Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule. By Fenggang Yang. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. xv, 245 pp. $99.00 (cloth); $24.95 (paper).
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Yang Fenggang has done more than any other scholar to put Chinese religion on the map of the sociology of religion. Besides carrying out the broad stream of research upon which this study is based, he has organized a series of workshops and conferences that have introduced a generation of scholars in China to the sociological theories and methods for studying Chinese religion. He is exceptionally well informed about policy debates within China about how to regulate religion, and about empirical research that has been done on the extent of the religious revivals taking place in China today. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in this topic.

Yang intends this book to be a contribution to the sociology of religion, and from the point of view of area specialists, this has strengths and weaknesses. Unlike many historians and even anthropologists (an excellent example combining both history and anthropology is Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011]), Yang focuses not on what makes Chinese religion unique, but on what makes it part of universal sociological processes: "Working in a discipline of social science, sociologists of religion must recognize and appreciate religious variations among individuals, groups, communities, and societies. But the goal of science, including social science, as a modern enterprise is to discover lawlike patterns across variations. This is an important characteristic of social science. It sets itself apart from certain disciplines of the humanities that seek to establish the idiosyncratic uniqueness of the particular events, cases, or people" (p. 10). Thus, Yang links the study of Chinese religion to a global community of social scientific theorists.

The book contributes to creative destruction within sociological theorizing. The destruction is of secularization theory, which (in its crude forms at least) holds that religion is fated to disappear with modernization. Yang documents widespread forms of religious revival in China despite, or perhaps because of, the efforts of an atheist government to eradicate it. His creative contribution consists of a modification of religious market theory. This theory explains patterns of religious practice around the world as a result of the success or failure of governments to regulate the market for religion. Yang shows how the Chinese Communist Party has attempted to restrict the supply of religious institutions (e.g., churches, temples, and ordained clergy) over the years, although the Party has reduced the scope and methods of such regulation in the reform era. Government regulation has not led to the withering away of religion, but rather to black or grey markets for religion. Yang does an excellent job of showing the form these markets take, and his analysis of these markets could also be applied to black or grey markets for many other restricted goods. Yang also argues—and here is his creative

contribution to religious market theory—that restrictions on religious supply have actually *increased* the demand. Excessive regulation has also spurred the adoption of substitutes for religion, "alternative spiritualities without a religious label, that is, semi-, quasi-, or pseudo-religious beliefs and practices" (p. 157).

Besides its strengths, the universalistic, sociological frame of analysis also has weaknesses from the point of view of area specialists. The sociological imagination is too often a Western-centric imagination. Yang Fenggang's analysis rests on a "scientific" definition of religion that privileges Western religious historical experience. In his scheme, a "full religion" has beliefs in the supernatural combined with ritual practices and a formal organization. Examples of a full religion are Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam. A "semi-religion" is oriented toward the supernatural but has underdeveloped beliefs and organization. This describes folk or popular religion in China. A "quasi-religion" has only a diffused social organization. An example is ancestor worship. A "pseudo-religion" has no belief in the supernatural. Examples are the "religion" of communism or the personality cult of Mao. People start to accept semi-, quasi-, or pseudo-religious substitutes because of the restriction of supply in the market for full religion.

Literally millions of local temples and ancestor halls have been constructed or reconstructed in the past thirty years. They represent what the great Chinese sociologist C. K. Yang called the "diffused religion" that for many centuries has been the predominant feature of the Chinese religious landscape. But for Fenggang Yang this is at best only a semi- or quasi-religion, which continues to be popular only because the market for full religion, like Christianity, has been restricted. An alternative explanation, what we might call the historian's explanation, would be that it has been Christianity and formally organized Buddhism that are seen by many Chinese as somewhat alien, quasi-religious substitutes for *real* religion, that is, the local worship of gods, ghosts, and ancestors, or perhaps veneration of Confucius or cultivation of the mysterious powers of the *qi*. Fenggang Yang's scientific sociological explanation precludes this possibility.

Which of the alternative explanations is correct will be of great practical consequence. If Fenggang Yang's explanation is correct, then a breakdown of state regulation will lead to a hegemony of Christianity and perhaps formally organized Buddhism. If the historian's explanation is correct, then the future might lead to a revitalization of traditional Chinese spiritual traditions that would challenge our Western notions of what a full religion is and would call forth additional creative destruction in the fundamental categories of the Western sociology of religion.

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