



From the Director:



On the Easter Sunday thirty years ago (April 8, 1979), a Christian church in the coastal City of Ningbo in Zhejiang was reopened for a worship service. It marked the end of the 13-year ban on religions in China that took effect in 1966 at the onset of the Cultural Revolution. In the last thirty years, we have seen the revival of many kinds of religions and traditional spiritual practices and the introduction of various new religious and spiritual movements in China. In the 21st century, hundreds of millions of people assert adherence to Buddhism. Daoism-based folk religions have large masses of practitioners. The ethnicized Islam in China begins to attract converts among the Han people. Tibetan Buddhism is also drawing followers among urbanites in eastern metropolises of China. All the while, Christianity has been the fastest growing religion. The religious effervescence in China is unlikely to abate in the foreseeable future.

To better understand these religious changes and concerned about the social implications, more and more scholars of social sciences and humanities, both in China and the West, have strived to conduct empirical studies of Chinese religions and spiritualities. The Beijing Summit on Chinese Spirituality and Society on October 8-10, 2008 provided an opportunity for many scholars to engage in lively discussions about the theories, methods, and important topics in the social scientific study of religion in China. Together they have helped to chart future directions for the study of religion in China and beyond, some of which are summarized in the overview of the Beijing Summit in the previous issue of this newsletter. We have been working hard to get the conference articles published in China and the West.

In addition to formal conferences and research articles, other effective ways to carry on the scholarly exchanges include interviews with scholars and dialogues among scholars. Before the Beijing Summit, we conducted a series of interviews, which were published in the *China Ethnic News* and other Chinese newspapers before and during the Beijing Summit. In the last issue of the newsletter, we published a group of interviews with the renowned scholars of Confucianism. In this issue we present interviews with four scholars who participated in the Beijing Summit. Like the other scholars we have interviewed, they provide invaluable insights about the current status and future of the social scientific study of religion in China.

(Dr. Fenggang Yang)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>Interview with Philip Jenkins</i>	2
<i>Interview with Richard Madsen</i>	2
<i>Interview with J. Gordon Melton</i>	4
<i>Interview with David Palmer</i>	6

Interview with Philip Jenkins

Philip Jenkins is the Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of the Humanities at Penn State University. His major current interests include the study of global Christianity, past and present; of new and emerging religious movements; and of twentieth century US history, chiefly post-1975. He also has an enduring interest in issues of crime and deviance, and the construction of social problems. He has published twenty books, including The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South (2006) and God's Continent: Christianity, Islam and Europe's Religious Crisis (2007): all from Oxford University Press. His latest book is The Lost History of Christianity (Harper One).



Question: *You have been observing the Christian movements in the global South. Now you are focusing on the Far East, in China; what do you think about the Christian growth in China? Will Chinese Christianity have any impacts on global Christianity?*

Philip Jenkins: Numerically, China is already an important presence within Christianity, as there are probably more Christians there than in most European countries. I believe also that these numbers will increase over time. The more Chinese Christianity develops in dialogue with Chinese society and Chinese culture, the more it will evolve distinctive forms that will be of enormous interest to Western researchers and thinkers.

Question: *What are your expectations for social scientific studies of religion in China?*

Philip Jenkins: One fascinating point about the summit was seeing Western scholars present their familiar methodologies, especially as they concern new religious movements. China will prove a wonderful testing ground and research site for these issues. I also appreciated the frankness of Chinese scholars about the history of their discipline, and some of its shortcomings. Such honesty provides an excellent basis for future growth. I would hope to see Western scholars take this emerging Chinese research very seriously indeed.

Question: *What is your reflection on the Beijing Summit?*

Philip Jenkins: I vastly appreciated the opportunity for Chinese and Western scholars to see how each other worked, what their different assumptions were. Speaking personally, it was a wonderful opportunity for me to become better acquainted with the rich scholarship being done on Chinese religion. The summit will really change the way I teach, as I try to absorb some of these insights. I hope there may be other such gatherings in future!

Interview with Richard Madsen

Richard Madsen is distinguished professor and chair of the sociology department at the University of California, San Diego and a co-author (with Robert Bellah et al.) of The Good Society and Habits of the Heart, which received the Los Angeles Times Book Award and was jury nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. He has authored or co-authored five books on China, including Morality and Power in a Chinese Village for which he received the C. Wright Mills Award; China's Catholics: Tragedy and Hope in an Emerging Civil Society; and China and the American Dream and Democracy's Dharma: Religious Renaissance and Political Development in Taiwan. He also co-edited (with Tracy B. Strong) The Many and the One: Religious and Secular Perspectives on Ethical Pluralism in the Modern World.



Question: *What are your recent projects on Taiwan and mainland China?*

Richard Madsen: My most recently completed project was a study of transformations in religious life among the middle classes in Taiwan. Last year I published a book on the subject, *Democracy's Dharma: Religious Renaissance and Political Development in Taiwan*. The book focuses mostly on various "humanistic Buddhist" organizations in Taiwan. These organizations are attracting large numbers of middle class Taiwanese and are showing a remarkable amount of religious creativity, global vision, and social concern. Such groups exploded in size and influence after Taiwan's transition to democracy, and I argue that they have made an important contribution to the stabilization and consolidation of that democracy.

Question: *Do you think mainland China will follow the steps of Taiwan in its change of religious policy?*

Richard Madsen: It is always very difficult to predict the future. There are similarities, however, between the ways that China represses and controls religion today and the ways that Taiwan did this 40 years ago. And there are some signs of gradually increasing flexibility of China's religious policy that is similar to what began to happen in Taiwan about 35 years ago and that eventually led to the growth and flourishing of the groups that I studied.

Question: *What kinds of social and political roles will religious groups play in mainland China? How much will Taiwan-based religious groups spread into mainland China? Is this a good thing for mainland China?*

Richard Madsen: Even now some religious groups are playing important roles in social welfare – providing help to the poor and sick, education (especially moral education) to the young, and so forth. Some Taiwanese groups – especially Tzu Chi – are very good at this and have now been welcomed and registered officially in China. Tzu Chi, especially, made an important contribution to providing help to the earthquake victims in Sichuan.

Sometimes, though, in China as in the USA, religious commitments can lead to political activism. Under some circumstances, for example, Tibetan Buddhism can give Tibetans the courage to resist Han Chinese domination. The Chinese government reacts very strongly to any religious movements that seem to have this political tendency.

Question: *What is your reflection on the Beijing Summit?*

Richard Madsen: Serious study of religion has been marginalized in Chinese academic life and serious discussion of religion is also rather rare in public life in China. The Summit made a major contribution in moving the study of religion closer to the mainstream of Chinese academic life. The Summit was also widely publicized in the Chinese press – including the *People's Daily*. This will certainly help to legitimize religion as a topic of public conversation in China.



Interview with J. Gordon Melton



J. Gordon Melton is the Director of the Institute for the Study of American Religion located in Santa Barbara, California, and a Research Specialist with the Department of Religious Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara. He is the author of more than 40 reference and scholarly books. His most famous book The Encyclopedia of American Religions originally appeared in 1979 and is now in its 7th edition (2002). Most recently he co-edited Religions of the World: a Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Beliefs and Practices (ABC-CLIO, 2002), with Martin Baumann, which received the Editor's Choice Award from the American Library Association and Booklist, the ALA journal. Other recent titles include: Encyclopedia of Protestantism (2005), Nelson's Handbook of Denominations (2007) and A Will to Choose: the Origins of African American Methodism (2007). He is currently finishing a book on Chinese Buddhism.

Question: *You once said that China is a country with exporting religions. Can you explain? What have you documented so far?*

Gordon Melton: Through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, China moved from a land with closed borders that attempted to a large degree to block the flow of information (including religious culture) from passing in and out. Relative to the West, little information on Chinese religion was available and no practitioners, much less communities of practitioners, could be found across Europe and North America. This situation changed step by step through nineteenth century as Christian missionaries developed a range of strategies to penetrate China, and periodically groups of Chinese (including religious teachers) migrated from China.

Christian penetration of China began in earnest in the 1840s and over the next century penetrated the major cities and most of the land within a hundred miles of the Pacific coast. Important to our story, the missions led to the creation of new Chinese forms of Christianity, both orthodox and otherwise, and created a situation in which additional new religious movements were created out of the ferment of the clash of Protestant Christianity with the several older Chinese faiths.

At every step of these changes, from the Manchurian Qing Dynasty, to the Republic, and the People's Republic, leaders have expressed, for a spectrum of reasons, a concern with the importation of religion into China by outsiders. The People's Republic has been especially concerned with foreign influence on China's religious culture, and have offered a variation on older rationales for keeping foreign missionaries and evangelists from the Chinese people. This concern has frequently led to criticism of the People's Republic for repressing religion. As consideration of globalization has peaked, its implications for religion have been largely ignored.

Globalization is a two-way street. Just as religious culture flows into China, overwhelming the many barriers that have been set up to block the flow, so religious culture flows outward. China is not only home to ancient religious traditions, but throughout the twentieth century joined the whole world in producing many new religions, most variations on older religions and/or syntheses of two or more of the older religions. Prominent among the newer religions have been Tian Dao (Yiguandao), the True Jesus Church, and the Assembly Hall movement (The Local Church) of Watchman Nee.

These three movements are the best examples of China's role as an exporter of religion. Beginning soon after

these groups were formed inside China, missionaries left China to spread the religion, first among Chinese diaspora communities and then to Westerners. Already through the nineteenth century, Chinese has begun migrating to other lands, primarily in Southeast Asia, and then, beginning in 1849, to North America. They brought Buddhism, Daoism, and Chinese folk religions with them. A relatively steady movement of people around the Pacific realm was punctuated by larger movement following different wars. Most notably, hundreds of thousands of Chinese moved to Taiwan in 1949-50, with lesser numbers moving to Hong Kong. They brought their religions with them and transformed Hong Kong and Taiwan into points of dissemination. Followers and leaders of Tian Dao, the True Jesus Church, and the Assembly Hall movement were prominent among the Buddhists and Christians who moved to Taiwan. In spite of official disapproval, they grew large and from Taiwan expanded into significant international movements. Meanwhile, those Buddhists who remained closer to the traditions flowered and created a spectrum of new movements which also have become significant international organizations. One new Chinese form of Buddhism, Humanistic Buddhism with its new emphasis on relevance to this world and human need produced the two largest Taiwanese Buddhist movements, the Tzu Chi Buddhist Compassion Society and Fo Guang Shan. Then a decade later, Tibetans left their homeland and turned northern India into a base for disseminating every form of their religion globally.

One could go on, but the point is made. Just as religions have and continue to enter China by a variety of means, so religion is being exported from China and having a dramatic effect in different contexts. Most recently, we are seeing businessmen from the People's Republic, especially those who wind up living for a period of time abroad, funding the construction of Buddhist temples and supporting religious functionaries from their homeland who are spreading Chinese religions in their new homeland.

Question: *You have authored several encyclopedia, one on the US, one on Europe, are you doing one on China? What would it take to do one on China? What kinds of research and preparations are necessary?*

Gordon Melton: I have been in conversations with several of my colleagues, who unlike me are specialists in Chinese religion, about doing an *Encyclopedia of Religion in China*. We have worked through a variety of theoretical problems in coming to a definition of what constitutes Chinese religion in the broadest sense, creating a header list of possible (an important and necessary step to ensure inclusiveness) and developing a list of potential contributors both inside and outside the People's Republic. Such an encyclopedia would include entries on all the ethnic groups, each province of China, each separate movement, and a variety of individual biographical entries.

We made a start with the entries for the *Religions of the World: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Beliefs and Practices* (ABC-Clio, 2001), which I co-edited. We also worked through the legal situation with a fairly comprehensive volume published by the Institute for the Study of American Religion (ISAR) in Santa Barbara concerning Chinese religious laws. A few practical problems remain, but I am hopeful that they will be worked out in the near future.

Most recently, ISAR has worked with the Hong Kong Institute on Culture, Commerce and Religion headed by Dr. Edward Irons to bring out *Spiritual Pathways: Hong Kong (A Directory of Hong Kong's Religious and Spiritual Communities)*. This 190 page directory illustrates the diversity now present in Hong Kong religion and the amount of work that would go into creating an Encyclopedia.

It may be that the first edition will be published as an Internet product, thus allowing ongoing additions and corrections.

Interview with David Palmer



David A. Palmer is Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at Hong Kong University. From 2004 to 2008 he was a research fellow at the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient (French School of Asian Studies), where he was director of its Hong Kong centre. In addition to 13 articles and book chapters, he is the author of Qigong Fever: Body, Science and Utopia in China (Columbia University Press, 2007) and is currently completing book manuscripts on The Religious Question in Modern China (with Vincent Goossaert) and Global Taoism: the Search for Authenticity (with Elijah Siegler).

Question: *You published Qigong Fever: Body, Science and Utopia in China in 2007. Could you briefly tell us what are the main findings and arguments in your book?*

David Palmer: The book is a study of Qigong as a social movement in China from 1949 to 1999, which, in the post-Mao period, became the main outlet for the expression of mass religiosity in Chinese cities. The book relies on a combination of historical, anthropological, and sociological perspectives to describe the spread of the Qigong craze in the context of socialist China's socio-political evolution. It traces the complex relationships among the masters, officials, scientists, practitioners, and ideologues involved in the Qigong movement, and shows how the movement expanded, fragmented, and collapsed (with the Falungong ban) as a result of the shifting relations between political leaders and popular masters and their organizations.

Question: *How well it has been received in Western academia and in China?*

David Palmer: The book has been very well received in the West, with unanimously positive reviews. As the first book-length study of a major movement which is neither one of the major institutionalized religions, nor rural popular religion, nor a single-organization new religious movement, it has contributed to opening the field of the sociology of Chinese religion to non-institutionalized forms of religiosity and spirituality, which blur the boundaries of the religious, the secular and the political, and can have a significant social impact. The book was awarded the Francis Hsu Award for the Best Book in East Asian Anthropology in 2007 from the Society for East Asian Anthropology of the American Anthropological Association. In China, the book is not available but I know that some scholars and Ph.D. students have obtained it and are using it in their research. I presented the findings at the Summer Institute on the Social Scientific Study of Religion in Shanghai in 2007, and it was very well received.

Question: *Your presentation in the Beijing Summit was about the study of Daoism. Why has your focus changed from Qigong to Daoism?*

David Palmer: The Qigong movement was a major episode in the transformation of China's religious tradition in the context of modernity. It can also be seen as a chapter in the contemporary history of Daoism. Only a few years ago, when I finished my research on Qigong in 2002, the field of Daoist studies and of Chinese religion remained within a classical sinological framework, which considered that nothing of interest had happened in Daoism or Chinese religion since the late Qing, and that the only reason to do field research was to uncover living fossils which could illustrate practices and rituals mentioned in earlier historical sources. The Qigong movement put all of that into question – as such a mass phenomenon, leading to the Falungong issue, it couldn't be ignored. But although it was clearly linked to a long history of self-cultivation and salvational movements, it also had many new characteristics

typical of religious modernity, and other aspects unique to the socio-political configuration of Maoist and post-Mao China. Since 2003, I have been engaged in several projects which aim to come to a better understanding of the transformation of Chinese religion in the modern era, both through case studies and through painting the broad landscape of religious evolution from the early 20th century until today. My paper at the Beijing Summit was one instance of the latter approach. It summarizes the findings and conceptual issues that arose at a conference on Daoism and modernity which Liu Xun and I organized at Harvard University in June 2006 (the published conference volume, entitled *Daoism in the 20th Century: Between Eternity and Modernity*, should come out in 2009).

Question: *What is your reflection on the Beijing Summit? And what's your expectation on the social scientific study of religion in China?*

David Palmer: It was a perfectly planned and organized event. Congratulations! I liked the fact that it was truly international and cross-disciplinary. One aspect that impressed me is to see how much good research is being done by Chinese scholars now. In 2003 I asked around and could hardly find any scholar in China doing empirical research on contemporary religious movements and communities. Now there's so much going on; it's becoming hard to keep abreast of it all! As for the future, I see a positive trend in the adoption of more rigorous empirical social scientific methodologies, which is being stimulated by the growing exchanges with Western scholars, notably through the programs organized by Professor Fenggang Yang. At the same time, it's going to be interesting to see how the Chinese scholarship will contribute to the theoretical development of the discipline: right now we're still at the stage of seeing how Western-derived theories and concepts work with the Chinese experience, and applying them, questioning them and modifying them. Actually, since China has no single dominant religion, and is a place where every conceivable type of modern and traditional religious formation can be found, it's the perfect testing ground for any theory.

The sociology of religion needs to move out of its European and American regionalism, and live up to its universalist claims. This necessarily involves taking into account the world's most populous nation (as well as other major regions, including India and Africa), not as a regional side story but as a central concern. Ultimately, it is the work of Chinese scholars which will make this possible.

Finally, it will be interesting to see how these issues are worked out in the Chinese cultural and intellectual context, in which there is a strong moral and normative orientation. I think this is a good thing. After all, religion is not an exotic intellectual toy: it challenges us profoundly, both as individuals and as societies. In China, there's a sincere interest in finding how religion can contribute to society while avoiding its drawbacks. To truly engage with this question as a scholar requires a combination of humility, scientific detachment, moral discernment, and sense of social responsibility – a wisdom which I have seen in many of our Chinese scholar friends.



<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ChineseSSSR/>

This online/email discussion group is for scholars and students interested in the social scientific study of Chinese religions (including religions among the Chinese anywhere in the world). Currently (April, 2009) it has more than 500 subscribers from many parts of the world. Most of the postings are in Chinese, and some in English. If you are interested in joining the group, please visit the website above or send an email to CRCS@purdue.edu.

News and Activities

Website:

<http://www.purdue.edu/crcs>

This website has been developed into a center of information and resources of Chinese religion, spirituality and society. It includes an archive of government documents, scholarly articles, and short essays on Chinese spirituality, religion and society.

- Dr. Fenggang Yang gave a lecture on “Religious Trends in China Today and their Social and Political Implications” at the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture, Institute for Research on Social Issues, and China Studies Workgroup, Indiana University – Purdue University in Indianapolis, March 6, 2009.
- Dr. Fenggang Yang participated in a colloquium on “Educating for Liberty and Happiness,” sponsored by the Liberty Fund, French Lick, Indiana, March 19-22, 2009.

CRCS Anniversary Symposium at Purdue, 2009

On the anniversary of the establishment of the Center on Religion and Chinese Society (CRCS), the Purdue Symposium 2009 will be held on April 30-May 2 at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana. The theme is "Religion and Spirituality in China Today". For more information, please visit our website.

Center on Religion and Chinese Society

Director
Fenggang Yang

Project Manager
Lily Szeto

Stone Hall Room 306
700 W. State Street
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907-2059

Phone: (765)494-5801
Fax: (765)494-6938
Email: CRCS@purdue.edu



Scholarly Informed Articles for the Public

- Yang, Fenggang. 2009.** “Religious Trends in China and Their Social Implications.” Feature essay of the *Freeman Report*, a monthly newsletter of the Freeman Chair in China Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 7(3):1-3.
- Yang, Fenggang. 2009.** “This Shore and That Shore” (*ci an bi an*), a weekly newspaper column on religion and society (in Chinese). *China Ethnic News* (*zhongguo minzu bao*) (Beijing). Already published columns:
- “Switching Positions in Party-Politics Relations in the United States.”
 - “The Election of Obama as the President and the Adaptation of the Black Church.”
 - “The Religious Elements in the U.S. Presidential Inauguration.”
 - “The Religious Elements in the Spring Festival Celebration among Chinese Americans.”
 - “Is God Male or Female?”
 - “Darwin’s Evolution Theory: Believe or not Believe?”
 - “A Visit to a Catholic Monastery.”
 - “Hillary Clinton’s Faith.”
 - “Faiths of US Senators and Congress Representatives.”
 - “Experiencing an Interdenominational Retreat Center in the Forest.”
 - “Experiencing the ‘Last Supper’.”