i) Destiny
j) God of wealth
k) Ancestor worship[6]
l) Connection



Source: Horizon Research Consultancy Group, *Survey on Chinese Residents' Religious Beliefs*, 2007.

Figure 5. Chinese adherents to institutional religions (%).



Source: Horizon Research Consultancy Group, *Survey on Chinese Residents' Religious Beliefs*, 2007.

Figure 6. Chinese belief in various elements of diffused religion (%).

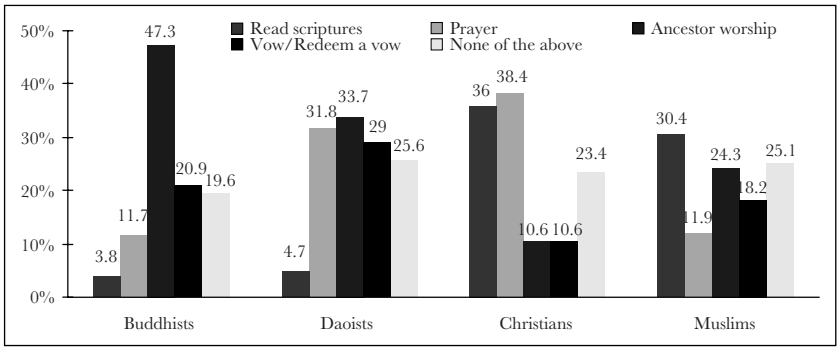
It may be said that religion is comprised of two types of common "norms." The first of these is the norm of conduct, taking the form of religious discipline or rites; the second is the norm of belief, taking the form of explanations and activities which manifest belief. Hence, the extent to which religious believers conduct religious activities according to religious doctrine becomes an important criterion of their religiosity. Certainly, this criterion exhibits great diversity. The findings of the Horizon survey reveal that a large percentage of Chinese Christians and Muslims read scriptures (36.0% and 30.4% respectively), while only 3.8% of Buddhists and 4.7% of Daoists do so. Ancestor worship and prayer are, however, quite prevalent among these two

[5] Fairies (*shenxian* 神仙) refer to entities who possess supernatural powers and an eternal life.

[6] The ritual adulation by descendants of the spirits of their predecessors.

latter groups: 47.3% of self-identified Buddhists acknowledged that they had worshipped ancestors and 31.8% of Daoist respondents professed to have prayed during the previous twelve months. Of particular note is the fact that approximately 20% of religious believers (and 25.6% of self-proclaimed Daoists) did not engage in any religious activity.

Question VII: In which of the following activities have you engaged during the past 12 months? [Single-choice question]
a) Reciting religious books/scriptures
b) Prayer
c) Ancestor worship
d) Make a vow/redeem a vow



Source: Horizon Research Consultancy Group, *Survey on Chinese Residents' Religious Beliefs*, 2007.

Figure 7. Comparison of religious behavior of China's religious believers.

The Chinese tend to view belief as a standard of conduct. Thus, belief is manifested in various ways through daily behavior, including choosing auspicious days to hold weddings and funerals (7.3%), setting off firecrackers to avoid evil spirits (16.0%), wearing charms or worshipping ancestral tablets (12.1%), and suspending deific images in one's home to dispel disasters and ask for blessings. Deeply rooted in traditional beliefs, these activities have become an intrinsic component of the contemporary Chinese lifestyle and hold strong traditional cultural significance.

Question VIII: During the past 12 months, have you engaged in any of the following activities (or asked another to do so on your behalf) in order to avert evil or seek blessings? [Multiple-choice question]
a) Wearing a red belt in your zodiac year[7]
b) Hanging a mirror to avert evils[8]
c) Holding wedding ceremony/moving on auspicious days[9]
d) Sticking rune on the door[10]
e) Setting off firecrackers[11]
f) Wearing articles to avoid evil spirits[12]
g) Unwilling to answer
h) Unsure

Question IX: Which of the following items do you keep in your home? [Multiple-choice question]
a) Portrait of the god of wealth
b) Buddhist sculpture/portrait
c) Sculpture/portrait of Chairman Mao
d) Ancestral tablet
e) Portrait of the local deity, kitchen deity, or door deity
f) Unwilling to answer
g) Unsure

[7] Traditionally, one's zodiac year was often regarded as unlucky and, thus, a red belt or string was worn to avert evil.
[8] Hanging a mirror above a window or door was traditionally believed to repel evil spirits.
[9] The most auspicious time/date for a wedding is determined based on the hours and dates of birth of the bride and groom.
[10] A rune was traditionally seen as the symbolic form of supernatural power; certain text or graphics were inscribed upon specific materials, such as paper, silk or wood, and these were affixed to the front door of a home.
[11] In rural communities, firecrackers are set off during festivals, on wedding days, and on a baby's day of birth.
[12] Traditionally, people wore crystal, jade, or gold charms to seek blessing for themselves and their families.

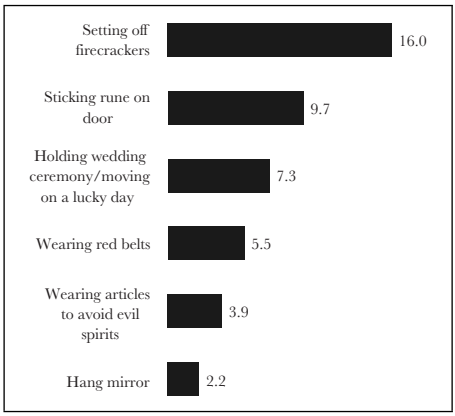


Figure 8. Chinese engagement in activities to request blessings/avoid evil spirits in the past year (%).

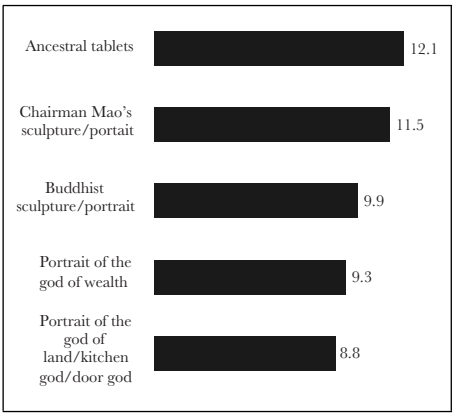


Figure 9. Items of worship kept in Chinese homes (%).

Source: 2007 Horizon Research Consultancy Group, *Survey on Chinese Residents' Religious Beliefs*, 2007.

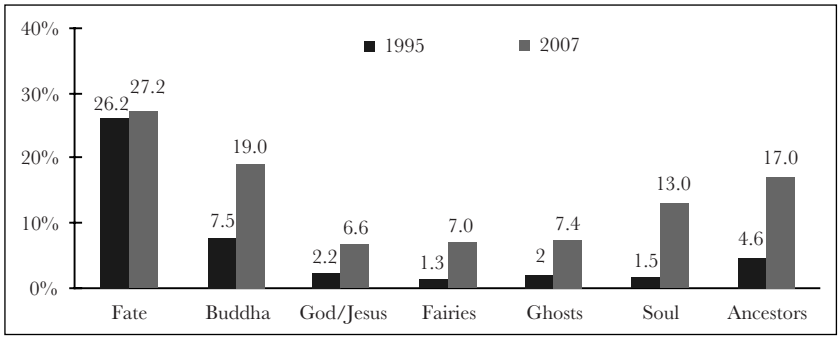
2. *With the Improvement of Material Conditions, the Chinese People Have Become More Engaged in Spiritual Pursuits*

Due to improvements in standard of living following the implementation of the Reform and Opening policy, a revival of religion has taken place in China since the late 1970s. This growth in religious belief and practice, now an indisputable fact, has continued to accelerate as Chinese people have engaged more and more in spiritual pursuits.

Within the more tolerant policy environment of contemporary China, an increasing number of people now believe in such spiritual concepts and practices as *yuanfen* (destined connection), fate, fortune-telling, horoscope, incense burning and deity/ancestor worship, and the avoidance of evil. The Horizon survey indicates that in 2007 nearly half (45.6%) of urban residents believed in the notion of "yuanfen," and 27.2% believed in fate (up from 26.2% in 1995). Meanwhile, the belief among urban and rural respondents in gods and Buddha rose from 7.5% and 2.2% (in 1995) to 19.0% and 6.6% (in 2007), respectively.

This rise in religious belief has been accompanied by increases in institutional religious adherence, as manifested in the 18.1% of respondents who identified themselves as Buddhists and the 2.9% of participants who professed adherence to Christianity (Protestantism). Rather than detracting from the commitment of the Chinese people

to work and family, these (oftentimes newly-adopted) beliefs appear to enhance traditional family belief systems and increase commitment to other forms of belief. At the same time, the cultivation of moral virtues through religious belief and practice has helped to redress the negative impacts of China's rapid economic development, through, for example, encouraging people to refrain from extravagant consumption and to show concern for disadvantaged groups. This may, to a certain extent, contribute to the maintenance of societal harmony and stability.



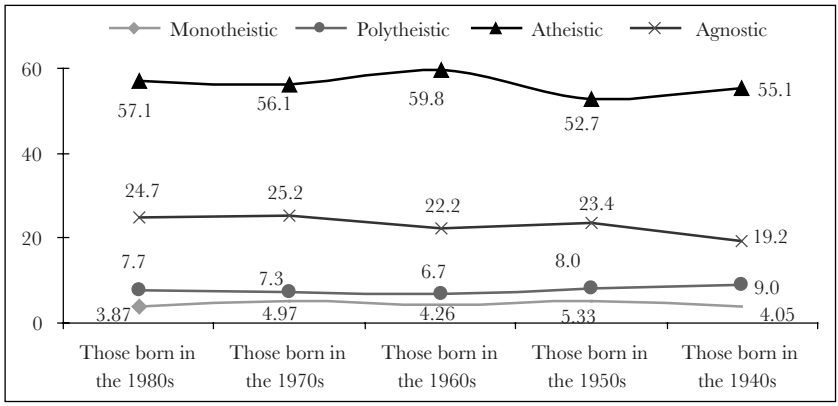
Source: Horizon Research Consultancy Group, *Surveys on Chinese Residents' Religious Beliefs*, 1995 and 2007.

Figure 10. Comparison of the beliefs of urban Chinese residents in 1995 and 2007.

3. *Religious Belief Is Lowest among Those Born during the 1960s*

Due to a lack of substantive differences in the content and form of education, little variation exists between Chinese residents of various ages with regard to profession of religious belief. An exception, however, may be seen in the low rate of religiosity of those born during the 1960s. This difference, though notable, is not drastic, and the structure of religious belief of those born in the preceding and subsequent decades is relatively comparable. In other words, the level and kind of religious belief of Chinese people born in different decades appears, at present, to be relatively consistent. Future changes will, along with other factors, depend on evolutions in religious policy and changes in the political and social environment.

Question X: Which of the following statements best describes your viewpoint on god(s)? [Single-choice question]
a) There is, in the universe, only one true God
b) The universe contains many gods
c) God/gods do not exist in the universe
d) It is unclear whether gods exist in the universe
e) Unwilling to answer
f) Unsure



Source: Horizon Research Consultancy Group, *Survey on Chinese Residents' Religious Beliefs*, conducted, 2007.

Figure 11. Comparison of the structure of religious belief of Chinese born in different decades in 2007.

4. *The Relevance of Religion Derives from Its Ability to Provide Guidance in the Lives of Individuals and Bolster Morality in Society*

It goes without saying that religion has a considerable impact on a person's values, yet the relevance of religion may be interpreted in a variety of ways. Within the sociology of religion, religion may influence personal behavior and social progress, and the significance of religion is seen to evolve in a society. With the advancement of modern societies, the role of religion in fostering social cohesion and providing a unified worldview has diminished considerably. However, religions still play a significant part in cultivating moral norms and offering assistance in confronting life issues. In fact, the characteristic loneliness and indifference of life in modern society has served to

further highlight the unique value of religion in an institutionalized and impersonal world.

The results of the Horizon survey indicate that the views of the Chinese public with regard to the positive and negative effects of religion are, as a whole, relatively consistent. Only 23.6% of respondents were of the view that religion lacks any positive value, and even fewer (17.9%) responded that religion contains no negative aspects. In general, participants recognized the value of religion in the improvement of individual lives, the cultivation of mind and body, and the illumination of social morality. Alternately, the intervention of religion in politics and its lack of logical grounding were largely identified as shortcomings.

Question XI: Which of the following do you consider to be *advantages* of religion? [Multiple-choice question]
a) Improving morality
b) Promoting mental health
c) Improving physical health
d) Increasing family/social harmony
e) Advocating kindness
f) Helping the disadvantaged
g) No advantages
h) Unwilling to answer
i) Unsure

Question XII: Which of the following do you consider to be *disadvantages* of religion? [Multiple-choice question]
a) Making people irrational
b) Causing cheating
c) Making people passive
d) Causing family disharmony
e) Causing social conflicts
f) Creating loopholes for bad people
g) Diminishing social morality
h) Wasting money
i) No disadvantages
j) Unwilling to answer
k) Unsure

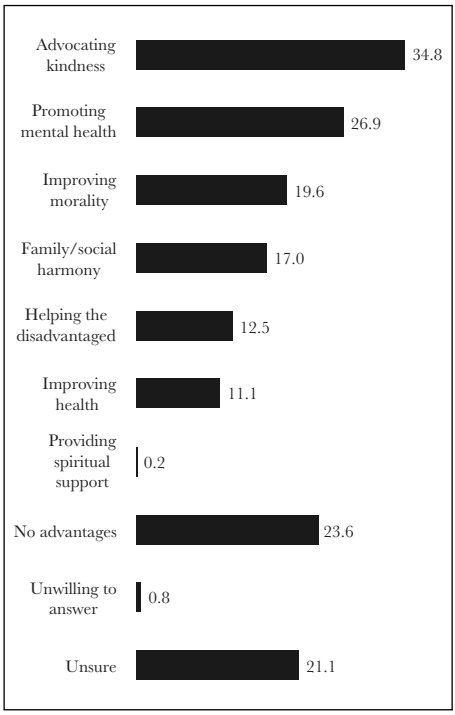


Figure 12. Advantages of religion in the eyes of the Chinese public (%).

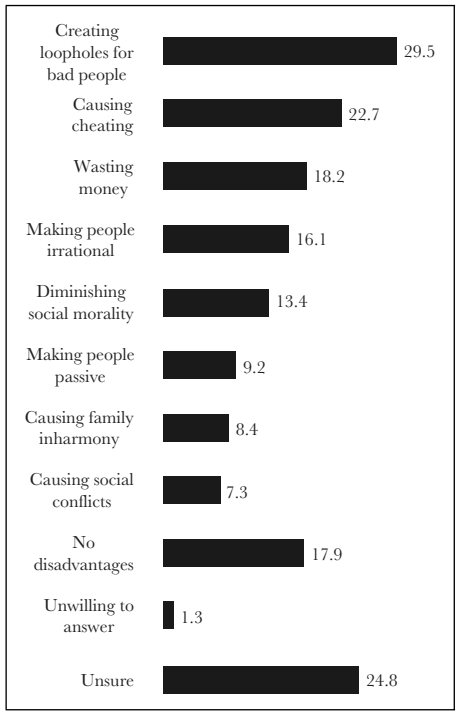


Figure 13. Disadvantages of religion in the eyes of the Chinese public (%).

Source: China Horizon Survey Group, *Survey on Chinese Residents' Religious Beliefs*, 2007.

III. *Conclusion*

Based on the findings of the 2007 Horizon Research Consultancy Group survey of public religious belief in China, three general conclusions may be drawn, and we offer these as topics for future research and discussion.

First, on the whole, the Chinese take a pluralistic approach to religious belief. That is, those who profess adherence to a particular form of religious belief are often open to, or participate in, other forms of belief. The environment of religious belief in China could be described as "loose"; believers possess a wide range of religious choices and are inclined to vacillate among them. Within this environment, the Chinese people are increasingly engaging in exploration of the spiritual world.

Second, Chinese religious belief is generally unsystematic and possesses notable secular characteristics. Those who believe in diffused religion are often interest-driven and tend to pursue short-term benefits.

Third, for the Chinese public, religion is, by and large, a carrier of cultural heritage. Rather than playing a distinct and definable role in the molding of Chinese values, religious belief blends with the daily lives of individuals, providing guidance for personal behavior.

CHAPTER EIGHT

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND ETHNICITY IN CHINA

He Qimin
The Minzu University of China[1]

Since the 1990s, a team of religious studies researchers from the Minzu University of China have explored the relationship between religion and ethnicity in China. Striving to "seek truth from facts" (实事求是), we have investigated the role of religion as a carrier of ethnicity and examined both the ethnic nature of religiosity and the religious nature of ethnicity. Our goal has been the establishment of ethno-religious studies as a subdiscipline of religious studies. On the basis of several broad, comparative studies of China's ethnic minority regions (first conducted in 2004 and then again in 2006–2007), we have reached the following fundamental conclusions: (1) The ethnic composition of the Chinese nation is best described as a pluralistic unity and the structure of Chinese belief as a pluralistic harmony; (2) Among ethnic minorities, the prevalent trend is the adoption of a single predominant religion as the basis of understanding for a community comprised of diverse viewpoints. These findings provide the framework for uncovering the present and historical realities of Chinese culture and thought and provide a new perspective for understanding the broad impact of ethno-religion on social politics, economics, and culture. This chapter provides a brief summary of our findings.

I. *Our Theoretical Starting Point*

Religious phenomena cannot exist, develop, or change in isolation, for they are, at all times, in constant interaction with other social factors. Similarly, our studies of religion, particularly of issues relating

[1] Previously known as the Central University of Nationalities.

to ethno-religion, have not occurred in isolation, for they have taken place within the context of China's social development and against the backdrop of globalization. Religion is, holistically speaking, a social phenomenon; i.e. its most meaningful aspects are revealed in the mutual interaction of collectivities. The ethnic group is one of these collectivities.

Theoretically speaking, *minzu* (民族, or ethnicity/nationality/nation) is established on the basis of tribal (or clan) lineage. The members of an ethnic group, or clan, generally reside within a common geographical region and share a common language and culture as well as a collective means of economic subsistence. However, ethnicity differs from clan membership in that the former does not rely on blood lineage as the most fundamental and defining relationship. Ethnic ties usually include a common outlook, a continuous cultural tradition, a self-conscious sense of identity, and an enduring sense of shared existence. Therefore, the initial significance of blood lineage decreases with historical evolution, social development, and population migration, and the fundamental characteristics of the ethnicity are increasingly maintained through shared socio-cultural elements, of which religion is a major component.

While individuals may, in many instances, perform the most meaningful activities within a religion, as an institution of beliefs, rituals, and norms, religion is always associated with a particular human group. Religion not only impacts and transforms individuals, but more importantly, it affects the social collectivity, strengthening ethnic identity and cohesion:

> Included within the process of the birth and evolution of an ethnic group is the development of religion. Ethnic culture and relations are inevitably influenced by religion. Resultantly, religiosity becomes one of the most significant attributes of ethnicity. As the belief systems of ethnicities, religions possess the cultural traits of and are associated with the challenges, development, and survival of ethnic groups.[2]

Thus, from an academic perspective, our understanding of religious phenomena would be incomplete without a study of the relationship between religion and ethnicity. From the more practical standpoint of social development,

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[2] Mou Zhongjian, On the Religiosity of Nationalities and the Nationhood of Religions," in *Chinese Religion*, Jan., 2006, pp. 14–16.

> a number of new religious trends have emerged within ethnic minority regions through the effects of political democratization and economic marketization as well as through the popularization of competition, marketization of ethnic cultures, and escalation of ethnic consciousness. At the same time, religion has been utilized as a political resource (the banner for collective demands and motivation for group mobilization), an economic resource (a source of financial support), and a cultural resource (a means of improving ethnic cohesion).[3]

Therefore, the motivation for the development of religion in ethnic minority regions is of particular significance in academic research.

The revival of traditional folk beliefs within ethnic minority communities may be attributed to a variety of recent developments. New sects, religious movements, and self-proclaimed evangelists have become active in ethnic minority regions, seeking new soil for the growth of their respective faiths. In response to the encroachment of these external forces, traditional religions are beginning to compete creatively to maintain adherents. Thus,

> Whether proceeding from a desire to revitalize ethnic strength or in an attempt to utilize religious resources to develop the local economy, various efforts have been made to revive religious beliefs. The state of religious conviction as it relates to ethnic development has become an increasing focus of attention and the role of religion in ethnic development is of growing importance.[4]

Furthermore,

> Through the study of religion from an ethnological perspective we are able to come to a better understanding of the living conditions, historical developments, and social needs of religious groups through a study of their origins and realities. In examining ethnicity through the lens of religious studies, we gain a greater understanding of the evolutionary characteristics of ethnic culture and the emotional and mental framework that underlies ethnicity in order to comprehend better the spiritual components of ethnicity. Through a study of the intersection of the fields of ethnology and religious studies, we gain a multifaceted and stereoscopic understanding of both the cultures of ethnicities and the value of religions.[5]

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[3] *From our December 2004 unpublished report*, "Zhongguo shaoshuminzu zongjiaoxinyang xianzhuangshi diaochabaogao" ("Report of an Exploratory Study of the Religious Situation of China's Ethnic Minorities").

[4] Ibid.

[5] Mou Zhongjian, pp. 14–16.

In accordance with the academic tradition of Minzu University of China, we have, since the 1990s, focused our research on the religious phenomena of China's ethnic minorities. We began our research with a preliminary study of the primitive religions of the Yi minority, concentrating on Shamanism and the role of *Bimo* priests (毕摩, or shamans). This initial work was followed by two further waves of explorations.

II. *Explorations*

During the summer of 2004, four research teams from the Religious Studies Department of Minzu University of China were dispatched to ten provinces and autonomous regions in China's southwestern, northwestern, and northeastern regions as well as in Inner Mongolia and northern China. These researchers were authorized by the State Ethnic Affairs Commission to conduct a precursory study of the state of religious belief among ethnic minorities in preparation for a national survey scheduled to take place during the subsequent three years. While various factors prevented the teams from fully completing their research in accordance with the original plan, a number of findings have generated interesting questions.

First, ethnic religion is closely connected to human nature and ethnic culture. Modernization has not significantly diminished the importance of religion to the cultural identity of ethnic minorities. Rather, in confronting the difficulties and frustrations that inevitably arise in the transition from the traditional to the modern, the majority of ethnic minorities still appeal to religion. As the standard of living improves with continued development, folk beliefs will become even more dynamic.

Second, while the significance of ethnic religion is growing, the present system for classifying ethnic religions and calculating their numbers of adherents remains ambiguous. For example, the government continues to recognize only five legally-sanctioned religions, i.e. Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism and estimates the total number of religious believers to be approximately 100 million. This system of classification excludes indigenous ethnic beliefs as well as the adherents of these beliefs and, thus, does not provide an accurate representation of China's ethno-religious makeup. The shortcomings of this system are demonstrated in the following statistics. According to

official reports,[6] registered minority religious believers constitute 40%, 13.2%, and 47% of the populations of the northwestern provinces and autonomous regions of Ningxia, Gansu, and Qinghai respectively, whereas the registered adherents of the five official religions comprise only 3.7% of those of Inner Mongolia.[7] When we compare this final statistic with Minzu University research team's findings that 80% of the inhabitants of Inner Mongolia worship *tian* (loosely translated "heaven") and *aobao* (traditional stone structures that serve as altars for sacrifice), it is evident that the official calculations of registered religious believers are markedly low, and the policy decisions based on these numbers lack the necessary grounding in reality.

Third, past experiences prove that against the greater backdrop of the histories and cultures of China and East Asia, religion is not innately insulated, exclusive, or reactionary.

Foreign religions can be transformed into indigenous ethnic religions, and the traditional folk religions of China's ethnic minorities can integrate and neutralize non-native religions. Thus, China's ethnic religions should not be regarded as social burdens or challenges, but rather as valuable cultural assets.

The research team's findings also indicate that the predominant theories of religion applied within the study of contemporary Chinese religions derive from the Western societies of the 19th century. These theories not only display an epochal bias toward Western religions themselves but also reflect ethnocentric attitudes toward Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism and lack a subjective understanding of Chinese ethnic and folk religions. Clearly, such theories do not reflect the practical reality of China's ethnic religions. The impact of these theories on our understanding of religious studies may be seen not only in the directional tendency of academic research within the field but also

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[6] Wang Jian (director of Ningxia Religious Affairs Bureau), 《关于全区宗教事务管理工作情况的报告》(A Report of the Religious Affairs in the Whole Autonomous Region) http://www.nxrd.gov.cn/ReadNews.asp?NewsID=3821; 《不做好宗教工作 我们无法交待—专访甘肃省宗教局局长丁军年》(An Interview with the Gansu Province Religious Affairs Bureau Director Ding Junnian), 《中国宗教》(China Religion) 2009 年 08 期第 28–32 页; Ma Huiwen,《宗教文化与青海地区信仰群众的社会生活》(Religious Culture and the Social Life of Qinghai Believers), 《青海民族学院学报 (社会科学版)》(Qinghai Minzu College Journal) 2001 年第 1 期, P43–46页。

[7] Zhang Jiangong, ed., 《内蒙古年鉴 2007 卷》, 呼伦贝尔市: 内蒙古文化出版社出版, P50页。

in the positions of the scholars conducting this research. Moreover, many Chinese studies of religion have been conducted by scholars of philosophy, history, and foreign languages. Consequently, the majority of these Chinese studies lack a socio-scientific foundation, empirically-rooted research, and structured methods of analysis.

The transition from research based on value judgment to strategic and practical fieldwork, i.e., from studying *what* is to *why* and *how* it is, constitutes a new point of growth for the field of ethno-religious studies. Taking into consideration the constant, dynamic interaction between religion and other social forces as well as the perseverance and mystery of religion and the magnitude and capacity of religious institutions, our research should examine individual and collective human activity, formal religious systems, and other relevant aspects of society, culture, and life. At the same time, in our study of religious phenomena and, more specifically, of the geographical location, languages, cultures, and lifestyles of ethnic minorities, we should focus more fully on understanding the current context within which religion is practiced and the experiences of individual believers as well as of religious communities. In this way, we may deepen our understanding of the religious life of China's ethnic minorities.

Following two years of careful deliberation and preparation, our research team embarked upon a new course of study with the authorization of the state and the financial support of the "Project 985" fund.[8] Our goals were as follows: to summarize our own empirical observations and verify those of Western scholars; to identify the principles underlying the development of Chinese religions and the scope of our own research; and to strive to generate new theories. The following insights shared by Professor Mou Zhongjian, a member of the Minzu University of China research team, reflect our collective outlook during this stage:

> Nationality is the social vehicle through which religion is conveyed, and religion is the spiritual center, or home, of nationality. Nationality is a social construct, while religion is a spiritual and cultural construct. While obvious differences distinguish the two, they are also intricately related, constituting a paradoxical union. Their dynamic development impacts

[8] Begun in May of 1998, Project 985 is an educational program aimed at building "world-class" institutions of higher learning in China. Administered and funded by the Chinese government, the program provides funds to improve the programs of select Chinese universities.

considerably the existential state of religions and nationalities as well as of social cultures. The complex and multifaceted relationship between the two is still far from fully understood.

Hence, we find that even an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from the diverse fields of ethnography, philosophy, and religious studies, falls short of providing the necessary foundation for the systematic, theoretical research of ethnic religions. It is this very insufficiency that offers Minzu University of China researchers the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Chinese field of religious studies.

III. *Discoveries*

In 2006, we established the Center for the Research of Major Issues in Contemporary Ethnic Religions as part of Minzu University of China's program for the "Strategic Study of Issues Concerning the Ethnic Minorities of Contemporary China," sponsored by Project 985. Our research teams set out to investigate the following questions:

(1) What are the relationships among religion, religious ethnicity, and contemporary culture? How are these relationships established, and what are their developmental trends?
(2) To what extent is religion a cultural resource and a mechanism of social stability?
(3) How should we view the indigenization of non-native religions and their subsequent absorption into Chinese culture?
(4) How can Chinese theories of religion reconcile local definitions and subjective understandings in order to reflect objectively the conditions of religious belief among China's ethnic minority groups?
(5) How should ethnic religions be classified, and by what means should data on religions be obtained?
(6) What are the ideal conditions (i.e. state of ecological equilibrium) for China's numerous ethnic religions?
(7) How are we to understand the diverse choices of faith among ethnic groups? (We recognize that the role of religion in the cultural identity of ethnic minorities is often of greater significance than the religious beliefs themselves. While several different ethnic minorities may share a single religious belief system, the cultural

expression of their beliefs may differ widely. This is demonstrated in the drastically different attitudes of literate and illiterate ethnic minority groups toward externally-introduced religions.)

(8) Can ethnic religious traditions be transformed into resources for economic development, and if so, how is this best achieved?

We believe that the aforementioned questions, while specific to the field of ethno-religious studies, are at once worthy of study and have universal relevance.

With regard to research methodology, we drew from the experiences of the 2004 study and began with questions of representative significance, focusing on the "communities" as the basis for our research and synthesizing methodologies from the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, religious studies, and history in order to shape our theoretical approach to the study of ethnic religious phenomena. Through the integration of empirical and theoretical research, we have endeavored to reveal the intricately entwined relationship of ethnicity and religion in order further to expound the far-reaching impact of ethnic religion on the political, economic, and cultural forces of society. Furthermore, we wish to provide an accurate representation of the Chinese experience and perspective within the field of religious studies and contribute to the advancement of modern theories of religion. Toward this end, the Center for the Research of Major Issues in Contemporary Ethnic Religions formed five research groups, each with a different theoretical and empirical emphasis, to study major issues relating to China's ethnic religions. The goals and foci of each of these groups are defined as follows.

The designated objective of the principal research group is the "general exploration of ethno-religious studies" in order to develop new theories and provide theoretical and policy-related guidance to other research teams. In contrast with the broad purpose of this primary group are the narrow foci of the remaining four research teams, which conduct case studies of specific ethno-religious relationships.

The focus of the second team is the study of the history and actual experience of ethno-religious groups. More specifically, this group is responsible for studying "the historical development and practical experiences of the Party and the State in dealing with the religious issues of ethnic minorities" as well as providing an overview of "the contemporary ethno-religious developments and religious affairs management experiences of Gansu Province" and "the historical course and

chief experiences of the multiple coexisting religions and ethnicities of Yunnan Province." While not ethnic autonomous regions, Gansu and Yunnan are two of China's most diverse provinces, with populations comprised of numerous coexisting ethnic minority groups.

The third research team is charged with investigating the harmonious development of Chinese Islam in ethnic minority regions, including "the relationship between the system of Islamic *Menhuan* (*religious lineage groups*) and the harmonious social development of Gansu Province" and "*Hui* Islam and the harmonious social development of China's western region: A case study of Wuzhong County in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region." These studies examine the far-reaching and close connections between China's ethnic minorities and Islam, focusing on religious experience within China's ethnic minority autonomous regions and uniquely Chinese Islamic communities; examining the role of Islam within individual communities and Chinese society as a whole; and exploring the relationship between the *Menhuan* and the social, political, economic, and cultural conditions of the communities in which they reside.

The concentration of the fourth research group is Tibetan Buddhism and, more specifically, the stability and development of communities both within and surrounding the Tibet Autonomous Region. This group is charged with examining the relationship of Tibetan Buddhism to Tibetan ethnicity and culture as well as that of Tibetan Buddhism to other ethnic groups and cultures.

The work of the two previous research teams focuses on ethnic minority communities whose members share a single religion. The work of the final research team focuses on modern patterns of primitive or aboriginal folk beliefs among ethnic minorities, including the study of "the primitive ethnic folk beliefs of the seven nationalities of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region" and "the history and present status of the aboriginal folk religions of the Zhuang nationality." While previous studies on aboriginal belief systems have frequently focused on Shamanism, the role of the *Bimo* priests in the Yi community, and the *Dongba* religion of the Naxi people, the work of this research team concentrates on two types of faith groups. First, this team is charged with the study of the indigenous religious cultures of China's predominantly Muslim ethnic minority communities, and through conducting systematic field research seeks to gather, analyze, and classify up-to-date data concerning the aboriginal folk religions of the ethnic minority groups of Xinjiang Province. Second, the research

team endeavors to present a comprehensive overview of the multifaceted religious life of the Zhuang minority group, examining the position and function of aboriginal folk beliefs within the Zhuang cultural structure and exploring the relationship of such beliefs to contemporary society and ethnic development. While the religious cultures of these two groups have long been overlooked by researchers, we believe that they demonstrate exemplarily the traits and experiences of ethnic communities comprised of multiple religious beliefs and practices. These studies not only provide valuable examples through which we might deepen our understanding of ethno-religious phenomena but also allow us to observe directly the social development models of multi-ethnic communities.

Our research thus far has yielded a number of breakthroughs in areas of both theoretical and practical significance and has further advanced our understanding of the fundamental relationship between ethnicity and religion.

During these initial stages of investigation into China's ethno-religions, we have achieved a theoretical breakthrough in our understanding of China's religious culture. Building upon the theory of the "pluralistic unity" of Chinese ethnicity, we have advanced a model of the "pluralistic harmony" of China's religious culture. Mou Zhongjian, one of the leading scholars contributing to the project, notes that

> just as China's ethnic composition was described by Fei Xiaotong[9] as a "pluralistic unity," so the structure of China's religious culture may be viewed as a "pluralistic harmony." This "pluralistic harmony" is comprised of four principal aspects: the unity of diversity and uniformity, the unity of continuity and stages, the unity of the worldly and the otherworldly, and the unity of ethnicity and openness.[10]

Mou identifies several key factors as contributing to the formation of this "pluralistic harmony":

> First, the amalgamation of China's numerous ethnicities with the Han majority has resulted in the "hybridization" of religious culture. Second, the simultaneous integration and isolation of China's geographical regions has resulted in both the convergence of China's numerous ethnic minorities at the nation's center and their dispersion across the

[9] A prominent scholar and professor in the fields of sociology and anthropology, Fei Xiaotong, also contributed substantially to the Chinese field of ethnography through his pioneering studies of China's ethnic minority groups.

[10] Mou Zhongjian, *Introduction of Ethnic Religious Studies*, 49.

> vast countryside, facilitating the formation of multi-cultural communities. Third, China's enduring agricultural civilization and system of clan lineage have generated a religious culture characterized by peacefulness, tolerance, and mutual cooperation. Finally, Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism constitute the ideological core of Chinese culture. The teachings of Confucius, Laozi, Sakyamuni, and their successors were grounded in the notions of benevolence, compassion, harmony amidst diversity, equality, tolerance, and humanitarianism, and these have impacted profoundly the religious cultures of China's ethnic minorities as well as the numerous external cultures that have consistently flowed into China.[11]

The notions of the "amalgamation of ethnicity" and the "pluralistic harmony of religion" have established the theoretical basis for the deepening study of ethno-religions and provided new motivation for the theoretical analysis and articulation of empirical data.

Our study of the various types of relationships that exist between ethnicity and religion has also yielded significant achievements. Noteworthy among these is an article recently published in the *China Social Sciences* journal entitled, "Harmony amidst Differences: An Investigation of the Experiences of Amicable Coexistence among Qinghai Province's Multi-Ethnic Communities," authored by Banban Dorgye, director of the research team investigating the relationship between Tibetan Buddhism and ethnicity and a member of the Tibetan ethnic minority. In his study, Professor Banban Dorgye provides specific examples of the adoption of the traits of one group by another, e.g. the Tibetanization of Han culture, the adoption of certain aspects of Han culture by ethnic Tibetans, the adoption of Tibetan cultural traits by members of the Mongolian and Tu nationalities, and the Islamization of the Tibetan Hui people. Professor Dorgye also noted that the basis for ethnic identity differed among the various ethnic communities. In determining the basis for ethnic cohesion, ethnic Mongolians emphasize blood lineage over cultural identity, while the ethnic identity of the Tu community is based more on cultural unity than blood lines. While some Tibetans adopt an extremely open attitude toward other cultures while upholding the cultural core of their ethnic community—an approach which has been referred to as "establishing boundaries without closing the door"—the Hui Tibetans of Kaligang exhibit bicultural characteristics, combining Islamic religious practices and Tibetan cultural customs in a tradition of mutual adoption and

[11] Ibid.

respect. Banban Dorgye concludes that "harmony amidst differences" refers to the coexistence of different religions and cultures in a manner characterized by tolerance and respect, if not mutual exchange. The following conditions are necessary for the creation of this "harmony amidst differences": multiple ethnicities or nationalities must a) reside within a single multi-cultural region, b) share comparable economic conditions, and c) possess some form of religious ideology.[12]

The research team responsible for investigating the indigenous folk religions of the Zhuang ethnic minority has established the presence of (previously-negated) primitive and aboriginal folk beliefs among the Zhuang as an incontrovertible, objective fact. Included within these traditional folk beliefs are aspects of Daoism and Buddhism that, following adoption from the Han majority, were absorbed into traditional Zhuang culture. These folk religions manifest obvious ethnic and regional traits, including the relatively widespread occurrence of religious belief among group members despite the apparent scarcity of religious practitioners. Of particular note is the peculiarly mild and introverted manner of the clergy in their performance of spiritual activities typical of a rice-cultivating society. Possessing strong folkloric characteristics, these activities are an important element of Zhuang culture and have a profound impact on the lifestyle and ethnic character of the Zhuang people. The names of many of the deities involved in the religious ceremonies of the Zhuang derive from the religious traditions of the Han. Indeed, many of the rituals themselves have been adopted from the ritual practices of the Han. Thus, our study of the aboriginal beliefs of the Zhuang minority has revealed the enduring and deep-rooted cultural exchanges that have taken place between the Zhuang and Han nationalities. Embodied in these folk rituals are moral values and the notions of right and wrong. The question of why certain rituals were adopted while others were excluded is worthy of additional study.

In our study of the practice of Christianity among China's ethnic minorities, previous reports of the interfusion of Christianity with primitive, aboriginal religious practices within the ethnic minority communities of Yunnan Province were confirmed. Our researchers

[12] Banban Dorgye "Harmony amidst Differences: An Investigation of the Experiences of Amicable Coexistence among Qinghai Province's Multi-Ethnic Communities," in *China Social Sciences*. 2007(6): 111.

also observed this hybridization of native and foreign beliefs and practices among the Paxidai people—the Dai Muslims of Xishuangbanna in Yunnan Province. The descendants of Hui Muslims and local Dai people who intermarried during the Qing Dynasty, the Paxidai currently reside in two mountain villages in the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture. One village was established by the descendents of local Dai women and Hui Muslim merchants from Yunnan who traded in Burma and Northern Thailand, and the other village is populated by the descendants of Hui Muslims who, after rebelling against the Qing, fled to the borderland and married members of the local Dai community. While quite similar to those of other Dai groups, the clothing, cuisine, and dwellings of the Paxidai possess a number of culturally-specific features. Examples of such cultural traits include the inclusion of Arabic script on the front gate of the outer yard of homes and the customs of the Paxidai women of wearing veils and the men of wearing white, brimless caps. A member of the Paxidai community is usually given three names. A child's first name is selected by Dai Buddhist priests (the majority of Dai practice Therevada Buddhism), for the Paxidai believe that a child who is not given a proper Dai name will suffer great illness. A "scriptural name" is bestowed by the *ahong* (*imam*) of the local mosque when the child reaches one month of age, and when Paxidai children begin school, a third Han name is added. In conducting religious ceremonies or rituals, the Paxidai *imam*, or *ahong*, does not appear to possess the same degree of authority as other Hui Muslim *imams* throughout China. However, since over the last thirty years, young Paxidai men and women have travelled to other areas to receive Quranic instruction, or Muslim teachers have visited the Paxidai villages to offer Quranic teaching, religious conviction has deepened among some members of the community. In some instances, these changes have resulted in disagreements between community *imams* and elders, creating tension in the relationship between the ethnic and religious identities of the Paxidai people.

These case studies not only confirm the historical trend of religious interfusion within China's ethnic minority communities but also indicate the value of this trend in promoting China's traditional cultures toward the end of strengthening national cohesion. Despite the ongoing nature of these projects, our research thus far has already indicated the need to break with previous models of understanding that attempted to isolate individual ethnicities and religions from one another. Rather, in investigating and analyzing the amalgamation of

ethnicities and religions, we should employ the model of "pluralistic harmony," emphasizing the unity of diversity and uniformity, of continuity and stages, of the worldly and the otherworldly, and of ethnicity and openness.

IV. *Conclusion*

Given the frequency of ethnic and religious conflicts in the modern world, the experiences gained through the study of China's multi-ethnic, multi-religious minority communities are of great value. Without acknowledging the diverse voices of China's numerous ethnic communities, we cannot truly understand the status of religion within the Chinese social structure. At the same time, the voices of these ethnicities and religions cannot provide the sole basis for our research, for we must also heed the voices of people from various other social strata, geographical locations, backgrounds, and lifestyle choices for our research to yield objective and accurate results. Through our research of Chinese experiences, we not merely strive to verify Western experience, but also to generate new areas of theoretical inquiry and to contribute to the expansion of perspectives. We believe that the Chinese experience is both significant and irreplaceable. Thus, we hope that through the development of the discipline of ethno-religious studies, we may offer the world a systematic and conceptual understanding of the Chinese experience.

CHAPTER NINE

FROM GRASSROOTS ASSOCIATION TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE HEBEI PROVINCE DRAGON TABLET FAIR

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According to the official registration records of the state Ministry of Civil Affairs, few community organizations exist in China below the county level. It would appear that China's civil society, having primarily developed above the county level, has not yet emerged at the grassroots level. However, this is not, in actuality, the case. In local communities and rural villages, the quantity and types of folk organizations, as well as the number of participants in the activities of these organizations, greatly exceed those at and above the county level, though this is not reflected in official statistics. The depiction of the circumstances and evolution of these grassroots organizations is of great significance to an accurate understanding of contemporary Chinese civil society.

Voluntary organizations are not modern constructs of social interaction. China was traditionally an expansive empire, in which huge spaces existed between the state and the individual, and numerous intermediary organizations were relied upon to maintain social cohesion. Voluntary organizations functioned as the most basic form of social connection as well as the foundation upon which all of society operated. Included among these traditional folk organizations were blood relation-based families and clans geographically-defined associations and assemblies (e.g. the Spring and Autumn Assemblies which offered sacrifices to the earth, the economically-oriented Green Sprouts Assembly, and the comprehensive temple fairs and township associations); professional guilds; and associations based on personal interests, including poetry societies, money societies, incense societies, seniors associations, and fraternities. These folk organizations embodied the cultural models and values that traditionally defined Chinese interpersonal relationships and represented the customary means by

which social capital was cultivated in Chinese society. During China's process of becoming a modern nation, especially at the peak of the various socialist movements, most of these organizations were either banned or replaced. The few that survived were forced to operate covertly, or in a reduced and informal capacity.

However, thirty years of "Reform and Opening" has impelled the voluntary development of Chinese society beyond the official administrative system. The ideological bases and institutional forms of this development have derived from two major sources: the modern, civil societies of foreign (most frequently Western) nations, and traditional Chinese folk society. The former have provided the ideological and institutional framework for the regeneration of Chinese society, as well as models and institutional structures for this development. Employees of state-owned enterprises and administrative work units have frequently drawn upon the experiences of developed countries in establishing professional organizations, academic associations, and national charity and public welfare enterprises in China. The latter, conversely, has provided the organizational structures, shared values, and rules for interpersonal exchanges for China's rapidly-reactivated voluntary grassroots organizations. Through this process of development, we have not only witnessed the reemergence of organizational structures such as family and clan organizations, temple fairs, money societies, township associations, wedding and funeral councils, etc., but also the return of concepts such as "happiness," "auspiciousness," "harmony," "safety," "filial piety," "righteousness," "accumulation of virtue," and "benevolence," which serve as organizational resources as well as guiding values.

It is a verifiable fact that a wide variety of folk organizations have emerged in China during the past thirty years and that a number of these have adopted the title or organizational structure of traditional voluntary organizations. Yet academic studies of the adoption of traditional resources by folk organizations are replete with disparities and even contradictions. For instance, in discussing the revival of family organizations, certain scholars have used the example of disputes between families over burial grounds in denouncing the resurgence of the clan as "the rekindling of the cold ashes of feudalism." Meanwhile, others have pointed to the active role of family connections in the growth of rural enterprises as a manifestation of the vitality of Confucian traditions in modern industry and commerce. In examining the reinstatement of temple fairs (庙会), some scholars view the involve-

ment of the witch doctor (巫医)[1] as indicative of the ignorance and backwardness of the masses, while others commend the contribution of the organizers to promoting material exchange and cultural entertainment. The positive or negative assessment of these organizations depends both on the scholar's view of the development of China's civil society and the selection of examples or case studies upon which the assessment is based. When these organizations are assessed on an individual basis, viewpoints will, undoubtedly, differ widely. However, when these so-called "traditional folk organizations" are viewed collectively within the context of their continuous interaction with and adaption to the greater society, some degree of consensus may be reached despite certain differences in opinion.

Many of the organizational entities of local communities and rural villages take the form of traditional folk organizations. However, these may also be regarded as the social organizations of a modern nation-state. A closer examination of the structural elements and background of these organizations reveals that both organizers and participants are active members of modern society, functioning within and well aware of the administrative, legal, and ideological constraints of the state. These social organizations must function within society and withstand the scrutiny and oversight of public powers and the general public. As a result, it is self-evident that while these organizations have emerged in traditional forms, they are, nonetheless, entities of *this* society and *this* historical era. Many of these organizations have spontaneously adjusted to the historical context within which they are operating, actively utilizing available social resources to promote their own growth. These entities have survived and expanded, while other organizations have either perished or are struggling for marginal survival.

One aspect of China's "Reform and Opening"[2] process has been the reconstruction of the state-society relationship through the combination of a democratic state and a free society in the creation of a civil society. The extent to which democracy and freedom can be

[1] The witch doctor acts as a spirit medium through which peoples' prayers are conveyed to the gods or ghosts. During temple fairs, they predict fortune, illness, and danger in the coming years, based on the burning of joss sticks (看香).

[2] China's Reform and Opening policy was implemented in 1978 by Deng Xiaoping and constituted a major shift in Chinese policy toward greater economic marketization and social modernization.

actualized depends on the level of development within civil society. One of the defining features of a civil society is the creation of voluntary relationships among individuals, which is conditional upon the existence of a state which safeguards universal principles. Theoretically, due to the universalist nature of the state, the values, rights, and duties reflected in an individual's actions may also be applied to other individuals within society. Conversely, individual citizens view their actions within specific situations as significant to or part of the state and, thus, believe that other citizens may also act in this manner. Hence, citizens think and act within the confines of civil society. It is this mental and behavioral orientation of values that forms the basis of civil society. The reforms of the past thirty years have resulted in the transition from a work unit-based[3] society to a civil society. The "civil" nature of society is continuously generated through both the interactions of the state and society and those of the various constituents of society. Through studying the emergence and evolution of folk organizations, we can gain a greater understanding of the development of China's civil society.

In order to contribute to the understanding of the role of folk organizations within contemporary Chinese civil society, the authors conducted a case study of the Dragon Tablet Fair of Fan Zhuang village in Hebei Province. The dragon tablet is a wooden board engraved with the emblem of a dragon and inscribed with the words, "The Tablet of the Dragon Deity: The True Ruler of Heaven, Earth, the Three Realms, and the Ten Directions." The "Dragon Tablet Fair" refers both to the temple fair at which sacrificial offerings are presented to the Dragon Tablet and the organization of villagers responsible for offering these sacrifices. The central role of "folk" components within the Dragon Tablet Fair organization renders the examination of this organization within the context of "civil society" quite challenging. At

[3] The term, "work unit," or *danwei* (单位), refers to one's place of employment. Prior to the implementation of the Reform and Opening policy, the work unit was the multi-functional and basic collective unit through which the state organized and controlled urban citizens. In addition to overseeing employees' work, the *danwei* was responsible for its employees' political and social well-being. The *danwei* provided housing, medical coverage, and educational services to employees and their children. The work unit permeated every aspect of urban life: urban workers were required to obtain the written permission of their *danwei* prior to checking into a hotel or applying for a marriage certificate. While the term *danwei* remains in use today, the work unit does not wield the comprehensive control that it did thirty years ago.

first glance, the Dragon Tablet Fair differs greatly from other entities commonly regarded as constituents of civil society within Chinese academic circles. However, through more than ten years of continuous study, the authors have witnessed the evolution of the Dragon Tablet Fair from a grassroots association to a civil society organization. After years of observation and contemplation, we have realized that it is precisely those characteristics that distinguish the Dragon Tablet Fair from "ordinary" civil society entities that give this case its theoretical potential and power of persuasion.

The Dragon Tablet Fair is a rural, faith-based organization in Hebei Province's Fan Zhuang village.[4] With over 1,300 households and more than 5,100 villagers, whose primary source of income derives from the growing and processing of wheat and fruit, Fan Zhuang village has one of the highest average per capita incomes in the region. Fan Zhuang is the seat of the Fan Zhuang township government (under the jurisdiction of Zhao County, Hebei Province) and boasts the second largest marketplace in Zhao County (next only to that of the county seat), which serves as the chief distribution center for the surrounding pear farms. Fan Zhuang is also the economic and cultural center of eastern Zhao County. However, Fan Zhuang's widespread reputation primarily comes from the performance of the elaborate "Transition Rite" (过会仪式) on February 2nd of each lunar calendar year. The ceremony draws more than 100,000 people from nearby villages and townships, who descend upon Fan Zhuang to offer sacrifices to the Dragon Tablet. During the Transition Rite, Fan Zhuang bustles with activity, and throngs of people attend the flower fair performances, market fair, and additional festivities that are held during the same period. Since the early 1990s, the Dragon Tablet Fair has drawn the attention of scholars of folklore, and in recent years, numerous scholars and students from various universities and research institutes have attended the annual Transition Rite to observe and study the event. The local and national news media have also reported on the spectacular festivities.

[4] We have not, in this article, followed the common practice of changing place names when referring to the village and surrounding locations because this particular village and the Dragon Tablet Fair festivities have appeared in numerous public sources. However, pseudonyms have been employed when referring to the individuals involved in specific events in order to protect their identities.

I. *The Transition Rite of the Dragon Tablet Fair*

The Transition Rite begins on February 1st of the lunar calendar and lasts for four days. Before sunrise on February 1st, images of gods are hung inside the newly-assembled ritual structure, or "jiao booth" (醮棚).[5] Prior to the construction of the Ancestral Hall of the Dragon (龙祖殿), in which the tablet is currently housed, the Dragon Tablet was enshrined in the home of the on-duty Fair Head. Then, on February 2nd, the sacred tablet was transported to the newly-constructed jiao booth to be worshipped by local adherents. It is purported that in the fair's nascence, the jiao booth was constructed of locally available straws and reeds donated by the Fair Heads and various volunteers because the villagers were unable to afford durable building materials. The structure used in the 1996 Transition Rite, however, was comprised of a steel and wood frame and a canvas exterior. The halls inside the structure were separated by reed sheets. According to the local people, the jiao booth houses the images of numerous other deities (in addition to the Dragon Tablet) because multitudinous believers and gods assemble here together during the Transition Rite to celebrate the birthday of the god of the Dragon Tablet. The jiao booth, which faces southward and is thirty meters in length and twenty meters in width, is divided into three halls, each of which contains an altar. The Dragon Tablet is enshrined on the altar in the front hall. In the past, the Dragon Tablet was flanked by the three images of the Buddha, the Sage (Confucius), and the Old Lord (老君); later the figure of Maitreya (弥勒佛) was added. Of the 150 gods, buddhas, bodhisattvas, immortal beings, sages, goblins, and demons housed in the jiao booth, the dragon god alone is portrayed on a tablet; all other spiritual entities are depicted in portraits. The front altar hall contains a total of 36 images, principally of Buddhist and Daoist deities, Confucius, the Eight Immortals, and senior female deities (奶奶, or Nainai, including the Fertility Nainai). The middle altar hall houses 35 images, including most prominently, the Jade Emperor

[5] Daoist terminology was initially employed in the title and description of the Dragon Tablet Fair because during the early days of the Fair, Daoist priests were invited to perform rituals to consecrate the "sacred Daoist area" (道场). But since the 1980s, when the Dragon Tablet Fair resurfaced publicly, Daoist priests have only once been invited to perform these rituals. Today, the villagers of Fan Zhuang primarily use Buddhist terminology in describing their beliefs regarding the Dragon Tablet.

and his subordinates, the Goddess of Mercy (*guanyin* 观音), and the God of War and Commerce (*guandi* 关帝). In the rear altar hall are 11 images of the Three August Ones and Five Emperors (三皇五帝). On the eastern wall are hung 30 images, which include depictions of the Dragon Kings of the Four Seas (四海龙王), historically-renowned physicians, such as Bian Que, Hua Tuo, Ge Hong, Sun Simiao, and Li Shizhen, and the "baleful ones" of the Twenty-Eight Constellations. On the western wall are 34 images of the ten Kings of Hell and the "auspicious ones" of the Twenty-Eight Constellations. On the exterior wall of the jiao booth hang the images of 5 deities, namely, the God of Wealth, God of Roads, God of Fire, God of the Stove, and King of the Ghosts. In 1998, a portrait of Chairman Mao Zedong was installed inside the jiao booth. On the front exterior wall of the structure is posted the "Honor Roll," listing the names of those who contributed funds or vegetables (for the guests) and provided transportation (using trucks, vans, and minibuses) as well as of the Fair Heads and members of the Planning Committee (later renamed the "Dragon Tablet Fair Council").

Following the completion of initial preparations, the ceremonial welcoming of the Dragon Tablet to the new jiao booth takes place. After sunrise, the Dragon Tablet is transported in a yellow-curtained sedan chair from the home of the Fair Head on duty for that year to the jiao booth.[6] At the head of the procession is the yellow "dragon flag," followed by a banner with the words, "Fan Zhuang Dragon Tablet Fair." Next in the procession are a group of middle-aged and senior village women singing Buddhist scriptures, followed by performance troupes from Fan Zhuang and the surrounding villages, playing drums and presenting traditional forms of dance, including the lion, Yangge, boat, and Liuzhou dances.[7] Local residents set off fireworks, and the ritual proceeds amidst the sound of firecrackers and music. The procession attracts large crowds of spectators, and all of Fan Zhuang is swept up in the carnival-like festivities. The procession usually passes

[6] Following the construction of the Dragon Ancestral Temple, the Dragon Tablet was enshrined in the temple throughout the year, rather than in the home of the Fair head, and the welcoming ritual was, consequently, canceled.

[7] The authors also observed the local villagers, dressed in military uniforms, performing as a military band. [Translator's note: The Yangge dance is a popular folk dance, while the Liuzhou dance imitates the movement of using a *Liuzhou* (碌碡), a stone roller employed to level fields.]

through the major roads of the village, and the performances continue for more than an hour. When the Dragon Tablet is finally installed in the jiao booth around midday, the "dragon flag," a large yellow banner embroidered with nine dragons, is raised. To the right and left of the dragon flag are banners adorned with the words, "Godly Might Shakes Heaven and Earth," and "The Holy Spirit Guards the Universe," and these are flanked by two additional yellow flags which read "Karma" and "As the Shadow Follows the Form." Below the dragon flag is a large banner inscribed with the following horizontal couplet: "The Grand Assembly of the Dragon Tablet Was Passed Down from Ancient Times; Its Great Fame Has Resounded Near and Far through the Generations." The corresponding vertical couplet reads: "Buddhas of the Three Realms Gather Together in the Great Temple; Spirits from across the Land Protect All Living Beings." Once the dragon flag has been raised, the masses of assembled believers kneel in veneration, chanting "Namo Amitabha" (meaning "homage to the Amitabha Buddha"). It is, indeed, a spectacular scene.

Upon conclusion of the welcoming ritual, believers from Fan Zhuang and the surrounding villages enter the jiao booth for worship. Incense is burned as adherents bow and kowtow in supplication before the Dragon Tablet and other deific images, praying for the safety of loved ones, the fulfillment of a personal desire, or the redemption of a previous vow to the gods. Some are here in an official capacity to "observe the incense" (看香).[8] The burning of incense by worshippers is often accompanied by a monetary donation of "oil money" (油钱) or "vow-redemption money" (还愿钱), or by the contribution of other material offerings (often food items). The names of donors and the amounts contributed are recorded at the donation table outside the jiao booth. Some worshippers pass their donations directly to the Dragon Tablet attendants to be deposited in the Donation Box located in front of the Dragon Tablet. According to Dragon Tablet Fair participants, donations peaked during the mid-1990s, when 70,000 to 80,000 RMB (at that time 10,000 USD) was collected each year. In addition to funding expenses associated with the Transition

[8] "Observe the incense" refers to the practice of determining the potential fulfillment of a supplicant's request based on how well a stick of incense burns. The incense observer is generally a village elder or one who is regarded as having access to the gods. A well-focused and long-lasting spark at the tip of the incense is interpreted as indicative of safety and a positive outcome.

Rite and other offerings made to the Dragon Tablet throughout the year, the donations are used to promote public welfare in the community, including the financial support of village primary schools and widowed elders facing hardship. Lunch is provided for visitors and performers from the surrounding villages in a cafeteria equipped with six large stoves and caldrons and staffed by dozens of volunteers. During the Transition Rite, participants abstain from the consumption of meat and fish; hence, the cafeteria serves vegetarian dishes prepared with noodles and tofu and accompanied by steamed bread. Posted on the door of the cafeteria is the following couplet: "Without liquor or meat, noodles and vegetables satiate your appetite; with compassion and goodwill, boiled water quenches your thirst." Based on incomplete statistics, it is estimated that 5,000 people dined in the cafeteria during the 1996 celebration of the Transition Rite. The organizers of the Dragon Tablet Fair have proudly noted that neither a single bite of steamed bread nor a mouthful of soup has ever been wasted during the ritual proceedings.

During the first four days of February, the Dragon Tablet remains enshrined in the jiao booth for worship. Throughout this period, many believers conduct rituals in their homes to celebrate the birthday of the god of the Dragon Tablet. The authors noted that a majority of the Fair Heads and villagers erected portraits depicting multiple deities in their homes during the Transition Rite. Similar to those displayed in the jiao booth itself, these representations are comprised of a wide variety of deific images, and the Dragon Tablet occupies the position of central importance.[9] In the home of one Fair Head, a certain Mr. Liu, for example, the portrait contained eleven tiers of deific images, including, in descending order, the images of the Five Holy Mothers, Lord Buddha (flanked by Zhen Wu and Tai Bai Jin Xing), the Jade Emperor (with the Heavenly King who bears the Pagoda at his side), the three Heavenly Spheres (the Jade Sphere, Blue Sphere, and Cloud Sphere), the Female Goddesses (the Second Female Goddess, the First Female Goddess, and the Third Female Goddess), the Supreme Rulers of the

[9] The inclusion of specific deities is reflective of the will of the gods themselves, conveyed to the families through spirit mediums. If for some reason the image of a certain deity is no longer regarded as appropriate, the family will have it removed. Created by a folk artist from another village, these deific portraits contain vibrant colors, and the deities are depicted with solemn and majestic facial expressions. They are true works of art.

Three Offices (the Earth Office, Heaven Office, and Human Office), the Three Old Ladies (The Second Old Lady, the First Old Lady, and the Third Old Lady), the Three Royal Ladies, the Dragon Tablet, the Old Lady of Fertility (with Yanguang Nainai and Banzhen Nainai at her side), and the Lord of Guan (flanked by Zhang Fei and Guan Ping). In addition to this multi-tiered portrait of deities, images of the Old Lady of the South Sea and the Local God of the Land hung on the wall opposite the front gate of the Liu family home; a portrait of the Stove God guarded the kitchen; the God of Wealth was hidden in the crevices of the table atop which the shrine sat; the Earth Mother Nainai resided under the shrine table; the Holy Seats of Heaven and Earth were positioned by the doors; and the Office of the Barn adorned the grain barn. On February 2nd, families burn incense and place offerings before the portraits in their homes, and local women are invited to chant scriptures for the god of the Dragon Tablet and other deities in gratitude for the protections of the previous year and in supplication for a year of good harvest and safety for one's offspring.

On the evenings of the second and third days of February, worshippers again gather together in front of the jiao booth, applauding and cheering as fireworks light up the sky. Finally, on February 4th, the Transition Rite draws to a close. The Shefan Ritual (舍饭仪式) is conducted at one o'clock in the afternoon, in which paper money is burned in offering to the gods to send them on their way. At two o'clock begins the procession conveying the Dragon Tablet to the home of the year's Fair Head; the ritual proceedings mirror those of the welcoming ceremony, excluding the performances and fireworks. The Dragon Tablet is transported to the home of the following year's Fair Head at nine o'clock on February 6th, and all accounts are submitted to the accountants before noon on the same day. At 10 o'clock in the evening, the Fair Head renders the accounts to the god of the Dragon Tablet, reporting income and expenditures before burning the accounting books. From this point on, the new Fair Head assumes the daily responsibilities associated with the arrangement of the following year's Dragon Tablet Fair.

The Transition Rite is both the biggest annual event organized by the Dragon Tablet Fair and the most magnificent festival celebrated locally. Yet, the Dragon Tablet also holds an important position in the daily lives of the local people. A considerable portion of the local population not only make offerings to the Dragon Tablet during the Transition Rite, but also pay a visit to the Dragon Tablet to pray for

good fortune or make a vow to the gods when confronting significant life situations, such as illness, long-distance travel, business negotiations, weddings, and childbirth. Upon fulfillment of these wishes, many return to redeem their vows and make new ones. The hostess of the Fair Head's household is responsible for welcoming these visitors, safeguarding their monetary donations, and receiving their material offerings. More worshippers gather to pay tribute to the Dragon Tablet on the first and fifteenth days of each lunar month. Widespread belief in the Dragon Table has given rise to numerous stories and legends of the apparitions of the Dragon Tablet god, and the Karmic notions evoked by these stories have a profound influence on the local people. Therefore, the Dragon Tablet belief is already deeply embedded in the daily lives of the villagers.

II. *The Dragon Tablet Fair Organization*

Although the Dragon Tablet Fair may be described as a local, publicly-held ritual conviction, it is also a narrowly-defined service organization, the function of which is to provide ritual services and public ceremonial goods, as well as to act as a local charity foundation. It encompasses the Council of Fair Heads as well as various peripheral service organizations that contribute to the organization of the temple fair. This organization ensures the continuation and development of the Dragon Tablet Fair, the organization and implementation of the large-scale Transition Rite events, and most importantly, the proper management of the relations between the Dragon Tablet Fair, the local government, and the general public.

The Dragon Tablet is customarily enshrined in the home of the Fair Head until it is transported to the jiao booth at the commencement of the Transition Rite festivities. The Fair Head system guarantees the maintenance of the Dragon Tablet between temple fairs, and responsibility for the Dragon Tablet alternates between the families of the Fair Heads each year. Duties associated with the regular care of the Dragon Tablet include: the daily offering of incense to the Dragon Tablet in the morning and in the afternoon, the welcoming of villagers who come to burn incense before the Dragon Tablet, and the safeguarding of monetary donations. The transference of the Dragon Tablet from the home of the previous year's Fair Head to that of the new Fair Head on the morning of February 6th (following the conclusion

of the Transition Rite) marks the successful completion of the former's duties and the commencement of the responsibilities of the new Fair Head. In this way, the family of one Fair Head assumes responsibility for the Dragon Tablet each year. For some time, the Dragon Tablet rotated between the families of Fan Zhuang's nineteen Fair Heads.[10]

In order to become a Fair Head, one must request the approval of the Lord Dragon Tablet through performing the "Incense Receipt" (接香) ritual. First, offering incense and kowtowing before the Dragon Tablet, the prospective Fair Head entreats the blessing of the Lord Dragon Tablet in the following manner: "My family wishes to serve Lord Dragon Tablet and seeks Your Majesty's permission." This supplication is followed by the burning of paper money. If the paper money turns upward while burning, it is taken as an indication of the Dragon Tablet god's approval. The successful performance of the Incense Receipt ritual is the only means by which an ordinary villager may become qualified to serve the Dragon Tablet as a Fair Head. Most villagers volunteer for this position because they wish to redeem a vow to the god of the Dragon Tablet. When confronted with a serious challenge—such as a grave illness—local families often entreat the Dragon Tablet for his protection. Some even vow to become a Fair Head and serve the Lord Dragon Tablet from generation to generation if their wishes are granted. Upon the fulfillment of this request, the household head will petition the Fair organization to perform the Incense Receipt ritual. Hence, the execution of the duties of Fair Head is viewed as analogous to a holy covenant. Fair Heads are generally regarded by the villagers as devout and honest, and the position holds considerable prestige among Dragon Tablet Fair believers and commands respect within the local community. The position of Fair Head is often passed down through the generations, and the majority of current Fair Heads inherited the post from their forbears.

The Council of Fair Heads oversees all matters related to the services of the Dragon Tablet Fair. However, two other constituents—the

[10] In 1997, the number of Fair Heads grew to twenty-one, when two new households obtained the approval of the Dragon Tablet god after burning incense before the Dragon Tablet. Only fifteen Fair Heads participated in the 2006 temple fair. In the interim, three Fair Heads had passed away, and their sons and daughters-in-law did not wish to continue to bear the responsibilities associated with the Dragon Tablet. In order to be discharged from this duty, they were required to burn incense before the Dragon Tablet and ask that the god of the Dragon Tablet release them from their responsibilities. The three remaining households chose not to take part in the 2006 Fair due to personal disagreements with that year's appointed Fair Head.

Family Head (当家人) and the Helping Hands—assume responsibility for the management of events and services during the annual Transition Rite. The Family Head is selected from among the devout male believers of Fan Zhuang village and holds considerable standing among the villagers. He takes part in all matters concerning the preparation for the Dragon Tablet Fair. The Family Head is generally, but not always, chosen from among the Fair Heads. Most important among the tasks for which the Family Head is responsible during the year preceding the Dragon Tablet Fair is the convening and chairing of the January 6th (lunar calendar) Dragon Tablet Fair meeting to organize the Helping Hands and determine the division of responsibilities for the forthcoming temple fair. The "Helping Hands" are a group of villagers who, though not officially associated with the Dragon Tablet Fair, volunteer to assist with the temple fair proceedings. In the past, volunteers were most frequently recruited to assist with the construction of the jiao booth and the preparation of food in the cafeteria. Formerly, the jiao booth was assembled prior to the commencement of the temple fair and dismantled following the conclusion of the ritual proceedings. This required not only physical strength and skills but also certain construction materials, such as reed sheets and wood. In order to provide meals for guests and performers from other villages, the cafeteria relies on donations of grain and vegetables purchased with incense money and contributed by the Fair Heads and Helping Hands. Hence, the Helping Hands play a pivotal role in the Dragon Tablet Fair, contributing labor, goods, and materials.

The Dragon Tablet Fair organization also includes a choir consisting of more than ten musicians (playing drums, cymbals, etc.) and chanters (of scriptures). In addition to their performances in the welcoming and commencement ceremonies of the Transition Rite, the Dragon Tablet Fair choir gathers at the home of the on-duty Fair Head on the first and fifteenth days of every lunar month (as well as when a community member wishes to pray for the Dragon Tablet god's blessing in confronting a great challenge) to chant scriptures and play gongs and drums. The choir also represents the Fan Zhuang Dragon Tablet Fair at the temple fairs of neighboring villages.[11]

[11] Most of the villages in the region worship their own guardian deity, and it is a custom for a village to invite the religious associations (神会) of the surrounding villages to attend the celebration of its guardian deity's birthday.

The organizational structure of the Dragon Tablet Fair, comprised of the Council of Fair Heads, Family Head, Helping Hands, and choir, remained consistent until the mid-1990s, after which the traditional organization underwent several changes. At the 1996 Dragon Tablet Fair, the names of the director, two deputy directors, and five members of the Planning Committee were posted in addition to the customary roster of Fair Heads. The list was accompanied by the following explanatory statement: "Elected at the annual January 6th Fair heads meeting, the Dragon Tablet Fair Planning Committee is a temporary organization charged with overseeing all matters related to the Dragon Tablet Fair." The Planning Committee oversees eight work teams: the "External Affairs Group" (responsible for receiving scholars, government officials, and journalists), the "Publicity Group" (charged with creating bulletin boards and posters), the "jiao booth Group" (tasked with the construction and removal of the jiao booth), the "Mass Entertainment Group" (responsible for receiving performance troupes from the neighboring villages), the "Local Operas Group" (charged with making the arrangements for the local opera troupes' performances), the "Science and Technology Group" (tasked with hanging posters outside of the jiao booth to promote the popularization of the sciences), the "Cafeteria Group," and the "Security Group." Inspired by the visit of several scholars and students from Beijing Normal University in 1995, the organizers of the Dragon Tablet Fair collaborated with the Chinese Folklore Association the following year to host a large group of scholars invited by the Secretary General of the Association to attend the Dragon Tablet Fair proceedings. In order to provide the best possible reception, the Dragon Tablet Fair introduced a new organizational structure that was at once more complex and more readily accessible to non-local visitors than the previous traditional structure. Due to the success of the 1996 reception, the same model was implemented thereafter in welcoming guests, and later, the new organizational structure was adopted officially.

The organizational structure of the Dragon Tablet Fair underwent additional changes prior to the 1998 temple fair. The Family Head for that year, a Mr. Li, adopted the title of "President of the Board of Directors" in his communications with external parties. At that time, the Dragon Tablet Fair organization was already in frequent contact with officials at the County Cultural Center and had encountered among the scholars visiting from Beijing numerous presidents and vice presidents of the boards of directors of various academic

associations. Later, when the Dragon Tablet Fair organization submitted applications to various county government departments for the construction of a museum to house the Dragon Tablet, a more "modern" title was required; hence, the use of "Board of Directors" was gradually popularized. The bulletin board posting of the 1998 temple fair organizational structure included the Family Head, Fair Heads, Consultants, Board of Directors, and the Planning Committee and its sub-committees, a structure which combined traditional local entities with modern organizational classifications. In the authors' 1998 interview with the aforementioned Mr. Li, the latter was accustomed to being referred to by the title of "Family Head." When asked why the Board of Directors lacked a president, Family Head Li responded, "The Board of Directors is presided over by the directors, rather than by a president." However, in 2000, a Mr. Shi was elected from among the Fair Heads to become the first President of the Dragon Tablet Fair Board of Directors. In dealing with non-local scholars and cadres from the county government, Mr. Shi frequently used the title of "President." The organizational structure of the 2006 temple fair included two components: first, the Board of Directors, including one president, two vice presidents, and three female presidents; and second, the Planning Committee, consisting of the committee members and various sub-committees. This new organizational structure was clearly influenced by externally-introduced ideas and values, such as gender equality. The female presidents of the Board of Directors were charged with overseeing the Dragon Tablet Fair Choir, a branch of the organization consisting chiefly of women, who traditionally played a central role in the ritual proceedings of the Dragon Tablet Fair and most frequently liaised with visiting scholars and graduate students. Numerous scholarly articles have discussed female folk traditions and the role of women in the Dragon Tablet Fair.

While the position of Dragon Tablet Fair Family Head evolved into that of President of the Board of Directors, Board membership was not confined to Fair Heads alone. According to the 1998 Dragon Tablet Fair Family Head, who was responsible for the establishment of the Board of Directors, the Board comprised not only Fair Heads, but also a number of Helping Hands. Since important matters relating to the Transition Rite were discussed and decided at Board meetings, the participation of non-Fair Head members provided a critical element of oversight on issues previously handled by the Fair Heads alone and, most importantly, on finances. According to previous practices, the Fair

Head on duty was responsible for safeguarding all monetary donations received during the year and, on February 6th of the lunar calendar, transferring the accounts in the presence of the Dragon Tablet to the next Fair Head before burning the financial logs. Hence, only the Fair Heads and the Dragon Tablet were privy to the Dragon Tablet Fair's financial information, and the accuracy of the accounts depended on the honesty and sincerity of the Fair Heads. According to the 1998 Family Head, "Some people were dissatisfied with this system and were concerned that some inaccuracies might exist. I established the Board of Directors, including non-Fair Head members, to increase oversight." In addition to the oversight of financial management and accounts, the organization has adopted democratic decision-making procedures, as described by the 1998 Family Head: "Although as the family head, I may determine certain matters independently, I generally let the Board members consult and reach a consensus in order to avoid controversy." Following several years of experimentation, the Board of Directors system has been incorporated into the management structure of the Dragon Tablet Fair organization, which has, over time, become increasingly open, transparent, and democratic.

III. *The Three Stages of Development of the Dragon Tablet Fair*

The authors were given the opportunity to view three of the previously-used Dragon Tablets in a storage cellar in Fan Zhuang village. While the central inscriptions on these simple wooden tablets were identical to those of the tablet currently in use—"The Tablet of the Dragon Deity: The True Ruler of Heaven, Earth, the Three Realms, and the Ten Directions"—the colors of the paintings lacked vibrancy. The oldest of the three tablets, that which was used prior to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, is also the smallest, standing only 72 centimeters in height. The tablet used during the 1950s is 84 centimeters tall, and the most recently used of the three, created after China's Reform and Opening, is 120 centimeters tall. Revealed in the size, material, shape, and quality of these three older tablets is the comparative simplicity of Dragon Tablet Fairs past, differing significantly from the grandiose proceedings of contemporary fairs.

The origin of the Dragon Tablet ritual is uncertain. However, according to the oral history passed down by village elders, migrants

from Hongdong County of Shanxi Province resettled the region after the villages were laid to waste by the northward sweeping armies of the Ming Dynasty' King Yan. Based on historical records of the changing course of the Hutuo River, it is believed that the lifestyle and production patterns of the current Fan Zhuang village date back to the close of the Qing Dynasty (Tieliang Liu, 2000). One Fair Head, Zhenying Luo, collected historical data on the Dragon Tablet Fairs of the past one hundred years, which means that at least a century of the "belief history" of the Dragon Tablet Fair can be reconstructed on the basis of the family records of the region and the recollections of village elders. The rituals associated with the Dragon Tablet were even performed during the Japanese occupation.

The "Great Leap Forward" (1958–1961) had a considerably negative impact on the Dragon Tablet Fair, though the temple fair continued despite the disturbances. However, all ritual activities and worship were suppressed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), and during this period, the Dragon Tablet was hidden and ritual proceedings were conducted secretly. Within the political environment of the time, such folk beliefs and activities were subject to the state's policy of cultural regulation. For a ruling party philosophically rooted in materialism and atheism, religion of any kind, particularly folk activities, were "feudal superstitions" which must be eradicated in the process of constructing a modern state. At the peak of the crackdown on "feudal superstitions," the Dragon Tablet was concealed in the cellar of the Fair Head's home.

Following the implementation of the Reform and Opening policy, the Dragon Tablet Fair was reinstated. In the authors' view, this process may be roughly summarized in three stages. The first stage of reinstatement began in 1979 when the practice of the Dragon Tablet being enshrined in the homes of the Fair Heads on an alternating basis was resumed, and the Dragon Tablet was once again accessible to the public. The Transition Rite was recommenced in 1983 by Laoliang (1917–1997), the on-duty Fair Head and a member of the Chinese Communist Party. At that time, great risks were taken and enormous pressures endured in resuming the ritual practices of the Dragon Tablet Fair. Laoliang's Oldest son, Xiaosuo, recalled:

> Before 1983, ritual activities took place privately in one's home. But in 1983, when the Dragon Tablet was enshrined in our home, the jiao booth was erected and the Transition Rite held for the first time [in many years]. Ying Liu, a former Eighth Route Army member and a Wubao

> Hu,[12] was the Family Head when the Dragon Tablet Fair was reinstated. He and my dad were on good terms. They determined to hold the Fair publicly according to traditional customs, and they informed the party chairman at the time of their intentions. Although he did not support them, they had made up their minds and would not be swayed. Ying Liu and my dad agreed, "If something happens, we'll take our blankets and go to court." Many of the villagers were apprehensive; thus, during the ritual proceedings, guards were stationed at each crossroads to warn the villagers if local law enforcement officers were approaching.[13]

The circumstances under which the Dragon Tablet Fair was reinstated reflect the fact that the state had not yet recognized the legitimacy of grassroots organizations. Whereas urban organizations throughout China were state sponsored, rural organizations were forced to conduct activities quasi-publicly and semi-secretively. Despite the relative restriction or dormancy of quasi-official and grassroots organizations at this time, the gradual emergence of urban and rural social organizations during this period constitutes the first signs of China's bourgeoning civil society.[14]

The Dragon Tablet Fair entered a new stage of development around 1990. Rooted in grassroots society, the Fair is entirely dependent upon the local supply of free time, public space, and floating resources for survival and revival.[15] Following the implementation of the Household Responsibility System (包产到戶),[16] village life became increasingly autonomous as villagers were permitted to determine independently

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[12] Wubaohu (五保戶) refers to the "Five Guarantees," or five forms of social security provided by the government to elderly individuals without children, i.e. food, clothing, medical care, housing, and burial expenses.

[13] Many villagers who had endured the hardships of the Cultural Revolution feared the consequences that might follow from their participation in the ritual proceedings, for many of the very customs and practices that constitute the Dragon Tablet Fair were denounced on posters and signs during the Cultural Revolution.

[14] While "grassroots" organizations are entirely independent from the state, "quasi-official" organizations are usually granted certain benefits and authorizations as a result of their connection to the administrative system.

[15] Here, "floating resources" refers to those materials, funds, and human resources that are not controlled by the government and are, thus, able to "float" with relative freedom. See Sun Liping, *Transformation and Fracture: Changes of Social Structure in China since the Reform*, (Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, 2004), 150–154.

[16] Introduced in the early 1980s, the Household Responsibility System lowered household production quotas and permitted the contracting of land, equipment, and other resources from collective organizations. While maintaining the unified management of the collective economy, this system allowed households to make independent production decisions within established boundaries and to determine freely the use of production surpluses. Villagers were, thus, provided the opportunity to sell their

their daily schedules and activities. By the early 1990s, villages had begun to accrue their own cash reserves and to experiment boldly with the organization of personally meaningful social organizations. Moreover, the "free floating resources" and "space for freedom of activity" that followed from deepening state reforms impelled the growth of various new social forces. Taken together, these two factors expedited the rapid development and expansion of such grassroots organizations as the Dragon Tablet Fair.

The evolution of the Dragon Tablet Fair did not remove the tension that existed between the Fair and the government and state ideology. Officially labeled a form of "superstition," the Dragon Tablet Fair was still looked upon negatively by China's "upper echelons." Unlike many other temple fairs, however, the Dragon Tablet Fair did not passively await condemnation. Instead, it actively worked to redefine itself. In order to continue its activities safely and legally, the Fair needed to dilute, or better yet, remove the negative label of "superstition" and build a connection between Fair practices and officially-condoned cultural activities and affairs. To this end, the Dragon Tablet Fair adopted a strategy which transformed the February 2nd Transition Rite into a public forum for preserving folk culture, popularizing scientific and cultural knowledge, and advocating spiritual civilization and public morality. Within such a public arena, "superstitions" are not blatantly exposed but rather graciously covered with "science" and "culture."

While the worship and earnest entreaty of the gods continue to be the principal activities conducted during the Transition Rite, the Fair organizers decorate the area surrounding the jiao booth to create a grand cultural event. Local opera troupes present the favorite plays of the village elders (such as Hebei Bangzi); amateur song and dance groups perform popular songs and dances in a makeshift tent for young people; folk performance groups, including Yangge troupes and percussion bands, are invited from the surrounding villages; recreational activities commonly practiced in urban plazas, such as balloon-shooting and ring tosses, are set up outside of the jiao booth; and chess and calligraphy contests are organized to provide villagers the opportunity to showcase their talents. Thus, the Transition Rite has become

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excess produce at unregulated prices on the free market, resulting in the widespread improvement of living standards across the country.

a grand festival for the entertainment of both gods and humans and a stage for the display of folk customs and culture.

Bulletin boards are assembled outside of the jiao booth on which is posted information concerning science and technology, culture, morality, and daily etiquette. One such bulletin board focuses on scientific and technological development relevant to agricultural practices, focusing specifically on the prevention and treatment of pear tree diseases and pests since Fan Zhuang is located in a pear-growing region. Another board covers a wide range of topics relating to cultural knowledge, some of which are only remotely related to daily village experiences, including "Criteria for Smart Consumption," which gives tips on shopping; "Commonsense for Life," which offers guidance on daily life; and "Advice on Returning Parental Kindness," which offers moral guidance. A number of recommendations for personal etiquette, originally intended for urban residents, are also presented on the bulletin boards. These include the "Four Don'ts after Eating" bulletin board, which advises that "One shouldn't drink tea, eat fruit, take a walk, or smoke after finishing a meal" and the "Social Don'ts" bulletin board, which includes advice such as "Don't miss an appointment or be an unexpected guest; don't call at the home of someone who is busy working; don't persist in idle banter; and don't leave without saying goodbye."[17] During the Transition Rite, the streets are lined with posters urging villagers to behave virtuously. These are written by educated locals and contain such maxims as "Lust is the root of all evil; filial piety is above all other virtues," taken from the classics on virtue.

The Fair organizers have always taken great pride in promoting the temple fair as a place for moral practice. According to one participant:

> The fundamental tenet of the Fair is to "be a good person and do good deeds." Those who do not accept this principle do not participate, and thus, the Fair Heads are all known as upright individuals. Quarrels, fights, theft, or loss of money never occur at the Fairs. Beyond the simplicity, honesty, and purity of the participants, the reasons for this are not readily explicable. The Fair Heads devote three months of their time to the preparation and organization of the Fair, and they do this all on a

[17] Many of the activities discouraged by these social etiquette posters are considered common and acceptable forms of social interaction and behavior among the villagers.

> voluntary basis. This is rare in a consumer society, and the participants are very appreciative.

When explaining the content of the poster and the Fair activities, participants describe the Fair as a public arena for the cultivation of morality.

Thus, the "superstitious" ritual activities associated with the temple fair, such as the worship of the Dragon Tablet and the entreaty of other spirit entities, are enveloped in a magnificent display of officially-condoned cultural activities promoting "folk culture," "scientific and technological education," "modern civilization," and "public morality," creating a complex public cultural forum that cannot be considered one-dimensionally. In actuality, it would be quite difficult to mount a general critique of the Dragon Tablet Fair activities, though some may disapprove of certain aspects of the Fair.

The second tactic employed by the Dragon Tablet Fair to gain legitimacy has been the dilution, or better yet, removal of the label of "superstition." The greater social space occupied by the Fair after 1995 may be attributed to the participation of external scholars, who initially presented the Dragon Tablet Fair within academia and the greater society as a folk culture phenomenon. As they gained a greater understanding of the Dragon Tablet Fair, scholars recognized that rather than merely consisting of superstitious, ignorant ritual practices, the Fair constituted a public forum for the promotion of folk culture and public morality. At a symposium held during the 1996 Dragon Tablet Fair, the speeches of numerous scholars touched on the topic of superstition. A certain Professor Song, also a curator in a history museum, noted, "This festival is basically healthy.[18] While it does contain certain elements of superstition, it is primarily a recreational event that also has educational value and has positively influenced the formation of the village market as well as the development of the local economy." Professor Tao of the Central University for Nationalities observed:

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[18] As the names of locations and individuals mentioned in this article have been previously publicized, we have elected not to use pseudonyms here. However, while the full names of individuals are used in factual descriptions, only partial names are given in presenting personal opinions. We hope that in this way we may both provide real evidence and avoid causing those quoted any trouble. Since quotations have not been verified by the original speakers, the authors of this article take full responsibility for any and all inaccuracies.

> The principal purposes of the Dragon Tablet Fair are the protection of agricultural production and the veneration of ancestors. It is a cultural amalgam, a fair where multiple cultures come together.... Yes, some superstition is involved, but is this the main purpose of the Fair? The Fair serves an educational function...We must keep traditional culture alive. The Dragon Tablet Fair is a living historical relic, and we must protect it as such.

In a speech delivered at the "First Symposium on the Dragon Culture," held in Zhao County in 2001, the President of the Chinese Folklore Association noted, "Although superstitious elements exist within the 'Dragon Tablet Fair' phenomenon, it provides positive moral standards for rural residents. Therefore, if rightly guided, it can be transformed into a tool for the construction of spiritual civilization." Many of the scholars of folk customs studies in attendance agreed that the positive impacts of the Dragon Tablet Fair on the community superseded its negative, superstitious elements and, thus, that the Fair may be generally regarded in a positive light. The villagers themselves attached great significance to the views of these "upper level" specialists and scholars.[19] A number of the speeches and articles presented at the symposium were copied and distributed among the Fair organizers and villagers, and these were subsequently used as the basis for establishing the positive image of the Dragon Tablet Fair in promoting the temple fair to non-locals as well as officials. The viewpoints of some scholars were even gradually absorbed into the local narrative. In the authors' interview with a retired middle school teacher, Uncle Wu, the latter described the temple fair in the following manner:

> The Dragon Tablet Fair is a form of folk culture. It contains some superstitious elements. It is a kind of folk culture with superstitious features, I think. Of course, without these superstitions, it would not be considered a folk custom, because it would contain nothing to attract the people and unify their hearts.

Through the interactions between the local villagers and external scholars, the Dragon Tablet Fair has been redefined. Although it does contain some superstitious elements, it is primarily a positive, healthy folk custom and is not completely at odds with the "advanced" culture advocated by the state.

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[19] The term "upper level" here refers to institutes or organizations with high administrative/academic rank and authority.

As a result of the efforts of the Fair organizers to legitimize the Dragon Tablet Fair, the temple fair does not appear antagonistic to the mainstream ideology of the state. An even more effective legitimization strategy has been the linking of the Dragon Tablet belief to the national Chinese culture of the dragon, rendering the Fair a representative of Chinese traditional culture.

It would seem that the tablet worshipped at the temple fair, "The Tablet of the Dragon Deity: the True Ruler of Heaven, Earth, the Three Realms, and the Ten Directions," bears no direct relation to China's national dragon totem. However, since 1991, scholars from the Hebei Folk Customs Studies Association, educated residents of Fan Zhuang village, and officials in the county-level administrative units on cultural affairs have endorsed the notion that the god of the Dragon Tablet is, in fact, the Gou Dragon of ancient Chinese legends. The Dragon Tablet was officially linked to the Gou Dragon in brochures introducing the origin of the Dragon Tablet Fair to non-local guests, and Fair banners reading, "The Children of the Yan Emperor and the Yellow Emperor are the Offspring of the Dragon." Consequently, the public view of the Dragon Tablet began to change. Whereas in the past, it was simply believed that the Dragon Tablet was the ancestral memorial of Fan Zhuang village and the Lord Dragon Tablet the local guardian deity responsible for maintaining the peace and safety of the community through linking the Dragon Tablet to the Gou Dragon, the Dragon Tablet has risen in status to become one of the ancestors of the Chinese people. The authors conducted a survey of villagers from Fan Zhuang and Dragon Tablet Fair participants from the surrounding area in 1998 and 1999 (with 107 and 100 valid questionnaires returned, respectively). Of those surveyed, 72% of Fan Zhuang villagers and 50% of Dragon Tablet participants from the surrounding villagers believed that the Dragon Tablet Lord was an ancestor of the Chinese people. The slogan, "Offspring of the Dragon," has been employed in modern China to fortify the cohesion of the Chinese people, and in recent years, it has been endowed by both state and society with the deeper political significance of patriotism. The dragon has, thus, become a political and cultural symbol representing Chinese traditional culture. Thus, through remanufacturing (reinterpreting and disseminating meaning and identity), the organizers of the Dragon Tablet Fair have created a connection between the Fan Zhuang Dragon Tablet and the national Chinese culture of the dragon. The Fair organizers often invite honored guests of the Dragon

Tablet Fair to sign a guest book, and the support of local and visiting intellectuals may be seen in the words of encouragement they leave behind: "Offspring of the Dragon—Carry forward the traditions of the ancestors, and forge a path for those who follow"; "The charm of the dragon is present here"; and "Flute and drum sing and dance in celebration of peace and prosperity; walking beneath the Big Dipper, we worship the Black Dragon; a jubilant community participates in the Dragon Fair; through the Dragon Tablet festival, fame of the village spreads far and wide." Moreover in a report used to apply for protection and development aid, the Dragon Tablet Fair defined itself in the following manner, "The 'Dragon Tablet Fair' of Fan Zhuang village, Zhao County, inherited the folk ritual venerating the dragon from the ancient ancestors. It constitutes a rich, unique, and profoundly influential remnant of the dragon culture." The Dragon Tablet Fair has, thus, been transformed from an unacceptable local superstition into a popular cultural event, the political correctness of which is now difficult to deny. In reality, the dragon totem of the state narrative differs drastically from the god of the Dragon Tablet Lord revered by the Fan Zhuang villagers. The modern use of the slogan, "Offspring of the Dragon," signifies that the Chinese people are the descendents of an ancient people who believed the dragon to be their ancestor and worshipped the dragon totem, yet modern Chinese people regard this as a myth. However, the villagers of Fan Zhuang recognize the dragon of the Dragon Tablet as their ancestral deity; thus, the Dragon Tablet Lord existed in the past and still has "efficacy" today.[20] Although the original significance of the Dragon Tablet Lord differs greatly from that of the dragon totem, the Dragon Tablet belief has, through narration and reinterpretation, come to be viewed as a corroboration of the ancient Gou Dragon myth and enjoyed an elevation of status from local folk belief to "living fossil" of Chinese history. In the search for the origins of the Dragon Tablet belief, the Dragon Tablet has become linked to China's national dragon totem and to the history of the nation-state. No longer a heretical superstition banned by the

[20] According to the findings of our 1999 survey, ninety-one percent (91%) of the villagers believed the Dragon Tablet (or the Dragon Tablet Lord) still has efficacy. Therefore, ninety-seven percent (97%) of them donated money, materials, or labor during the temple fair, and ninety-four percent (94%) came to the Fair to worship the Lord.

state, the Dragon Tablet belief has been transformed into being a representative of traditional Chinese culture.

If the activities of the Dragon Tablet Fair during this stage were to be viewed as a simulation, it can be seen that during this period, the state no longer adopted an attitude of forceful suppression toward voluntary grassroots organizations and it abandoned its former "zero-sum game" model. A number of survival-savvy grassroots organizations, taking advantage of the slackening of state policy and changes in social organizations' gaming strategies, have consistently striven to establish political legitimacy and a space in which to exist in order to be recognized as "normal" members of society. It is precisely this interaction between the state and grassroots organizations that reflects and confirms the emergence and development of China's civil society.

The development of the Dragon Tablet Fair epitomizes that of the temple fairs of the surrounding villages. Like the Fan Zhuang Dragon Tablet Fair, neighboring village fairs carry the names of the deific entities they were established to worship, e.g. the Old Lady Fair, the Niangniang Fair, the Jade Emperor Fair, and the God of War and Commerce Fair. In 2005, a total of fifty-two temple fair organizations attended the Fan Zhuang village Transition Rite, and a number of these also took part in the Flower Fair performances and scripture-chanting rituals. Each Flower Fair troupe organized an incense-offering group, which not only burned incense in worship of the Dragon Tablet but also made monetary contributions in amounts ranging from 5 to 20 RMB. Reciprocally, the Dragon Tablet Fair organization takes part in the temple fairs of neighboring villages. During the 2005 Transition Rite, for example, the Dragon Tablet Fair received invitations to more than ten other local temple fairs. Much like the reciprocal relationships among the members of a family, these organizations maintain close connections through their mutual participation in one another's temple fairs. The establishment of relations between the Dragon Tablet Fair and other temple fair organizations began more than a decade ago. Based on a survey conducted ten years ago, as well as invitations received from neighboring temple fairs and accounting records documenting the amounts of incense money donated by Dragon Tablet Fair representatives to other temple fairs, the Dragon Tablet Fair participated in fifty-seven local village temple fairs in a single year. In terms of distance, the closest temple fair attended was the Zhangjia Zhuang village Bodhisattva Fair (approximately 1 mile away) and the furthest was the temple fair of Yuan Shi village, nearly 30 miles

away. Investigations of neighboring temple fairs indicated that these grassroots organizations possess a broad social basis and have experienced stages of emergence, development, and revival similar to those of the Fan Zhuang Dragon Tablet Fair. From the evolution of these temple fairs, we see that grassroots organizations similar in nature to the Dragon Tablet Fair can expand rapidly and establish the necessary space for survival within the current social climate. As a result of the increasing interconnectedness and interaction of these grassroots organizations, a growing number of people and organizations are able to participate in local-level grassroots activities.

The Dragon Tablet Fair has, since the turn of the millennium, entered a third stage of development, demonstrating through its broader scope of operation the potential role of grassroots organizations in China's emerging civil society. A momentous event in the development of the Dragon Tablet Fair was the construction of the structure known as the "Ancestral Hall of the Dragon," which was begun in February 2001 and completed in February 2003. Two signs hanging outside of the Hall read: "Zhao County Dragon Culture Museum of China" and "Hebei Province's Fan Zhuang Village Dragon Tablet Fair"; these two appellations are indicative of the Hall's dual functions. Formerly rotated among the homes of the Fair heads, the Dragon Tablet is now enshrined in the inner sanctum of the Hall. Positioned in front of the Dragon Tablet are rush cushions for kneeling and kowtowing, incense burners, and fruit offerings; a continuous stream of worshippers pass through the Hall daily to pray and offer incense before the Dragon Tablet. The Hall more closely resembles a traditional village temple than a "museum" for the collection, classification, and study of dragon culture. In fact, according to the local narrative, the hall is a "temple." How then can this depiction of the Hall as both a "temple" and a "museum" be explained? Further investigations into the details of the proposal and construction of this building revealed the true nature of the Ancestral Hall of the Dragon. A grassroots organization and a constituent member of the greater society, the Dragon Tablet Fair has actively adapted its relationships and model, ensuring its continued existence amidst a myriad of organizations and social relations through the conscious efforts of its organizers.

Prior to the founding of the People's Republic of China, Fan Zhuang village contained over ten temples, including three Jade Emperor Temples, three Zhenwu Temples, two Five Dao Temples, one Three Offices Temple, one Old Lady Temple, and one Nainai Temple. These

temples had fallen into disrepair prior to being completely destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Following the implementation of China's Reform and Opening policy, a trend in large-scale temple reconstruction swept across northern China. While many of the neighboring villages erected simple structures for local worship, Fan Zhuang village did not reconstruct any of the temples previously destroyed. Never possessing a temple of its own, the Dragon Tablet had historically been alternately enshrined in the temporary jiao booth or in the homes of the Fair Heads. With the gradual revival and growing power and influence of the Dragon Tablet Fair beginning in the 1980s, the Fair organizers purported to establish a permanent temple for the worship of the Dragon Tablet. However, in order to do so, they had to first resolve the issue of "status." Under the rigorous regulatory system of the state, temple construction required the authorization of the State Bureau of Religion. However, the official classification of the Dragon Tablet Fair as a "folk belief" (rather than as a legitimate religion) precluded the processing of its application by the Bureau of Religion, the mandatory initial step for temple construction. Thus, the Dragon Tablet Fair would have to pursue an alternate course to obtain official approval for the construction of a Dragon Tablet temple.

At the 1996 symposium of Beijing scholars studying the Dragon Tablet Fair, the aforementioned Professor Song, curator of a history museum, observed that "the village contains a great wealth of remnants of China's traditional agrarian culture that could provide the basis for the assembly of a folk customs museum."[21] The comment was made in passing, and neither he nor his colleagues pursued the idea any further. However, years later after the museum was built, the villagers recalled that it was Mr. Song's comment that first inspired the notion of building a museum in Fan Zhuang village.

Long after a proponent of the construction of a temple for the Lord of the Dragon Tablet, a certain Mr. Shi was elected President of the Board of Directors prior to the 2000 temple fair, and the Board subsequently resolved to prioritize the construction of a temple on its

[21] The museum proposed by Professor Song would represent the folk customs of traditional agrarian culture and possessed no connection to the dragon, for according to Professor Song himself, "Our studies have raised several questions, including 'what is the Dragon Tablet?' According to the local people, it is an ancestral deity, and the fact that they refer to it as the 'Dragon Tablet Lord' indicates that it has no relation to the dragon totem."

agenda. In his negotiations with relevant government departments, Mr. Shi cunningly put forth a proposal for the construction of a dragon culture museum, circumventing the previous obstacles resulting from the official classification of the Dragon Tablet Fair as a folk belief.[22] The definition of the Dragon Tablet Fair as a cultural organization also allowed the organizers to successfully avoid the regulations of local religious administrative organs (the comments of visiting scholars were critical in substantiating this claim during the application process). By this time, the Zhao county government cadres had come to recognize the compatibility of the Transition Rite with the oft-quoted official slogans, "Culture Builds the Stage upon Which the Economy Performs" (文化搭台经济唱戏) and acknowledged the practical role the Fair had played in the growing reputation and tourism industry of Zhao county. The statements of scholars from such political and cultural centers as Beijing and Shijiazhuang City concerning the historical and cultural significance of the Dragon Tablet Fair prompted local government recognition of the Fair as representative of China's traditional dragon culture; consequently, the Dragon Tablet Fair's application for the construction of a dragon culture museum was accepted with relative ease by the local government. Fortuitously, the processing of the application of the Dragon Tablet museum coincided with the coordinated effort of relevant county departments to draft a plan for the development of the local tourist industry. While two well-known tourist attractions (the Zhaozhou Bridge and the Bolin Temple) were located in the western region of the county, the Tourism Bureau was having difficulty identifying potential tourism resources in the eastern section of the county. Due to Fan Zhuang's location at the center of the eastern region of the country, the proposed Dragon Tablet museum provided a glowing opportunity to advance the goal of comprehensive, county-wide tourism development. Having obtained the necessary authorizations of the Administrative Departments on Land Use and Construction Projects, the County Planning Committee commenced preparations for the dragon culture museum project. In 2001, the "Groundbreaking Ceremony for the Zhao County Dragon Culture Museum of China" was held during the second month of the

[22] Folk Belief refers to those popular religious customs and practices in grassroots society which are not officially recognized as a formal religion such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism.

lunar calendar. The ceremony was attended by major Zhao county party leaders and government officials and more than 140 of the scholars who had participated in the "First Academic Symposium on the Dragon Culture, Hebei Province."

However, this officially-sanctioned project received not one penny of state or local government funds. While the local government provided support in the form of official preparation and authorization for use of the land and construction materials, the actual funding for the project derived from resources raised by the Dragon Tablet Fair in the form of accumulated incense money and donations from the villagers. In August of 2003, the authors learned from the President of the Board of Directors that in the three years since he had taken office, the Fair had saved a total of 36,000 RMB. The donations collected from among the local villagers during this period for the specific purpose of supporting the construction project exceeded 50,000 RMB, with the majority of the Fair Heads making monetary contributions ranging from 20 to 1,000 RMB. Several villagers donated as much as 2,000 RMB, while some were only able to contribute 1 or 2 RMB. Despite these valiant efforts at fundraising, the amount collected was significantly lower than the total cost of the project (260,000 RMB). In order to make up the difference, the Dragon Tablet Fair took loans from the local credit union, to be repaid with the incense money collected in subsequent years.

Having obtained the necessary funding and authorizations, the Dragon Tablet Fair confronted another challenge. The organizers had applied for and received official approval to build a museum, so a museum had to be built. Yet, the funds contributed by the villagers were for the purpose of constructing a temple and, thus, needed to be used to construct a temple. In the name of building a museum, the Fair had acquired official authorization but neither land nor funding, and in the name of constructing a temple, it had obtained the approval of the Village Committee to use the land and a large quantity of donations and loans, but had no legitimate status. Since only one structure could be built, it needed to serve as both a museum and temple. Through the Fair organizers' skillful maneuverings, the plan to combine the museum and temple received the support, understanding, or acquiescence of all parties involved.

Under the patronage of the Village Committee and the county government, the Dragon Tablet Fair exhausted all available resources, and despite funding shortages, successfully completed the construction of a

traditional hall. In 2003, the "Inauguration Ceremony of the Ancestral Hall of the Dragon and the Official Unveiling of the Zhao County Dragon Culture Museum" was held in the second month of the lunar calendar. The ceremony itself further enforced the dual identity of the structure as temple and museum: described in the official narrative as an "official unveiling," the local villagers referred to the ceremony as the "light-giving ritual" (开光仪式). The formation of the relationship between the official description and actual nature of this structure has been key to the successful realization of the project and has provided a window for understanding the cultural logic of Chinese society.

From a case study of the construction of this dual-natured structure, we can appreciate the social significance of the successful completion of the hall. Based on the original system of social classification, this case involves drastically different organizational institutions, e.g., the official entities of the county and village governments; legitimate folk organizations in the form of academic associations; and the traditional folk belief organization of the Dragon Tablet Fair, which possesses no legitimate status. The first of these differences is seen in the distance that exists between official and folk entities; the second is demonstrated in the antagonism between those who formulate and uphold regulations and those who violate them; and the third difference is manifested in the ideological contradictions between the representatives of science and the practitioners of "superstitions." Both theoretically and logically, one would assume that these organizations, given their vast differences and strained relationships, would be in constant conflict. Yet, we find that in the present realities of Chinese society, these entities are actively pursuing, and have found, developmental mechanisms for cooperation and coexistence.

IV. *Conclusion: Traditional Grassroots Organizations and Civil Society*

Within the context of the modernization movements of the contemporary era, traditional grassroots organizations have, as a result of their "traditional" and "local" character, come into conflict with the modern forces of the nation-state. Along with the evolutions of the era of opening have come opportunities for the reconciliation of grassroots organizations with modernization and the nation-state. Adjustments have also been seen in the attitudes of the political and academic elites toward these organizations, as the oppressive and eliminative policies

of the past have yielded to greater tolerance and acquiescence and, in certain instances, even limited support and participation (depending on the selective judgment of local governments). During this period, traditional grassroots organizations, like guerilla warriors, initially sought survival and expansion within the political and administrative "cracks" and, later, seizing upon appropriate opportunities and methods to achieve public legitimacy, actively adjusted their organizational structures, styles, and values (or at least the narratives regarding their values) in order that, through integration into or association with state institutions and values (narratives), they might become "normal" constituents of the state and society. From the case study of the Dragon Tablet Fair, we see that an initially vast physical, social, and cultural distance may be overcome at a much higher level (i.e. in more universalistic terms) through free association and organizational cooperation, and formerly isolated individuals, groups, and departments may find an effective means of communication.[23] This process bears witness to the development of contemporary Chinese civil society and the gradual growth of the "civil" nature of local organizations.

Moreover, through a reshaping of their relationship with the state, the issues of the isolation and insulation of grassroots organizations are resolved, and as these entities become active constituents of the nation-state, their members also gain increasing awareness of their citizenship. In the case of the Dragon Tablet Fair, we see that the Dragon Tablet was a symbol of local and village identity. Influenced by scholars with sufficient awareness of the nation-state, the Fair reoriented itself through tracing its history back to the ancient dragon culture and identifying itself as representing the Chinese nation. Through the cooperation of the villagers, the government departments, and the intellectual community, the Dragon Tablet was transformed from a symbol of village identity to one of regional locality, and finally, to that of the state. The relationships among the participants of the Dragon Tablet Fair, the general public, and the nation-state, as well as the awareness of these relationships, have taken on even greater significance. The Fair participants have proven themselves to be an organic part of the state and have shed further light upon the multifaceted identity of a people who regard themselves not only as the worshippers

[23] Bingzhong Gao, "Ethnography of a Museum-Temple Architecture: On the Dual-Name System of Becoming Political Art," *Sociological Research*, Issue 1 (2006).

of the Dragon Tablet Fair but also the offspring of the dragon and the citizens of the state.

Regardless of whether in actual relationships or in imagination alone, the organizers of the Dragon Tablet Fair were willing to explore all possible options for becoming active members of mainstream society and achieving positive social images. In 2006, the Dragon Tablet Fair successfully achieved the status of "Hebei Province Non-Material Cultural Heritage," and this honor was marked during the 2007 ritual rite with the dedication of a commemorative plaque. The Dragon Tablet Fair has thus been inducted into a new social category and obtained a new positive social standing. Again, we find that the Dragon Tablet Fair has consistently sought out opportunities to assimilate mainstream social values and overcome the chasm that initially prevented it from participating actively in society. Thus, it can be seen that the antagonistic relationship between state and society may be transformed into one of cooperation, and folk organizations and state cooperatives may evolve into organs of civil society. The value of civil society exists in its ability to absorb previously-rejected individuals, groups, and organizations as "normal," "common" members on the basis of universal principles. The wide-scale realization of this principle is a long and arduous process, for with regard to the civil rights of rural residents, we as a society face numerous daunting obstacles and challenging issues. Fortunately, through case studies of grassroots organizations such as the Dragon Tablet Fair, we see that the process of the actualization of universalistic principles has already begun, with remarkable results.

CHAPTER TEN

ON THE PROBLEM OF DEVELOPING A MECHANISM FOR THE PARTICIPATION OF RELIGION IN THE SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR

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The participation of religion in social services is a critical issue within contemporary Chinese society, involving the interests of tens of millions of people and, thus, cannot be ignored. In recent years, numerous debates have taken place within the various sectors of society, including religious, academic, and government institutions, concerning whether or not and why religion should be permitted to participate in social services. Through these discussions, the majority of the parties involved have reached the consensus that China should vigorously pursue the development of charitable and public welfare enterprises and that because religion is a considerable force for promoting charitable undertakings, the participation of religious groups in social services will prove beneficial to the people, the state, and society. Regarding these points, no objections have been raised. In his October 2007 address to the 17th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, President Hu Jintao explicitly stated that we should "allow religious leaders and believers to play an active role in promoting economic and social development." Thus, the issue of whether or not religion should be permitted to play a role in social services is no longer in question.

However, according to a survey recently conducted by the Pu Shi Institute for Social Sciences (普世社会科学研究所),[1] religion has yet to be allowed to play a role in the social services sector. In most of

[1] Pu Shi Institute for Social Science is a non-governmental organization established in 1999 to promote the rule of law within the field of religion. The Institute conducted the aforementioned, government-approved survey from 2007 to 2008, the focus of which was the issue of the church–state relationship in China. The interviewees included believers, non-believers, and officials in charge of religious affairs, and the study involved more than 4,000 people from over 30 counties and cities within 18 provinces across China.

the areas surveyed, religious involvement in social services or in charitable ventures is still an extremely difficult, if not sensitive, or even forbidden, issue. Thus, we no longer face the question of "if" religion should participate in the social services sector but rather, of "how" religion can play an active role in China's social services. Unless this issue is resolved, any additional appeals for religion to play an active role in advancing social and economic development will be futile. It is as if a capable individual were rendered immobile, with hands and feet bound and mouth and nose blocked: no matter how great the desire to work, nothing would be accomplished. Therefore, this article intends to address the question of "how" religion can contribute to the social services sector by examining the fundamental factors that impact religious participation in social services and the mechanisms through which such participation might be advanced.

I. *The Issue of the Legality of Religion Stretching Beyond Religious Venues*

If religion is to be allowed to contribute to the social services sector and religious leaders and believers are to play an active role in promoting social and economic development, the issue of the legality of religious participation in social services must first be resolved, for without such resolution, we lack the necessary basis for further discussion. A consensus has been reached among the various sectors of society concerning the positive implications of the participation of religion in the social services sector not only for the nation and society but also for religious organizations themselves. Yet, are religious institutions allowed to conduct non-religious activities outside of religious venues, providing such social services as poverty relief, medical treatment, health services, and educational assistance in an official capacity? Are they permitted to establish charitable organizations and organize and execute various kinds of charitable projects? Do religious philanthropic organizations enjoy the same treatment as their non-religious counterparts? Based on current societal practices, all of these questions must be answered in the negative. However, of fundamental importance here is the issue of whether or not religious organizations may *legally* conduct activities outside of religious venues.

According to China's *Religious Affairs Regulation* (《宗教事务条例》),

> The collective religious activities of citizens who profess religious belief should generally be conducted within registered venues for religious activity (i.e. temples, mosques, churches, and other established places of religious activity). These activities shall be organized by the religious venue or organization and presided over by religious instructors or other persons in compliance with these regulations.[2]

A number of additional administrative laws, such as the *Measures for the Registration of Venues of Religious Activity* (《宗教活动场所登记办法》), *Regulations for the Registration and Administration of Social Organizations* (《社会团体登记管理条例》), and *Measures for the Assessment, Approval, and Registration of the Establishment of Religious Venues* (《宗教活动场所设立审批和登记办法》) contain similar provisions. While these regulations provide specific guidance for the management of religious activities by religious organizations, they do not explicitly address the issue of the involvement of religious groups in non-religious activities outside of venues of religious activity.[3]

Again, we must return to the question of whether or not religious organizations are permitted to conduct non-religious activities and provide various types of social services in an official capacity outside of venues of religious activity. From a legal perspective, beyond a single provision contained within the administrative *Religious Affairs Regulations* stipulating that "religious groups and venues of religious activity shall be permitted to establish social welfare enterprises in accordance with the law," China has yet to promulgate a "Law on Religion" or "Law on Charitable Enterprises." None of China's existing laws offer clear, legal delineations of concepts central to the participation of religion within the social services sector, including what constitutes a "religious organization" or "venue of religious activity"; which laws apply to religious organizations; and which kinds of social welfare enterprises

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[2] Decree No. 426 of the State Council, promulgated on December 18, 2004, implemented from March 1, 2005.

[3] For the purpose of this paper, "religious activities" refers to faith-based activities conducted by religious believers or groups in the practice of profession of religious belief, and "non-religious activities" refers to secular activities carried out by religious adherents or organizations. "Venues of religious activity" are places in which religious ceremonies are conducted by religious groups or believers, e.g. churches, mosques, temples, etc.

are these groups permitted to establish. The legal basis for the participation of religious leaders and believers in open, organized, and non-religious charitable activities outside of religious venues is, as yet, unclear.

According to the principle of the rule of law, the "absence of legal prohibition implies permissibility." Does this mean that because China's current legal code does not contain any clear prohibitions against the participation of religious groups in the social services sector that these organizations may freely conduct charitable activities? The answer is extremely obvious: of course not! Why? Because there presently exists no legal basis for such participation. Without the legal and administrative framework necessary to approve the social services activities of religious organizations and monitor their growth and development, religious groups are unable even to begin organizing such activities. Moreover, the approval of the participation of religious groups in non-religious social service activities is beyond the scope of the present government organs of religious administration, and hence, without legal and administrative approval, religious organization are excluded from participating in charitable activities.

In reality, there are in China today only a very limited number of charitable organizations that are legally permitted to conduct social welfare activities.[4] It is extremely complicated for a charitable organization to obtain official certification, and it is impossible for an ordinary individual to establish a charitable enterprise without government backing. Moreover, because religious regulatory agencies have consistently emphasized that religious activities must be conducted within religious venues, the general public, including religious organizations themselves, have long held the view that religious activities should be limited to religious venues.[5] In the case that a religious organization attempts to conduct public activities, regardless of whether they are of a religious or non-religious nature, the attention and censorship

[4] While there are many charitable institutions in China, only a few are certified to collect donations and give tax receipts. These include the China Charity Federation, Red Cross Society of China, Youth Development Foundation, China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation, and China Women's Development Foundation.

[5] Very few religious organizations have lobbied for the right to engage in charitable activities. Those groups that are registered to conduct such activities are monitored by the government and must limit their charitable work to their own venues. Unregistered groups are prohibited from conducting any activities at all, and thus, a number of unregistered groups are currently fighting to obtain legal status.

of government regulatory agencies are immediately attracted. Anyone living in China can imagine the outcome if a group were, under the banner of a Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, Daoist, or other religious organization, to attempt to conduct non-religious charitable activities, such as collecting donations, providing poverty relief, or showing other forms of compassion, in a public venue. Would local law enforcement agencies fail to act?[6]

An example of the present role of religious organizations within the social services sector may be seen in responses to the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake in Sichuan Province. Despite the considerable monetary contributions of China's religious groups to the relief efforts[7] and the throngs of volunteers dispatched by religious groups to work on the frontline of the rescue operation, the general public never once glimpsed in the public media a sign or banner denoting the participation of religious organizations.[8] The reason for this, of course, is that the right of religious organizations, leaders, and believers to conduct non-religious activities outside of religious venues has never actually been legally established. Thus, open reporting on the public activities of religious groups is likely to be viewed as "violating journalistic rules." Hence, despite their donations, volunteer efforts, and other acts of compassion, religious organizations have never received credit for their charitable activities.

It is no accident that the state has yet to establish laws and implement corresponding policies that would encourage religious organizations and believers to step beyond the narrow confines of their religious venues to assume a larger role in providing charitable services

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[6] In actuality, a number of religious organizations have conducted charitable activities, but this is, indeed, uncommon. The success of these ventures primarily depends upon the relationship of the religious organization to the local government or the extent to which they are able to sidestep the law. The point, of course, is that they have no legal grounds for conducting charitable activities, and in the case that they do attempt to participate in the social services sector, the government may, at any time, "legally" restrict or discipline them. Even those organizations that have successfully carried out charitable activities have not been publicly recognized due to media censorship.

[7] According to official reports, the Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement alone donated over 117 million RMB. See the State Administration for Religious Affairs website, www.sara.gov.cn.

[8] The "public media" means the mainstream official media, such as the People's Daily, the Party organs, Xinhua News Agency, China Central Television (CCTV), the Central People's Broadcasting Station (CPBS), the Xinhua News website, the People's Daily website, etc.

toward the promotion of economic and social development. Rather, the government's reluctance to establish a legal framework for religious participation in social services is historically rooted. During the past several decades, governmental regulatory agencies have, under the influence of "leftist" thought, adopted a basic policy of preventing the expansion of religious influence in society. Since the implementation of the Reform and Opening policy, major adjustments have been made across Chinese society; yet, official policy concerning numerous religious issues continues to "conform to established rules" rather than evolving to reflect the changing landscape of contemporary society and the practical needs of the people.[9] There is among governmental regulatory agency officials a lingering concern that if religious organizations were permitted to operate outside of religious venues and participate in the social services sector, their social influence would expand.

Therefore, if religion is ever to be allowed to play an active role in society, we must first resolve the issue of the legality of religious organizations operating outside of religious venues. Otherwise, any discussion of the contribution of religion to charitable ventures within the social services sector amounts to nothing more than mere theorizing and empty strategizing.

II. *The Issue of the Structure of Religious Charitable Enterprises*

A. *The Nature and Status of Religious Charitable Organizations*

In order for religions to contribute to the social services sector through promoting charitable ventures, they must first establish specialized institutions characteristic of and capable of handling the tasks of so-called "religious charitable organizations." Such institutions have two prominent features: 1) they are established by religious groups or organizations and guided by religious doctrines or moral codes; and 2) they do not conduct religious activities, but rather only carry out chari-

[9] Successful examples in Hong Kong and Taiwan have had little influence on charitable activities in mainland China. This is not because the government fails to recognize the value of charity but rather, because of the lack of civil society mechanisms and the absence of a system in which NGOs may conduct social services. This issue involves the sharing of power between people and government, which may only be resolved through political reforms.

table activities. At present, however, neither governmental regulatory agencies nor religious organizations themselves are truly familiar with the characteristics of religious charitable institutions; as a result, local government officials and religious leaders may hold the following misperceptions of religious charitable institutions. First, religious charitable institutions may be regarded as part of or equivalent to religious organizations. Based on this notion, religious charitable institutions, as religious organizations, should not be permitted to operate outside of religious venues, regardless of the nature or purpose of their operations, for religion should, under no circumstances, stretch beyond religious venues. Second, some may believe that religious groups could, for charitable purposes, indiscriminately undertake profit-making ventures, including commercial initiatives. Third, religious charitable institutions may be treated in the same manner as common, secular charitable organizations without a recognition of the fundamental, guiding role of religious doctrines and moral creeds within religious charitable institutions. Some local officials may even prohibit the use of religious names, symbols, and print materials as well as any activities that may be construed as having a religious connotation or reveal a religious connection. In addition, officials may fear that religious charitable institutions may use their participation in charitable ventures to proselytize and expand religious influence.

The above-mentioned views are generally held by those who lack a full understanding of the nature, status, and characteristics of religious charitable institutions. These individuals fail to recognize that though religious charitable institutions are established and managed by religious groups and guided by religious doctrines, they are separate from the religious organizations themselves; that while religious charitable institutions may share an organizational and faith-based connection with a religion, they do not conduct religious activities; and that although religious charitable institutions conduct various kinds of charitable activities, these are not for the purpose of earning a profit. The goal, form, and activities of religious charitable institutions should accord with religious doctrines and reflect religious moral creeds while complying with state laws and responding to societal needs.

Regrettably, governmental regulatory agencies and religious groups have not yet reached a consensus with regard to the nature and characteristics of religious charitable institutions. In the absence of consensus, religious organizations have confronted severe restrictions in establishing charitable enterprises, and religious charities have been exploited

for personal gain. In some instances, local governments have even used religious organizations as additional sources of revenue. Other issues have arisen in the absence of regulations governing the sale of tickets and burning of incense at local religious sites, which fall outside the jurisdiction of local industry, tax, and auditing departments. Further confusions exist within religious organizations themselves due to the absence of clear accounting and management practices. Hence, it is essential that both governmental regulatory agencies and religious groups understand clearly the nature and status of religious charitable institutions. Unless the institutional characteristics and status of these institutions are clarified, China's religious charitable enterprises will be unable to develop.

B. *Equal Access to Social and Public Resources*

If religions are to participate in public welfare and charitable activities within the social services sector, they will require access to public resources, for they will, through these activities, inevitably need to make public presentations, deal with all sectors of society, and interact with the general public. According to the principle of the rule of law, "all are equal before the law"; thus, any institution engaged in social service or charitable activity, as long as it is not violating the law, should enjoy equal access to public resources as well as the right to the reasonable use of these resources based on its individual characteristics and needs. In practice, however, there still exists a strong bias against the participation of religious charitable institutions in charitable activities, and religious charitable institutions have yet to obtain equal access to public resources. This problem is particularly apparent with regard to mass media access. The mass media, as a public resource, serves the general public. The use of mass media by various charitable institutions for publicity purposes and general momentum-building is regarded as common practice within society. However, in conducting charitable activities, religious charitable institutions cannot disclose their organizational affiliation, use the mass media for fundraising or donation collecting purposes, or publicize their efforts on the Internet, in newspapers, or on television. None of China's domestic media sources, regardless of level or location, would be willing to publicize the activities of a religious charitable institution. Yet few have raised the question of why, despite their commonly shared goals and structure, China's religious charitable institutions receive such vastly

different treatment from the various levels of officially-authorized charitable organizations, such as the Red Cross and public welfare foundations. Are not all of the organizations engaged equally in charitable activities?

It would be unreasonable to allow religious charitable institutions to continue to carry out acts of compassion, undertaking public welfare and poverty alleviation ventures, without any recognition of their good deeds; they cannot be forever expected to remain the "unsung heroes."

Moreover, while other charitable organizations may establish different institutions in order to provide a wide variety of health, sanitation, educational, community, and environmental protection services, the activities of religious organizations are extremely limited. Even if the local religious regulatory departments were to authorize the establishment of an officially-recognized hospital, school, community center, or environmental protection agency by a religious organization, it would be difficult to obtain official approval from other relevant government agencies. Thus, it may be said that due to the conditions of contemporary Chinese society, religious organizations are discouraged from entering into social services enterprises, and religious charitable institutions lack the same access to public resources as other charitable organizations. Unless these issues are resolved, religious charitable organizations will be unable to undertake social welfare ventures.

C. *The "Double-Approval" Registration of Religious Charitable Institutions*

Founded by religious organizations, religious charitable institutions must be established in compliance with religious doctrines, be approved by religious leaders, accord with the institutional statutes of the religious organization, and obtain the support of religious believers. Yet this internal approval is far from sufficient for the initiation of a religious charitable institution. According to existing regulations for the certification of charitable enterprises, the founding of a charitable institution must be approved by relevant governmental regulatory agencies prior to being registered with the Department of Civil Affairs in order to obtain legal status. This is what is referred to as the system of "double-approval" registration.

While the "double-approval" registration system guarantees that charitable organizations are supervised and regulated by the government, it also complicates considerably the official process through

which non-governmental charitable institutions are founded and renders meaningless the system by which religious charitable institutions obtain the approval of their own religious organizations. Since religious organizations are not governmental agencies, they are unable to issue official authorizations; thus, the approval of religious organizations cannot be substituted for that of the relevant governmental regulatory agencies in qualifying for registration with the Department of Civil Affairs. However, in allowing religious regulatory agencies to become the sole determiners of whether or not religious charitable institutions are established, religious organizations are deprived of their autonomy. It is self-evident that religious groups should independently oversee issues relating to their own religious, financial, personnel, and social services affairs, for if required to submit all of these decisions, including the founding of charitable enterprises, to the relevant governmental regulatory agencies for approval, religious organizations would be reduced to the status of subordinate units of the religious regulatory agencies, and China's religions would be transformed into "state-owned enterprises" or "state religions." This would clearly be inappropriate. However, without the approval of governmental regulatory agencies, religious charitable enterprises are unable to register with the Department of Civil Affairs. Thus, unless the "double-approval" registration issue is resolved, religious charitable enterprises cannot be established, and the ability of religions to participate in the social services sector is contingent upon the goodwill of governmental regulatory agencies, rather than their own initiative.

III. *The Issue of Funding Religious Charitable Enterprises*

A. *Fundraising Capacity*

In order to launch a charitable enterprise or provide social services, one must have access to continuous and substantial sources of funding. It goes without saying that charities cannot operate without funding, and religious charitable enterprises are no exception. With regard to the means by which this funding is acquired, all charitable organizations must, to a certain extent, depend on fundraising. Religious charitable institutions generally rely upon two sources of funding: 1) donations collected from within the membership of the religious organization itself, and 2) funds contributed by the general public.

Since religious believers constitute only a fraction of the total Chinese population, religious groups depending solely on internal donations would lack sufficient funds to conduct charitable activities. Therefore, these organizations must also seek sources of funding in other sectors of society and from within the general population; this is the common practice of many religious organizations in other countries.

However, according to the specifications of the Department of Civil Affairs, only "public foundations registered by the civil affairs departments of the people's governments at or above the country level whose purpose is to provide disaster relief" are authorized to conduct fundraising activities.[10] Hence, unless a religious charitable enterprise is also a registered disaster relief foundation, it cannot collect donations. However, it is universally recognized that unless religious charitable enterprises can conduct public fundraising campaigns, they will be unable to obtain sufficient funding to conduct charitable activities.

In actuality, due to their religious background, religious charitable institutions are often viewed by society as possessing a greater degree of trustworthiness and moral influence than their secular counterparts and, thus, tend to gain the trust and support of donors more readily. Undoubtedly, this position of advantage will ultimately have a beneficial influence on the advancement of public welfare enterprises in society. However, if religious charitable institutions are unable to collect donations from the general public, not only is their position of superior trustworthiness with regard to the collection, management, and use of funds rendered meaningless but they are unable to conduct charitable activities due to lack of funds.

Furthermore, the issue of the fair treatment of donors arises when religious charitable institutions are only permitted to collect donations from members of their own organizations. After contributing to a government-approved charitable enterprise, donors are issued a receipt which may later be used for tax deduction purposes. However, unless religious charitable institutions are authorized to collect donations from the general public, they are unable to issue such receipts. Thus, donors are treated differently depending on the kind of charitable organization to which they are donating. In practice, this policy encourages all donors, including religious believers, to contribute to secular charitable

[10] The "Regulation on the Administration of Foundations" (《基金会管理条例》) was implemented in June 1, 2004.

institutions rather than religious charitable enterprises. How can such a policy be regarded as conducive to allowing religion to play an active role in the social services sector?

Therefore, if religion is to play an active role in the social services sector, the fundamental issues of whether or not religious charitable institutions should be permitted to conduct public fundraising campaigns, establish fundraising foundations, and issue donors receipts for tax deduction purposes must first be addressed.

B. *The Tax Exemption Status of Religious Charitable Institutions*

Apart from the donations of religious believers, religious groups rely on their own resources, including those generated by their own property and real estate holdings, as an important source of funding for charitable ventures. Here, the issue arises of how to treat the income earned by religious groups through the use of their own resources. As stipulated in China's *Religious Affairs Regulations*, "Religious groups and venues of religious activity shall implement state policies regarding financial management, accounting, and taxation and shall be granted tax exemptions and deductions in accordance with the relevant provisions of the state tax code." Ostensibly, this regulation accords religious groups and venues tax exemptions and deductions, but in actuality, this provision holds no practical meaning with respect to promoting the active participation of religions in social services. Since religious groups themselves are non-profit entities which provide religious services and do not engage in commercial activities, they are not subject to taxation and, thus, they do not, in fact, enjoy the privilege of tax exemption.

For religious groups that do not engage in commercial, profit-making activities, the issues of tax exemption and deduction are of no practical import. However, the religious charitable institutions established by these groups would benefit greatly from tax exemption. Religious charitable institutions engage in a variety of business activities, including profit-making and capital appreciation, in order to obtain the funds necessary to expand and improve their charitable ventures. Religious charitable institutions engaging in profit-making, commercial activities for institutional purposes should be subject to taxation in accordance with the state's taxation policies for profit-making entities; however, any portion of these earnings that is donated to charitable

enterprises should be exempt from taxation. In other words, in handling the revenue earned by religious charitable enterprises through profit-making ventures, state policy should be adjusted based on the use of these earnings. In order to encourage religious organizations to make better use of their resources to provide funding for social welfare enterprises, the state must grant religious charitable institutions tax exemption status. If it is discovered that religious charitable institutions are utilizing their revenue for purposes unrelated to charity, the state should revoke their tax exemption status and rescind their authorization to conduct charitable activities. This kind of preferential policy is directive in nature and accords with international conventions. Under the guidance of this policy, religious charitable institutions will undoubtedly use the entirety of their earnings (including donations) for charitable ventures.

C. *The Issue of Religious Property*

Religious properties constitute a significant portion of the economic resources of religious groups. Hence, the issue of whether or not religious groups should be permitted to use their own property as a source of financial support for their charitable enterprises is extremely important. According to China's *Religious Affairs Regulations*,

> Any land lawfully used by a religious group or venue of religious activity, or any building, structure, facility, or property, including income, lawfully-owned or used by a religious organization is protected under the law. No organization or individual may seize, plunder, partition, destroy, blockade, freeze, confiscate, or subject to fines the lawful assets of a religious organization or venue of religious activity; no organization or individual may damage or destroy cultural relics owned or used by a religious organization or venue of religious activity.

Article 77 of the *General Principles of the Civil Law of the People's Republic of China* (《民法通则》) stipulates that "The lawful property of social organizations, including religious organizations, shall be protected by law." However, to this day, there persist instances in which the rights to the ownership, usage, and operation of religious property have not, due to historical reasons, been conferred upon or returned to a religious group. Particularly challenging among these is the issue of returning property to its lawful owner.

Moreover, the recent upsurge in urban construction projects, old city renovations, and real estate development has only served to magnify these unresolved religious property issues as the encroachment of profiteering developers on religious properties has, in some regions, triggered group conflicts following the forceful demolition of religious structures. The ongoing failure to resolve the religious property issue has not only severely damaged the relationship between the state and religious believers, it has also prevented religious charitable institutions from recovering ownership and usage of their own resources and ultimately resulted in a shortage of funding for conducting charitable activities.

D. *Overseas Donations*

Contributions from overseas believers have always constituted an important source of funding for religious organizations, and overseas donations provide a significant source of support for the charitable enterprises that are overseen by these organizations. According to Article 29 of the *Regulations for the Registration and Administration of Social Organizations*,

> The contributions and financial support received by a social organization must be in compliance with the principles and scope of activity stipulated in the organization's charter, and the purpose, manner, and timeframe of use must accord with the donor's specifications. The receipt and usage of contributions and financial support by social organizations must be reported to the sponsor organization, and appropriate measures should be taken to disclose relevant information to the public.

Hence, it may be seen that the receipt of donations by religious organizations is rigorously controlled. Article 35 of the *Religious Affairs Regulations* stipulates that

> Religious organizations and venues of religious activity may, in accordance with relevant state regulations, accept donations from organizations and individuals, both domestic and international, for uses consistent with the purpose of the organization or venue.

However, in the practical implementation of this policy, religious regulatory agencies focus on the requirement that "religious organizations and affairs be free from the influence and control of foreign powers" and, thus, adopt a politically-guarded approach in dealing with overseas donations. Consequently, it has long been the practice

of governmental regulatory agencies to investigate the sources of foreign donations to uncover any attempted infiltration or interference by foreign religious groups, rendering the receipt of overseas donations by domestic religious organizations an extremely complicated and sensitive issue. This has, to a certain extent, limited the number of donations from ordinary religious believers overseas to religious organizations in China, weakening the ability of these organizations to play an active role in the social and economic development of the country.

IV. *The Issue of Oversight and Management*

A. *Internal Oversight and Management*

If religious organizations are to be permitted to conduct charitable activities, their internal oversight and management mechanisms must first be improved. In order to preclude the manipulation of religious charitable institutions by individuals within religious organizations and governmental agencies for personal gain, religious groups must establish sound management regulations, implement a system of strict financial and accounting practices, and accept the oversight of believers and donors. Religious charitable institutions must practice financial transparency and provide believers and donors with a clear account of the collection, maintenance, and use of donations. Such internal oversight and management are necessary to ensure that the charitable ventures of religious organizations are well-managed.

B. *Social Oversight and Supervision*

Since the very purpose of religious charitable enterprises is to provide social services, these institutions should also be subject to the strict financial oversight of relevant governmental agencies and should not fall outside the jurisdiction of governmental regulatory agencies or the local taxation and auditing departments. Furthermore, the media, in representing the interests of the people, should play a role in holding religious charitable institutions accountable to public opinion as well as in encouraging organizations and institutions engaged in charitable ventures to establish professional associations and practice independent oversight and management.

C. *Legal Oversight*

While the two aforementioned mechanisms of oversight play an important role in guaranteeing that the activities of religious charitable enterprises are transparent and well-managed, laws and regulations ultimately constitute the most critical mechanisms of oversight and supervision for religious groups, religious charitable institutions, and their charitable activities. The legal oversight and supervision of religious charitable institutions must be strengthened and improved in order to ensure the transparency and public disclosure of every donation and source of income and guarantee the establishment and healthy development of religious charitable enterprises. China has yet to formulate and implement specific laws to guide the activities of charitable organizations and religious organizations and, as a result, lacks the sound mechanism of accountability and strong legal foundation necessary for the development of religious charitable enterprises.

V. *Conclusion*

In this article, we have identified and analyzed the major issues that have influenced the participation of religion in the social services sector. These issues are primarily the result of the negative position that religion has held in Chinese society during the past several decades, which for some time, has prevented religious organizations from even entering the social services sector, much less conducting charitable and public welfare ventures or playing an active role in the country's economic and social development. Moreover, since the implementation of the Reform and Opening policy, China's religious policies have not been adjusted to keep pace with new social realities, despite marked conflicts between religion and state resulting from inappropriate policies and deficient institutional planning. The current, general consensus regarding the permissibility of religious participation in charitable enterprises indicates an imminent and dramatic shift in the relationship between the state and religious organizations and believers. The former conflicts between politics and religion, the discomfort of religious organizations in adjusting to their new roles within new societal conditions, and the inadequacies of existing laws, regulations, and policies concerning the activities of religious groups have become increasingly apparent.

From a historical perspective, the issues discussed in this article are those that arise in the process of social development and reform and are the inevitable outcome of the adjustment of the religion-state relationship. Hence, based on the principle of the rule of law, the state should hasten to formulate necessary legislation concerning charity and religion; develop and improve those aspects of the legal system that deal directly with religion and charity; accelerate the promulgation of the "Law on Religion" and "Charitable Enterprise Law" following their passage by the People's Congress; and improve corresponding laws and policies in order to create a set of practical mechanisms for safeguarding the active participation of religious groups in the social services sector. This new set of mechanisms will provide the legal framework for governmental regulatory agencies to conduct effective religious affairs management and religious charitable institutions to participate lawfully in charitable ventures, thereby resolving the fundamental issues hindering and influencing the active participation of religion in the social services sector.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

RELIGION AND ENVIRONMENTALISM IN CHINESE SOCIETIES

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I. *Introduction*

Some of the most serious issues that we will face in the coming decades concern the environment, including not only pollution and climate change but also the continuous, unsustainable depletion of both renewable and non-renewable resources. As has been widely noted, China's rapid economic development has contributed significantly to the problems of pollution and environmental degradation (Economy, 2004). While national governments will play a pivotal role in addressing these issues, the participation of non-governmental groups and environmental worldviews must also be considered. Thus, we are led to examine the relevance of religion to these challenges.

Do religions provide doctrines or perspectives that might improve a society's successful response to these issues? What (if any) is the impact of religious belief on attitudes concerning the environment and environmental protection? What role might religions play in the organization and promotion of environmental conservation efforts within Chinese culture regions?[1]

A number of religious leaders have been particularly vocal and visible in promoting awareness of environmental issues (see, for example, BBC News, 2009) and sponsoring environmental preservation efforts within their local communities. In some cases, secular, environmental organizations, such as the United Nations Environment Program and

[1] For the purpose of this paper, the term "Chinese culture regions" shall be used to refer to mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

the World Wildlife Fund, have actively sought the support of religious leaders and organizations in promoting their causes, while in other instances, religions leaders have themselves taken the initiative in promoting environmental conservation.

A comprehensive review of these activities over the past twenty years would be extensive (see Tucker and Grim [2001] for a summary), yet the authors believe that a quantitative analysis would reveal the growing involvement of religious leaders in environmental initiatives, particularly in promoting greater conservation of natural resources, reduction of environmentally-damaging practices, and attention to the notion of "environmental justice." While the pronouncements of some religious leaders have, at times, lacked a firm scientific foundation, their concern for environmental problems is noteworthy.

The growing public support of religious leaders for environmental issues has been a motivating factor in the increased interest of scholars of religion in the ecological relevance of and environmental themes within religions.

The rising perception of imminent environmental crisis as well as the increasing participation of religious figures in the discussion of these problems were among the influential factors prompting the organization of a series of conferences on "Religions and Ecology" in the late 1990's by the Harvard Divinity School's Center for the Study of World Religions, which "brought together over seven hundred international scholars of the world's religions as well as environmental activists and grassroots leaders" to review relevant themes in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Shinto, and indigenous religions (Tucker and Grim, 2001; see also: http://environment.harvard.edu/religion/).

A prevalent argument for the relevance of religion to environmental preservation efforts points to the insufficiency of scientific and rational analysis in dealing with issues that require the adjustment or revival of values. According to this viewpoint, religions may play a significant role in promoting the collective value shifts and new ethical paradigms necessary to confront these environmental challenges.

This argument has been used, for example, to justify the large-scale, scholarly investigation of the possible ecological implications of the doctrines of the world's major religions. This view was expressed by Mary Evelyn Tucker in the Harvard University Press series on "Religions of the World and Ecology." Sponsored by the Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions and co-edited by Tucker,

the series arguably constitutes the most comprehensive attempt to link religions to environmental and ecological issues and includes volumes on Buddhism (Tucker and Williams, 1997), Confucianism (Tucker and Berthrong, 1998), and Hinduism (Chapple and Tucker, 2000; see also Gosling, 2001). In the first of these volumes, Tucker observes that "while in the past, none of the religions of the world have had to face an environmental crisis such as we are now confronting, they remain key instruments in shaping attitudes toward nature" (Tucker and Williams, 1997: xvii). This argument for the relevance of religion to the solution of environmental issues also provided the premise for a special issue of *Dædalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* on the topic of "Religion and Ecology: Can the Climate Change?"

In the introduction to this special issue, Tucker acknowledges that if religion is to have a role in confronting global, environmental crises, it must take the form of a pan-religious movement carried out in collaboration with the secular fields of education, public policy, and the sciences. She, nonetheless, insists that religion must play a part in this collective response: "as key repositories of enduring civilizational values and as indispensable motivators in moral transformation, religions have an important role to play in projecting persuasive visions of a more sustainable future" (Tucker and Grim, 2001; see also Lerner, 2006:313, and Gottlieb, 2006: 9).[6]

All of the questions to which the scholarly contributors to the "Religion and Ecology" issue of *Dædalus* were asked to respond presupposed the existence of pro-environmental texts and themes within the particular religions on which the scholars were writing. In responding to one such question, for instance, the authors were asked to explicate "the core values from this tradition that can lead to the creation of an effective environmental ethic." Of course, it goes without saying that religious scholars have been conducting this kind of "directed-analysis" for millennia.

We may assume that religious leaders and scholars are tuned in to the debates and intellectual currents of their times (to the extent that their positions and capacities allow) and will, for various reasons, contribute their own voices to the public dialogue. Their views on these issues may derive from discussions taking place within their own social or peer networks or from their own intellectual pursuits, and their participation may be motivated by a desire to increase the relevance of their religious organizations or to gain attention and influence. It may also be true that there is mounting pressure, both

from inside and outside of religious organizations, for religious leaders to promote environmentalism. In any case, leaders of religious organizations, drawing upon their doctrinal knowledge or their positions of religious authority, may ground their public views in religious doctrine. To this end, religious leaders and scholars have little difficulty identifying texts, doctrines, or themes within their own religions that are relevant to or in support of a particular position. The more complex, multi-authored, and voluminous a religion's sacred canon, the more readily available are texts which may be adopted to support a specific stance on a given current issue. Given the complex, doctrinal resources of many religions, it is not difficult to "cherry-pick" or reinterpret texts to fulfill a particular purpose. Numerous examples of this practice exist.

Moreover, it is apparent that religious leaders may utilize religious texts and the interpretations thereof to increase the support among their followers for a particular political position or program. This is most effectively carried out within groups for which sacred texts are authoritative and are viewed as adding weight to any position or perspective. Once again, we return to the question of the relationship between religious worldviews and environmentalism.

II. *Surveys*

Extensive studies of environmental awareness and attitudes have been conducted overseas, and numerous variables have been considered in the analysis of environmental attitudes and beliefs, including religion, political affiliation, and political ideology. What does such survey data indicate about the relationship between religious affiliation or belief and environmental attitude?

In his influential essay "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," Lynn White (1967) argued that Christian scripture and doctrine endorse the "dominion" of man over nature and the notion that "nature has no reason for existence save to serve man", and that this view predisposed believers against environmental protection by condoning the exploitation of the natural environment for human benefit based on the concept that God is the preserver of the natural universe (ibid.: 1207). The results of a number of surveys appear to support this conclusion, at least among certain Christian groups.

An example is seen in the results of a study conducted by Janel Curry and Kathi Groenendyk (2006) of Christian seminary students training for the ministry in Michigan. Considerably different attitudes regarding environmentalism were found between the students of a fundamentalist seminary, who espoused an "individual rights" paradigm and stressed the utilitarian use of nature by humans (similar to what Riley Dunlap calls the "dominant social paradigm") and those attending two "reform" seminaries, who held a more communitarian perspective, i.e. that the rights of the individual may be subordinated to the interests of the community (known as the "community paradigm"). Uninterested in maintaining a balance in the relationship between humankind and nature, the former were, perhaps, influenced by religious doctrines which emphasized the afterlife and the notion that this life is merely a temporary sojourn. The results of this study are consistent with that of other research which indicates that fundamentalist Christians tend to display a substantially lower interest in the notion of the ecological balance between humans and nature than do religionists who hold politically liberal or communitarian worldviews (eg. Nooney, et al., 2003).

A cross-national comparison of Canada, Sweden, Norway, and the U.S. also suggested that environmental views differ significantly based on whether respondents identify themselves as "conservative individualists," "liberal collectivists," "materialistic individualists," or "postmaterialist collectivists" (Oloffson and Ohman, 2006). The survey findings revealed that "conservative individualists" (common in the U.S. sample) were consistently less disposed toward environmentalism than those with collectivist orientations, who in turn, associated themselves more strongly with environmental issues and placed greater faith in science. Based on these findings, it is evident that a Christian worldview can be compatible with both environmentalist and anti-environmentalist attitudes and beliefs. Some Christian groups, including the "ecotheology" movement, have even integrated ideas and themes on ecology and the natural sciences into their theology (Sideris, 2007).

The Pew Research Center has conducted regular surveys on the relationship between religious affiliation and environmental attitudes and beliefs. The most recent surveys, conducted in 2004, 2006, and 2008, suggest that the majority of religious adherents within most religious groups believe that "stricter environmental laws and regulations are worth the cost."

However, notable differences exist between individual religious groups. For instance, while support among most of the religious believers in the sample ranged from 52% to 69% (Pew, 2004), Latino and Black Protestants in the same sample were considerably less likely to support stricter environmental regulations (39% and 43%, respectively). The highest levels of support for such regulations in the 2004 survey existed among "modernist mainline Protestants" (66%), "modernist Catholics" (69%), and Jews (67%). The views of religious adherents within most of these groups changed very little between 1992 and 2004, and the percentage of atheists and agnostics espousing stricter laws was comparable to that of "modernist mainline Protestants" (66%).

The 2008 Pew survey was expanded to report the viewpoints of religious adherents outside of the Judeo-Christian tradition (Pew, 2008). Of those surveyed, the lowest levels of support for stricter environmental regulations existed among Mormons and the members of historically black churches and evangelical Protestant churches (with only 55%, 52%, and 54% of those surveyed expressing support); these groups also contained the highest proportion of respondents who opposed such regulations on the basis that they would "cost too many jobs." While a higher percentage of Catholics and mainline Protestants supported such regulations (60% and 64% respectively), the highest levels of support for stricter environmental regulations existed among Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and Jews (with 67%, 69%, 75%, and 77% of respondents respectively). The support of atheists and agnostics was comparable to that of the most environmentally-inclined religious groups (with the support of 75% and 78% respectively). (Pew, 2008a: 104).

The high-level of support among American Jews for environmental initiatives appears to be a relatively recent phenomenon. In his book *A Greener Faith*, Roger Gottlieb interviews Rabbi Arthur Waskow, a liberal Jewish activist who began promoting environmentalist discourse and activities in the 1980s. In their interview, Gottlieb raises the issue of growing Jewish support for environmentalism: "As a Jew myself, I know that environmentalism wasn't big in the Jewish community until recently. What kinds of responses did you get to your work?" Waskow's response offers some insight into the evolution of environmental attitudes among Jews:

> Well, first thing, they thought I was kind of a pagan! Then, as a general awareness of environmental stuff grew, they wanted to know, sincerely: 'Is the earth a Jewish issue?' The more liberal Jews—reconstructionist,

> reform, feminist—had no problem. But it's been a tough sell in the more traditional and conservative communities [i.e., precisely the Jewish groups who take the sacred texts most seriously] (Gottlieb, 2006: 200).

The overwhelming support for environmental regulations among surveyed American Jews is most likely the result of the high average levels of education and generally-liberal social perspectives within the group (which also leads more than 80% of American Jews to vote for the Democratic candidate in most presidential elections). Hence, it would seem that this tendency is not directly related to religious doctrines.

Some studies have sought to identify the effects of religion after controlling for the effects of other variable such as education. A number of these have supported Lynn White's hypothesis that conservative Christian groups generally adopt a "dominion over nature" worldview, which in turn, seems to correspond with diminished support for pro-environmentalist attitudes and beliefs (Hand and Van Liere, 1984 and Eckberg and Blocker, 1989). One study revealed a negative correlation between church attendance and acceptance of the "New Ecological Paradigm, or NEP scale, developed by R. E. Dunlap and Kent D. Van Liere (1978), a model which reflects "the need to preserve the balance of nature, the belief that growth should be limited in order to sustain the environment, and the notion that humans are part of rather than rulers of, nature" (Kanagy, et al. 1993: 676).

Andrew Greeley (1993) found that atheists, agnostics, and those who viewed the Bible as a "book of fables" were more likely to support environmental spending than theists and those who regarded the Bible as the "Word of God." However, the fact that the former were also younger, better educated, and more politically liberal may account for some of the variance.

Some study results suggest that religious participation may be linked to some degree of pro-environmental behavior, even after controlling for religious and environmental beliefs (Kanagy, et al., 1993; Wolkomir, et al., 1997). These findings indicate that religious participants may be more inclined toward displays of altruistic behavior and voluntary participation in social causes, which may include support for environmental initiatives. This tendency may exclude certain kinds of religious adherents, such as those who believe that all aspects of the natural world are ultimately controlled by God for the benefit of humans (Curry and Groenendyk, 2006), or those who feel that environmental catastrophes are orchestrated by the gods to chastise humans (a view

that has been promoted in a number of societies during and in the wake of natural disasters) (e.g. Lang and Ragvald, 1998; Lang and Wee, 2005).

III. *Surveys in China*

The potential impact of religious ideologies on environmentalism within Chinese societies depends, of course, on the level of religiosity in these societies. In areas where religious adherence is widespread, the possible influence is considerable. In areas of low religiosity, however, secular ideologies and worldviews are likely to be the main factors promoting environmentalist attitudes.

Data collected by the World Values Survey suggest that during the 1990s, China was one of the least religious societies in the world. At the time of the 1990 and 1995 surveys, China appeared at the extreme low end of a scale comparing the "importance of religion" and self-reported religious participation in countries around the globe (Norris and Inglehart, 2004: 224). Yet, statistics indicate that religious participation in China has grown since the 1980s as, presumably, have religious belief and affiliation. Furthermore, it is likely that the trend toward increased religious participation and affiliation will continue, despite the various constraints and "religious market distortions" produced by state regulations and restrictions (F. Yang, 2005, 2006).

However, survey results indicate that only a small percentage of the Chinese population profess affiliation with one of the world religions. The results of surveys on religious affiliation commissioned by the Pew Research Center in select Chinese cities and their surrounding districts in 2005, 2006, and 2007 are displayed below. Table 1 depicts the results of the 2006 survey question "How important is religion in your life?"

Table 1: "How important is religion in your life?" Mainland China, 2006

Very important	12%
Somewhat important	19%
Not too important	44%
Not at all important	11%
Don't know	13%
Refused to answer	1%
Total	100%

Source: Pew, 2008b.

The data show that 31% of respondents considered religion "very" or "somewhat" important, while 44% of those surveyed, viewed religion as neither particularly important nor altogether unimportant. The responses of participants of the 2005, 2006, and 2007 surveys to the question "what is your religious faith?" indicated a much lower rate of religious affiliation: only 14–18% of respondents identified themselves with any one of the major world religions. Table 2 includes the results from the Pew surveys conducted in mainland China alongside partially-comparable data from surveys carried out in Hong Kong (1988, 1995) and Taiwan (2001).

Table 2: "What is your religious faith or affiliation?" Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan

	Mainland China			Hong Kong		Taiwan
	2005 %	2006 %	2007 %	1988 %	1995 %	2001 %
Total "Believers"	16	18	14	41.7	39.8	79.0
Buddhist	11	16	12	6.6	11.6	16.0
Folk Religion	N.I.*	N.I.	N.I.	23.0	15.3	46.7
Protestant	2	1	1	7.2	8.4	4.8
Catholic	2	<1	1	4.9	4.5	1.5
Muslim	1	1	<1	<1	<1	0.3
Daoist	<1	<1	<1	N.I.	N.I.	8.1
No religion	77	77	81	58.3	60.2	20.9
Refused/D.K./Other	7	7	5	—	—	.2
Total: %	100	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	(2,191)	(2,180)	(4,104)	(1,644)	(2,275)	(2052)

Source: mainland China: Pew, 2008b; Taiwan: Institute of Sociology, Sinica Taiwan; Hong Kong: Cheng and Wong, 1997.
Note: "N.I."= "No Information"—category not included in the questionnaire.

According to the data presented in Table 2, Mainland China appears to have the lowest rate of religiosity and Taiwan the highest, with religious affiliation in Hong Kong falling between that of mainland China and Taiwan. However, a higher proportion of "refused" or "don't know" responses were included in the mainland China surveys than in the Taiwan survey (5–7% in mainland China versus 0.2% in Taiwan), and we might surmise that a portion of mainland respondents were unwilling to acknowledge their religious affiliation to the interviewers.

It is notable that the proportion of self-identified Buddhists is roughly comparable in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan (11–16%). The biggest differences in religious adherence among these three Chinese culture regions are seen in the categories of "folk religion" (not included in the mainland China surveys; 15.3% in Hong Kong; 46.7% in Taiwan), and Christianity (about 2% in mainland China; 6% in Taiwan; and 13% in Hong Kong). The divergent political histories of Taiwan and Hong Kong help to explain the latter's higher percentage of professed Christians.

The proportion of respondents who selected "no religion" varied considerably within these three societies, with 77–81%, 60%, and 21% of participants professing no religious affiliation in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, respectively. However, in the case of Hong Kong, we know that the selection of "no religion" does not signify a complete absence of religious belief: 43.5% of "no religion" respondents indicated that they had "worshipped at Chinese temples," and 74.5% of these participants believed in the existence of some kind of supernatural "retribution." Hence, in Hong Kong, "no religion" simply means that the respondent does not claim affiliation with or adherence to a particular religious label. It is likely that this is also true of some of the 77–81% of the "no religion" respondents of mainland China. Although the "folk religion" category (拜神, or "worship gods") was not included in the mainland China questionnaire, Hong Kong surveys indicate that, if offered as an option for religious identification, this response is selected by a substantial proportion of participants.

It is, at present, difficult to estimate the impact of religion on attitudes toward the environment in mainland China. If religious affiliation does, in fact, have an influence, it could be substantial given the 31% of respondents who acknowledge that religion has at least "some importance" in their lives. While the influence of the major world religions (Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, etc.) may only extend to about 15% of the population, with the professed adherents of Daoism (a religion more thoroughly Chinese in origins) constituting less than 1% of mainland Chinese respondents, a significant portion of the population may, as in Hong Kong, participate in folk religious practices and ritual worship. To what extent (if any) do these religions influence environmental attitudes and practices? The authors are aware of only one study, conducted in Taiwan, which may serve as a basis for investigating the potential relationship between religions and environmentalist attitudes in Chinese societies.

A 2001, island-wide survey of social problems conducted by the Institute of Sociology, in Sinica, Taiwan, included several "environmental" items, such as recycling, the use of plastic bags, etc. Responses to the question "Are you willing to buy more expensive environment-friendly products to improve the quality of the environment?" are presented in the following table according to religious affiliation.

Table 3: "Willing to buy more expensive environment-friendly products to improve… the environment." By religion: Taiwan, 2001

	Strongly Unwilling or Unwilling		Strongly Willing or Willing		Total	
	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)
Buddhism	18	(58)	82	(267)	100	(325)
Daoism	16	(27)	84	(139)	100	(166)
Folk Religion	25	(241)	75	(707)	100	(948)
Yiguandao[2]	23	(7)	77	(23)	100	(30)
Islam	33	(2)	67	(4)	100	(6)
Catholicism	10	(3)	90	(28)	100	(31)
Protestantism	22	(21)	78	(75)	100	(96)
No religion	19	(80)	81	(345)	100	(425)
Total	22	(439)	78	(1588)	100	(2027)

Source: Institute of Sociology, Sinica Taiwan (http://www.ios.sinica.edu.tw/sc/cht/scDownload2.php)
Not included: '*Don't Know*," '*Don't Understand*," "*No Answer*," and missing.

As evinced by the above survey findings, responses varied, to a certain extent, with religious affiliation or identification. Most striking, however, is the fact that the overwhelming majority of respondents in each of the belief categories were willing to pay more for environmentally-friendly products. The differences are much less pronounced than those that exist between the American adherents of various religions on certain environmental questions (Pew, 2008a). One possible explanation for this is that as a result of the comparatively smaller

[2] A popular sect founded by Zhang Tianran in the 1920s, Yiguandao (一贯道, or Way of Unity) spread rapidly across the Mainland during the Republic period. Its ties to the Japanese forces during the Japanese occupation of China became a source of contention with both the Communist and Nationalist parties, and it was effectively eliminated on the Mainland shortly after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Resurfacing in Taiwan, Yiguandao was not officially recognized on the island until 1987.

size of Taiwanese society, local environmental concerns are so widely discussed that a near-consensus has emerged among all belief groups regarding environmental issues.

Unfortunately, we have almost no comparable data for mainland China. Hence, it is unclear whether this kind of consensus also exists across belief groups, including those with no religious affiliation, on the Mainland. A 2007 survey of a sample of approximately 7,000 persons conducted by the Horizon Research Consultancy Group included only one environment-related item: "What do you think of environmental issues such as pollution?"[3] The survey findings suggest that almost no difference existed between the adherents of Buddhism and Protestantism and those who professed no religious affiliation, with around 9–10% of respondents in each category indicating that such issues were "not at all important," and 24–29% claiming that such issues are "very important." (The numbers of Confucian, Daoist, Muslim, and Catholic respondents were too small to allow for a meaningful comparison).

A further analysis of the Horizon survey data (Li, 2010 forthcoming) indicates that while self-proclaimed religious affiliation does not appear to impact participants' awareness of environmental pollution, some correlation does exist between religious ideas and views on pollution. Specifically, those who believe in "one God" (versus many gods), an "afterlife," and "fate" are more inclined to consider pollution a serious issue than are those who "worship ancestors." However, the data indicate that level of education is more closely correlated with awareness of pollution than are any religious variables, i.e. respondents with a higher degree of education were significantly more likely to view pollution as a serious problem than were those with lower levels of education. Although the Horizon survey offers some useful information, a more extensive survey using a broader measure of environmentalist attitudes, such as the New Ecological Paradigm scale, would provide a greater opportunity to explore potential differences between religious groups and compare the viewpoints of believers and non-believers than does the single, pollution-related item in the Horizon survey. Until such data are available, we must rely instead on qualitative accounts, focusing on the environmental activities of religious groups and leaders, supplemented by investigations of the potential influence of the doctrines promoted by these leaders.

[3] Respondents were asked to select from "very important," "somewhat important," "somewhat unimportant," and "not at all important".

IV. *The Impact of Religious Doctrines and Leaders in Chinese Societies*

While it would appear that, in certain instances, religious doctrines and leaders play a role in environmental endeavors, we cannot assume that these activities have a significant impact on the views of believers or on the implementation of policies. Examples of the environmental activities of religious leaders in mainland China include the Shangri-La Sustainable Community Initiative, or SSCI, in northwest Yunnan Province, where Buddhist monks have been assigned to protect and maintain the facilities of the surrounding sacred mountains and have become involved in the larger conservation efforts in the area. One monk, designated a "living Buddha," has participated in promoting conservation endeavors in local villages, and materials on the connection between Buddhism and conservation have been compiled and distributed throughout the surrounding villages. One such publication, a book entitled "An Ecological View of Tibetan Buddhism," has evidently been used in university courses (Frescatta, 2008/9:29). Yet these efforts, initiated and promoted by the World Wildlife Fund,[4] appear to constitute only a small fraction of the environmental educational projects being conducted in the area. It would seem that little initiative has been taken by the monks themselves independent of the activities organized by such secular organizations as WWF, although if such efforts have occurred, they deserve some attention.

A. *The Role of Daoism*

It would appear that Daoist doctrines and themes might provide a considerable resource for the promotion of environmental discourse and values (Snyder, 2006; Nixon, 2006). However, the scholarly literature on this topic is quite complex, and the alleged relationship between Daoism and the preservation of ecological balance is contentious and by no means provides clear advocacy or themes. For instance, the meaning of the fundamental Daoist concept of *Wu-wei* (无为), sometimes translated as passive non-action, is itself a topic of contention and interpretation, lacking clear implications for the use of

[4] The WWF has established educational centers on ecological protection and conservation at a number of monasteries and has also cultivated joint, environmental activities with religious groups in other countries.

natural resources by human beings (if nature and humans can even be distinguished).

In China, Daoists may be understood as the seekers, professional practitioners, and purveyors of quasi-magical services (including in the past the quest for immortality through the cultivation and utilization of exotic substances), competing to varying degrees with other purveyors of religious services (D.R. Yang, 2005). Seldom interested in abstract themes, the purveyors of Daoists services both inside and outside of temples tend to focus on prolonging life and improving health (both their own and that of their clients). Within Asian societies, the worship of deities at Daoist and folk-religion temples is typically directed toward the attainment of certain benefits for an individual or family (e.g. Lang and Ragvald, 1993: 73–126). Although many aspects of rural, folk religious practice in China, such as the *jiao* (醮) festivals in rural Hong Kong, include a broader scope of obtainable benefits, the results are generally viewed as confined to a particular collection of villages. A number of Daoists have addressed environmental themes after gaining an awareness of these issues through the media or educational institutions. However, many Daoist leaders appear to have no interest in environmental topics, preferring instead to focus on providing services for paying clients, their families, and their businesses.

Environmental themes have not, however, been entirely excluded from Daoist temples. For instance, a number of environmentally-inclined Daoists have joined an environmental initiative at the Taibaishan Tiejia Daoist Ecology Temple in Shaanxi Province. The first workshop, held in July of 2006, included ten participants and produced the Qinling Declaration:

> Harmony between Heaven, Earth, and Humanity is the crucial guarantee for the sustainability of human activities on earth. It is the highest aim of Daoists. With the environmental crisis getting worse day by day, we have a duty to rethink the role of Daoism in China, and to consider how we can make a better contribution to the environment today. All the attendants of the first workshop on Daoism and Conservation have reached an agreement to set up a Daoist Temple Alliance on Ecology Education.[5]

[5] For the text of the declaration in Chinese, see: http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/The%20Qinling%20Declaration%20–%20chinese%20and%20english.PDF (retrieved from the Web, 29/8/2010).

The proposed plan of action included the commitment to introduce ecological education into temple programs and construction practices, reduce pollution from incense burners and fireworks, protect local species and support sustainable forestry, use energy-saving technologies in temples, and protect nearby water resources. Convened in June of 2007, the second workshop attracted additional attendees, including fifteen monks and three nuns from the 18 temples which had signed the Declaration as well as government officials from the Bureau of Religious Affairs and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. During this workshop, Laozi (老子) was adopted as the "Daoist God of Ecological Protection," and it was agreed that this notion should be promoted to other temples. Attendees reported on specific areas of progress such as the installation of solar panels, the practice of water recycling and sewage treatment, the use of eco-friendly incense, etc. Finally, a "temple audit" was developed for use by temple managers to rate their own progress (e.g. "Ecology Education: Are there indicators of ecological guidance? Are there any educational posters?").

It would appear that this series of noteworthy, practical and thematic innovations were primarily promoted and sponsored by external officials, intellectuals, and organizations rather than initiated by the temple leaders themselves. While a limited number of Daoists have developed environmental themes in their work, we cannot yet conclude that any substantial movement toward broader ecological awareness and regional or national environmental conservation exists among Daoist practitioners.

In China, the state itself is likely to be concerned only with the cultivation of secular environmental perspectives, as evidenced in the calls of Pan Yue, former Deputy Director of the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA), for the promotion of environmental ethics and a new form of civilization beyond mere technical solutions to environmental problems.

As in the aforementioned case, a number of officials and a limited number of Daoist practitioners have, in keeping with the policy currents of the times, cautiously and modestly adopted environmental actions and themes. It is, of course, quite common for officials to seek out opportunities to incorporate religious organizations into campaigns that accord with current policy priorities. Yet, we cannot, based on the limited activities of these religious organizations, automatically assume that the practice of Daoism in China has provided much independent impetus for environmentalist efforts, beyond

modest calls for conservation, applied first and foremost to the temple's own use of resources.

B. *The Role of Buddhism*

Taiwan offers several interesting examples of the role played by Buddhism in promoting environmental conservation within Chinese communities. A number of environmental movements have become quite active in Taiwan since the 1970s, particularly those protesting the pollution produced by economic development. While several local temples have become involved in these efforts, these initiatives may merely constitute what have been deemed by environmental sociologists as the NIMBY ("not in my backyard") responses of self-serving or local community-serving religions, i.e. local opposition to local pollution (Weller and Bol, 1998: 334; Weller, 2006).

In response to growing environmental movements and protests, the Taiwanese government established an Environmental Protection Department in 1987. Since the 1980s, numerous, island-wide environmental NGOs have emerged, and several Buddhist groups began to participate in these movements in the late 1980s. There are, at present, a number of Buddhist organizations in Taiwan that are quite active in environmental protection initiatives. Their work includes utilizing traditional Buddhist ideas and theories to legitimate environmental protection, developing new theories to support environmental protection, reforming certain traditional rituals that have proven to be ecologically-unsound, and undertaking voluntary activities to promote environmental protection.

In all of these cases, environmental conservation initiatives were initially promoted by secular organizations. As the salience and public awareness of these issues has increased, however, Buddhist groups have begun to contribute both practically and ideologically to the conservation efforts. In demonstrating the relevance of Buddhism to environmentalism, Buddhist organizations have emphasized Buddhism's long tradition of treasuring all constituents of the natural world, including animals. Some have, for example, pointed to the notions of "cherishing blessings" (惜福) and "merits" (功德) as particularly useful in coping with environmental problems.

In Buddhism, "merit" is akin to spiritual currency, which allows an individual to transcend the circle of birth and rebirth. Since Chinese Buddhists attach great importance to merit, Buddhist theorists have

used the concept of accumulating merit to promote environmental protection. For instance, in order to reduce the use of plastic bags, the Dharma Drum Mountain (法鼓山) encourages people to use reusable shopping bag which display the slogan "using one less plastic bag accumulates one more merit." Similarly, the Tzu Chi Foundation (慈济基金会)[6] stresses that "picking up a piece of trash is equal to accumulating a merit."

The notion of "treasuring blessings" is also used by Buddhists in the rejection of consumerism. According to this concept, the enjoyment of natural resources is a "blessing." However, these blessings are limited and should be treasured rather than wasted. In order to accumulate greater blessings, people must refrain from wasting and depleting resources. In practice, this requires that people produce as little trash as possible, reuse materials to the greatest possible extent, and recycle waste. In this way, greater blessings are reserved for the future.

Buddhist organizations have also developed new theories to link their missionary work to environmental protection. One of the most influential Buddhist groups in Taiwan, the Dharma Drum Mountain, is renowned for its environmental protection efforts. Founder Master Sheng Yen (聖嚴) has expanded the scope of environmental protection with the proposal of four forms of environmentalism: protection of the spiritual environment (心灵环保), protection of the natural environment (自然环保), protection of the living environment (生活环保) and protection of the social environment (礼仪环保). According to Master Sheng, successful environmental protection must be based on an acceptance of this model and the rejection of consumerism. The first of the four forms of environmentalism, the protection of the spiritual environment, is necessary to cultivate the consciousness of environmental protection. While the term itself is newly created, the notion of the protection of the spiritual environment is rooted in Buddhist sutras. According to the Vimalakirti Sutra, "bodhisattva wants to get pure land so he first purifies mind (心), when mind is purified, the Buddhist land is purified." The mission of the Dharma Drum Mountain is "to uplift the character of humanity and build a pure land on earth." To this end, it is committed to promoting the purification of the mind. The notion of protecting the spiritual environment is, today,

[6] One of the three largest Buddhist organizations in Taiwan, the Tzu Chi Foundation is a community service and aid foundation with over 10 million members.

extremely popular in both Taiwan and mainland China. It identifies recurring natural disasters as stemming from "polluted" spirituality and promotes the improvement of the natural environment through the purification of the mind and the elimination of mass consumerism. The ideological basis of the Dharma Drum Mountain may be seen in the following quote from the group's website: "our wants are many; our needs are few; pursue only what you can and should acquire; never pursue what you cannot and should not acquire." Hence, it is seen that in order to purify the natural environment, we must voluntarily relinquish some of the "benefits" of consumer society. In this way, we nurture blessings.

A number of Buddhist organizations have taken practical steps to reform traditional rituals that have a negative impact on the natural environment. Foremost among these is the burning of paper money, a practice which numerous Buddhist groups have, in recent years, forsaken altogether. From the late 1980s, the Dharma Drum Mountain began to use flowers instead of paper money in their rituals. Volunteers of the Tzu Chi Foundation have conducted community outreach activities to dissuade adherents from burning paper money during what is known in China as the "ghost month," or the month of July on the lunar calendar.

Master Sheng Yen of the Dharma Drum Mountain has also worked to reform the tradition of "mercy releases" (放生), or the freeing of captive animals. He notes that this practice is ultimately damaging to the environment, for when creatures raised in captivity, such as fish and birds, are released into the wild, they often do not survive. According to Master Sheng, "in celebrating Buddha's birthday, many temples perform the ritual of freeing captive animals. Businessmen will capture birds and sell them to Buddhist believers who will then free them. This practice does not free animals but kills them. According to experts, only thirty out of one hundred captured birds will survive after they are returned to nature."

Many Taiwanese Buddhist groups are actively involved in environmental conservation. As the biggest civic organization in Taiwan, the Tzu Chi Foundation began to participate in environmental protection activities in 1990. By 2005, Tzu Chi had more than 44,700 registered volunteers working to promote environmental preservation in their communities, picking up and sorting trash, and collecting recyclables. These volunteers have "collected and sold recyclable materials worth over NT$160 million [US$6 million] since 1990" and recycled a

quantity of paper "equal to 360,000 twenty-year-old trees." Of course, it goes without saying that the interests and character of the leaders of these initiatives is critical to their success, and organizations such as Tzu Chi have been strongly influenced by their charismatic founder-leaders (Laliberté, 2004). Having observed the public acclaim received by groups such as Tzu Chi as a result of the initiatives promoted by their leaders, other Buddhist organizations may attempt to follow in the footsteps of these innovators.

These Taiwanese examples lead us to question whether Buddhist organizations in mainland China might play the same kind of role in promoting environmental activism as their Taiwanese counterparts. Moreover, to what extent does Buddhism serve as a useful resource as both governmental and non-governmental organizations attempt to cultivate public awareness of and mobilize public commitment to environmental and natural resource conservation efforts? Based on the Taiwan examples, it appears that Buddhist organizations can be effective and constructive in two ways: first, they can motivate and mobilize large numbers of followers to take environment-conserving actions and participate in environmental preservation campaigns; second, they can employ Buddhist concepts to provide religious motivation for taking part in environmental conservation initiatives. These Buddhist concepts require interpretation in order to extract their alleged environmental applications (which may not be immediately evident in the traditional uses of these concepts), but they seem, nevertheless, useful in providing believers with a religious basis for environmental behavior, in addition to the secular justifications provided by environmental NGOs. Thus, it is evident that Buddhist concepts and themes may be adapted to support environmental and ecological perspectives; indeed, such adaptations have characterized certain forms of Buddhist belief and practice in the U.S. (Johnston, 2006).

C. *The Role of Confucianism*

It has been suggested that Confucianism may contain certain themes relevant to environmental conservation, such as "its respect for the vast continuity of life, its sense of compassion for suffering, [and] its desire to establish the grounds for just and sustainable societies" (Tucker and Berthrong 1999: xxxv). However, there is little evidence that Confucianism has, in previous centuries, developed "ecologically sound environmental attitudes, policies, or practice," despite potentially useful

themes such as "cosmic resonance" and the interconnected trinity of heaven, earth, and humans (Weller and Bol 1998: 336).

A revitalization of Confucian thought has taken place in Mainland China since the late 1990's. Having, like many other intellectuals, realized the significance of the environmental crisis, a number of Confucian activists have attempted to establish a connection between Confucianism and the solutions to these problems. Some scholars have found it necessary to denounce the past application of Confucian principles in support of political and economic instrumentality toward the end of economic growth and have, instead, revived (or constructed) an older Confucianist perspective conducive to and promotive of greater ecological harmony with the natural world. Tu Weiming, for example, writes:

> An ecological focus is a necessary corrective to the modernist discourse that has reduced the Confucian worldview to a limited and limiting secular humanism. Confucianism, appropriated by the modernist mindset, has been misused as a justification for authoritarian polity. Only by fully incorporating the religious and naturalist dimensions into New Confucianism can the Confucian worldview avoid the danger of legitimating social engineering, instrumental rationality, linear progression, economic development, and technocratic management at the expense of a holistic, anthropocosmic vision. Indeed, the best way for the Confucians to attain the new is to reanimate the old, so that the digression to secular humanism, under the influence of the modern West, is not a permanent diversion. (Tu, 2001)

Further separating Confucianism from "secular humanism," Tu argues the necessity of a Confucian dimension to the environmental discourse:

> The possibility of a sound environmental ethic depends heavily on the ability of Chinese intellectuals to transcend a narrow nationalism informed by secular humanism.... When [they] begin to appreciate the profound religious implications of the ecological turn and the importance of retrieving and reappropriating indigenous [i.e., 'Confucian'] spiritual resources to develop an environmental ethic, they will be ready to take part in a dialogue among civilizations concerning religion and ecology. (Tu, 2001)

Here, Tu appears to be adapting or reinterpreting Confucian concepts in support of environmentalism, an approach similar to that taken by Christian and Jewish environmentalists within their own religious traditions.

Arguably the most active Confucian intellectual, Jiang Qing has claimed that Confucianism is helpful in developing the principles of a "deep ecology" (深度生态学), without which the present, ecological

discourse, rooted in science and technology, is merely superficial. However, he does not offer a detailed explanation of this allegedly-Confucianist "deep ecology."

A number of intellectuals, equally enthusiastic about the revival of Confucianism, have established institutes for the study of traditional culture, particularly the Confucian classics. At least twenty-three "private Confucian schools" (儒家书院) may be accessed on the internet. One such institute, Mingde Shuyuan, explicitly identifies environmental education as one of its missions. However, the majority of these newly-established Confucianist schools are not concerned with environmental protection. Still in its nascent stages of development, the Confucian revival movement is not, at present, well organized. Hence, as far as the authors can tell, elite Confucianism has had little impact on environmental policies in contemporary China.

D. *The Role of Folk Religion and Sectarian Groups*

Adherents of folk religions are also beginning to take part in environmental protection initiatives at the grassroots level. Heilongdawang Temple (Temple of the Black Dragon King), in Yulin County, Shanxi Province, is renowned for both the efficacy of its deity and its attention to environmental protection. Despite its long history, the temple was destroyed in the 1960's only to be later rebuilt in 1980. Since 1988, the temple managers have used a portion of the large quantity of donations received from pilgrims each year to plant trees. By 1999, the temple had planted a forest covering more than 1,300 *mu* (亩)[7] of local land, attracting global attention (Chau, 2005). Thus, it appears that the resources and organizations associated with certain local temples have begun to play significant roles in protecting the local environment. Of course, the planting of trees has been endorsed by the national afforestation campaign since the 1950s (Lang, 2002), and so it may be said that these temples are simply promoting well-established national policies.

In Taiwan, local temples not only contribute large sums of money to boycott the construction of pollution-producing factories but also employ "spirit writings" (扶乩)[8] to denounce "the offending factories

[7] A *mu* is a traditional Chinese unit of measure equivalent to .0165 acres.

[8] "Spirit writing" is a form of revelation in which the deity controls a stick, or a basket with a pointer attached, held by one or two devotees, and the stick or basket

as threats to the long-term welfare of the local areas the gods control" (Weller and Bol 1999: 334). Yiguandao, a sect regarded by some adherents as an offshoot of Confucianism, has also generated "spirit writings" to emphasize environmental protection.

The "101 Revelations of Patriarch Zhang," the most popular Yiguandao "spirit writing" produced in the late 1990s, contains three revelations related to environmental issues: Revelation 11 states that while missionary work is important, charitable activities and environmental protection are also vital, and Revelation 87 requires adherents to invest money to protect the environment rather than build grand temples. Revelation 88 focuses solely on the importance of environmental issues:

> Now the earth is badly destroyed. Without careful repair and protection, this beautiful planet will wither away and die. All gods are worried about this problem. Disciples, in addition to protecting the spiritual environment, you must help and participate in environment movements.

Today, environmental protection and charitable activities have become an important means for religious organizations to gain public support and attract resources, and thus, many religious groups, including Yiguandao, have become increasingly active in environment protection.

V. *Conclusions*

With the growing social prioritization of environmental issues, religious organizations, leaders, and adherents have begun to take part in environmental advocacy and activism. However, rather than being driven by doctrines, this participation tends to follow from and be motivated by the attention, discourse, and activism taking place among secular environmental movements (and as covered by the media). Only after these movements were well-established in Taiwan did religious groups begin to take part in environmental conservation projects. It seems likely that we will, in due course, observe a similar sequence of events in mainland China.

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inscribes Chinese characters on a tray or table, thus transmitting messages from the deity. The messages are copied, and studied later. Lang and Ragvald (1998) describe this practice and its uses in the development of a Chinese worship-group.

At the same time, it is apparent that some religious leaders have taken up this mission earlier and more proactively than others. While some well-organized religions (e.g. Buddhist organizations in Taiwan) have proven to be quite effective in mobilizing members and resources to engage in environmentalist activities, the representatives of other religions or ideologies (e.g. Confucianism, Daoism) have been more passive and unengaged. Thus, we may say without a doubt that religious leaders have made some contribution to environmentalist awareness and activism.

From a strictly ideological standpoint, survey findings and qualitative studies suggest that the best partners for environmental activism are likely to be religions or ideologies that are compatible with a "collectivist, this-worldly naturalism," i.e. those for which: the sciences provide a valid view of the operation of nature, gods do not actively manage nature on behalf of humans, life on earth is the most important focus of human effort and striving, and humans must collaborate to achieve a balanced integration with the natural world. Such notions are generally espoused by religious organizations whose adherents possess a relatively-high degree of education, and thus, the greater propensity of these groups toward environmental activism may, to a certain extent, be the result of higher educational levels rather than a direct consequence of religious doctrine. These organizations and their adherents tend to be "liberal" in the sense that they do not dogmatically prioritize ancient religious texts, but instead mix religious themes with "modern" ideas and issues. This may account for the greater contribution of Jews, liberal Protestants, and perhaps, even Buddhists in the U.S. to environmental initiatives.

It would appear that religions or ideologies less compatible with, or conducive to, environmentalism tend to be those which focus on the afterlife (discounting the importance of the world in which we live), prioritize individual benefits (ignoring the need to make certain sacrifices for the collective wellbeing of the present world), hold that God has provided the natural world for human use and manages nature to profit or punish humans according to their obedience to religious requirements, and are skeptical of or hostile toward those scientific findings regarding the natural world which appear to conflict with religious doctrines. This may, to some extent, explain the lower level of environmental awareness and support within fundamentalist or conservative religious groups in the U.S. However, political influences may also play a role in the anti-environmentalist attitudes of some

fundamentalist Christian organizations in the U.S., since these groups tend to be more closely aligned with the Republican Party, which for a variety of reasons, is typically far less willing to support environmental initiatives and regulations than the Democratic Party (Dunlap, 2008b). Due to the influence of these and other factors, we cannot automatically conclude that the lower level of environmentalism among these groups derives directly from religious doctrines.

It must also be noted that the espousal by religious leaders and their followers of religious asceticism, the rejection of consumption and wealth as the principal goals of human striving, and religious notions which accord special status to other life forms (independent of their human uses) may contribute somewhat to the cultivation of these so-called environmentalist attitudes. Such themes may be (and, in the past, periodically have been) emphasized within the traditional religions of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism in mobilizing support for environmentalist perspectives within Asian and, more specifically, Chinese societies. Certain environmentalist religious leaders, as well as a number of similarly-inclined religious studies scholars, are clearly prepared to excavate, reinterpret, and deploy religio-cultural resources in support of such interpretations. While much less evident in mainland China than in Taiwan, a number of religious organizations and religious studies scholars on the Mainland have also worked to link religious doctrinal themes to environmentalist activism, and have collaborated with secular organizations on environmentalist projects.

In the authors' views, a qualitative and quantitative study of the full spectrum of religious and secular belief within Chinese culture regions would be of great value in assessing environmental awareness and concerns within these societies as well as the relationship of these concerns to various religious and secular ideologies. While it is clear that religion plays a much less salient role in mainland China than in Taiwan, further surveys and qualitative research are necessary to distinguish the influence of religious ideologies and leaders from those of secular leaders and worldviews. Additional studies should also examine the use of various ideological resources by secular and religious leaders and officials at the local level in their collaborative efforts to promote environmental perspectives. It may even be possible that, despite religious or ideological differences, a degree of environmental consensus is emerging among certain, local, mainland Chinese populations, as it has in Taiwan. Such a development would, indeed, be remarkable.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

SECULAR STATE AND RELIGIOUS SOCIETY IN MAINLAND CHINA AND TAIWAN

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Charles Taylor distinguishes three meanings of secularism as it relates to the "North Atlantic societies" of Western Europe and North America.[1] The first of these is political. In this sense, secularism refers to political arrangements that maintain the neutrality of the state with regard to religious belief. The legitimacy of the government is not dependent on religious belief, and the government does not privilege any particular religious community (or any community of non-believers). The second meaning of secularism can be termed sociological. It refers to a widespread decline of religious belief and practice among ordinary people. The third meaning is cultural and refers to a change in the conditions of belief, "a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace."[2] In the North Atlantic world, all governments are (for all practical purposes) secular in the first sense, Western Europe (but not the United States) is secular in the second sense, and all societies (including the United States) are secular in the third sense. Taylor recounts the development and mutual influence of these three modes of secularism throughout the course of Western history. He is especially concerned with the third mode, the development of secular conditions of belief.

To what extent might this same intellectual framework be applicable outside of the North Atlantic world, particularly to Asian societies? In this paper, these three modes of secularism will be applied to the modern societies of the People's Republic of China and Taiwan. The author will argue that this framework is useful for deciphering many

[1] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), Introduction, pp. 1–22.
[2] Ibid., 3.

of the contemporary developments in both of these parts of the Chinese cultural world. Even in those instances where the framework does not perfectly fit, this lack of fit is useful for highlighting particular dilemmas faced by the Taiwanese and Chinese governments in an era of political and religious transformation.

I. *A Secular Government*

While the governments of both the Communist-led People's Republic of China and the Nationalist-led Republic of China are secular, the forms of their secularism have changed over time. Heirs to the religious iconoclasm of the May Fourth Movement, they were committed in the 1920s and 1930s to creating a unified "modern" China by destroying those local temples that supported the particularistic solidarities of families, lineages, and villages. Following its ascendancy to power in 1949, the Communist government of the PRC moved to suppress all religious practice—destroying temples, banning public religious rituals, eliminating religious leaders (through forced changes of profession, imprisonment, or sometimes execution)—and replaced it with a cult of the state and its leader. This religious repression reached a crescendo during the Cultural Revolution era. At the same time, the economic basis for ancestor worship and much other local religious practice—the ownership of family property and the ownership of common income-producing property by temple associations—was destroyed through land reform and the collectivization of agriculture. Nonetheless, whether intentional or not, the Maoist social system largely maintained and even reinforced the corporate basis of Chinese social life—that is, the social basis for ancestor worship and local temple religion. The collectivized production teams and production brigades of the "people's communes" corresponded to portions of family lineages and traditional villages, and the socialist system confined people to these communities—not only was it difficult during this period to move from the countryside to the city, but also from community to community within the countryside. Under these circumstances, the ties that submerged individuals into extended families actually thickened, and the social basis of local temple religion was preserved.

When the Nationalist government fled to Taiwan after World War II, it brought with it a secular constitution and secularizing policies. In Taiwan, however, the Nationalist government confronted a particular

set of challenges not previously faced on the Chinese mainland. First, it encountered the problem of establishing its legitimacy as a representative of the Chinese nation. After 1949, it no longer controlled the Chinese mainland and, following its brutal repression of Taiwanese elites in the February 28 Incident of 1947, was viewed by many local Taiwanese as an alien force.

The Nationalist Party's effort to convince the local Taiwanese that they were indeed the heirs to a great Chinese civilization now represented by a new government entailed a shift in its original iconoclastic ideology. Rather than rejecting traditional Chinese culture (as did the Communist Party in China), the KMT now identified itself as the conveyor of a purified, modernized version of Confucian culture.[3] The government sponsored celebrations of the birthday of Confucius and propagated Confucian values within the public education system—values interpreted to emphasize the most authoritarian aspects of the Confucian tradition.

In addition to promoting its version of Confucian values, the new Nationalist government also propagated modern science, including not only the natural sciences but also positivist versions of the social sciences. This modern scientific education attempted to debunk "superstition"—those religious practices associated with the vibrant ritual life of Taiwan's villages and neighborhoods. However, unlike its previous efforts on the China mainland, the KMT did not attempt to close down local temples or ban their rituals, recognizing that such endeavors were not only futile but would provoke widespread popular resistance from an already alienated population. Moreover, the deities of the local temples were identical to those in villages on the other side of the Taiwan Straits and constituted a link to the culture of Greater China that the KMT claimed to represent. Thus, local folk religion flourished in Taiwan, even as its social basis slowly began to erode because of social mobility and urbanization.[4]

This flourishing of village-level folk religion did not pose a threat to the hegemony of the KMT government. While village-level cults represented and affirmed particularistic allegiances to local communities,

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[3] The last direct lineal descendant of Confucius had, in fact, escaped from mainland China and was now residing in Taiwan.

[4] Paul Katz, "Religion and the State in Post-war Taiwan" in Daniel L. Overmyer, ed., Religion in China Today (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 93–97.

the latter were formed through descent rather than consent, through ascribed membership by kinship or ethnicity rather than through voluntary association based on personal belief. This form of religious practice is akin to what Charles Taylor refers to "embedded religion," the prevalent form in Europe during the Middle Ages. The world of embedded religion is "enchanted," filled with good and bad spirits. Religious practices are employed to summon the good and control the bad, as much for the sake of the material health and prosperity of the individual and the community as for any otherworldly salvation. The community is under the protection of local spirits—patron saints in the European Middle Ages and ancestors and various local protector spirits in many parts of Asia—and although these local spirits may be imagined to be under the control of a supreme being, much of actual popular religious practice is aimed at inducing the local spirits to take care of family and friends in the here and now.[5] Such cults inhibited the widespread collective action that might have become a political threat to the KMT.

In early 20th century mainland China, the proliferation of such localistic forms of religion would have presented obstacles to the Nationalist project of creating a strong, centralized state, and this was among the reasons that both the Nationalist and Communist governments had suppressed such religion. Conversely, during the second half of the 20th century, these localized religious cults did not present as much of a challenge to the political unity of Taiwan. The island and its population were relatively small, and the KMT had brought a large army to Taiwan. Moreover, the Japanese had left behind a legacy of good roads and railroads linking the various parts of the Island. Hence, the KMT possessed enough sheer power to secure the basic political unity of Taiwan.

The modernization of Taiwanese religion would, alternately, have required the disembedding of religious symbols and practice from local cults in favor of more universalistic religious visions expressed through large scale religious institutions. Yet, this was precisely the kind of religion that the government tried to discourage, fearing that such religion could facilitate widespread collective resistance to Nationalist rule.

During the first three decades after World War II, both the Communist Party in mainland China and the Nationalist Party in Taiwan

[5] Taylor, op. cit., 24–43.

effectively used Leninist methods to control national-level religious practice. Both governments established Party-directed organizations to carry out surveillance and control of national religious institutions. The Buddhist Patriotic Association in mainland China and the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (BAROC) in Taiwan oversaw the vetting of all leaders of the national Buddhist community and instituted policies to ensure that the ideas propagated by Buddhist organizations supported government ideology. National-level religious movements not easily incorporated into this top-down system of control—such as the "Unity Way" (Yiguandao) in both China and Taiwan—were vigorously persecuted.[6]

Through these surveillance and control agencies, the governments of both mainland China and Taiwan pursued measures to prevent the increasing sophistication and modern relevance of religion. The establishment of religious universities or seminaries was, for instance, forbidden. However, an exception to this attempt to inhibit the modernization of religious practice is seen in the Taiwanese government's policy toward Christianity. Protestants and Catholics were permitted to establish first-rate universities, most notably the Protestant Tunghai University and the Catholic Fu Jen University, and to develop elaborate hospitals and social service organizations. This was in large measure due to the Nationalist government's need to maintain the favor of its sponsors in the United States. Many of the strongest advocates of the Republic of China on Taiwan were former Christian missionaries. By supporting Christianity, affirming an idealized version of Confucian values, and tolerating folk religion, the Republic of China on Taiwan presented itself to the world as a country that respected religion, in contrast with the "godless Communism" being propagated on the other side of the Taiwan Straits. It represented itself as a modern, secular government, modeled after liberal democracies like the United States, which stood apart from religion but offered religious freedom to all and basked in the halo of its people's godly virtues.[7]

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[6] Katz, op. cit., 95–100.

[7] Richard Madsen, Democracy's Dharma: Religious Renaissance and Political Development in Taiwan (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 13–14. Charles Brewer Jones, Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660–1990 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003); Murray A. Rubenstein, "Christianity and Democratization in Modern Taiwan: The Presbyterian Church and the Struggle of Minnan/Hakka Selfhood in the Republic of China" in Philip Clart and

In both China and Taiwan, government capacity to control national-level religious institutions began to break down after the 1970s; however, this breakdown occurred somewhat later in China than in Taiwan and to a much fuller extent in Taiwan than in China. In China, the Maoist government's approach to inhibiting the intellectual modernization of national-level religions has continued during the Reform era, albeit with a degree of relaxation that allows for the establishment (under careful government supervision) of academies and seminaries for the training of monks, priests, and ministers. Moreover, the increasing fluidity of China's market economy makes it impossible for the government to exercise the thorough control of the Maoist era. Outside of official government frameworks, a variety of "unofficial" or "underground" religious activities flourish, some of which receive tacit, if tentative, toleration, while others (that potentially might pose a threat to social stability) are the object of strict (but not always effective) persecution.

In the early 1970s, as hope of recovering the Mainland waned and the Cold War began to draw to a close, the Nationalist government's control of religion began to break down, disintegrating completely in the mid-1980s as the government underwent a transition to democracy. As the likelihood of regaining the Mainland diminished, the KMT gradually began to present itself as the representative not of China as a whole, but of the people of Taiwan. Its legitimacy now increasingly depended on its ability to manage and develop the local Taiwanese economy. It also began to integrate more native Taiwanese into its government. Among the intellectuals of the 1970s "Return to Reality Generation," there was an increasing effort to "return to the soil" of Taiwan's popular culture[8] and an associated renewal of fascination with local religious practice. Meanwhile, the increasing complexity of Taiwan's industrializing society led to a need for new forms of social welfare. Temples had long provided such services, without government support or acknowledgement. Lacking a state-funded economic safety net, the government now needed to encourage temples to provide such services. In 1976, the government commanded all temples to carry out social welfare work, proving rewards to temples that conducted this

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Charles B. Jones, eds., Religion in Modern Taiwan (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003, pp. 204–56.

[8] Hsiau A-chin, Haigui Xianshi, Taipei: Academica Sinica, 2010.

work with particular efficacy. Amongst the most effective of these local religious organizations were socially-engaged Buddhist associations such as the Buddhist Compassionate Relief Association (Tzu Chi) and Buddha's Light Mountain (Foguangshan)—organizations whose members derived not only from particular local communities but from the entire Taiwanese population. These organizations, based in monasteries but with growing associations of lay people, more closely resembled the voluntary associations of American religious congregations than the corporate kinship-based groups of local popular religion. Thus, Taiwan's secular government was gradually transitioning from a policy of watchful surveillance of national-level religious activity toward one of active cooperation with it.[9]

In 1971, Taiwan's principal international supporter, the United States, began a rapprochement with the People's Republic of China. In July of that year, President Richard Nixon's national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, undertook a clandestine visit to Beijing, paving the way for a visit the following year by Nixon himself. As the U.S. moved to repair its relationship with China, its support for maintaining the United Nations seat of the Republic of China disintegrated. In 1971, the United Nations voted to expel the Republic of China, giving the China seat instead to the People's Republic of China. This commenced a long diplomatic slide in which the Taiwanese government lost the diplomatic recognition of most countries in the world community and which culminated in 1979 with the United States' normalization of relations with China and severance of ties with Taiwan. Losing its firm grip on Taiwanese society, the Nationalist government confronted an increasingly restive, oppositional population at home. Abroad, it became especially vulnerable to the criticism of human rights advocates as it faced mounting pressure to live up to its claims that the island was freer and more open than China and moving toward democracy (the very claims from which most of its international support had originally derived). In 1987, Taiwan's president Jiang Jingguo ended the martial law that had justified dictatorial government since the late 1940s.

As a result of these events, Taiwanese civil society flourished. With the way opened for the free association of citizens, a bewildering array of new organizations was constantly forming, decaying, and re-forming.

[9] Katz, op. cit., 96–100; Madsen, op. cit., 134–36.

Prominent among these were religious associations of all kinds, contributing to the enlivenment and diversification of the religious landscape.

Consolidated in the 1990's, this new form of government continued to be secular—it neither legitimized itself through religious ideas nor privileged any form of religion. However, this new secularism was different from that adopted after the initial establishment of the KMT government. Neither suppressing local religion nor presenting itself as a nationalistic substitute for popular religious beliefs and practices, the government now, in accordance with liberal democratic principles, allowed free exercise of any kind of religion (albeit with regulations to restrict practices that could cause physical harm or perpetrate fraud). The legitimacy of the state was now based on its ability to give voice to the values and interests of all groups comprising Taiwanese society. It was a legitimacy that came from the bottom up rather than from the top down.

At the same time, the new state was unable to represent adequately the aspirations welling up from the grassroots, including the strong desire for a unique Taiwanese identity that could alone find representation in an independent nation state. Yet, at present, no major nation in the international system recognizes Taiwan as an independent state, and a declaration of independence by the Taiwanese government would likely provoke war with China. Moreover, the vast majority of the Taiwanese population is divided on this issue, possessing not only a strong (and constantly growing) desire to be recognized as a distinct nation but also an unwillingness to do anything that would provoke war with China. As a result of these circumstances, the Taiwanese government (regardless of whether it is led by the Democratic Progressive Party or the Nationalist Party) is both unable to represent the highest ideals of the people and to obtain cosmic significance. Hence, the burden falls even more on Taiwan's local religious practices to provide such significance.[10] Religion in Taiwan is, on balance, a positive asset to Taiwan's democratic government, while in mainland China religion is a potentially destabilizing threat to the authoritarian government.

[10] Madsen, op. cit., 139–44.

II. *Religious Society*

We have, thus far, discussed post-World War II secularism in mainland China and Taiwan from the points of view of their states. Let us now consider the same subject from the points of view of their societies.

The exigencies of fighting the Cold War may have actually intensified the Chinese Communist effort to use its political apparatus to suppress the corporate, family-centered groups of its rural society. The conflict with "godly" capitalism may have intensified the resolve to impose a pure atheism on the populace. However, the Maoist effort to control society by suppressing the religious practices that provided the identity of lineages and similar corporate groups was ultimately unsustainable.

Following the death of Mao Zedong, China entered a period of "reform and opening," and beginning in 1979, the old system of control rapidly collapsed. As a result, Chinese society has become much more porous. Millions of farmers migrate to cities each year in search of work, although most are unable to obtain permanent urban residence or gain access to the health and welfare institutions of the cities, and many periodically return to their rural communities, depending on their families for social and moral support (even as these families depend on the migrant laborers for economic support). Meanwhile, even as the Chinese government warns of the dangers of "feudal superstition," there has been a great resurgence of ancestor worship and, indeed, of all sorts of popular religious practices. Although certain Chinese intellectuals and upper-levels government officials may still sincerely insist that the "Chinese are not religious," it is plausible, as Peter Ng has estimated, that 95% of the population engages in some form of religious practice, especially during personal crises, life passages, and traditional social festivals.

Much of this religion is of the socially embedded kind, similar to that which prevailed in Western Christendom during the Middle Ages. If not exactly a return to tradition, it is an invention of tradition. Let us consider the example of Chen village. Twenty years ago, the author and two colleagues published a book about this small farming community not far from Shenzhen City, in Guangdong Province. Like most other single-lineage families in southern China (in this case, the male villagers all shared the surname Chen and claimed descent from a common ancestor who lived about 400 years ago), the village had once had an

ancestral temple which commemorated and housed the spirits of the Chen lineage's distant ancestors, and each family kept tablets of their more recently-deceased ancestors on an altar in the front rooms of their homes. Major festivals, such as the lunar New Year, were filled with colorful rituals for greeting and sending off the spirits of these ancestors and caring for their needs in the afterlife. These festivals involved the whole community and inspired vibrant cultural creativity. They were a principal source of entertainment for the community and provided pleasure and brightness in a life otherwise characterized by strenuous farm labor. They also strengthened the bonds of the Chen lineage and distinguished it from other lineages.

Following the land reform and collectivization campaign of the early 1950s, the lineage hall was stripped of its sacred implements. It was first converted to a school and then to a dormitory for "sent down youth"[11] hosted by the village. Even during the Cultural Revolution, when all forms of ancestor worship were banned, some villagers continued to worship quietly and cautiously, using mosquito repellant coils instead of incense sticks. Since the implementation of China's Reform and Opening policy, ancestor worship has experienced a revival. The community is no longer a village in the traditional sense but, rather, an industrial zone in a vast metropolis with factories employing 50,000 migrant workers. The original villagers have become quite prosperous through renting local land to factories, and this new-found wealth has been used first to refurbish the old ancestral temple and, more recently, to construct a new, elaborate temple, with intricate wood carvings and images of traditional deities inlaid with gold and mother of pearl, a project that cost two million Yuan. The ancestral graves have been relocated to a new cemetery, with beautiful tombstones carefully arrayed in proper generational order. The temple and its associated festivals provide the villagers with a sense of identity and prevent them from being absorbed in the sea of migrant workers and impersonal factories.[12]

This rebuilding and renovation of temples has taken place across much of the Chinese mainland, and local festivals are often even more

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[11] The term "sent down youth" (下乡青年) refers to the privileged young people of China's urban centers who were sent to the countryside during the 1960s and 1970s to learn traditional trades.

[12] Anita Chan, Richard Madsen, and Jonathan Unger, *Chen Village: From Revolution to Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

spectacular than those of Chen Village. Local temples have become multi-purpose centers of social life, expressions of the community's unique identity, and a vehicle for the expression of its members' creativity. Religious practice embodies a particularistic ethics in which the interests of the immediate community take precedence over commitments to universal justice and fairness. For a state that seeks to create a unified community of national citizens, this localistic, particularistic religion can pose problems.

Meanwhile, the secularity of the Taiwanese state, which has, in different incarnations, governed Taiwan over the past half century, has not resulted in the diminution of religious belief and practice in Taiwanese society. However, the transformations of that state have led to the evolution of different patterns of religiosity. Forms of religious practice that had been discouraged by the Nationalist Party during the era of martial law have now gained new vigor, and forms that had been encouraged are now in decline.

As we have seen, the Nationalist Party at once permitted the village festivals and local temples that symbolized and helped to actualize the solidarities of family, lineage, and local community but tried to delimit such activities in the name of promoting frugality.[13] Today, these festivals and temple rites are flourishing once again, enhanced by modern technology, such as video cameras. In the past, the Taiwanese government discouraged forms of Buddhist and Daoist religious practice that transcended local communities and could potentially promote pan-Taiwanese social identities. It outlawed syncretistic sectarian religions like the Unity Way for fear that such groups might provide even stronger vehicles for widespread social action than formally-organized Buddhism. Additionally, during the early period of martial law (up until the mid-1960s), many forms of Christianity were afforded special privileges by the KMT.[14] During martial law, the Nationalist Party also privileged classical Chinese Confucian learning, especially those forms that stressed respect for authority.

As the control of the Nationalist Party over Taiwanese society began to wane, so too did the vigor of most forms of Christianity. Following a

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[13] Katz, op. cit., 96.

[14] Those forms of Christianity were encouraged that were amenable to supervision and control by the government. The Taiwanese Presbyterian Church, an incubator of Taiwanese nationalism since the early 20th century, was not encouraged, nor were independent evangelical Christian groups.

period of rapid growth during the 1950s and early 1960s, the percentage of baptized Christians reached a plateau of about 7%, while the number of Christians who regularly attended church began to steadily decline. The Taiwanese Presbyterian Church, conversely, continued to show vigor, and evangelical Christianity has maintained a relatively small but growing presence.

Meanwhile, since the ban on the Unity Way was revoked in the mid-1980s, the sect has flourished and become a major public presence, with its own television shows and extensive charitable activities. Even more spectacularly, maverick Buddhist organizations, which in the 1960s had begun to grow quietly outside of the purview of the BAROC, exploded in popularity and influence once martial law was lifted. Most popular among these are Tzu Chi and Buddha's Light Mountain (Foguangshan), both of which have branches around the world, extremely sophisticated medical outreach programs, and billions of dollars in assets. Unifying these groups is their common capacity for national and, indeed, global organization; their foundation in Asian, rather than Western, religious practices; and their adaptation of such practices to the particular circumstances of modern Taiwan.[15]

The membership of these organizations principally derives from Taiwan's urban middle classes, and their practices and teachings correspond with modern, middle-class life experience. Especially popular among the middle classes seem to be interpretations of Confucian social morality that affirm the virtues necessary to sustain social interdependence while emphasizing mutual support, rather than the subordination of inferiors to superiors. Members of Tzu Chi have, for example, published books discussing the struggles of maintaining filial piety after one has moved far away from one's parents and attained a level of education that one's parents cannot understand. These publications recommend that filial piety be expressed in different ways—by making one's parents proud and taking care of their material needs through achieving professional success and establishing a reputation of integrity and generosity. Similarly, the relationship between middle-class professional husbands and wives is described in terms of complementarity and mutual affection, rather than authority and obedience.[16]

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[15] Madsen, op. cit., 16–84.

[16] Buddhist Compassion Relief Association, Rebirth: Transformations in Tzu-chi (Taipei: Buddhist Compassion Relief Association, n.d.).

Under the aegis of its various forms of secular government, then, Taiwanese society has not only maintained traditional forms of religious belief but has witnessed a veritable religious renaissance, creatively transforming indigenous traditions to resonate with the experiences of a highly-educated, urbanized middle class.

III. *Modern Conditions of Belief*

As we have seen, religion has undergone a revival in mainland China, despite the efforts of the secular government, while it has flourished in Taiwan under the newly-liberal political regime. However, the integration of both societies into global systems of communication and commerce has transformed the meanings of religious practice.

In mainland China, even farmers in remote rural locations are aware that many alternatives exist to their local gods and the religious practices that anchor their rural way of life. Even when older traditions are revived and bear a superficial resemblance to their original forms, they carry different meanings and have a different social valence, because the conditions of belief have changed. Decades of Communist repressions have, at least partially, dislodged the connection of the people (particularly the younger generations) to local communal religious practices. The principal rituals at the Chen Village ancestral temple are, today, primarily attended by the senior members of the community. At the same time, the new mobility of migrant workers partially loosens their ties to their home communities, and exposure to modern media opens their imaginations to many alternative ways of understanding the world.

One consequence of these new conditions of belief is the abandonment (though often only partial) of religious practice. While sojourning in the city, for example, many migrant workers may have little interest in participating in religious rituals (with the exceptions of those which provide good fortune). Upon returning home, however, these same workers may contribute to the construction of an ancestral temple and take part in community festivals. Moreover, while loosening ties to their local community, labor migration leads workers to seek orientation through new forms of religious meaning.

Another consequence of the new conditions of belief, however, may be an openness to new religious movements, guided by visions that transcend family and locality. The antecedents of these are found in

the so-called sectarian movements (e.g. the White Lotus movement) of pre-modern Chinese history, and now, with the help of globalized communications, these have taken on new forms and force.

One such set of new religious movements entails a search for physical healing and moral reform based on qigong—the evocation and channeling of the primordial energy that in traditional Chinese cosmology pervades the universe. The most notorious form of this qigong practice was Falun Gong ("practice of the wheel of dharma"), which developed an elaborate ideology based on concepts found within Daoism and Buddhism to explain and guide such practices. Many other forms, including xianggong (fragrant practice) and zhonggong (middle practice) gained popularity in both and rural and urban milieux. Such forms of spiritual practice transcend local corporate communities and spread through ramifying personal networks that linked people throughout China. As is well known, the Chinese government, perceiving such large scale religious organizations as threatening, has ruthlessly moved to suppress them. Nonetheless, some of these movements have proliferated throughout the world. From their havens in exile, the leaders of Falun Gong have used sophisticated communications technologies to spread their message and attract adherents around the world. Because of the persecution they have experienced, their message has become increasingly polarizing and even apocalyptic (e.g. the Chinese Communist Party is an evil regime that must, and inevitably will, be destroyed).

Another example of the rising influence of new religious movements in China (built out of traditional forms) may be seen in the rapid spread of evangelical, mostly Pentecostal, Christianity (particularly in rural areas). Because the government inhibits systematic research on the topic, it is difficult to obtain accurate statistics on the spread of Christianity in China. However, it appears that, within the past thirty years, the number of Chinese Christians has grown from less than one million to more than thirty million. Some observers (many of whom are themselves associated with evangelical churches) claim that the population of Christians has grown to over one hundred million.

Like the qigong movements, the expansion of Pentecostal Christianity in China appears to be taking place through the ramifying network rather than the locally-grounded community. The most important of these Christian networks originated in inland rural areas, especially in Henan Province, but they now reach much more widely throughout China and serve to link numerous congregations of like-minded

individuals over broad areas. The congregations, thus linked together, consist of individuals who have had a "born again" experience (often validated by faith healing) and have made a personal commitment to Jesus in adolescence or adulthood. These networks are rooted in the indigenous Christian movements of the early 20th century, but the major impetus for their expansion has come from their contact with Pentecostal missionaries from the U.S. during the 1980s.

The de-centered nature of these Christian networks allows them constantly to generate new offspring with new theologies and new ways of adapting to specific environments. A few main themes remain constant—the Second Coming, speaking in tongues, faith healing—but specific interpretations differ. While this aids in the expansion of the networks, it also raises the threat of sectarian division, and it is not uncommon for local assemblies to accuse each other of heresy. Out of this ferment have arisen certain new groups, like the "Eastern Lightning" with beliefs that seem bizarre by mainstream Christian standards.[17]

Taiwan, even more than contemporary mainland China, is situated at a nexus of global cultures and ideologies. Through the education system, mass media, and constant international travel (both for business and pleasure), the Taiwanese are exposed to every manner of Asian and Western religion, as well as to Western liberalism, positivism, feminist theory, Marxist-inspired critical theory, and all of the trends of thought that fall under the category of "post-modernism." Any form of religious practice in Taiwan must be carried out in the knowledge that many successful and intelligent people do not accept the cosmology or the vision of moral order represented by that practice. Even "traditional" family rituals must be performed as a matter of choice, in the recognition that the practice is not obligatory and that viable alternatives exist.

Therefore, religious practices are conducted with a certain measure of reflexivity, a questioning of motives and a quest for the reasons behind the practice. For example, even those who acknowledge that we are all comprised of atoms and that there is no subsistent "qi" (气) that remains after death, might accompany family members to sweep the tombs of the family's ancestors on the Qing Ming festival (Tomb

[17] The Eastern Lightning, for example, follows a female messiah, who they believe is a re-incarnation of Jesus.

Sweeping Day, or 清明节) in order to carry on family traditions and avoid social condemnation. Yet, even this might be based on a rational decision to go along with family custom rather than dealing with social disapproval. Alternately, the decision to observe the festival in this manner may be viewed as a way to honor the memory of one's deceased forebears despite the absence of a belief in lingering spirits. A further example may be seen in the practice of visiting temples to pray for success in exams (many students from prestigious universities visit temples before important exams), a form of "hedging one's bets" on the off chance that such prayer might work. In such cases, the external ritual may appear the same, but the interior meaning may differ significantly from that of earlier generations.

The existential challenges of carrying out religious practices in a cosmopolitan, multicultural world also lead to desires for deeper understandings of these practices. Thus, a large market exists for courses on Buddhist and Daoist philosophies. Buddhist Universities, like those of Dharma Drum Mountain, Buddha's Light Mountain, and Tzu Chi, conduct high-level scholarship on classical Buddhist texts and history, as well as on the modern-day psychology and sociology of Buddhism. Within the past three decades, Taiwan has become one of the leading world centers for the modern intellectual development of world Buddhism.

Besides the intellectual elaboration of Buddhism, Taiwan has also become the center for what might be termed the pastoral application of Buddhism to modern life. Leading Buddhist monks and nuns produce countless sermons, disseminated globally through all manner of media, on the application of Buddhist principles to life in the modern world; these address such issues as the application of Buddhism in healing broken relationships, confronting ethical challenges in business, and maintaining a healthy, well-balanced life. The major temples offer a wide variety of classes, study groups, retreats, and summer camps to assist followers in assimilating and applying these teachings.

Similarly, the Daoist Hsing Tien Kung temple in Taipei plans to open a cultural university that will doubtlessly elaborate and rationalize Daoist teachings. The temple already produces a handsome magazine that offers an updated perspective on Confucian virtues and, additionally, maintains a library and culture center that hosts concerts and discussion groups on relieving the stresses of modern life. The temple also organizes study groups at the major universities in Taipei and offers services to people unable to accept the metaphysical foundations

of religious Daoism. Temple literature stresses that the statues of Lord Guan and other deities in the temple do not contain the actual spirits of these mythical figures; rather, the images are symbols of the moral virtues represented by these mythical entities. Similarly, the purposes of religious practice are explained (especially in study sessions for well-educated people) in terms of modern psychology: it gives you a feeling of peace; it reminds you of your responsibilities to others; it lifts your spirits in the face of challenges.[18]

For their part, Christian theologians at the Presbyterian theological seminary have produced pioneering works on an Asian form of the theology of liberation, and Catholic theologians at the Jesuit school of theology of Fu Jen University have made major contributions to Biblical and pastoral theology. Across the spectrum of faiths, Taiwan is a world center for intellectual innovation in religious teaching; yet, in Taiwan, the most fruitfully creative of these has been Buddhism. All of this creativity is a response to modern crisis: crisis caused by the confusing plurality of beliefs and ideologies in a country deeply intertwined in the global system, and crisis caused by Taiwan's geo-political vulnerability in the face of a rising China. However, religious, philosophical, and theological creativity is based on stability as well as crisis—by a sustained but precarious peace that has enabled crisis-challenged thinkers to carry out their work in a systematic way.[19]

Under these conditions, religious believers in both mainland China and Taiwan yearn for signs that their beliefs are on the right track. One important sign of this is the expansion of the faith community. Thus, there is a strong missionary impulse within all of these new movements. This is, indeed, also the case beyond mainland China and Taiwan. With the crumbling of political barriers that once confined religions to a particular place, there is now a global scramble for souls.

Depending on the specific contexts in which they develop, new expansionist religious movements may either generate serious social and political conflict or provide resources for reconciliation and healing. In mainland China, this "scrambling for souls" has resulted in increasing conflict. While these movements generally direct their adherents to otherworldly concerns, rather than to worldly political

[18] Madsen, op. cit., 104–129.
[19] Ibid., 144–157.

activity, certain beliefs give the government cause for concern—especially eschatological beliefs. Falun Gong, for instance, believes that a great millennial transformation is coming in which the good will be saved and the evil punished. Many Chinese Pentecostal Christians believe in premillennialism, which holds that the end of days will soon be upon us at which time those who have accepted Jesus will be raptured up to heaven while the world undergoes great tribulations culminating in the triumphant Second Coming of Christ. The government is also anxious about the public health implications of practices like faith healing. Hence, the Chinese state often increases surveillance, and sometime suppression, of such movements. However, eschatological religious movements organized through ramifying networks cannot easily be suppressed. The punishment of particular leaders only serves to inspire members who revere martyrdom. If a portion of the network is severed, other shoots quickly crop up elsewhere. These networks are not easily immobilized, since the members of groups that promote the notion of otherworldly salvation do not seek that which the government offers. Despite government efforts to obstruct the growth of such beliefs and practices, the networks that foster them are expanding very rapidly.

In Taiwan, conversely, the aforementioned socially-engaged Buddhist movements appear to have contributed positively to healing the tensions of a democratizing society. These ideologies emphasize the generous acceptance of all people and motivate their members to build a better world through gradual, sustained efforts. Through reducing the tensions emanating from Taiwan's multitudinous forms of conflict-producing identity politics, these Buddhist movements have assisted in fortifying the shaky foundations of Taiwan's democracy.

This new "scramble for souls" can also lead to intensified conflict internationally, especially since these universalistic, but not purely religious, visions are, at least in part, the conveyors of nationalistic energies. These newly-universalizing impulses do not, however, inevitably lead to conflict. Much depends on the content of the traditions out of which they arise and the specific context in which they evolve. Optimally, the universalization of religious visions results in confluences of care rather than conflict—as seen in the case of the socially-engaged Buddhists of Taiwan. Tzu Chi, for example, conducts missions of mercy around the world, feeding and housing earthquake victims in Sichuan and tsunami victims in Indonesia, giving seed grain to the famine stricken of North Korea, rebuilding a bombed out hospital in

Iraq, providing shelter for victims of war in Ruanda and Kosovo, and extending care to those in need in cultures and societies worldwide. This is undoubtedly spurred on by Taiwan's urgent need to increase its international allies, yet it is made possible through a purifying return to the deepest roots of Buddhist teaching on universal compassion.

IV. *Religion and Taiwan's National Identity*

Thus far, the analytic framework proposed by Charles Taylor has assisted us in understanding the manner in which the secularisms of state, society, and culture in mainland China and Taiwan have shaped one another through their mutual interactions. This tripartite distinction does not in itself, however, help us explain the unique characteristics of the religious situations of these two societies, e.g. the reasons for the differences between secularly-governed Taiwan and secularly-governed China as well as for the disparity in the magnitude of religious practice within these two societies—whereas Taiwan is more similar to the United States than Europe, mainland China more closely resembles Europe than the United States in this respect. Moreover, although the (relatively low) quantity of religious practice in mainland China bears a resemblance to that of Europe, and the (relatively high) amount of religiosity in Taiwan resembles that of the United States, mainland China and Taiwan both differ from their Western counterparts in their specific patterns of religious belief and practice. In order to gain a greater understanding of these similarities and differences, we might draw on another part of Charles Taylor's theory: his account of the transformations of the position of the sacred in the "social imaginaries" (i.e. "the way we collectively imagine, even pretheoretically, our social life.…") of Europeans and Americans during the transition to modernity.

According to Taylor, the social imaginary of baroque Europe was "paleo-Durkheimian." Durkheim argued that social order receives its moral integration through a distinction between sacred and profane. The sacred is that realm of unassailable, awe-inspiring, non-utilitarian value that gives purpose and coherence to mundane, utilitarian, everyday life. According to Durkheim, within baroque Europe, the sacred was found in the fusion of religion and politics in the absolutist state, which was directly blessed by God. The king had a divine right to rule, and it was the glory of the state that gave unity and purpose

to society. After the traumas of the Protestant Reformation, wars of religion, and democratic revolutions, the moral landscape of Europe took on what Taylor terms a "neo-Durkheimian" order. It was not the state itself that was sacred, but the *design* around which society was rightly ordered. It was the state's role to protect and uphold that design. The sacred now came not from above, from an absolutist state with religious pretensions, but from below, through voluntarily-established associations that together constituted the agencies through which society would regulate itself. Key among these voluntary associations were a diverse array of religious associations through which citizens worshipped God and affirmed the values of common decency that sustained a democratic social life. These religious organizations were diverse, because each believer had to be free to join the "church of his choice." Yet, despite differences in theology, they affirmed an overlapping moral consensus. This form of moral order largely survives today in the social imaginary of the United States, where there is a strong (but, of course, not absolute) expectation that people who wish to be accepted fully as members of society ought to belong to a Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish denomination, albeit one of their own choosing that fits their own spiritual tastes. Together, this system of diverse, voluntarily-chosen denominations constitutes the religious dimension of the "American way of life."[20]

This same pattern would have been found throughout much of Western Europe in the late 19th century. However, according to Taylor, most of Europe is now "post-Durkheimian;" that is, the sacred is no longer located in any group or system of groups, but in the self-expression of the individual. This is "belief without belonging." At most times, the beautiful, ancient cathedrals stand empty, tourist attractions rather than places of worship. Yet, people still seek the "spiritual" in private, personal quests for self-expression. The old nations have come to be seen as collections of self-actualizing individuals.[21]

This framework might also be applied in explaining the shifting locations of the sacred in mainland China and Taiwan.

Mainland China might be said to fit the paleo-Durkheimian pattern. On the mainland, the Communist government under Mao suppressed all forms of religion, including local village religion, and

[20] Taylor, op. cit., 454–472.
[21] Ibid., 473–504.

this suppression reached a level of particular intensity during the Cultural Revolution. Nonetheless, religion was never entirely eliminated, and it has reemerged during the Reform era in a variety of forms. However, religion is still subject to strict control by the state and is systematically discouraged by the educational system. The continuance of strict social controls explains some, but not all, of this relative lack of religious activity (compared to Taiwan).

However, the Chinese Communist Party did not merely try to suppress religion. It strove to present itself as a sacralized alternative to religion—a sacred secularism. Under Mao Zedong, the Chinese state proffered a quasi-religious version of Marxism—a grand vision of history leading to the liberation of all of humanity under the guidance of the Great Leader Mao Zedong. While this grand vision of history seems to have been plausible to many ordinary Chinese in the early days of the PRC, most of its credibility was lost in the insanity of the Cultural Revolution.[22] Now, however, communist ideology is being replaced by a strong nationalism. Bolstered by its success in raising China to the rank of the world's major powers, the Chinese state is seen as the bearer of this national destiny. The Chinese Communist Party has used all of the means at its disposal (including its apparatus for punishing dissent) to construct a sacred aura around itself—a process that reached a crescendo in the opening ceremonies for the Beijing Olympics.

Taiwan, by contrast seems neo-Durkheimian. During the Chiang Kai-shek regime, the Republic of China strove to present itself as a sacralized secular state bearing the glorious legacy of the Chinese tradition. But through the process of democratization, this legacy has been repudiated. The relationship of the Taiwanese citizens to their state more closely resembles that which exists between American, rather than European, citizens and their state. The Taiwanese people are developing an ever stronger sense of nationhood.[23]

However, lacking recognition from other world powers and unable (for all sorts of geopolitical reasons) to declare itself independent of China, the Taiwanese state is unable to serve as a sacred vehicle for representing the nationalist hopes and aspirations of the Taiwanese

[22] Richard Madsen, Morality and Power in a Chinese Village (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

[23] Hsiau A-chin, Contemporary Chinese Cultural Nationalism (London: Routledge, 2000).

people. The Taiwanese state has fostered a renaissance of public religious activity in order to avoid becoming *overly* secular; the state does not itself hold the capacity to represent sacred meanings. Hence, the Taiwanese seek collective representation of those meanings in religious associations—especially those that claim to be rooted in native soil.

Beginning in the late 1970s, Taiwanese intellectuals initiated a "return to the soil" movement, seeking (or constructing) the roots of Taiwanese culture in order to create a basis for Taiwanese national identity. This movement included anthropological and ethnographic research on local Taiwanese religions. For at least some intellectuals, these religious practices were no longer seen as a part of a pre-modern Taiwan but as a primal source of energy for modern Taiwan. In the meantime, the aforementioned middle-class oriented Buddhist and Daoist organizations were beginning their ascendancy. With their inclusive, universalistic messages, they were better able to represent a positive Taiwanese identity to the world. Yet, these organizations could also claim to constitute a purified form of spiritual energies that grew in Taiwanese soil.[24]

Thus, like that of the United States, but not of mainland China or Europe, Taiwanese public life is shaped to a significant extent by a wide variety of religious organizations. The predominant middle-class versions of these organizations are voluntary associations, i.e. membership is based on individual free choice, rather than on the un-chosen affiliations of family and native place. Yet, these organizations embody a much more communitarian vision than do most Protestant Christian organizations in the USA.[25] In accordance with the Confucian elements that have remained embedded in both the religious Daoist and Confucian traditions, the major Taiwanese religious organizations do not require their lay adherents to disengage from their families in search of universalistic commitments but, rather, to expand their conception of "family" to encompass wider collectivities. The result is a much more vivid sense of interdependence than is encouraged by the main strands of American religious culture.

The global charity work conducted by Tzu Chi, more than any projects of foreign aid undertaken by the Taiwanese government, helps

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[24] Compromised by the privileged positions they enjoyed under the Chiang Kai-shek regime, most Christian group were unable to do this as effectively.

[25] Richard Madsen, "The Archipelago of Faith: Individualism and Religious Community in America" American Journal of Sociology, vol. 114, no. 5 (March 2009).

to display the generosity of the Taiwanese people on the world stage.[26] Whether in response to national disasters (like an airplane crash at the Taipei international airport) or moments of national celebration (like the arrival of a precious Buddha's tooth in Taiwan), the massive public rituals of the Buddha's Light Mountain provide deeply-resonant, common rituals that unify the public.[27] The learned commentaries on the true meaning of "karma" by leaders such as the late Dharma Master Shengyen of Dharma Drum Mountain have helped Taiwanese to find meaning in the midst of calamities like the 1999 earthquake.[28] Through the practice of Taiwanese religions is represented the face of an emerging nation not adequately represented through its state.

These broad comparisons among Taiwan, mainland China, Europe, and the United States are useful only to the extent that we are aware of the dynamic relationship between state, society, and culture in each place and, thus, recognize that the points of comparison may change. The relationships between state, society, and culture in Europe and the United States are much more stable than those in Taiwan and mainland China, both of which are very much works in progress. The transition of the Taiwanese state to democracy took place only two decades ago, and its democratic procedures are still not fully institutionalized. Moreover, it is by no means clear whether it will be able to maintain its de-facto independence vis-à-vis China, nor is the issue of its integration into the international state system resolved. For its part, the mainland Chinese state has also undergone great changes during the Reform era. However, its current attempt to portray itself as the historic carrier of Chinese nationalism may not succeed in the long run, especially if the Communist Party loses its capacity to monopolize public discourse and the rapid economic growth of China cannot be sustained. The middle-class religious renaissance in Taiwan is filled with the enthusiasm of novelty and, thus, the forms of religious belief may change as this freshness fades. The mainland Chinese state may be unable to restrain the religious enthusiasms that appear to be simmering at the surface of society. Finally, the frisson generated by the stark contrasts between the globe's most modern—or post-modern—philosophies and socially-embedded local religions may lead to more

[26] Madsen, Democracy's Dharma, 41–50.
[27] Ibid., 48–84.
[28] Ibid., 85–89.

confusing and turbulent patterns of belief in Taiwan and mainland China than have emerged in Europe and the United States, where such contrasts have played themselves out over a longer period of time.

Secularism is not a fact but a process, operating on at least three different levels. Due to the complexity of this process, we are unable to predict its course easily. This is especially true of the secularism process in Asia. Any comparisons between Taiwan and Europe or the United States will only be valid for a short period of time. However, the effort required to undertake such comparisons may help us to refine theoretical frameworks that will be useful for analyzing situations that are sure to change in the future.

AFTERWORD

Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank

A traveler in China in the early 1980s shortly after religious practice was once again permitted could observe the stirrings of its revival. Yet not find much note of this revival could be found in the extant scholarly literature. Scholars in China were restricted from studying contemporary religion by politics and lack of career options. Inquiry by international scholars was precluded by limitations on research in China and a general view that the Cultural Revolution had eliminated religion from Chinese society. This volume, therefore, is remarkable both as an empirically rich document of the revival of religion in the years since the early 1980s and as a record of the development of social scientific scholarship on religion in China.

The emergence of a social scientific study of religion in China reflects not only changes in the object of study itself—namely religion—but also the process of modern state formation, the stream of which China reentered in the late 1970s. Following the Cultural Revolution a space for religion reopened as China once again sought to build a modern secular state by recognizing the right of freedom of belief. Over the past three decades this space has filled up with organizations, actors, ideas, and networks that have constituted religion and its scientific study.

The filling of the space of religion can be seen as occurring in three phases, in which the revival of religion and the development of scholarship on religion have moved in tandem as part of the politics of state formation. These phases are not exclusive stages but rather historical layers of accumulations. The first two phases are described in He Guanghu's introductory essay, while the third is seen in the publication of this volume.

The first phase is characterized by the resuscitation of the state apparatus of religious control, ranging from officially recognized seminaries and religious association to the Religious Affairs Bureau alongside efforts of various actors to establish the legitimacy of religion as both practice and study during the 1980s. The revival of religious practices was often complicated by the uncertainty of local authorities of how to

treat religion due to the rapidity of changes in state policy and ideology. Yet despite resistance many temples were reclaimed and rebuilt by supporters, and festivals and rituals were resumed.

At the same time intellectuals sought to reposition discussion of religion from the rigid Marxist view of religion as an "opium of the masses" and as one of the four "old evils" during the Cultural Revolution to a new location within more nuanced views of religion found elsewhere in the corpus of Marx' works. Earlier organizations that had been disbanded during the Cultural Revolution, such as the Institute of World Religions, were restored and some new institutes, journals, and associations for the study of religion were created. A small number of graduate students began to study religion in research institutes, and several international scholars, such as Kenneth Dean, undertook field studies of religion during the latter half of the decade.

Against this backdrop of declining political hostility towards religion, a second phase characterized by growth took shape in the 1990s. The size and scale of rebuilding religious sites expanded dramatically, as did the number of worshippers, size of congregations, and frequency and scale of festivals and ceremonies. There are a number of reasons for this. One was local state recognition that religion could help stimulate the local economy by encouraging tourism and expenditures on festivals. The second is declining state suspicion towards religion following the 1989 student movement, as religion appeared as relatively less problematic than independent student and worker associations. The third reason was the increasing professionalization of the Religious Affairs Bureau as older demobilized army soldiers who had filled its ranks were replaced by college educated cadres who had some knowledge of religion, a clearer idea of political and administrative control of clergy and religious activities, and an appreciation of how religious activities could help the local economy. A fourth reason was the huge amount of new resources poured into religious activities by the rising domestic business classes, replacing the more limited state funds and overseas Chinese donations that had fueled the reconstruction of religious sites and performance of ceremonies and rituals in the 1980s.

Alongside this expansion of religious activities, a professionalized social scientific study began to emerge within religious studies in China. Classic works of social theory on religion by Max Weber, Emile Durkheim and others were translated into Chinese. Some scholars, such

as Fan Lizhu began empirical studies of religion, including practices that were, according to state policy, readily classified as superstition. Domestic scholars felt a declining need to justify their studies by reference to Marx although they still tended to orient their studies towards state concerns, such as the link between religious values and economic development. There was also much organizational growth as the establishment of new journals and research institutes on religion continued apace. An increasing number of international scholars with facility in Chinese, including Richard Madsen, pursued in-depth empirical studies, often through new forms of collaboration with domestic scholars.

A third phase dates roughly from 2000. It is marked by the campaign against Falungong, which expressed the state's awareness of the challenge that religion could pose to its authority. This stimulated state attempts to systematize control of religion through national laws for religion to replace *ad hoc* local regulations. New developments also occurred in state support for Chinese religion, especially in international contexts as seen in the convening of the World Buddhist Forum in 2006 in Hangzhou and other events.

This phase also saw the increasing institutionalization of the social scientific study of religion in China. Within the state educational system, an increasing number of universities set up religious studies departments and began offering majors and courses in religion, and research grant money for studies of religion from both foreign and domestic sources has become more readily available. This trend has been fueled by the return of Chinese scholars who received their graduate education outside of China and to take up positions in Chinese universities. Domestic scholars feel declining constraint to explicitly define their object of study in terms of state ideology and goals, indicating the emergence of what Weber termed value-free inquiry. Another trend is that international scholars of religious studies who are not Sinologists, such as Dan Olson, have become interested in religion in China as a topic of study in its own right, as well for its conceptual implications in religious studies. Also scholars from disciplines other than anthropology and religious studies that have long emphasized the study of religion in China, have become increasingly interested in the study of religion in China, such as political science and sociology. This volume is the result and summary of these various phases and their accretions.

Trends in Methodology, Theory, and Findings in this Volume

The essays in this volume encompass diverse research designs, theoretical approaches, and findings. First, in regard to research design, the essays are based on multiple methods, including event analysis, closed ended and open-ended interviews, attitudinal and social surveys, participant observation, textual exegesis, and symbolic analysis. Some essays use only one method, such as closed-ended attitudinal survey in Yuan Yue's essay, while others use several methods. However, the volume makes no claim for the superiority of any specific method: as the essays clearly illustrate, selection of an appropriate method depends on the question being asked.

The essays' authors embody a range of motivations and justifications. Their authors include both domestic and international scholars of diverse national and cultural backgrounds, actors in government agencies, private survey firms, think tanks and academic institutions. Their motivations range from, at one end, to furthering state policy goals, such as He Qimin's concern for founding a religious studies focused on ethnic minorities to, at the other end, contributing towards theory development in religious studies. In between these extremes are authors who examine the link between religions and other societal sectors that are considered desirable, such as Graeme Lang and Lu Yunfeng, Liu Peng, and Gao Bingzhong and Ma Qiang foci on environmentalism, philanthropy, and civil society.

Second, in regard to theoretical approaches, the essays in this volume generally eschew a narrow view of religion as an independent phenomenon to emphasize its link with the state and such other societal sectors as tourism and environmental concerns. While some authors exhibit a concern with the ideational aspect of religion, such as Eileen Barker's discussion of religiosity and Yuan Yue's study of values, many others seek to understand the how religious practice is constructed by formal and informal organization, community social structure, and state policy. Also, in circumscribing their studies, the essays show a grasp of the link between the bounding of an object of study and theorizing and generalizing their findings. The frames used in this volume include single-case and comparative-case studies, and multi-level and global-local analyses.

A number of authors see religion in China as providing various opportunities for theory development in religious studies. One is to see the rapid revival of religion in China as a laboratory to test competing

theories, such as supply-side versus demand-side theories of religion. Others see the need to adapt general theories of religion to the situation in China. This is especially apparent in the discussions of secularism as, for example, the application of theories of secularism by Eileen Barker and others to understand the situation of religious belief in a context of extreme atheism and in comparative contexts.

However, there are different approaches over the use of concepts from religious studies derived from the historical development of Christianity in Europe to explain the situation of religion in China. Some authors, such as Gordon Melton, classify religions in China by the organizational concepts of "religion, sect, and new religions" derived from European context while others, such as Fan Lizhu, critically examine the tendency of Chinese intellectuals to apply concepts from western scholarship to analyze and explain religion in China.

Third, the volume contains numerous and even competing findings. One finding concerns state and religion. Moving beyond standard secularization arguments about the separation of religion and state, some authors emphasize their mutual constitution. Studies by Gao Bingzhong and Ma Qiang, Liu Peng, and others show how organizational aspects of the state constitute the organization and activities of religions. This is a relatively new movement in the study of state and religion that transcends a long-standing dichotomous framework of state and religion. Instead, these studies show the complex politics of state and religion, including, how religion can construct state administrative structures, and local religious communities appropriate state symbols and meanings for their own purposes.

Another noteworthy finding concerns the relevance of the term "religion" itself. In their essays Eileen Barker and Fan Lizhu question the relevance of western concepts of religion for understanding the situation in China. Kenneth Dean advances this line of reasoning with rich data from the southeast China on rituals that are so thoroughly constituted by the social structures and annual life cycles of local communities as to problematize the entire concept of "religion." He proposes a form of analysis that emphasizes the patterns of organization, participation, and meanings within communities' ritual events.

Several authors arrive at novel findings in regard to secularization in China by theoretically disaggregating the concept of secularization. Making a tri-partite distinction of political, sociology, and cultural secularism, Richard Madsen advances the comparative understanding of religion in Taiwan and China. Daniel Olsen distinguishes micro,

meso, and macro trends of secularization to argue that religion recovers from severe state repression in different processes at various levels of society. Disaggregation enables these authors to move beyond categorical statements about the degree of secularization to more nuanced observations about specific processes and configurations. These various attempts to consider to the relevance of western concepts of religion to situations in China could make the study of religion in China a major fount for the development of social scientific theories of religion.

Conclusion

Religion is a classic concept in the social sciences to explain society. This essay has emphasized the enduring nature of religion, its integration into social science analysis, and its links to politics and society in China. Religion is a rich field of study, interweaving through such various disciplines as political science, economics, and legal studies, to challenge existing conceptual frameworks of theory and analysis. This volume serves as proof of this. It is an excellent document of the historical condition of religion in China at the millennium's cusp, and a record of diverse trends by scholars inside and outside of China for the study of religion in China.

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