

“RELIGIOUS ECOLOGY” AS A NEW MODEL FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN CHINA

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In 2011, Vincent Goossaert and David Palmer published their milestone work, *The Religious Question in Modern China*.¹ New research on previously largely neglected subject areas (such as religious policies of the early Republic or field studies of popular religion, Buddhism, Daoism, and Christianity in the People’s Republic of China [PRC] after 1978) has rounded off the picture of religious life in twentieth-century China to the extent that a synthetic state of the field publication such as this has become possible. In spite of the singular employed in the book’s title, in fact numerous questions have accompanied the twentieth-century history of religions in China, starting with the very notion of “religion”/*zongjiao* 宗教, over its distinction from “superstition”/*mixin* 迷信, to issues such as the place of *zongjiao* in a modernizing Chinese state, whether under KMT (Kuomintang) or under CCP (Chinese Communist Party) rule. Even if we limit our attention to developments in the last 30 years or so, the “*zongjiao wenti* 宗教问题” (religious questions) are manifold and include, for example, mainland Chinese attempts to critically reflect the very notion of *zongjiao* and bring previously excluded areas of religious life such as popular religion (*minjian xinyang* 民间信仰) into its fold,² or to reopen the debate about the religious nature of Confucianism (*Rujiao* 儒教).³ In the Taiwanese case, a key question inspiring current research is that of the role of religious organizations in the civil society of the post-martial law period,⁴ a question that is also gaining relevance on the other side of the Taiwan Strait.⁵

However, without doubt the overriding “religious question” facing scholars and policy makers in the PRC today is that of the astounding revival of religious life during the post-1978 period of reform and opening, and specifically the uneven distribution and structuring of that revival. This involves a number of phenomena, but none looms larger than the rapid expansion of Protestant Christianity, especially in the form of unregistered “house churches” (*jiating jiaohui* 家庭教会), and that again especially in rural areas.

This chapter examines one particular theoretical approach toward this phenomenon, that of “religious ecology” (*zongjiao shengtailun* 宗教生态论), which sees itself in competition with another theoretical camp, that of religious market theory. I shall trace the (quite recent) origins of the ecological model, examine an attempt to apply it to empirical data in a field research setting, and evaluate its analytical value as well as its potential prescriptive applications in policy making.

THE RELIGIOUS ECOLOGY MODEL

Proponents of the religious ecology approach point to a 1999 publication by Hong Kong theologian Leung Ka-lun 梁家麟 as the beginning of that line of thought. In a study of the spread of Protestant Christianity in rural China, he surmised that the Communist suppression of popular religion removed what had functioned as a key obstacle to Christian proselytization prior to 1949.⁶ Leung did not yet develop a full-fledged “religious ecological” perspective, but he did introduce a key explanatory factor that was avidly adopted by mainland scholars in the 2000s worried about the rapid spread of Protestant Christianity in rural areas.

One of the earliest programmatic occurrences of the term “religious ecology” in the current discourse seems to be in a 2006 article by Mou Zhongjian 牟钟鉴, a professor at the Institute of Philosophy and Religious Studies of Minzu University, entitled “The Chinese Pattern of Religious Cultural Ecology.”⁷ Let me summarize its main themes. After a brief nod to anthropologist Julian Steward’s notion of cultural ecology as the study of the interactions between culture and natural environment,⁸ Mou calls for the application of cultural ecology to the study of religion and thus for the establishment of “religious cultural ecology studies” (*zongjiao wenhua sheng-taixue* 宗教文化生态学). Different from Steward’s cultural ecology, this new approach would focus not on the relationship of culture and nature, but on the interrelations of elements within a cultural system. This new field of study would not just

investigate the mechanisms of the emergence and evolution of all types of religion, but would research, in a comprehensive approach to society and culture, both in a single nation or region and in transcultural scope, the conditions of the existence of religious culture, the relationship between religion and society and between religion and religion, the impact of religions on the development of civilization, and their current development trends, as well as address ways to preserve religious pluralism and to optimize the religious cultural ecology so as to render it beneficial to the harmony and progress of humankind.

Mou goes on to distinguish three types of religious ecologies:

- the unitary/dominant type (*yiyuan zhudaoxing* 一元主导型), exemplified by societies with one strongly dominant religion (e.g., India/Hinduism, Pakistan/Islam, Poland/Catholicism, Thailand/Buddhism);

- the plural/contentious type (*duoyuan jinzhangxing* 多元紧张型), exemplified by societies with multiple religions engaged in conflict with each other (e.g., Iraq/Sunni-Shia, Northern Ireland/Protestantism-Catholicism);
- the plural/harmonious type (*duoyuan hexiexing* 多元和谐型), where multiple religions coexist peacefully (e.g., China, Korea, Japan, Singapore).

Historically, the last-named type has its roots in Chinese religious culture produced by the overlay of Confucianism and Buddhism. This type of religious ecology is characterized internally by its harmony and emphasis on morality, and externally by its positive role in promoting religious dialogue and preserving world peace. Mou regards a type 3 religious ecology as a uniquely Chinese civilizational achievement that even the leftist antireligious aberrations of the twentieth century could not destroy. However, the political campaigns against traditional culture were not without impact: They damaged and weakened China’s sensitive religious ecology, which only today is recognized not as a hindrance to China’s progress, but as an inexhaustible treasure store enhancing China’s cultural competitiveness and soft power. The gaps in this grand spiritual edifice now provide entry points for religious invaders such as David Aikman who hopes to see the “Chinese dragon” tamed by the “Christian lamb.”⁹ In this respect, Mou finds the Taiwanese example instructive and well worth studying by the mainland: Taiwan has preserved a balanced religious ecology based on pluralism and harmony, and respect for Heaven and ancestors, while at the same time giving space to Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, and various kinds of “developed popular religions” (*gezong fada de minjian zongjiao* 各种发达的民间宗教).¹⁰ In this environment, Catholics and Protestants could never become more than a small minority. Mou ends his article with a call for the restoration of Chinese ecological balance. Socialism must be unified in government and law, but pluralistic in religious culture. A healthy religious ecology would give appropriate space to “Marxism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, and all kinds of healthy popular religion,”¹¹ allowing none to dominate the others.

The following five points appear to me to be crucial in this contribution which set the agenda for the developing religious ecology discourse: In a grand comparative perspective, Mou Zhongjian (1) identifies three types of religious ecological systems, among which (2) the plural/harmonious type is both uniquely Chinese (and secondarily, East Asian) and in terms of harmony and peacefulness superior to the other two types. (3) This cultural heritage was damaged by the political campaigns of the twentieth century, resulting (4) in incursions by and rapid growth of disharmonious and intolerant Christianity. (5) The political task is now to restore the original religious-ecological balance.

This brief treatise demonstrates in a fairly typical manner the imbrication of various concerns: scholarly theorizing, a nativist sense of cultural crisis, a sensitivity to current affairs, and the ability to move seamlessly from scholarship to policy advising. A valuation of religious pluralism and harmony as a

specifically Chinese cultural heritage links up with anxiety about the intrusive, destabilizing, and explosive growth of Protestant Christianity. This troubling development is seen as a symptom of the weakening of the Chinese religious ecology; the restoration of the latter is recommended as a solution.

Chen Jinguo 陈进国, of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a specialist in the study of popular religions, has played an active role in efforts to raise the legal status of popular religion,¹² and is also emerging as the key proponent of Religious Ecology. In a brief position paper posted in 2010, Chen emphasizes that Religious Ecology is not just a purely scholarly discourse, but has “two profound sources” (*shencengxing genyuan* 深层性根源):

First, the continuing reconsideration of the ideological prejudices towards native religious culture, brought about by “linear thinking,” and a hope that national religious policies will be adjusted to address the changing times. Second, a response to the “itchings of faith” brought about by the development of Christianity and a “cultural self-awareness” for native values.¹³

If indeed a criticism of the derogatory treatment given to China’s own religious traditions, and in particular to the popular religion that provided much of the cultural glue that held local society together, is at the root of the Religious Ecology discourse, this explains why the rapid growth of Christianity is regarded as a problem to be solved. For some, the foreign origins of Christianity, its historical links with Western imperialism, as well as its suspected role in US subversive policy toward China (see Mou’s critique of Aikman earlier) are reason enough to oppose its further spread in China. Such nationalist undertones are definitely present in the debate, but do not dominate the statements of thoughtful proponents like Chen Jinguo. More significant is what he terms “cultural self-awareness” (*wenhua zijue* 文化自觉), a reimagination of Chinese traditions not as hindrances in the path of China’s modernization, but as assets of Chinese soft power.¹⁴ This pride in a uniquely Chinese model of religious pluralism was already apparent in Mou Zhongjian’s 2006 article quoted earlier and is turned into specific policy recommendations by Chen Jinguo. Crystallized in phrases widely current in scholarly, social, and political discourse such as *duoyuan yiti* 多元一体 (“many elements, one system”) and *he er bu tong* 和而不同 (“harmonious yet differentiated,” a quote from the *Analects* of Confucius), this model should be made part of China’s “cultural strategy” to create internally a “spiritual home” (*jingshen jiayuan* 精神家园) for the Chinese people and protect Chinese “cultural security” (*wenhua anquan* 文化安全), and externally to counter Western cultural imperialism and offer a competing model.¹⁵ For Chen Jinguo, the challenge will be to balance and combine the two factors cited in the title of the research report he directed: “concern for one’s own culture” (*bentu guanhuai* 本土关怀) and a “global perspective” (*quanqiu shiye* 全球视野), with the latter serving both to project Chinese soft power abroad and to prevent the “native concern” from turning into cultural narrow-mindedness and nationalism (*wenhua xia’ai zhuyi he wenhua minzu*

zhuyi 文化狭隘主义和文化民族主义).¹⁶ The ultimate aim is not to exclude Christianity from China, but to insure its “reasonable” development and acculturation (*tuoyanghua de Jidujiao* 脱洋化的基督教), which will allow it to occupy its proper niche in China’s religious ecology and coexist harmoniously with other religious traditions.¹⁷ Since the current severe ecological imbalances were caused by unenlightened government policies, they can only be corrected by a change in these policies. Chen even calls for a critical reception of Imperial Chinese precedents in religious administration, such as the “*shendao shejiao* 神道设教” maxim enshrined in the *Book of Changes* (literally: “to establish the teachings by means of the way of the gods”), thus implying that the PRC government should not retain a religiously neutral position.¹⁸ The call is taken up by sociologist He Huili 何慧丽 in a 2011 article on the religious ecology of Henan province, in which she calls for a transition from an “unrestrained” (*zizai* 自在) to a “self-aware” (*zijue* 自觉) approach in the regulation of religious life. This combines active promotion of popular religion (including public funding for temple and lineage shrine construction, temple festivals, etc.), measures to further the acculturation and hence ecological compatibility of Christianity, as well as investments in the secular cultural infrastructure of rural areas.¹⁹

The Religious Ecology proponents’ emphasis on the regulatory role of government is anathema to the other major theoretical/political camp in Chinese religious studies, that of rational choice theory, which is based on the premise that religious markets work best without government interference. Sociologist and historian Li Xiangping 李向平 recently launched an all out critical attack on the Religious Ecology model. He summarizes the key positions of Religious Ecology as follows:

1. The loss of religious–ecological balance is an important or even the fundamental cause of the rapid development of Christianity. In concrete terms, the decline of popular religion enabled the development of Christianity; the relationship of popular religion and Christianity is one of reverse correlation.
2. The development of Christianity in rural society challenges the values of traditional society and destroys social bonds based on the maintenance of popular religious activities.
3. The apparent bias in the state’s religious strategy brings about the insufficient development of popular religion(s) and the dominance of Christianity. Therefore, religious ecology theorists forcefully call on the state to adjust its religious development strategy.
4. The spiritual home of the Chinese can only be found within traditional religious belief. Popular religion is orthodox, foreign Christianity is not only not orthodox, but it is also a symbol of Western cultural hegemony and religious colonialism.²⁰

Li Xiangping is critical of these propositions for a number of reasons, including their limited focus on rural China, their weak empirical basis, their

implicit and in his view regressive nativism, but most importantly, their call for government intervention, which leads to (or preserves) a much more serious imbalance, that between religions and state:

What is truly imbalanced is not religion, but the power of the state and the manner in which it controls religions, leading to a loss of balance in the relationship between religious belief and state power.

The solution is clearly not for government to start strengthening native traditions in order to stop the growth of Christianity, but for government to get out of the religious market altogether. The preferred approach of the Religious Ecology theorists and political advisers would have regressive effects on China's gradual (and positively evaluated) transformation into a more pluralistic "civil society" (*gongmin shehui* 公民社会).

It seems that the scholarly debate between the Religious Market and Religious Ecology camps reproduces more general political discourses about the future role of government in Chinese society, with the former propagating market liberalism and the latter a culturally conservative strong government approach with explicit echoes of Imperial Chinese traditions. The metaphors of market and ecology are well chosen to serve their respective purposes: treating religions as market actors allows one to call for liberalization and a retreat of government, while a view of religions as parts of an ecological system requires the active role of government in restoring and protecting the natural balance damaged by harmful human interference (in the form of earlier, leftist policies). My task here is to point out this political embeddedness of scholarly discourses in China, but not to judge the relative merits of these political arguments.²¹ I will instead in the following section return to Religious Ecology as a model for the explanation of religious changes in modern China to examine its usefulness when applied to empirical data.

A CASE STUDY

To my knowledge, there has so far been only one sustained and systematic attempt to test the Religious Ecology model in a field research setting: Chen Xiaoyi 陈晓毅, a young anthropologist, conducted a field study of the religious life of a town in Guizhou province 贵州省 from the Religious Ecology perspective.²² He starts out from the assumption that every local religious system seeks to reduce internal conflict and maintain a state of balance among its constituent elements; this balance may be lost temporarily, but is always eventually reestablished. In the past and present, key culprits in the destabilization of the local religious system have usually been Christians (both Catholic and Protestant) whose exclusivism does not harmonize easily with the other locally present traditions. Chen's field research locale of Qingyan was in the nineteenth century the site of a violent persecution of Catholics (the Qingyan *jiao'an* 青岩教案 of 1861), which in his estimation, however, the Catholics largely brought upon themselves by their disharmonious behavior. A key role

in healing such breaches in the local religious–ecological system is played by popular religion (which he terms *minsu zongjiao* 民俗宗教).²³ He conceptualizes a three-tiered hierarchy in the religious system of Qingyan in terms of institutional and doctrinal differentiation: The bottom layer is made up of the popular religions of the Han 汉, Miao 苗, and Buyi 布依 ethnic groups; the middle layer by Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism; and the top layer by Catholicism and Protestantism. As the substratum of the whole system, the popular religions play a key role in maintaining its harmonious balance. Given the crucial role of popular religions in maintaining systemic harmony, Chen sharply criticizes current discrimination of them:

The current religious policies of China fundamentally do not provide any protection to the indigenous “popular religions,” which have the broadest social basis and greatest “mass character.” Not only that, but they even mistreat them by applying to them names such as “feudal superstition” and “stupid and backward”—this is culturally self-hating behavior.²⁴

He demands that popular religion (under the moniker *minsu zongjiao*) be put on an equal footing with the officially recognized five religions. The government should utilize the inherent stability of popular religion and its ability to meet many individual, social, psychological, and cultural needs to further the construction of a unified and harmonious society and world.²⁵ The political rhetoric sounds very similar to other Religious Ecology proponents already cited, but it is noteworthy that Chen does not construct his model in contradistinction to religious market theories. His principal *bête noire* is not rational choice theory, but Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations,”²⁶ which to him represents an aggressive model of cultural–religious conflict that needs to be countered with the Chinese example of harmonious coexistence.

Another interesting move by Chen is his particular version of an intellectual lineage for Religious Ecology theory. He starts out with a brief review of the historical origins of the term “ecology” in the biological sciences beginning with Ernst Haeckel’s *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen*,²⁷ its adaptation into cultural anthropology by Julian Steward, and its employment by Chinese “eco-philosopher” Yu Mouchang 余谋昌.²⁸ However, these are merely nods to the historical development of the notion of “ecology,” and do not define Chen’s own use of the term. Like Mou Zhongjian (whom he mentions), Chen Xiaoyi’s concept of religious ecology focuses on the relations among religious traditions within a sociocultural system, rather than on the interaction between cultural systems and their natural environment:

In my study, this concept [that is, religious ecology] basically does not involve the relationship between religion and nature; instead it mainly covers the relations among religions, the relations between religions and their social environment, relations among believers within religions, relations between religious believers and their social environment, as well as the relations among religious elements within the individual psychological make-up of religious believers,

and the relations between religious elements and their individual ideational environment.²⁹

However, he refers to one precedent for his approach, which does not share just the terminology, but also a similar understanding of religious ecology. In view of the nativist sentiment invested by other authors in *Religious Ecology* as an approach uniquely linked to (and suitable for) Chinese religions, it is interesting that this precedent is a monograph by American sociologist and theologian Nancy L. Eiesland.³⁰

This reference deserves following up in some detail: Published in 2000, Eiesland's work deals with religious change in a once-rural community that is turning into an exurb of Atlanta, Georgia. She utilized a perspective of what she calls "religious organizational ecology," because she found more mainstream approaches employing "the metaphor of supply-side religious markets and basic tenets of rational choice models of religious change" insufficient to account for the patterns of change she observed in her field site.³¹ By contrast,

A focus on religious ecology enables the researcher to relate organizational prospects in ways more nuanced than is often employed by the market competition or congregational dominance approaches. In an ecological frame, the focus shifts from individual organizations to the population of organizations and the contexts in which they are embedded. Religious organizations are related to one another and to other organizations within their locale—even though some draw from far beyond the locality in which they are situated. Thus religious organizations often behave in ways that are more relational than autonomous—assisting with community projects, sharing information about distressed locals, or supporting anticrime or pro-life campaigns.

Their interdependence is not simply a matter of competition. The religious ecology is not a ceaseless round of skirmishes of groups, organizations, and individuals, caught in win-lose arena of combat and death.³²

Eiesland thus positions herself against rational choice and religious market theories that seek to explain religious change in terms of religious consumers shopping in a marketplace of competing religious providers. In Eiesland's view, this model not merely fails to account for the processes of change she observed in Dacula, Georgia, it also fundamentally misunderstands the nature of religious organizations:

Organizational ecology allows us not to ignore struggle and competition and to balance it with appreciation of the particular type of organizations that religious groups are, that is, communities of faith bearing witness within their locality, to one another, and beyond... Whatever else the groups examined in these pages may claim to be, whatever other ends they may serve, their original and continuing identity is religious. The continuing power of religious belief and commitment provides a basis for enduring solidarity and common moral concern.³³

Eiesland’s rejection of market models of religious life as analytically of limited usefulness leads over into a normative concern that sociology needs to supply a language that actually helps foster cooperation over competition:

Ecological language is particularly useful in that it allows religious groups at the local level to see themselves more clearly as potentially complementing one another, sometimes sharing resources, often serving diverse populations, and now and then competing for the same pool of people, funds, and status. If, however, religious organizations see themselves as perpetually embattled because of limited goods or as singly responsible for the spiritual well-being of the entire community, they may be less willing to cooperate and be more inclined simply to vie for their share. While competition surely happens, it does not characterize the dynamics among many religious organizations. This is reason enough for developing a fuller ecological framework when discussing the relations among religious organizations.³⁴

An awareness of the normative force of supposedly strictly technical, sociological language here seems to shade over into a liberal theological agenda of ecumenical cooperation as preferable to denominational competition and exclusivism. Chen Xiaoyi’s study (and the work of other Religious Ecology proponents discussed earlier) demonstrates similar characteristics in that he also positions his ecological approach explicitly against models of cultural pluralism based on conflict and competition, while pursuing a normative agenda, though a quite different one.

CONCLUSION

This discussion of the recent emergence of the religious ecology approach in the method and theory debates of Chinese religious studies has had to dwell, not surprisingly, quite a bit on its political context and ideological implications. However, I do not want to argue that Religious Ecology is completely reducible to politics and ideology. Looking at Eiesland’s study, we find that its normative context does not necessarily vitiate the explanatory value of her model for the empirical data in her field site. Similarly, the religious ecology approach holds the promise of conceptualizing the role of Christianity in China not just as that of an eternal misfit, but as a participant in a larger cultural system. As such it may still stand in tension (or competition) with other participants, but it may also engage in more complex relationships with them. The Religious Ecology approach thus may allow to investigate interactions that are not reducible to religious market competition. For example, there are indications that competition between Christianity and popular religion may in some places not be completely adversarial, but produce hybrid forms or lead to a functional “popularization” (*minjian xinyanghua* 民间信仰化) of Christianity.³⁵ The assumption of “ecological” systemic interdependence and shared cultural idioms/values of local religious players may provide a better conceptual handle on such developments than a strict rational choice market perspective. Finally, I would like to suggest that researchers consider

the affinities of the Religious Ecology model to classical structural-functionalism and its proclivity toward construing balanced sociocultural systems, most famously applied to the Chinese religious sphere by Maurice Freedman and C. K. Yang.³⁶ While C. K. Yang's notion of "diffused religion" has been enthusiastically adopted by Religious Ecology theorists, there has so far been no sustained attempt to link the Religious Ecology model with Yang's larger systemic construct of "religion in Chinese society." Structural-functionalism seems to me conceptually much closer to Religious Ecology than Julian Steward's cultural ecology, which always and somewhat misleadingly gets cited as a precursor. Further explorations of these theoretical affinities may allow Religious Ecology to emancipate itself from its ideological roots and develop into a viable and empirically applicable approach to the study of Chinese religion(s) and religious change.³⁷

NOTES

1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.
2. "Conceptualizations of 'Popular Religion' in Recent Research in the People's Republic of China," paper presented at the conference "研究新視界：媽祖與華人民間信仰國際研討會," Hsinkang 新港, Taiwan, May 22–23, 2010.
3. See the overview by a proponent of "Confucianism as religion" position in the controversy: Li Shen 李申, "Rujiao yu Rujiao yanjiu 儒教与儒教研究," in *Zhongguo zongjiao baogao* 中国宗教报告 (2009), ed. Jin Ze 金泽 and Qiu Yonghui 邱永辉 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2009), 144–160.
4. Raised most trenchantly by Richard Madsen, *Democracy's Dharma: Religious Renaissance and Political Development in Taiwan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).
5. See, for example, two chapters in the recent collection, *Social Scientific Studies of Religion in China: Methodology, Theories, and Findings*, ed. Fenggang Yang and Graeme Lang (Leiden: Brill, 2011): Gao Bingzhong and Ma Qiang, "From Grassroots Association to Civil Society Organization: A Case Study of the Hebei Province Dragon Tablet Fair," 195–226; Liu Peng, "On the Problem of Developing a Mechanism for the Participation of Religion in the Social Services Sector," 227–243. See also Gao Bingzhong 高丙中, *Minjian wenhua yu gongmin shehui: Zhongguo xiandai licheng de wenhua yanjiu* 民间文化与公民社会：中国现代历程的文化研究 (Beijing: Beijing Daxue chubanshe, 2008).
6. Leung Ka-lun, *Gaige kaifang yilai de Zhongguo nongcun jiaohui* 改革開放以來的中國農村教會 (Hong Kong: Jiandao Shenxueyuan 建道神學院, 1999). Cited in Chen Jinguo et al. 中国社会科学院世界宗教研究所课题组、陈进国 执笔, "Bentu guanhuai yu quanqiu shiye: Gan, Xiang, Yun sansheng Jidujiao xianzhuang diaocha baogao 本土关怀与全球视野—赣、湘、云三省基督教现状调查报告," in *Zhongguo zongjiao baogao* (2009) 中国宗教报告 (2009), ed. Jin Ze 金泽 and Qiu Yonghui 邱永辉 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2009), 255. Chen et al. agree with Leung, but add that the suppression of popular religion began long before 1949, constituting a dominant policy concern throughout the twentieth century. See Chen et al., "Bentu guanhuai yu quanqiu shiye," 256.
7. Mou Zhongjian 牟钟鉴, "Zongjiao wenhua shengtai de Zhongguo moshi 宗教文化生态的中国模式," posted May 16, 2006, <http://www.mzb.com.cn/html/>

- report/122313-2.htm (accessed September 16, 2011). Print version: *Zhongguo minzu bao* 中国民族报, no.536/6 (2006). Reprinted in: Mou Zhongjian, *Tansuo zongjiao* 探索宗教 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2008), 94–100. My citations are drawn from the online version.
8. Julian Steward, *Theory of Culture Change: The Methodology of Multilinear Evolution* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1955).
9. David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2003), cover blurb.
10. This seems to be one of the few areas of quasi-political discourse where it is deemed permissible to regard Taiwan as an example that the PRC should emulate. Similar sentiments can be found in a recent, very personal and passionate essay by veteran historian of religion Han Bingfang 韩秉芳: “Zhongguo minjian xinyang zhi hexie yinsu 中国民间信仰之和谐因素,” in *Zongjiao zhe he, he zhi zongjiao* 宗教之和、和之宗教, Han Bingfang et al. (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2009), 1–43.
11. *Makesi zhuyi, Ruxue, Fojiao, Daojiao Daojiao, Yisilanjiao, Tianzhujiào, Jidujiao yiji gezhong jiankang de minjian xinyang* 马克思主义、儒学、佛教、道家道教、伊斯兰教、天主教、基督教以及各种健康的民间信仰.
12. See Clart, “Conceptualizations of ‘Popular Religion’ in Recent Research in the People’s Republic of China.”
13. Chen, “Guanyu Zhongguo zongjiao shengtailun de zhenglun 关于中国宗教生态论的争论,” <http://minzu.people.com.cn/BIG5/166717/12068925.html>, posted July 6, 2010 (accessed September 21, 2011).
14. The inspiration for this revaluation of native traditions (or at least its cited authoritative support) is drawn from the late writings of Fei Xiaotong 费孝通 (1910–2005), the father of Chinese sociology. His call for cultural self-awareness and appreciation of the uniqueness of Chinese cultural pluralism is frequently adduced to legitimize research into popular religions and culture—as well as the resultant policy recommendations. See also Xie Dongli 谢东莉, “Zai wenhua zijue zhong goujian hexie: yi Qinghai Guide Wangcun siyueba miaohui wei ge’an de kaocha 在文化自觉中构建和谐——以青海贵德王村四月八庙会为个案考察,” *Jieri yanjiu* 节日研究 2 (2011): 92–101.
15. Chen Jinguo et al., “Bentu guanhuai yu quanqiu shiye,” 258–259. The call to build a spiritual home for the Chinese nation is a direct legitimating take-off on Hu Jintao’s 2007 report at the seventeenth Party Congress, which is frequently appealed to in this article. See <http://english.cpc.people.com.cn/66102/6290211.html> (accessed on September 21, 2011).
16. Chen Jinguo et al., “Bentu guanhuai yu quanqiu shiye,” 253.
17. Ibid., 254.
18. Ibid., 253.
19. He Huili, “Nongcun zongjiao shengtai: ‘duoyuan yiti’ guanxi de dongtai fazhan—yi Henan nongcun weili 农村宗教生态: ‘多元一体’关系的动态发展——以河南农村为例,” *Zhongguo nongcun guancha* 中国农村观察 2/2011: 67–73.
20. Li Xiangping, “‘Zongjiao shengtai’ haishi ‘quanli shengtai’: zongjiao xinyang de guojia xiangxiangli ‘宗教生态’还是‘权力生态’——宗教信仰的国家想象力,” http://21ccom.net/articles/sxpl/sx/article_2010080414907.html, 2010 (last accessed September 22, 2011). A slightly altered version appeared as “‘Zongjiao shengtai’ haishi ‘quanli shengtai’: cong dangdai Zhongguo de ‘zongjiao shengtailun’ sichao tanqi ‘宗教生态’还是‘权力生态’——从当代中国的‘宗教生态论’

- 思潮谈起,” *Shanghai Daxue xuebao* 上海大学学报 (*shehui kexue ban* 社会科学版) 18 (2011) 1: 124–140. My citations are drawn from the online version.
21. An (not quite convincing) attempt to evaluate both theories and to propose a third alternative was made by Peking University philosopher Zhang Zhigang. See Zhang Zhigang 张志刚, “Dangdai Zhongguo zongjiao guanxi yanjiu chuyi: jiyu guonei wai yantao xianzhuang de lilun yu zhengce tantao 当代中国宗教关系研究刍议——基于国内外研讨现状的理论与政策探讨,” *Beijing Daxue xuebao* 北京大学学报 (*zhexue shehui kexue ban* 哲学社会科学版) 48 (2011) 2: 35–36.
 22. Chen Xiaoyi 陈晓毅, *Zhongguoshi zongjiao shengtai: Qingyan zongjiao duoyangxing ge'an yanjiu* 中国式宗教生态: 青岩宗教多样性个案研究 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2008). There is, in fact, a second recent dissertation that carries “religious ecology” in its title: Yanfei Sun’s “Religions in Sociopolitical Context: The Reconfiguration of Religious Ecology in Post-Mao China” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2010), which is based on field research in Lanxi county 兰溪县, Zhejiang province. Dr. Sun shares with Chinese RE proponents a highly critical attitude toward religious market approaches, but instead of drawing on the PRC religious ecology discourse, she develops a model of her own that seeks to explain the dynamics of a local religious field in terms of the interaction of a religious tradition’s internal resources with the external sociopolitical context. The focus lies here on the relations between religious and state actors, not on those among religious groups, and the ecological metaphor employed in the dissertation’s title does not play a central role in the dissertation itself. In a personal communication, Yanfei Sun told me that she is currently working on a paper that will clarify her theoretical position (e-mail, September 3, 2011).
 23. On this terminology see my paper “Conceptualizations of ‘Popular Religion’ in Recent Research in the People’s Republic of China.”
 24. Chen, *Zhongguoshi zongjiao shengtai*, 38.
 25. *Ibid.*, 38–39.
 26. *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22–49.
 27. Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1866.
 28. Cf. Yu Mouchang 余谋昌, *Wenhua xin shiji: shengtai wenhua de lilun chanshi* 文化新世纪——生态文化的理论阐释 (Harbin: Dongbei Linze Daxue chubanshe, 1996); *Shengtai zhexue* 生态哲学 (Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 2000); *Shengtai wenhua lun* 生态文化论 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001). Chen Xiaoyi cites only the first two of these three titles. Chen, *Zhongguoshi zongjiao shengtai*, 10–11.
 29. Chen, *Zhongguoshi zongjiao shengtai*, 1.
 30. Nancy L. Eiesland, *A Particular Place: Urban Restructuring and Religious Ecology in a Southern Exurb* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000).
 31. *Ibid.*, 13.
 32. *Ibid.*, 16.
 33. *Ibid.*, 17.
 34. *Ibid.*
 35. For a Zhejiang case study, see Tang Xiaofeng 唐晓峰, “Cangnanxian XJ cun de Jidu zongjiao ji qi minjian xinyanghua tezheng 苍南县XJ村的基督宗教及其民间信仰化特征,” *Zongjiao renleixue* 宗教人类学 1 (2009): 83–98. In the same issue, Chen Xiaoyi gives a less optimistic view of the adaptive capacities of Protestant Christianity in his Guizhou field site of Qingyan, where as a result Christian growth has stagnated in the 2000s. Chen Xiaoyi, “‘Zhu’, ‘zu’ zhi jian: Qingyan Jidujiao yu Hanzu minsu zongjiao de hudong ‘主’、‘祖’之间——青岩基督教与

汉族民俗宗教的互动,” *Zongjiao renleixue* 宗教人类学 1 (2009): 196–215. A radical critique of the normative “indigenous/foreign” dualism of RE discourse might undermine the project of indigenizing a foreign Christianity by arguing that Protestant house churches are successful precisely because they represent an already indigenized form of Christianity. Cf., for example, the argument made by Lian Xi in his *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). From that perspective, then, a Chinese religious ecology would have to accommodate elements that are not so easily harmonized, such as indigenous millenarian traditions.

36. Maurice Freedman, “On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion,” in *The Study of Chinese Society: Essays by Maurice Freedman*, ed. G. William Skinner (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1979), 351–369; C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1961).
37. Versions of this essay were presented at the symposium “Religious Diversity in Chinese Thought,” University of Münster, October 27–30, 2011; Centre national de la recherche scientifique (Paris), January 20, 2012; and at the Center for Chinese Studies (Taipei), April 30, 2012. I am grateful to all participants who offered insightful comments that helped improve the essay. A particular thank you goes to Vincent Goossaert for his detailed suggestions on the first written version of the essay.