

The Progress of Academe amid New Church-State Interactions in China

In the 2008 autumn issue of this newsletter, I anticipated “A Bright Future of the Social Scientific Study of Religion in China.” Some people might have doubted it. For example, the Christian “house churches” have been a politically sensitive topic in China. Their very existence has been routinely denied by the Chinese government and official Three-Self church leaders. In the past year or so, however, scholars of religious studies in China have taken three bold steps to de-sensitize the topic.



First, in October 2008, the Beijing Summit on Chinese Spirituality and Society, co-organized by our center at Purdue and several institutes in China, included a special session on “The Current Status and Future of the House Churches.” Professor LI Xiangping (at that time Director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Society at Shanghai University) chaired the session. Three Research Fellows of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, YU Jianrong of the Institute of the Rural Development, GAO Shining of the Institute of World Religions, and LIU Peng of the Institute of American Studies, presented their findings and analyses based on their respective empirical studies. The session stimulated enthusiastic discussion. This is believed to be the first open discussion of this topic at a scholarly conference in China.

Soon after, in November 2008, the non-governmental Pushi Institute of Social Science in Beijing (under the directorship of LIU Peng) and the State Council’s Institute of Ethnic Development co-sponsored the “Chinese House Church Symposium”; participants included scholars, house church leaders, and government officials. This was the first special symposium in China devoted to the issues of house churches, which aroused strong interests among observers inside and outside China.

Third, the *Annual Report on China’s Religions (2009)*, one of the semi-official “blue books” published by the Social Sciences Academic Press (China) and edited by the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, made Christian house churches one of the major foci in the volume, pointing out that “...it is an undeniable fact that both Three-Self churches and house churches have rapidly increased during the last thirty years of reforms” (p. 191). Several articles in the volume used the word “house churches” dozens of times, with some in-depth analyses. This was the first formal publication in China to directly address the house churches phenomenon.

However, despite this greater openness in academia, several large “house churches” in Chengdu, Linfen, Beijing and Shanghai have experienced greater suppression since summer 2009, and it is hard to predict the consequences of this wave of crackdowns. Nonetheless, the current interaction between the house churches and government agencies once again clearly demonstrates that the Christian house churches are a complex social phenomenon that scholars should not ignore. The house church issue involves politics, economics, the rule of law, and other major areas of social concerns, yet “seeking truth in facts” is a principle of social scientific studies of religion. I believe that scholars’ in-depth studies and rational explorations will help advance objective, multi-dimensional and deeper understanding of the phenomenon. In our globalizing era, how the rising China deals with house churches and other religious issues is a concern of many watchful people throughout the world. For whom, the true nature of this rising power is most likely judged by the way the government responses to such issues.

(Dr. Fenggang Yang)

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The Chinese Spirituality and Society Program

To advance the social scientific study of Chinese religions, the Center on Religion and Chinese Society at Purdue University has launched the Chinese Spirituality and Society Program (CSSP) on October 15, 2009. This program, funded by the John Templeton Foundation, is to support well-designed research projects on Chinese spirituality and society, organize training workshops for the grantees to carry out robust social scientific research on religion, and sponsor summer institutes for teaching the sociology of religion in Chinese universities. We hope the CSSP will generate new findings on religion in China, nourish the spirit of creativity and international collaboration among Chinese scholars, and enhance scholarly understanding of Chinese spirituality and society both in China and the West.

The central component of this program is to provide research grants to Chinese scholars through an open Request for Proposal (RFP) competition. The funding will be divided into two types: Research Center Grants and Individual Grants. With a total of \$500,000, we plan to award 2 or 3 large grants to research centers up to \$100,000 each and about 10 grants to individual projects.

For more information, please visit our web site www.purdue.edu/crcs.



Welcome

Welcome our Co-Directors, Dr. Sandra Liu and Dr. George Hong, and Post-doctoral Research Fellow, Dr. Joy Tong. Drs. Liu and Hong have joined our center to serve as co-directors since May 2009. Dr. Tong has just moved from Malaysia to West Lafayette in October.



Dr. George Hong

Dr. George Hong is Professor of History, Chief Research Officer, and Associate Vice Chancellor for Research and Professional Development at Purdue University Calumet (PUC). He received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Maryland at College Park in 1992. Dr. Hong has authored three books, edited and co-edited five books, and published more than eighty refereed articles and book chapters in the fields of modern China, U.S.-China relations, comparative modernization, and economic history. At present, Dr. Hong is studying the role of faith in social corruption, house churches in China, and Chinese political culture.

Dr. Sandra Liu

Dr. Sandra S. Liu is Professor of Consumer Sciences and Retailing, and Director of International Training for Discovery Park at Purdue University. Dr. Liu has had extensive industry and consultancy experience in the pharmaceutical and healthcare industries. She has authored or co-authored eight books and more than fifty journal articles in strategic marketing issues in various industries. Her current research is in the area of healthcare strategy and policy with a more socially-oriented focus on sustainability and the cultural evolution of social enterprises; the characters and generosity of social entrepreneurs in China.

Dr. Joy Tong

Dr. Joy Tong received her Ph.D. in sociology from National University of Singapore in 2009. Her thesis was about Christian ethics and economic life of overseas Chinese in mainland China. Her research interests include Christianity in Chinese societies, Islam in Southeast Asia, business ethics, overseas Chinese, and media. Her publications include "McDonaldization and the Mega-Church" in *Religious Commodifications in Asia* (Routledge, 2008; edited by Pattana Kitiarsa), and "Women, Piety and Practices," *Contemporary Islam*, 2(1) March, 2008 (co-authored with Bryan Turner).

Purdue Symposium on Religion and Spirituality in China



The Symposium was held from April 30 to May 2, 2009 to celebrate the anniversary of the establishment of the Center on Religion and Chinese Society at Purdue University. About thirty scholars from the United States, China, and Singapore engaged in lively discussions. The sessions included “the Revival of Confucianism,” “the Rise of Christianity in China,” “Christianity and Civil Society,” “Islam in China,” “Religious Freedom and U.S.-China Relations,” “Studies of Religion of the Chinese in Diaspora,” and “the Chinese Spiritual Life

Survey Findings.”

The symposium opened with the session on “the Revival of Confucianism.” Professor Diane Obenchain of Calvin College, based on her research and life experience in China, discussed the complexity of the “Ru” concept (Confucian scholarship, Confucian religion, and Confucian philosophy, etc.) in traditional Chinese culture and the historical context of the English term “Confucianism” coming to designate “Ru” and its limitations in conveying the rich meanings of “Ru.” Based on her fieldwork and the Chinese Spiritual Life Survey (2007) conducted by Horizon Research Consultancy Group, Professor Anna Xiaodong Sun of Kenyon College examined the rituals practiced by the people in the Confucius temples, ancestral temples and by the graves of ancestors and concluded that there is a noteworthy religious dimension to the Confucian tradition. Joy Lam of University of Southern California investigated the role of Confucianism in contemporary China by looking at the daily life in Confucian boarding schools, religious institutions and voluntary organizations.



In the session on “the Revival of Christianity in China”, Professor Shangyang Sun of Peking University reported the findings of a survey of Peking University students’ attitudes toward Christianity. According to the survey, over 60 percent of the students held neutral attitudes toward Christianity. Only a very small number of students from other religious backgrounds rejected Christianity. The survey also showed that over 70% of the students agreed with the theory of religious markets, showing that the concept of freedom of religion is deeply rooted in the university today. Jianghua Yang, a visiting student at the University of Chicago, looked at the structural transformation since the economic reforms in China from the perspective of institutionalism and how the failure of religion policy has led to the rise of Christian house churches. Zhenyu Tang, a graduate student at Purdue University, offered an estimation of the number of Christians in China based on the Chinese Spiritual Life Survey (2007).

The session on “Christianity and Civil Society” explored the role Christianity has played in the emerging Chinese civil society. Professor Carsten Vala of Loyola College in Maryland analyzed the ways in which unregistered Protestant churches in China building up far-flung social networks by accepting Chinese Communist political rule but rejecting the regime’s hegemonic cultural agenda. Professor Xuefeng Zhang of Westmont College reflected on Chinese civil society and Protestantism based on his fieldwork on the Chinese house churches. Dr. Joy Tong of National University of Singapore analyzed the various models of how overseas Chinese Christian entrepreneurs integrated religious values and business strategies in order to establish corporate ethics in the cut-throat competition of the market.

Keynote speaker Professor Dru Gladney of Pomona College explained the development of Islam in post-Olympic and post-9/11 China. Through examining the theme of the Beijing Olympics “One World, One Dream” and its “staging” of unity and plurality, Professor Gladney gave the audience a vivid multimedia presentation of the historical trajectory of Islam in China and the state’s policy toward Islam, pointing out the tension of internal politics of “many worlds, many dreams” and the circumstances for Islam’s survival.



In the session of “Studies of Religion of the Chinese in Diasporas,” Dr. Gordon Melton, Director of the Institute for the Study of American Religion, presented his analysis of the number and distribution of Buddhist temples

in the United States. Based on survey data and participant observation, Professor Andrew Abel of Keene College compared the views of three groups of Christians, namely ABCs (American Born Chinese), immigrant Chinese, and non-Chinese Christians, toward the Bible and the truth content of other religions and concluded that ABCs were the most conservative, immigrant Chinese less so, and non-Chinese were the least conservative of the three groups of Christians. Yulin Liu, a doctoral student at Trinity International University in Chicago, explored the contextualization of the Christian doctrine "Justification by Faith" by collecting and analyzing various explanations of this doctrine in today's Chinese Christian churches.



Keynote speaker Dr. Brian Grim opened the session on "Religious Freedom and U.S.-China Relations" with his talk on "*The Yin and Yang of religious freedom in China.*" He argued that whereas Chinese society in general allows a fair degree of religious latitude (the yang, or light side of religious regulation), the government is less willing to afford such latitude (the yin, or dark side of religious regulation) largely because it views a number of religion-related groups in the country as threats. Professor Yichao Tu of Fudan University talked about the function and efficacy of religious freedom in U.S.-China relations in the last ten years by analyzing the foreign policies of these two countries.

Several sessions were devoted to the analysis of the Chinese Spiritual Life Survey (CSLS). Dr. Rong He, a research fellow at the Institute of Sociology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, examined the belief in karma and its influence on the notion of social justice. Professor Yuyan Zhao of Hunan Normal University looked at the correlation between personal happiness and factors such as age, gender, educational attainment, and health. Professor Changqi Xia of Wuhan University focused on the prevalence of ancestor worship practices among the Chinese people and questioned the significance of ancestor worship as a religious phenomenon on account of the remarkable contrast between the popularity of ancestor worship practices and the absence of religious belief and symbols. Dr. Yang Liu of Baylor University examined the relationship between fatalistic voluntarism and life satisfaction among women in the context of China's Marxist-atheist monopoly.



A group of Purdue University graduate students presented preliminary findings on the development of various religions in China. Anning Hu and Minle Xu examined folk religion and Confucianism, Jun Lu looked at atheists in China, and R.J. Leamaster discussed Buddhists.

Dr. Elisa Jiexia Zhai, who has become a professor at the Miami University in Ohio beginning in fall 2009, explored religious changes of migrants and how urbanization and geographic mobility influences migrants' religious choice in the religious market of China. Purdue graduate student Soyoung Kwon analyzed the problem of missing data in the CSLS and presented a statistical way to deal with it in the data analysis. Dr. Liyong Dai, a visiting scholar at Georgetown University at the time, put forward four basic types of social forms of Chinese religions: Confucuclesia, Forest (the religious place with open and vague social boundaries where Buddhist or Daoist activities take place), *Jianghu* (unfixed religious activities in the gray public spheres), and Sect (the religious communities that are developing and are often suppressed by the Confucian administration and the orthodox practitioners in the Forests).

The concluding session summarized some of the key findings of the CSLS. Keynote speaker Dr. Victor Yuan, president of Horizon Research Consultancy Group that conducted the survey, showed that religious beliefs have had significant impact on the habit, behavior, sense of happiness and public life of the Chinese. But the impact is still limited compared to that in Western societies, especially the United States. Professor Carson Mencken of Baylor University reported that religion, compared to family, career, and the media, has a lesser impact on enhancing one's feeling of happiness and control of fate in China. Professor Fenggang Yang of Purdue University highlighted three questions and three surprises about the general pictures of religious believers, Christians and atheists.



(Translated by Jun Lu)

Interview with Brian Grim



Could you briefly tell us about the Pew Research Center, and your own research there?

Brian: The Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan “fact tank” that studies issues of interest to policy makers as well as the general public related to national and global public opinion, politics, demographic trends, the press, the internet, and religion and public life. I focus on three areas: trends in international religious demographics, religion-state issues including religion-related violence, and cross-national survey data on religious beliefs and practices.

Why are you interested in China? What’s your connection with China?

Brian: Social life in the late 1960s and early 1970s was greatly controlled and most outside observers assumed that religion had been virtually eliminated during the Cultural Revolution. When I first worked in China in 1982, I was one of the first Western observers to find that this assumption was completely false. And it appears that not only has China become a major economic powerhouse, Chinese religious marketplace seems to be growing with the same vibrancy as China’s overall economy. This is a fascinating development, and one worth studying.

My personal connection with China is strong. In fact, three of my four children were born in China – one in Fujian and two in Urumqi, Xinjiang. In the late 1980s, I was working with the government of the Xinjiang-Uygur Autonomous Region to introduce Western education in the region, and had some success, with the region’s former party secretary, Wang Enmao, receiving personal approval for the project from Deng Xiaoping, the then paramount leader of China. I also taught at City University of Hong Kong in the year after Hong Kong was returned by Britain to China. My connection now is primarily through working with various scholars on the quantitative study of religious dynamics within China.

You have been studying religious regulations in the world, in which you made distinctions between state control and social pressures. Could you briefly explain these two measures?

Brian: Of course the most visible restrictions placed on the practice, profession or selection of religion are those coming from the official laws, policies or administrative actions of the state. Although the vast majority of countries promise religious freedom in their constitutions, many states qualify or contradict such promises in other parts of their constitutions. I should hasten to add that government regulation is not limited to formal laws, but also includes discretionary actions of local officials. For instance, one-in-two countries have government offices charged with supervising or overseeing religious groups, and about two-in-five of those offices use some coercive means to enforce their policies.

Religious regulation and restrictions come from more than just the actions of a government. Social forces can also place restrictions on the practice, profession, or selection of religion. These restrictions can come from religious groups, associations or the culture at large. This form of regulation might be tolerated or even encouraged by the state, but it is not formally endorsed or implemented by government action. Social regulation can be extremely subtle, arising through the pervasive norms and culture of the larger society, or it can include blatant acts of persecution by militia groups. When these actions become violent, they can be especially restrictive. Today in more than eight-in-ten countries there are tensions reported between religious groups, and in six-in-ten countries, these tensions have resulted in some violence between groups.

Government and social restrictions are each measured on scales of 0 (low) to 10 (very high). While the majority of the world’s countries have low-to-moderate restrictions on both measures, eight of the 25 most populous countries have highly restrictive scores on both measures, such as Iran, Pakistan and India, and four have highly restrictive government scores but more moderate social restriction scores, such as China, Russia and Vietnam.

And where is China located in this scale, and why?

Brian: China has one of the highest scores on government restrictions but one of the lower scores on social restrictions among the world's most populous countries. The reasons for high government restrictions are twofold. First, China has a long history of state intervention and control over religion. Government officials view it as part of their mandate to regulate religion. Second, the Chinese Communist Party holds a monopoly on government power, and any social movements or forces that occur outside of their purview could possibly threaten their hold on power, and in their perspective, the peace and security of the nation. The reasons for low social restrictions are also twofold. First, unlike some countries where there is a single dominant religion accompanied by tremendous social pressure to adhere to it, Chinese people are fairly laissez faire about the religious beliefs of others in society. Second, there have generally been peaceful relations between religious groups in society. However, I should mention that the level of social restrictions may be increasing related to recent events in Xinjiang and Tibet.

In your presentation at the Purdue Symposium on "Religion and Spirituality in China Today," you used the concepts of yin and yang to describe the religious situation in China. What do you mean by these? Could these concepts be applied to other countries as well?

Brian: I think that the philosophical concept of *yin* and *yang* captures the two opposing but complementary government regulatory forces of religion in China today. The light, *yang* side grants freedoms in selected circumstances in an attempt to regulate religious belief and practice. The officially approved religions are granted greater freedoms, but there is a price for that freedom. For instance, those joining must agree with the homogenized view of religion and theology espoused by the approved religions, which undermines the wider variety of religious expression that naturally exists within each religion. Whereas the dark, *yin* side of government regulation revokes or denies freedoms to groups the state disfavors, such as groups that do not register with the government or those that engage in activities viewed as a threat to the government. The *yin* side criminalizes certain religious activities and groups, giving broad latitude to local authorities to selectively enforce restrictions with limited legal recourse for the religious groups to challenge their treatment.

The regulatory dynamics represented by these concepts apply to any country. In fact, the *yang*, light side – which includes selective favors offered by governments to some religions and not others – is present to some degree in more than nine-in-ten countries today. In economic terms, this is a positive sanction, which has the aim of regulation through incentives that range from funding to political access. The *yin*, dark side – which uses coercion to regulate the religious market – also is present to some degree in more than nine-in-ten countries today. Again, in economic terms, this is a negative sanction, which has the aim of regulation through disincentives that range from discriminatory registration requirements, which occurs in nearly one-in-three countries, to force being used against religious groups and believers, which occurs in nearly one-in-two countries today.

In your opinion, what kinds of research are urgently needed in order to understand better the religious situation in China?

Brian: China, like much of the rest of the world, is experiencing a revival of religion. So one critical area of research needed is a fully nationally representative study on the religious beliefs and practices of people in China today, possibly similar to the religious landscape survey conducted of the United States by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life. A related area of research is a thorough study of the demographics of religious groups in order to project the likely trajectories of religions in China for the future. Since China's religious future will impact the world's religious future – these questions are of great interest to the research community.

<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 (December, 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 CRCSS@purdue.edu.

“GLOBAL CHINA FORUM”: A Colloquium Series

The Center on Religion and Chinese Society has launched the Global China Forum series and we have organized three lectures and a symposium under the series in autumn 2009:



On September 1, 2009, Professor Dedong Wei of Renmin University of China gave a lecture on the “*New Developments of Church-State Relations in China: Ideology or Interest?*” Professor Wei pointed out that there were new developments in the church-state relations in China in the new century. In addition to the traditional ideological factor, interest competitions among regions and various government agencies have become an increasingly important factor.

October 27, 2009, Dr. Joel Carpenter, Director of the Nagel Institute for the Study of World Christianity at Calvin College, gave a lecture on “*The Development of the Scholarly Research on Evangelicalism in the last 30 Years.*”



On December 1, 2009, Dr. Shuming Bao, Senior Research Coordinator for China Initiatives of the China Data Center at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, gave a presentation on “*Spatial Intelligence for China and Global Studies.*” He introduced some background information of Chinese government statistics, census data, and GIS data, and demonstrated how space-time data of different formats and sources can be integrated, visualized, and reported in a web based system. Some applications in disaster

assessment, environment, health, regional development, cultural and religious studies, and household surveys were discussed for China and global studies.

A Symposium about Images of China was held at Purdue University on October 7-8, 2009. This event was co-sponsored by Center on Religion and Chinese Society, Confucius Institute, Indiana Center for Cultural Exchange, China Center, Religious Studies and Asian Studies Program at Purdue University, and Office of Research and Professional Development at Purdue University Calumet. Victor Lechtenberg, Vice Provost for Engagement at Purdue University, and Ping Huang, Consul General of Consulate General of the People’s Republic of China in Chicago, gave opening remarks.



The two-day symposium consisted of two keynote presentations and three panel sessions. The keynote speakers were Professor David Lampton of Johns Hopkins University and Professor John Berthrong of Boston University. About 60-80 people attended the keynote presentations.



Professor David Lampton, a leading China expert, gave his keynote speech on “*Thinking about Chinese Power and What It Means for the World.*” Dr. Lampton examined the three faces of Chinese power: might, money, and minds both within China and in the global world. He stated that the current strategy of Beijing government is to focus on economic and intellectual power, to move up the value-added chain in the global economy, and it is this ambition and these growing capabilities that constitute the Chinese challenge in the 21st century.



Professor John Berthrong, one of the Boston Confucians, gave a talk on “*Chinese New Confucianism and its American Future.*” He believes Confucianism will be a part of America’s future because it will provide a moral common ground for our religiously diverse society, and it will be an important tool for solving the problems facing America.

The three panel sessions included "Politics and Economy", "Environment and Health" and "Religion and Culture" in China. The presenters were professors from different departments at Purdue University, including Holly Wang of Agricultural Economics, Greg Hundley of Management, George Hong of Purdue University Calumet, Guofan Shao of Forestry and Natural Resources, Sandra Liu of Consumer Sciences and Retailing, Howard Sypher of Communication, Don Mitchell of Philosophy, and Fenggang Yang of Sociology.



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.

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- The annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion was held on October 23-25 in Denver, Colorado. Dr. Fenggang Yang and Purdue graduate students, R.J. Leamaster, Jun Lu, Zhenyu Tang and Fan Jiang presented papers. CRCS visiting scholars Ying Liu of Beijing Normal University and Huawei Li of Peking University attended the conference as well.
- Dr. Fenggang Yang attended a meeting on "Economics of Religion", organized by The National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, Massachusetts, on October 15-16, 2009.
- Dr. Fenggang Yang attended the John Templeton Foundation 2009 International Board of Advisors Meeting in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on October 12-13, 2009.
- On September 24, 2009, Dr. Fenggang Yang participated in a research seminar in Oakland, California, organized by the Institute for the Study of Asian American Christianity.
- On September 23, 2009, Dr. Fenggang Yang gave a lecture on "Religious Policies in the People's Republic of China" at the Institute of International Studies at University of California, Berkeley, which was co-sponsored by the Religion, Politics and Globalization Program, the Institute for the Study of Asian American Christianity, the Department of Sociology, the Institute of Asian Studies, and the Center for Chinese Studies.
- On September 17-18, 2009, Dr. Fenggang Yang gave a keynote presentation on "Religious Policies in the PRC: A Sociopolitical History" at a conference at the Library of Congress "A Century of Change: China and Modernization 1900–Present," organized by the Library of Congress Asian Division, Confucius Institute at the University of Maryland and Institute for Religion and Society, Oxford, UK.
- Dr. Fenggang Yang gave a keynote presentation on "Oligopoly Dynamics: Consequences of Religious Regulation" at the 30th Conference of International Society for the Sociology of Religion in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, on July 27-31, 2009.
- On April 20-22, 2009, Dr. Fenggang Yang gave a presentation on the religious markets in China at a conference in Istanbul, Turkey, "Constituting the Future: A Symposium on Religious Liberty, Law, and Flourishing Societies."

