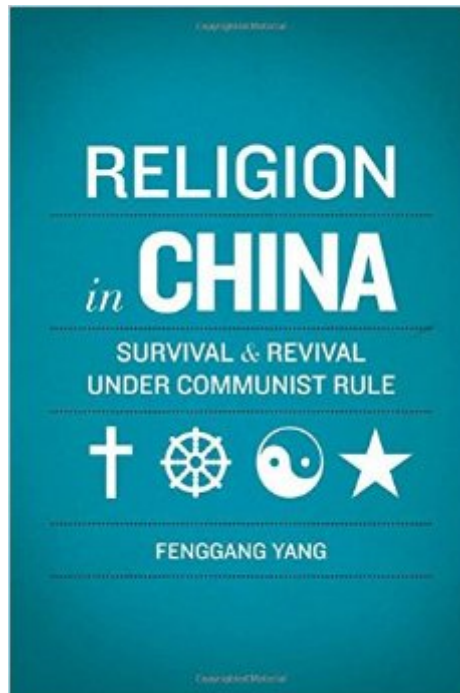


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# Religion In China: Survival And Revival Under Communist Rule



## Synopsis

Religion in China survived the most radical suppression in human history--a total ban of any religion during and after the Cultural Revolution. All churches, temples, and mosques were closed down, converted for secular uses, or turned to museums for the purpose of atheist education. Over the last three decades, however, religion has survived and thrived even as China remains under Communist rule. Christianity ranks among the fastest-growing religions in the country, and many Buddhist and Daoist temples have been restored. The state even sponsors large Buddhist gatherings and ceremonies to venerate Confucius and the legendary ancestors of the Chinese people. On the other hand, quasi-religious qigong practices, once ubiquitous, are now rare. All the while, authorities have carried out waves of atheist propaganda, anti-superstition campaigns, severe crackdowns on the underground Christian churches and various "evil cults." How do we explain religion in China today? How did religion survive the eradication measures in the 1960s and 1970s? How do various religious groups manage to revive despite strict regulations? Why have some religions grown fast in the reform era? Why have some forms of spirituality gone through dramatic turns? In *Religion in China*, Fenggang Yang provides a comprehensive overview of the religious change in China under Communism.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Dr. Yang's book is an interesting endeavor into the complicated nature of not only religion and the state, but specifically religion and the Communist point of view in China. While there are clearly stated facts with good data and sources, I did notice some parts of the text that did mislead me as to

his conclusion, however. Nonetheless, Yang clearly showed his reasoning for why religious sociologists should move away from the secularization theory and more toward an empirical, or working market theory of understanding the dynamics of religion and the state. In the beginning of the book, the author spends a considerable amount of time explaining the current held theories in understanding religion and how they are applied to societies throughout the world. He then goes on to explain why these simply do not work in modern times, and speculates that they were never truly as accurate as they should be. The author felt that a general theory should be applicable to all societies without the need for multiple exceptions, as per the general understanding of the scientific method. He also points out that the previous opinions, especially about Chinese religion, were often tinged with stereotypical assumptions made from a Western point of view. However, as mentioned, he also clearly proceeds to show how these old theories of the progression of religious belief (a declining state directly related to increased development) had not, nor currently apply correctly in the West. New theories must be made, or at the very least, the given questions must be addressed in a different manner. I feel the author states the case for this quite well, but I was often confused on what his point actually was until much later in the book. Even then, it felt like two conclusions within one.

Fenggang Yang, a Chinese born American sociology professor, has written a book entitled *Religion in China*. He gave it the subtitle *Survival and Revival under Communist Rule*. It was published by Oxford University Press in 2012 and has 245 pages. Given the appalling lack of knowledge about contemporary China in the West, this contribution to the sociology of religion - and at the same time to China studies - could only have been written by a cultural Chinese who feels at home in both his native Asian as well as his adopted American culture. The book is dedicated to Yang's father, "a lifelong Chinese Communist Party member who was baptized into Christ on his deathbed upon his request." Following a Preface and the Acknowledgments the work is divided into seven chapters. Explaining Religious Vitality is the title of chapter 1. In 23 pages the author points out that we must try to "understand the resilience of religion in a society with one-fifth of the world's population" (page 3). One of the claims voiced frequently by spokespersons of the party against religion is the demand, not to get orientation out of dogmas and dreams but instead "to seek the truth in facts" (4). Yang turns this demand against those, who launched it, in light of "the obvious fact of religious change in China is not decline but resilience" (4). As a theoretical method Yang follows Stark and Finke in their "economic approach to the sociology of religion" (14), but reveals weaknesses of their work and shows ways to develop that method further. Chapter 2 supplies A Definition of Religion for

the Social-Scientific Study of Religion. Yang quotes Durkheim and Max Weber but is unaware of Simmel's take on religion.

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