Chapter Title: Introduction

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Book Author(s): Fenggang Yang
Book Editor(s): J. E. E. Pettit
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Introduction

This atlas provides a bird's-eye view of the religious land-scape in China. It maps the officially registered venues of five major religions—Buddhism, Christianity (Protestant and Catholic), Daoism, and Islam—at the national, provincial, and county levels, and draws the contours of Confucianism, folk religion, and the Mao cult. It describes the main organizations, beliefs, and rituals of various religions, and the social and demographic characteristics of their respective believers. Putting various religions side by side in their social, political, and cultural contexts, this volume offers a comprehensive overview of religion in contemporary China.

Although religion can be studied in different academic disciplines, three broad approaches may be distinguished. The first approach is through theological or philosophical studies, which provide rational justification or criticism of certain beliefs and practices. The second approach is grounded in the humanities and interprets scriptures, commentaries, and other sacred texts. The third approach applies social scientific methods to empirical data, including historical records, fieldwork observations, and quantitative data from surveys and censuses. This volume follows this third approach. It is multidisciplinary, combining sociological and geographical studies of religious organizations and individuals. The analysis marries some economic concepts with Geographical Information System (GIS) research to analyze and visualize religious sites in China.

Definition and Classification of Religion

This atlas treats religion as a complex social institution comprising both beliefs and practices. Religion includes four elements: "(1) a belief in the supernatural; (2) a set of beliefs regarding life and the world; (3) a set of ritual practices; and (4) a distinct social organization or moral community."[1] Some religions demonstrate a systematic development of beliefs, rituals, and organizations.[2] In other religions, one or more of the four elements may not have developed in a systematic manner; this is often the case with so-called folk religions.

In the People's Republic of China, only five religions are officially recognized and legally allowed to operate. Among the five, only Daoism is native to China. Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam are world religions that have existed in China for hundreds or thousands of years and have large numbers of believers. It must be noted that China treats Catholicism and Protestantism as two distinct religions. Orthodox Christianity existed in pre-Communist China and has revived in recent years in some locations, such as Heilongjiang, but has not been recognized as a legally permitted religion at the state level.[3]

In addition to practitioners of the five legally allowed religions, many people hold beliefs in certain supernatural beings or forces, engage in rituals and practices in reference to the supernatural, and form social relations with spiritual leaders and fellow believers. According to the definition of religion introduced above, their beliefs, practices, and social institutions are clearly religious. Therefore, we include them in our description and analysis in this volume. In his classic study of *Religion in Chinese Society*, C. K. Yang 杨庆堃 distinguishes two structural forms of religion, institutional religion and diffused religion. An institutional religion is separate from secular social institutions, while a diffused religion is merged with or embedded in secular institutions.[4] Countering the claim frequently made around the turn of the twentieth century that the Chinese lack religion, C. K. Yang convincingly argues that diffused religion was pervasive in pre-Communist China. Under Communist rule, religious elements have been expunged from the state, the family, communities, and guilds, but folk religious beliefs and practices aligned with weak social organizations have shown resilience under religious suppression. The Mao personality cult, once a political religion or pseudo-religion, has now become part of folk religion in China.[5] In this atlas, we provide descriptive contours of some major folk religious beliefs and practices.

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1 F. Yang, *Religion in China*, 36.

2 J. C. Hemeyer (*Religion in America*, 17) writes that a "developed religion is an integrated system of beliefs, lifestyle, ritual activities, and social institutions by which individuals give meaning to (or find meaning in) their lives by orienting themselves to what they take to be holy, sacred, or of the highest value." For the idea of a "complete" religion, see Yinger, *The Scientific Study of Religion*, 10.

3 Some Orthodox Christians have appealed to the authorities for legal recognition, and there are some Orthodox Christian churches in operation in Heilongjiang and Inner Mongolia, but the number is extremely small and they do not seem to be accounted for in the economic census that we have used for this atlas.

4 C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, 20.

5 Zuo, "Political Religion"; F. Yang, *Religion in China*, 139.

Finally, there is a third category of religious sects that maintain a high-tension relationship with society, culture, or the political order. These sects have been labeled as "evil cults" (*xiejiao* 邪教) by the Chinese authorities and are excluded from classifications of religion in official Chinese documents. Again, according to our academic definition of religion, these groups are either traditional religious sects or new religious movements and are thus included in our description and analysis.

Religious Markets

In recent decades, some sociologists and economists have applied economic concepts to analyze the dynamics of religious change in the United States, Europe, and other societies.[6] The adoption of certain economic terms in a social scientific theory of religious change does not imply a vulgarization or commercialization of religion. Rather, these terms serve as analytical tools for describing some social aspects of religion. The idea of religious markets provides a useful way to conceive of the relationships that treat religion as a social institution. The institution of religion can be analyzed in terms of supply and demand, and the causes and consequences of religious change may often be explained in terms of a dynamic supply-demand equilibrium. Broadly speaking, the supply side includes religious organizations, venues, materials, services, and clergy, while the demand side includes religious adherents, who may also participate in the production of religious rituals, goods, and services.

Building on this theoretical development, I have adopted a political economy approach for analyzing the changing dynamics of religion in China under Communist rule and developed the triple market theory, the shortage economy theory, and the oligopoly theory.[7] Whereas previous economic theories focused on supply-side explanations, my political economy approach emphasizes the importance of regulation, which may shape the supply side or the demand side, but often with unintended consequences. Under the restrictive and repressive regulations, the religious economy does not form a single market, but splits into three parallel and intertwined markets, which I have labeled the red, black, and gray markets. Red is the color of the Communist Party and thus the red market represents the religions sanctioned by the party-state and

includes the five legal (officially permitted) religious organizations, believers, and religious activities. The black market, on the other hand, comprises all illegal (officially banned) religious organizations, believers, and religious activities. The gray market of religion lies somewhere in between: it comprises all religious and spiritual organizations, practitioners, and activities with ambiguous legal status.[8] Overall, religious supply is very low in China compared with most of the other countries, and the main reason for this shortage is the Communist party-state's imposition of restrictions on religions. The increase in supply in recent decades lags behind the rapidly increasing demand for more religious venues, activities, and services.

Each of the three markets has its distinct characteristics and dynamics in relation to the state and society. In the first part of the atlas, we describe and analyze the three markets of religion at the national level. The second part of the atlas includes descriptions and analyses of the red-market religions province by province.

The Religious Landscape: The Importance of Space and Place

Religious venues are a major component of religious supply. Indeed, religious buildings may be considered the most tangible and visible component of religion. They often signify the prevalence or significance of religion in a given society in a given historical period. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), all religious venues were closed down. Although there is still a shortage of religious venues in China, in recent decades the numbers of temples, churches, and mosques have increased. Nowadays it is hard to ignore the towering mosques of Western China or the large-scale cathedrals in southeastern China (Photos 1, 2). Of course, there are other important components of the religious supply, including religious organizations, clergy, staff, artifacts, and so on. We will describe religious organizations and seminaries or religious academies whenever information is available. However, we have mapped the religious landscape largely on the basis of data that records religious sites associated with the five red-market religions.

The spatial dimension is essential for religion. However, it has been very much neglected by social scientists, with only a few exceptions.[9] In the last several decades, the social scientific study of religion has been dominated by the individualistic approach, relying heavily on surveys

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6   For a systematic theoretical construction applying economic terms to the sociological study of religion, see Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*.
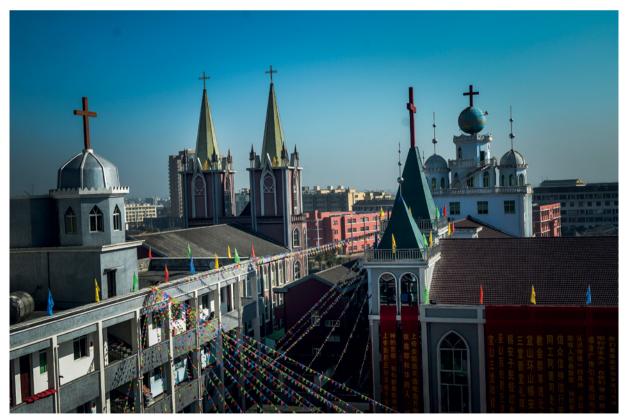
7   F. Yang, *Religion in China*.

8   F. Yang, *Religion in China*, 86–87.

9   For a summary review, see Carroll, "Religion in Space."

PHOTO 1   Mosque in Yanqi county (Xinjiang).
CREDIT: XUEGANG MA.

PHOTO 2   Three churches in Yishan, Cangnan county (Zhejiang).
CREDIT: SHIDANG OU.

of individual religiosity, which is commonly measured in terms of the three B's: religious belonging (identity or preference), beliefs (e.g., in God, the Bible), and behaviors (e.g., church attendance, prayer). Emile Durkheim, one of the founders of the social scientific study of religion, stressed the social nature of religion. Religion is a social institution with collective rituals and a moral community. However, in modern scholarship, only a minority of scholars have focused on congregations and communities or pursued the historical study of institutional differentiation.

Following Durkheim's distinction between the sacred and the profane, Mircea Eliade draws attention to sacred space, which is a social and cultural phenomenon constructed by rituals, symbols, and relationships. Through consecrating rituals, structured space becomes a sacred center around which people orient themselves.[10] Thomas Tweed argues that religion is a fundamentally locative process of finding a place and moving across space.[11] Roger Stump clarifies the inherent spatiality of religious systems. Religious groups do not simply exist in space, but seek spatial realization of their beliefs.[12] Hence, the spatial dimension of religious practice deserves close examination. In cultural geography, Henri Lefebvre argues that space is a primary dimension of competition and conflict involving production, appropriation, and redefinition.[13] Yi-Fu Tuan articulates the relationship between space and place, pointing out that space is an unorganized realm of motion, whereas place is the functional node in space; places become centers of values that people distinguish from the surrounding space by assigning meanings to them and forming emotional attachments to them.[14] Jonathan Z. Smith further shows that sacred places often develop not in symbolic centers but on social and geographic peripheries, where they function politically to interrogate, disrupt, and escape the hegemonic power of the center.[15] These theoretical advances have been extremely helpful in examining the displacement and re-emplacement of religion in modern and modernizing China.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, in their struggle to modernize China according to Enlightenment ideals, Chinese elites claimed that the Chinese had never been religious. Meanwhile, they worked with the state to appropriate Buddhist, Daoist, or folk-religious temples as sites for new schools incorporating a Westernized modern curriculum. This movement, often called the *Miaochan xingxue* 庙产兴学, or "converting temple properties to establish schools," called for the destruction of traditional temples and the introduction of new schools of modern education.[16] These same attitudes became radicalized in mainland China under Communist rule, especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), when all temples, mosques, and churches were closed and all religious activities were banned. Many religious buildings were torn down, and the rest were converted for secular use as factories, public schools, government offices, or gathering halls of the Communist Party. Interestingly, religious eradication failed. Religion survived, and began to revive in the late 1970s. The surviving beliefs have sought embodiment in practice and in the emplacement of sacred space.

The Chinese Communist Party and state has established a complex institution to regulate religion.[17] The major control apparatus for religious affairs is the United Front Department (*Tongzhanbu* 统战部, hereafter UFD) of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The UFD is in charge of making religious policies and rallying religious leaders around the CCP. The daily administration of religious affairs is the task of the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB); at the national level the bureau was renamed the State Administration of Religious Affairs (*Guojia zongjiao shiwuju* 国家宗教事务局, hereafter SARA). Its duties include processing requests for approval of the opening of temples, churches, and mosques; of special religious gatherings and activities; and of the appointment of leaders of religious associations. The SARA has sub-branches at the province, prefecture, and county levels, responsible for addressing religious affairs at each level.[18] Meanwhile, the Ministry of Public Security (*Gong'anbu* 公安部) deals with illegal religious activities and monitors some religious groups and active leaders, while the Ministry of State Security (*Guo'an bu* 国安部) monitors religious activities involved with foreigners. In 1999, a special "610 Office" (*610 bangongshi* 610 办公室) was created to monitor and suppress the so-called evil cults. The 610 Office has branches at various administrative levels. Instead of wiping out religions, however, these regulations have resulted in a complex religious field composed of legal and illegal activities and groups, as well as those of uncertain status.

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10   Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*.

11   Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*.

12   Stump, *The Geography of Religion*.

13   Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

14   Tuan, *Space and Place*.

15   J. Z. Smith, *To Take Place*.

16   See P. R. Katz's study of these events in his *Religion in China and Its Modern Fate*.

17   For more on the control apparatus for religious affairs, see Katz, *Religion in China and Its Modern Fate*, 65–84.

18   In spring 2018, the State Administration of Religious Affairs merged into UFD, and the lower level RAB is being merged into UFD at the provincial and municipal levels too.

Over the last several decades, the number of religious believers in China has continuously increased. Moreover, religious believers have strenuously contended with the party-state to reclaim religious sites, restore and construct buildings on traditional religious sites, and sometimes occupy state-owned or collectively owned spaces and construct new religious buildings. In short, the contention for space and place has been central in the religious revivals during the last several decades in China. In this atlas, we are able to offer an overall view of sacred places for the first time.

To put the religious sites in their social, political, and cultural contexts, we provide social and demographic profiles of adherents of each of the five religions recognized by the state in the first part of the atlas. We also sketch some of the characteristics of adherents of gray-market and black-market religions. In the second part, we present the demographic characteristics of the general population in each province, along with pertinent religious events. While the semi-legal and illegal groups are frequently mentioned in the second part, we have not mapped these groups because of the lack of geographical information.

Religious Organizations in the Economic Census of China

While administrative documents may record some rough estimates of the number of religious venues, little data has hitherto been available on the distribution of religious communities. Fortunately, through Dr. George Hong's introduction, Dr. Shuming Bao from the China Data Center at the University of Michigan approached me in 2009 with a dataset extracted from a 2004 Chinese Economic Census. The file includes 72,887 religious sites from all of China's 31 provinces and province-level regions and municipalities. From the outset, we knew this list certainly did not represent all religious sites in China. First, the economic census only listed a church, temple, or mosque if it was officially registered with the government. But there are many religious communities in China that cannot register or choose not to register with the government authorities. We have been in parts of China where unregistered groups certainly outnumber officially sanctioned ones. Second, given the economic focus of the census, it overlooked a great number of places whose annual income was too small to record. In some northwestern cities of China, such as Lanzhou, the census focused primarily on mosques that doubled as economic enterprises. When we visited the city in 2016, we discovered nearly three dozen churches not mentioned in the census, even though some

of them already existed when the economic census was conducted in 2004.

From the outset, we knew that the 2004 Economic Census would not give us a comprehensive overview of all religious sites in China. On the other hand, this data set did enable us to study the spatial distribution of religions in ways not previously possible. Previously, scholars were limited to conducting case studies and regional studies focusing on a single religion, and it was not possible to gain an accurate sense of large-scale developments in religion in contemporary China. This data set, however, gave us the name, location, leaders' names, relative size, and reported annual income of religioius organizations throughout China. Furthermore, even though not all religious sites were included, all provinces were represented.

Initially, our team had little experience in the technologies needed to clean and verify the data. Beginning in 2010, I assembled a small team of graduate students to begin cleaning the data. We encountered many challenges along the way. First, there was a considerable amount of inconsistency in the way that geographic data, such as the names of cities, towns, and villages, was recorded in the census. In addition, there was much conflicting information in the data that needed further examination. The most common problem was that the name of a religious establishment indicated that it was located in one village while its address pointed to a different location. According to the name of site #19238, for example, it was a church in Zhangzhuang Village 张庄村 in Zengfumiao Town 增府庙乡 of Changge City 长葛市, but it was associated with an address in Niutang Village 牛堂村 of Changge City 长葛市. Nearly one-fifth of the sites included in this dataset needed to be examined on a case-by-case basis.

Finally, the administrative geography of China has been revised and changed since 2004. At the time of the census, many sites belonged to one administrative division but are now located in another one. Sometimes an address was misspelled, or it turned out that there were two villages with the same name in the same region. All of these inconsistencies made cleaning the census data tedious and time-consuming. After seven years of effort, we have developed the dataset for informative description and analysis, and the results are incorporated in this atlas.

An Overview of This Atlas

By early 2017, we had finally cleaned the data as much as possible. Where the census listed a specific address, we were able to pinpoint the corresponding site. Where the census listed only a village or township name, we were able to find coordinates for the administrative center of

that location. We estimate that at least 90 percent of the religious sites in the dataset are associated with points located within 5 km of the real site. We have recorded the coordinates for these points, as well as the names and addresses of the associated religious sites. These will be made publicly available in a data archive. We are confident that this list of sites and coordinates can serve as a benchmark for scholars who will continue to expand, refine, and correct the information gleaned from the dataset in the future.

There are other sources that include religious sites along with their coordinates, such as Google Maps, Google Earth, Baidu Map, and Gaode Map. At present, however, none of these online resources provides information on a greater number of religious sites than the 2004 economic census, nor do they provide more systematic information on the religious sites included in that census. Yet even in the 2004 Economic Census, underreporting appears to be a problem in many counties and provinces. The underreporting of religious sites in the 2004 census is most conspicuous in Beijing, Tianjin, and Hainan Province. Focusing on these three provinces, we experimented with various ways of collecting additional information on religious sites, including thorough searching of websites and books, contacting local residents, and on-site visits. The maps of Beijing, Tianjin, and Hainan Province reflect the more recent information we collected. However, due to the cost of these methods, we were not able to employ them in other areas before producing this atlas.

The distribution of religious sites associated with the five red-market religions in each province is visualized on a point map using five different colors. However, many religious sites associated with one or more religions may occupy identical or adjacent locations, making it difficult to recognize them on the map. We have tried to show the location of as many sites as possible by arranging the points in layers: on each map, the points depicting sites associated with the religion best represented on that map (i.e., the religion associated with the greatest number of sites in that province) form the bottom layer, and each successive layer contains the points associated with the next best represented religion on the map. Unfortunately, it is not possible to represent each and every site on the point map. To complement the point map, we have provided a bar graph and a frequency table with information on the number of sites associated with the five religions at the prefecture level. A pie chart shows the proportions of the five religions in each province. Some provincial maps also include one or more inset maps showing locations where there is a high density of sites associated with multiple religions.

In an effort to contextualize the distribution of religious sites in the 2004 economic census, we provide information on the sociodemographic characteristics of China's provinces and their counties and prefectures. Many of our observations draw on data collected in China's 2000 and 2010 Population Census. The two censuses provide key demographic characteristics at the county and province levels, including level of education, urbanization, immigration, age structure, sex ratio, and family structure. In addition, by utilizing information from two time points, we are able to depict demographic changes at the county level.

In order to better understand the social location of religious followers in China, we mainly consulted three kinds of survey data: the 2007 Chinese Spiritual Life Survey (CSLS), the 2010 China General Social Survey (CGSS), and the 2010 Chinese census. The CSLS, which yielded one of the best datasets available for studying religion in China, was conducted by Horizonkey Information and Consulting Co., Ltd. Focusing on the spiritual life of Chinese residents, this dataset includes information on people's religious life and spiritual pursuits. This survey used multistage probability sampling and included 7,021 respondents randomly selected from 56 locales in mainland China, including 3 metropolitan cities, 6 province-level capital cities, 11 prefecture-level cities, 16 county-level cities, and 20 administrative villages. In our analysis, we mainly relied on the CSLS 2007, unless otherwise noted.

The CGSS is one of the most prominent surveys of the Chinese population in mainland China. The project, launched jointly by Renmin University of China and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, conducts multistage stratified national probability surveys. As a survey that was designed to survey general social values in China, the 2010 CGSS, conducted independently by Renmin University, included a Religion Module to investigate the religious life of Chinese people. We used the CGSS 2010 to complement the CSLS 2007. With a response rate of 73.2 percent, the 2010 CGSS surveyed 12,000 individuals randomly selected from 125 cities, townships, and villages, covering a wide range of administrative units across mainland China.

Relying on the 2007 CSLS, the 2010 CGSS, and the 2010 Chinese Population Census, we compared the sociodemographic characteristics of the religious population with that of the general population. Aiming to better understand the religious contours in China, we specifically compared the distribution of age, gender, educational attainment, and area of residence (urban or rural) of religious followers with the rest of the respondents in the survey sample. Because of the political significance

of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Chinese Communist Youth League (CCYL), we also compared the proportion of the members of each organization in the religious population with the rest of the respondents in the surveys or in the general population. Even though the CCP and CCYL officially prohibit their members from believing in or practicing religion, in reality the majority of them do hold spiritual or religious beliefs and practices. To roughly estimate the proportion of CCP and CCYL members in the general population, we used data from the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China website and from Xinhua.net.[19] As of 2009, which is close in time to the surveys of CSLS survey in 2007 and the 2010 CGSS, the number of CCP members was almost 78 million[20] and the number of CCYL members was about 75.5 million.[21] According to the 2010 Population Census, about 17 percent of the total population of 1,339,724,852

were under age 14.[22] Therefore, among the adult population aged 15 or above, 7 percent were CCP members and nearly 7 percent were CCYL members. Thus, 7 percent is the baseline reference for religious beliefs and practices of the CCP or CCYL members in the population.

Due to political restrictions and practical obstacles, it has been extremely difficult to collect or acquire data on religious organizations and individuals in China. By piecing together available census and survey data, supplemented with news sources and scholarly studies, we are able to present this description and visualization of the geographical location of religious sites and the social location of religious followers. I hope this first attempt will lead to more and better scholarly studies of religion in contemporary China.

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19   State Council of the People's Republic of China, "The Number of Chinese Communist Party Members."

20   State Council of the People's Republic of China, "The Number of Chinese Communist Party Members Reached 77,995,000 by the End of 2009."

21   Xinhuanet, "The Number of Chinese Communist Youth League Members Reaches 75,439,000."

22   National Bureau of Statistics of China, "Communique ... on Major Figures of the 2010 Population Census [1] (No. 1)"; "Communique ... on Major Figures of the 2010 Population Census [1] (No. 2)."