CHINA

an international journal

VOLUME 12, NUMBER 3 DECEMBER 2014

Institutional and Diffused Religiosities
Internet and Legal Reforms
Microblogging and Grassroots Surveillance
China and Technical Global Internet Governance
Chinese-Style Democracy
Confucianism, Worker Activism and Labour Law
The Potential Rise of Hostile Takeovers
The China Investment Corporation
China's Health Aid to Africa

The Worshipping Atheist: Institutional and Diffused Religiosities in China

TANG Wenfang

Using data from several Chinese national and cross-national public opinion surveys conducted between 1992 and 2008, this article proposes new ways to measure religiosity in China by separating institutional religiosity from diffused religiosity. The findings show that while institutional religiosity is exceptionally low in China, diffused religiosity is surprisingly high, increasing rapidly between the early 1990s and late 2000s. Furthermore, this latter group promotes regime support and political and economic efficacies. The article concludes by pointing out the importance of using multiple measurements of religiosity in future comparative research.

INTRODUCTION

Religion is a subject that has divided China from the rest of the world, particularly the democratic world. The latter has widely criticised China for its restrictive policy on religious freedom, including the control of religious practices in Tibet and Xinjiang, its ban on unofficial Christian churches, arrest of dissident Catholic priests and crack-down on the Falun Gong religious sect. However, it is common knowledge that religion has experienced rapid revival and growth in post-Mao China. How do religious control and religious growth coexist and reconcile with each other in China's new environment?

In this study, the author has used national and international survey data to compare religious values and practices in both institutional and non-institutional or diffused forms in order to examine how diffused religiosity affects Chinese citizens' social and political attitudes, particularly their civic attitudes and support for the government. The study seeks to demonstrate how effectively the Chinese government has attempted to regulate religious practice, and how China's rich cultural tradition and rapid economic modernisation have contributed to religious growth.

Tang Wenfang (wenfang-tang@uiowa.edu) is the Stanley Hua Hsia Professor of Political Science and International Studies in the Department of Political Science at the University of Iowa. He obtained his PhD in Political Science from the University of Chicago. His current research focuses on public opinion and political change in contemporary China, as well as comparative political behaviour.

© China: An International Journal

This study is based on the data drawn from several public opinion surveys. One such source is the 2004 Ethics and Values Survey (*Zhongguo gongmin sixiang daode guannian zhuangkuang diaocha*),[1] which was sponsored by the Ford Foundation and conducted by the Research Center for Contemporary China at Peking University. The survey includes a random sample of 7,714 respondents in 200 townships and urban neighbourhoods across the country. The respondents answered questions about their religious beliefs and practices as well as their social and political attitudes. In order to put China in a comparative perspective, the author used the 2005 World Values Survey and compared religious values in China and 39 other countries and regions.[2] Finally, the 2004 survey is compared with the 1992 Chinese Urban Social Survey (n = 2,395), conducted by the Economic System Reform Institute of China in 40 cities, and with the 2008 China Survey (n = 3,898), a representative national sample and project of the College of Liberal Arts at Texas A&M University in collaboration with the Research Center for Contemporary China (RCCC) at Peking University. The 1992, 2004 and 2008 surveys contain similar questions about the respondents' reported religious values and practices and will help researchers track changes over time.[3]

The above large-N surveys have three advantages. First, they use representative national samples that can produce more generalisable knowledge about religiosity in China than single case studies can. Second, they provide an opportunity to conduct cross-country comparisons that put China in an international context. Third, they allow a historic examination of religiosity in China over time from the early 1990s to the late 2000s. Most current studies rely on one-time surveys that can only show a snapshot of a given point in time. The disadvantage of large-N surveys is that they lack in-depth or "thick" descriptions of how an event occurs in a specific place and time. Case studies are much more useful in accomplishing such a task. Therefore, large-N studies and case studies should complement, not replace, each other.

Before exploring religiosity at the individual level, it is necessary to give a brief overview of religious developments in China during recent years.

---

[1] Co-principal investigators include Shen Mingming and Yang Ming (Peking University), Tong Yanqi (University of Utah), Pierre Landry (Yale University) and Tang Wenfang (University of Iowa).

[2] See the website for the World Values Survey at <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org>.

[3] For further discussion on the 1992 survey, see Tang Wenfang and William L. Parish, "Political Participation and Interest Articulation", in *Chinese Urban Life under Reform: The Changing Social Contract* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Tang Wenfang, *Public Opinion and Political Change in China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005). Tang used the 1992 survey in his comparative study of religiosity in China and Taiwan; see Tang Wenfang, "Religiosity in China and Taiwan", in *Chinese Political Culture: 1989–2000*, ed. Hua Shiping (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001). The 2008 China Survey includes a national random sample of 3,898 respondents in 146 townships, 73 counties and 25 provinces. The author wishes to thank Professor Robert Harmel and the China Archive at Texas A&M University for generously sharing the 2008 China Survey dataset.

RELIGION IN POST-MAO CHINA: REVIVAL OR REPRESSION?

A number of scholars have noticed that religion, banned during the Cultural Revolution, is flourishing in post-Mao China.[4] Indications of this are the increasing numbers of religious facilities, professionals and followers. Reportedly, many new temples and churches have been constructed through funding provided by both central and local governments, local companies or villagers, in order to accommodate the increasing number of worshippers and attract more tourists.[5] When he was associate director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs in 2008, Wang Zuo'an discovered that there were approximately 10 million Protestants (not including a small number of unregistered believers), 5.5 million Catholics (including unregistered believers) and as many as 21 million Muslims. If that figure included believers in Buddhism, Taoism and folk religion, the total number of religious believers in China would exceed 100 million.[6] Some scholars have argued that official estimates are usually very

---

[4] Julian Pas, *The Turning of the Tide: Religion in China Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Daniel Bays, "Chinese Protestant Christianity Today", *The China Quarterly* 174 (2003): 317–37; Pitman Potter, "Belief in Control: Regulation of Religion in China", *The China Quarterly* 174 (2003): 395–412; Richard Madsen, "Catholic Revival during the Reform Era", *The China Quarterly* 174 (2003): 468–87; Lai Chi-Tim, "Daoism in China Today, 1980–2002", *The China Quarterly* 174 (2003): 413–27; Tom Lambert, *China's Christian Millions* (London: Monarch Books, 1999); Lai H.H., "Religious Policies in Post-Totalitarian China: Maintaining Political Monopoly over a Reviving Society", *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 11, no. 1 (2006); Yang Fenggang, "The Red, Black, and Gray Markets of Religion in China", *The Sociological Quarterly* 47 (2006): 93–122; Richard Madsen and Fan Lizhu, "The Catholic Pilgrimage to Sheshan", in *Making Religion, Making the State: The Politics of Region in Modern China*, ed. Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2012). For discussion of the religious policies during the Cultural Revolution, see William L. Parish and Martin King Whyte, *Village and Family in Contemporary China* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1978); Martin King Whyte and William L. Parish, *Urban Life in Contemporary China* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1984); and Edmond Tang and Jean-Paul Wiest, eds., *The Catholic Church in Modern China Perspectives* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993). For the relationship between religion and communist ideology, see Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher, 1844); and Mao Zedong, *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* (*Mao Zedong's Manuscripts since 1949*) (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 1987). Some scholars in the post-Mao era argued that religion, as the spiritual opium described by Marx, was true only in feudal and capitalist societies, and that it no longer served that function in socialist China. Zhao Fusan, "Jiujing zhenyang renshi zongjiao de benzhi?" (How Should We Understand the Nature of Religion?), *Social Sciences in China*, no. 3 (1986); Qiu Yonghui, "Dangdai zongjiao yanjiu sanshi nian zongshu" (Summary to Contemporary Religions Studies in the Last 30 Years), in *Zhongguo zongjiao baogao* (*Annual Report on China's Religions*), ed. Jin Ze and Qiu Yonghui (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2008).

[5] Li Qiusheng, "Miaoduo he xiaopo" (Many Temples versus Poor Schools), *Education and Vocation* 2; Chen Youfang, "Mixin xianxiang juedui bushi xianjin wenhua" (Superstitions are Not Modern Culture), *Science and Atheism* (*Kexue yu Wushenlun*), 10 (2004).

[6] Wang Zuo'an, "Woguo zongjiao zhuangkuang de bianhua" (New Developments in China's Religions), in *Zhongguo zongjiao baogao* (*Annual Report on China's Religions*), ed. Jin Ze and Qiu Yonghui (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2008), at <http://www.sara.gov.cn> [22 June 2012].

conservative, and that the actual numbers could be much higher.[7] One survey conducted by East China Normal University between 2003 and 2006 among 4,569 urban residents in 30 cities claims that the total number of believers is closer to 300 million.[8]

However, many others are still pessimistic about China's authoritarian political environment, which prevents religion from further developing.[9] Some researchers argue that the lack of social organisation independent from the Communist Party control has made it very difficult for religion to revive.[10] Many Western countries continue to criticise the Chinese government for its slow expansion of religious freedom. The annual International Religious Freedom Report, published by the US Department of State in 2010, stated that the Chinese government continues to restrict religious freedom. Examples include the government's restrictive policy on the Catholic Church, suppression of the Falun Gong movement,[11] and arrests of religious practitioners of diverse religions in ethnic-minority regions and among the Han Chinese majority.

---

[7] Lambert, *China's Christian Millions*; and Bays, "Chinese Protestant Christianity Today".

[8] Wang, "Woguo zongjiao zhuangkuang de bianhua".

[9] Jason Kindopp and Carol Lee Hamrin, eds., *God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church-State Tensions* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004); Evan Osnos, "Jesus in China: Christianity's Rapid Rise", *Chicago Tribune*, 22 June 2008.

[10] Thompson G. Brown, *Christianity in the People's Republic of China* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1983); Merle Goldman, "Religion in Post-Mao China", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 483 (1986): 146–56; and Laszlo Ladany, *The Catholic Church in China* (New York: Freedom House, 1987).

[11] Established in 1992 by Li Hongzhi, the Falun Gong began as a healing group based on Taoist and Buddhist principles; see Tang Wenfang, "Forum: How to Keep China Stable (The Falun Gong Religious Movement and the Changing Social Contract in China)", *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 12 December 1999. Initially, it was tolerated by the Communist Party, which had considered it as merely a *qigong* practice group; see Chan Shun-ching Cheris, "The Falun Gong in China: A Sociological Perspective", *The China Quarterly* 179 (2004): 665–83. After an incident in April 1999, in which Falun Gong members surrounded Zhongnanhai—the Chinese government compound—the Communist Party of China (CPC) perceived this group as a threat to its legitimacy and leadership, and launched a nationwide campaign against it, labelling it as a cult; see Nancy N. Chen, "Healing Sects and Anti-Cult Campaigns", *The China Quarterly* 174 (2003): 505–20; and Chan, "The Falun Gong in China". Consequently, Western governments and human rights groups condemned China for violating the religious rights of its citizens, and for arresting and possibly torturing Falun Gong practitioners; see "China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong and Macau): International Religious Freedom Report 2006", US Department of State website, at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71338.htm> [21 June 2012]. The Falun Gong incident alerted the Chinese government to the potential threat of folk religions and put other similar groups under its close watch since then; see Zhou Liangtuo, Chi Jin, Tian Jun, Zhang Jian and Chen Penghui, "Xian jieduan nongcun xiejiao huodong yanjiu baogao (Report on the Current Cult Activities in the Countryside), *Jiangsu gong'an zhuanke xuexiao xuebao* (*Journal of Jiangsu School of Public Security*), no. 2 (1999): 21–30; and Chen, "Healing Sects and Anti-Cult Campaigns".

The above discussion suggests that political context plays a direct role in the changing level of religiosity in China.[12] When political conditions for religion become more tolerant, the "supply" of religion becomes more lively and robust, and religiosity is expected to grow as a consequence. Alternatively, if the government continues to control the supply of religion, then religiosity in China is expected to grow slowly. The religious revivals that have swept the post-communist world, brought on by the collapse of Soviet communism, observed by Hesli, Pollack and Froese, support this view.[13]

No one makes the important role of political context clearer than Mary Kissel, an editorial board member of the *Wall Street Journal*, who attributes the slow revival of Catholicism in China to the political repression of the Communist Party of China (CPC). For her, "China demolished churches, jailed priests and punished the faithful"; because of this, "when the regime eventually falls, China will be the holy grail of Catholic missions".[14] Apparently, Kissel believes that the CPC is the only barrier that prevents China from becoming a Christian society.

In this study, the author attempts to show how different conclusions about revival and repression can be reached depending on how religiosity is measured, and addresses the question about whether political repression is the only barrier to the slow growth of certain religions in China.

RELIGIOSITY: INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

Before analysing religiosity in China, it is necessary to compare the PRC with other states, and the Chinese with other societies. If viewed in a political context, the average Chinese person seems less likely to be religious than citizens from other countries due to China's communist ideology and restriction on religion. The 2005–2008 World Values Survey of 40 countries and regions (including China) contains valuable information for making international comparisons.

---

[12] Roger Finke and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Supply-Side Explanations for Religious Change", *Annuals of the American Academy of Political Science and Social Science* 527 (May 1993): 27–39; Rodney Stark, Roger Finke and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Pluralism and Piety: England and Wales, 1851", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34, no. 4 (1995): 431–44; and Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

[13] Vicki L. Hesli, Ebru Erdem, William Reisinger and Arthur Miller, "The Patriarch and the President: Religion and Political Choice in Russia", *Demokratizatsiya* 7, no. 1 (1991): 42–72; Detlef Pollack, "The Change in Religion and Church in Eastern Germany after 1989: A Research Note", *Sociology of Religion* 63, no. 3 (2002): 373–87; Paul Froese, "Hungary for Religion: A Supply-Side Interpretation of the Hungarian Religious Revival", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 402 (2001): 251–68; Paul Froese, "After Atheism: An Analysis of Religious Monopolies in the Post-Communist World", *Sociology of Religion* 65, no. 1 (2004): 57–75.

[14] Mary Kissel, "A Cardinal's Warning on China", *The Wall Street Journal*, 10 May 2011.

The survey includes three questions that relate to religiosity:

1. Do you belong to a religious denomination? (0 = no, 1 = yes)
2. Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, how often do you attend religious services these days? (1 = never, practically never, 2 = less often, 3 = once a year, 4 = only on special holy days, 5 = once a month, 6 = once a week, 7 = more than once a week)
3. Independent of whether you go to church or not, would you say you are a convinced: 1 = atheist, 2 = non-religious person or 3 = religious person?[15]

The first question includes a list of religious denominations (Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Other), and respondents who identify themselves with any one of these denominations are coded as "1"; those who do not belong to any denomination are coded "0". The wording of the questions is also changed to adapt to different societies. For example, in Islamic countries, the respondents are asked about Sunni and Shia, and how frequently they pray instead of attending religious services. A small number of missing values (about five per cent) in each question is estimated (that is, imputed) by using the information derived from the answers to the other two questions.

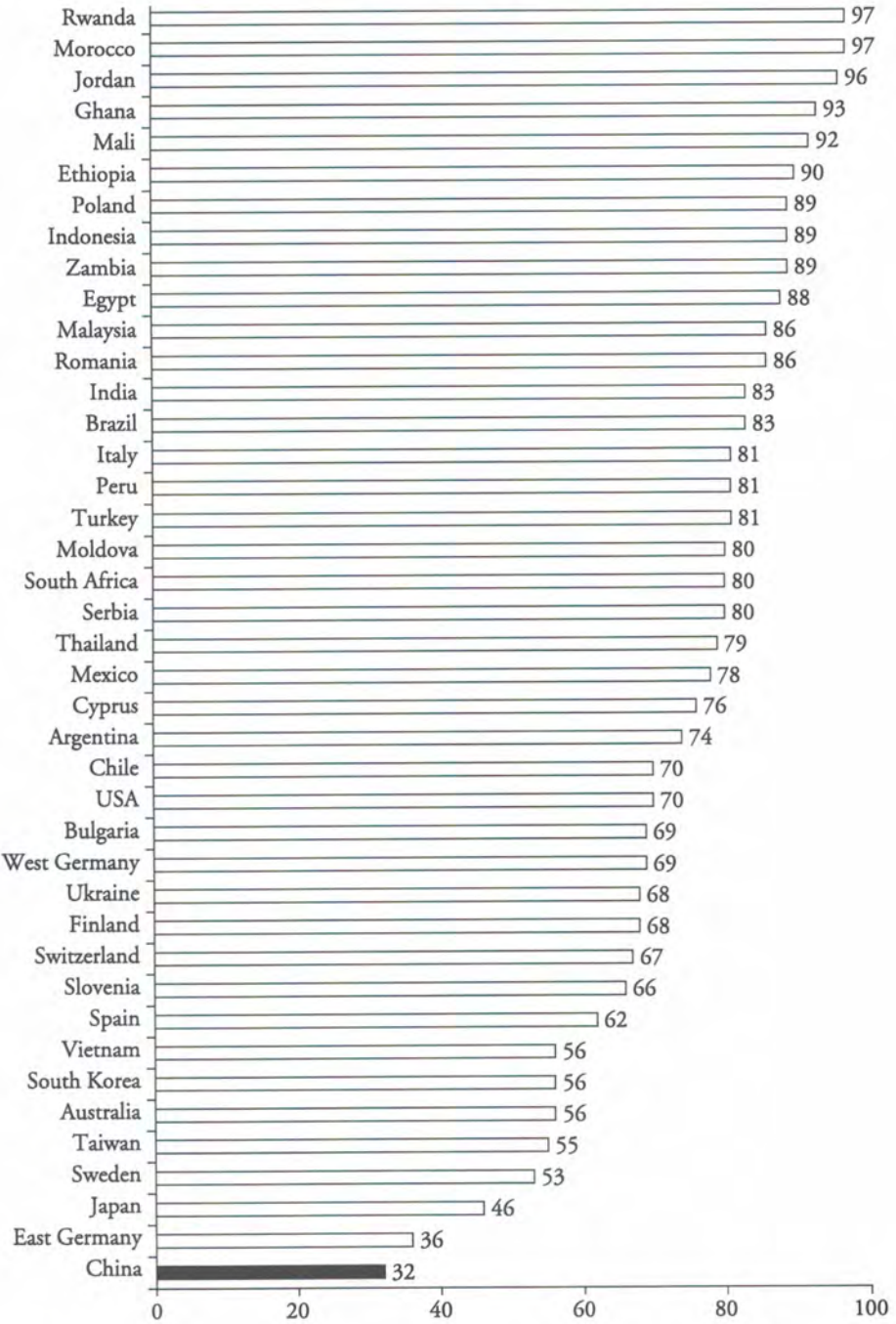
The author combined the three questions to form a common-factor index, ranging from 0 (the lowest level of religiosity) to 100 (the highest). Next, the author compared the religiosity levels of 40 countries and regions covered by the 2005 World Values Survey. In addition to China, these include Rwanda, Morocco, Jordan, Ghana, Mali, Ethiopia, Poland, Indonesia, Zambia, Egypt, Malaysia, Romania, India, Brazil, Italy, Peru, Turkey, Moldova, South Africa, Serbia, Thailand, Mexico, Cyprus, Argentina, Chile, the United States, West Germany, Ukraine, Finland, Switzerland, Slovenia, Spain, Vietnam, South Korea, Australia, Taiwan, Sweden, Japan, East Germany and China.

The ranking of religiosity in Figure 1 shows that among all the selected countries and regions in the 2005 World Values Survey, China sat at the end of the spectrum as the least religious country (32 on the scale of 100). The average level of religiosity among the survey's 40 countries and regions was 76 out of 100. The most religious countries (90 and higher) included Rwanda, Morocco, Jordan, Ghana and Mali. Least religious countries and regions (less than 70) included Bulgaria, West Germany, Ukraine, Finland, Switzerland, Slovenia, Spain, Vietnam, South Korea, Australia, Taiwan, Sweden, Japan, East Germany and China.

China's low level of religiosity seems to confirm the aforementioned pessimism about political control over religiosity. The low levels of religiosity in other communist and post-communist societies such as Bulgaria, Ukraine, Slovenia, Vietnam and East Germany provided further empirical support for the argument that communist ideology negatively affected religiosity. But the fact that the score for China was much

[15] World Values Survey 2005–08, vols. 185, 186 and 187, at <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp> [29 October 2014].

Figure 1. Religiosity in Selected Countries (weighted, max = 100)



Note: Religiosity is a factor index of (1) religious denomination, (2) frequency of attending religious services and (3) self-reported religiousness. World average = 76.

Source: World Values Survey 2005–08, at <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>.

lower than the score for these societies poses a puzzle, which is further addressed in the following sections.

Interestingly, the less religious countries also include Western industrial and post-industrial countries and regions such as West Germany, Finland, Switzerland, Spain, Australia and Sweden. These findings suggest that modernisation led to secularisation and reduced religiosity.[16] Further, other East Asian societies such as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan also show low levels of religiosity, suggesting that religiosity in these societies may be related to cultural factors in East Asia and cannot easily be measured by the three questions in the World Values Survey. Additional measures should be developed in order to capture the "hidden" dimensions of religiosity in these societies. In addition to the role of political context discussed in the previous section, the author will further examine the effects of modernisation and culture in this study.

RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS

The author examines religious denominations in order to further investigate religiosity in China. In the 1992 Chinese Urban Survey, including the 2004 Chinese Values and Ethics Survey and the 2008 China Survey, respondents were asked whether they believed in any of the Chinese government's five officially recognised religions, including Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestant Christianity, or some other religion (such as folk religion). Only the urban portions of the 2004 and 2008 surveys are compared with the 1992 urban survey, since the latter is based on urban population only. A comparison between 1992, 2004 and 2008 reveals the change in reported religious followers in China over a 16-year period.

The comparisons between 1992, 2004 and 2008 in Table 1 reveal some noteworthy changes. The first difference between 1992 and 2008 was the increase in self-reported non-believers from 83 per cent in 1992 to 89 per cent in 2004, which levelled off by 2008 at 89 per cent. As discussed earlier and in the following section, the 1999 crackdown on the Falun Gong marked the important political event that took place between 1992 and 2008, the year the two surveys were conducted. This policy may be at least partially responsible for the increase in self-reported non-believers and

[16] Religiosity in the United States is high among post-industrial countries, and this seems to refute modernisation theory. Norris and Inglehart note that this US outlier could be explained by the strong relationship that exists between levels of economic inequality and religiosity. Stark and Finke offer a more systematic explanation of the American religious exceptionalism, arguing that America's high level of religiosity is rooted in diversity and competition in the religious market and a lack of government intervention. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. See also José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994); M. Dogan, "Erosion of Class Voting and of the Religious Vote in Western Europe", *International Social Science Journal* 47 (1996): 525–38; D. Broughton and H. Ten Napel, "Introduction", in *Religion and Mass Electoral Behaviour in Europe*, ed. D. Broughton and H. Napel (London: Routledge, 2000).

TABLE 1
RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS IN URBAN CHINA, 1992, 2004 AND 2008 (WEIGHTED PERCENTAGE)

	1992	2004	2008
Atheism	**82.7**	**88.6**	**89.0**
Taoism	0.3	0.4	0.3
Buddhism	5.1	6.5	6.0
Islam	1.3	1.6	1.6
Folk religions	**5.2**	**0.1**	**0.4**
Catholicism	0.5	0.4	0.3
Protestant Christianity	1.3	2.0	2.3
Don't know	**3.5**	**0.6**	**0.0**
Total percentage	100	100	100
Total number	2395	1598	1197

Sources: The 1992 Chinese Urban Survey, 2004 Values and Ethics Survey (urban) and 2008 China Survey (urban, including migrants).

for the overall decline of folk religions.[17] Indeed, folk religions suffered the greatest decline between 1992 and 2008, from 5.2 per cent in 1992 to less than one per cent in both 2004 and 2008. This is the second noteworthy change between 1992 and 2008. Overall, the three surveys showed relatively stable patterns in most institutionalised religions, as the number of believers in Taoism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestant Christianity stayed about the same between 1992 and 2008.

On the surface, the increase in the number of non-believers from 1992 to 2008 seems to contradict the conventional impression of a rapid increase in organised religions in post-Mao China. In the 2004 and 2008 surveys, only about 10 per cent of the urban respondents (and also rural ones, not shown in Table 1) reported that they believed in organised religions. Yet 10 per cent of China's 1.3 billion people equate to 130 million people, and this figure is 30 million higher than the officially reported number of 100 million in 2000.[18] The total number of believers could approach 200 million if the "potential believers" of folk religions that comprise five per cent were not suppressed in 2004 and 2008. Further, although the proportion of Catholic and Protestant Christians as reported in the 2004 and 2008 surveys were 2.4 and 2.6 per cent respectively, these percentages translate into more than 31 million believers, a number that doubles the officially reported figure of 15.5 million for both religions.[19]

The fact that the number of religious followers reported in the surveys exceeded those reported in the official statistics suggests that the 1999, 2004 and 2008 surveys were more successful in capturing the religious reality in China than official efforts, while the official statistics perhaps failed to include informal religious adherents. They

[17] Chan, "The Falun Gong in China".

[18] "Zhongguo de zongjiao xianzhuang" (The Religious Situation in China), website for the United Front Work Department of the CPC Central Committee (Zhonggong zhongyang tong zhanxian gongzuo bu), 26 December 2002, at <http://www.zytzb.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/tzb2010/wdzj/200911/574214.html> [21 February 2013].

[19] Wang, "Woguo zongjiao zhuangkuang de bianhua".

further suggest that there was indeed a tremendous increase in the number of religious followers since the Cultural Revolution when religion was banned. The findings in this and the previous sections show that even if the total number of religious believers reach as high as 130 million to 200 million people in post-Mao China, they only constitute 10 to 20 per cent of the total population, meaning that the average Chinese is not very religious at all (if religiosity is measured by formalised religions).[20] In fact, religiosity in China ranked the lowest among the 40 countries and regions selected for the 2005–08 World Values Survey. Result comparisons of the 1992, 2004 and 2008 surveys suggest that political control, such as that executed in the anti-Falun Gong campaign, was effective only in reducing five to 10 per cent of the total number of religious believers. Another 80 to 85 per cent of the non-believer population still existed in China, something that cannot be explained by policy changes during this period.

DIFFUSED RELIGIOSITY

Religiosity is a multidimensional concept that may mean different things in different contexts. In societies where institutional religions are well developed, religiosity can easily be measured within a theological, doctrinal and faith-oriented framework. In societies where organised religions traditionally are less developed, the meaning of religiosity can be extended to folk customs, beliefs, practices and rituals that have been strongly influenced by social context and culture. In contrast to religious institutions, such forms of religiosity are diffused.[21]

Diffused religiosity does not require a universally applicable theology, an organisational structure or a membership commitment. As reflected in many folk religions, diffused religiosity often does not have an intermediary representative between the supernatural being and the individual. Diffused religious believers are more interested in praying to Buddha or some other forms of supernatural being in order to accrue practical benefits such as good health, personal safety, income and career success, rather than to achieve spiritual purity or learn religious doctrine. The other important aspect of diffused religion is ancestor worship, which is based on the Confucian idea of filial piety and social hierarchy.[22]

---

[20] In the 2012 World Values Survey in China, non-believers continued to constitute 80 per cent of the total respondents.

[21] C.K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1961); Ian Reader and George J. Tanabe, Jr., *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2004); Chiu Hei-Yuan, "Taiwan zongjiao shehuixue de fazhan" (The Development of the Study of Religious Society in Taiwan), *Zongjiao shehui kexue* (*Religion and Social Sciences*) (2008): 1251–76, at <http://www.ios.sinica.edu.tw/fellow/heiyuanchiu/> [25 October 2014]; and Joel Thoraval, "The Western Misconception of Chinese Religion ... and Its Consequences: A Hong Kong Example", *China Perspectives* 3 (January–February 1996): 58–65.

[22] See Confucius, *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing*), trans. Hu Shihua (1995–99), at <http://www.chinapage.com/confucius/xiaojing-be.html> [25 October 2014].

Diffused religiosity is highly integrated into everyday life. According to C.K. Yang, diffused religiosity merges its spiritual values, rituals and organisations with other existing concepts, norms and values and secular institutions.[23] Since diffused religiosity often does not exist in any organised form, it has been considered unreligious by some China scholars and Western missionaries.[24] However, Yang demonstrated the special position of diffused religions in the Chinese kinship system, social and economic groups and general moral order.[25]

Yang's study points out that diffused religious values contributed to the basic belief systems of ancestor and heaven worship that later formulated the theologies and rituals of institutionalised religions such as Taoism and other folk religions.[26] Foreign religions, especially Buddhism and Christianity, only became successful in China when they incorporated diffused religious values.[27] Matteo Ricci, a successful Catholic missionary of the late Ming dynasty, did not cling to Christian doctrine, and even borrowed ideas from Confucianism.[28] Bays shows that new converts to Protestantism in contemporary China are the products of Chinese popular culture.[29] The majority of Protestants in rural areas may not be familiar with Christian doctrine, but their beliefs and activities may have close linkages with the local diffused religious culture that emphasises the pragmatic aspects of religion.

From this cultural analysis, one may expect diffused religiosity to be more popular than institutional religiosity, since diffused religiosity is more likely to meet the need for spirituality's pragmatic benefit. However, diffused religiosity may be subject to political control. The previous sections show that the overall level of Chinese religiosity was the lowest in the world, and that the percentage of believers in institutional religions was very small relative to the total population. If these low numbers were indeed caused by political control, then the prevalence of diffused religiosity, which is also subject to the same political control, should be low, and it should not change significantly over time.

---

[23] Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, p. 244.

[24] Ibid., p. 3.

[25] Ibid., chs. 2, 3 and 11.

[26] Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, ch. 12.

[27] Chen Zhipin and Li Xiaoming, *Jidujiao yu Fujian minjian shehui* (*Christianity and Popular Society in Fujian*) (Fujian: Xiamen University Press, 1992); Daniel Bays, ed., *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996); Wayne Flynt and Gerald W. Berkley, *Taking Christianity to China: Alabama Missionaries in the Middle Kingdom 1850–1950* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1997); Tong Xun, ed., *Jidujiao yu Beijing jiaotang wenhua* (*Christianity and Church Culture in Beijing*) (Beijing: Central Ethnicity University Press [Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe], 1999); Wang Jiping, *Jindai Zhongguo yu jindai wenhua* (*Modern China and Modern Culture*) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2003); and Mou Zhongjian and Zheng Jian, *Zhongguo zongjiao tongshi* (*Chinese History of Religion*) (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxuan chubanshe, 2003).

[28] Mou and Zhang, *Zhongguo zongjiao tongshi*.

[29] Bays, "Chinese Protestant Christianity Today".

The 1992 Chinese Urban Survey and the 2004 Ethics and Values Survey allow for the comparison of diffused religiosity among Chinese urban residents over time. They contain three questions that can measure diffused religious belief:

1. Do you agree that one should choose auspicious days for weddings, funerals, business openings and moves?
2. Do you agree that ancestral worship is a good tradition?
3. Do you agree that before buying a house, one should consider its geomancy?

Responses that are in agreement with these questions reflect diffused religious beliefs. In addition, the 1992 and 2004 surveys also include the following four questions about the respondent's diffused religious activities:

1. Have you ever had your fortune told by a fortune-teller?
2. Have you ever hired a geomantic master?
3. Have you ever burned incense sticks, worshipped the Buddha, and divined by drawing lots from bamboo sticks (for good fortune)?
4. Have you ever burned paper money for the deceased?

Affirmative responses to the above questions indicate diffused religious behaviour.

The findings in Table 2 reveal a surprisingly wide gap between diffused religiosity and institutional religiosity as presented in Figure 1 and Table 1. Overall, diffused religiosity is much more prevalent than institutional religiosity. While China's institutional religiosity has remained among the lowest in the world, self-reported diffused

TABLE 2
CHANGES IN RELIGIOUS VALUES AND BEHAVIOUR IN CHINA (WEIGHTED PERCENTAGE)

	Agree/yes	Disagree/no	Don't know	Total %
A. Diffused religious values				
Belief in geomancy 92	15	69	16	100
Belief in geomancy 04	24	71	5	100
Auspicious days for events 92	44	46	10	100
Auspicious days for events 04	51	47	3	100
Ancestral worship is good 92	50	38	12	100
Ancestral worship is good 04	72	25	4	100
B. Diffused religious acts				
Hired geomantic master 92	3	97	0	100
Hired geomantic master 04	7	92	0	100
Used fortune-teller 92	11	88	1	100
Used fortune-teller 04	15	85	0	100
Burned incense sticks 92	9	91	0	100
Burned incense sticks 04	25	75	0	100
Burned paper money 92	54	42	3	100
Burned paper money 04	78	22	0	100

Sources: The 1992 Chinese Urban Survey (n = 2,395) and 2004 Values and Ethics Survey (Urban subsample, n = 1,598).

religiosity (Table 2) was more popular and grew noticeably over time. For example, compared to the low percentages (around 10 per cent) of institutional religious believers in Table 1, belief in geomancy, auspicious days and ancestral worship was much higher, ranging from 24 per cent to 51 per cent to 72 per cent respectively.[30] Similarly, diffused religious acts were also popular among urban respondents in 2004. While seven per cent hired a geomantic master and 15 per cent used a fortune-teller, those who burned incense sticks for good luck and paper money for the deceased reached 25 and 78 per cent.

Although the author did not show the rural portion of the 2004 survey in Table 2, for purposes of comparability, the rural respondents in the 2004 survey displayed a similar favour for diffused religiosity. Many of them believed in geomancy (45 per cent), auspicious days (69 per cent) and ancestral worship (83 per cent). Diffused religious acts were even more popular among the rural residents. Eighteen per cent hired geomantic masters, 17 per cent had their fortune told by a fortune-teller, 30 per cent burned incense for good luck, and 84 per cent burned paper money for the deceased (not shown in Table 2). Again, these are indications that diffused religiosity is more popular than institutional religiosity in China.

Furthermore, for urban residents, diffused religiosity also increased much more quickly than institutional religiosity. From 1992 to 2004, levels of institutional religiosity remained almost unchanged (Table 1). In contrast, the level of diffused religious values and actions rose quickly during the same period. The percentage of urban respondents who believed in geomancy grew from 15 to 24 per cent; those who would choose auspicious days for events such as weddings and business openings grew from 44 to 51 per cent; and those who believed in ancestral worship increased from 50 to 72 per cent. Moreover, considerably more people put their religious beliefs into practice between 1992 and 2004. The respondents who actually hired a geomantic master doubled from three to seven per cent. An additional four per cent—that is, 11 per cent—had their fortune told by a fortune-teller in 1992, and that number grew to 15 per cent by 2004. The most impressive changes took place among those who burned incense sticks for good fortune and paper money for the deceased; their numbers increased from nine to 25 per cent and from 54 to 78 per cent, respectively.

As the findings in the previous sections (Figure 1 and Table 1) seem to imply that political control inhibits religiosity, the results in Table 2 reveal the hidden part of the story. Religiosity, when further distinguished between institutional and diffused forms, exhibits an interesting variation. Religiosity remained low and unchanged from 1992 to 2004 when measured as institutional religiosity, but appeared to be popular with significant increase when measured as diffused religiosity.

---

[30] Although not shown in Figure 2, in both the 1992 and 2004 surveys, about 22 per cent of all urban respondents admitted that they let friends tell their fortune with palmistry or cards. In the 2004 survey, 31 per cent of all non-rural residents picked auspicious days for important events (not asked in the 1992 survey).

The findings in this section show the importance of further exploring the meaning of religiosity. Religiosity in China appears extremely low by measure of organised religious institutions and activities. However, religiosity appears to be in the midst of a rapid revival by measure of religious beliefs and practices integrated into traditional culture and everyday life. If "God" represents institutional religiosity and temples represent diffused religiosity, then China is a godless country with a temple on every street corner. The rapid revival of diffused religiosity from 1992 to 2004 puts a question mark on the effectiveness of political control by the Communist Party. It suggests that either the Party is not effective or there is a lack of intention to exert control, at least regarding diffused religiosity. The distinction between institutional and diffused religiosities also suggests the importance of tradition and culture in Chinese religious practices. It is possible that in the same political context, the low demand for institutional religiosity is at least partially the result of a cultural tradition that favours diffused religiosity.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF DIFFUSED RELIGIOUS BELIEVERS

In this section, the author further examines the social and economic characteristics of diffused religiosity. To simplify the analysis, the three questions representing diffused values (geomancy, auspicious days and ancestral worship) are combined to form a single-factor index of diffused religious belief. Similarly, the four questions on diffused religious acts are combined into a single-factor index of diffused religious acts. Each newly constructed index is converted into a 0–1 scale, with "1" representing the highest level of religiosity.

One of the questions attempts to find out whether economic modernisation will promote religiosity. Researchers have found that under similar political and cultural environments, the formation of religiosity is a function of modernisation. The development of technology is accompanied by urbanisation, improved living standards and education, and higher income. People become less religious because they develop more confidence and possess more resources and knowledge to deal with hardships and uncertainties in their lives.[31] Inglehart analysed the data from the World Values Survey of 1990 and 2000 and noticed a religious resurgence in Africa, Eastern Europe and Latin America, in states with greater economic uncertainty and political instability.[32] Meanwhile, advanced societies experienced marked religious decline, even though people there have more spiritual needs and think more about the meaning and purpose of life. Furthermore, Tang observed that in China, the winners of market reform are

[31] Malcolm Hamilton, *The Sociology of Religion: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

[32] Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Post-Modernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

less likely to join religious cults, compared to the losers.[33] According to these views, more "modernised" individuals tend to have a lower level of religiosity.[34] However, modernisation may not always bring satisfaction and therefore less religiosity. Stark and Bainbridge observe the rise of the "new religious movements" in post-industrial societies.[35] Although people in these countries have achieved material affluence, they also experience alienation, declining communal solidarity, psychological stress and deteriorating interpersonal relations, which consequently develop a further need for spirituality.[36]

In China, religiosity is likely to grow with economic modernisation. Despite remarkable economic growth, China is not a post-industrial country, like those societies studied by Inglehart.[37] Rapid improvement of material life may generate further needs and resources to improve spiritual life.[38] While long-term modernisation factors, such as education and urbanisation, may ultimately strengthen people's self-confidence and reduce religiosity, short-term economic gains in income may increase religiosity.

The author used the 2004 Ethics and Values Survey to examine the social and economic factors affecting diffused religiosity. The author examined regional economic development and family income for short-term modernisation effects, and the education and urbanisation factors for long-term effects. Regional economic development is measured by 2003 provincial per capita income. The original continuous numeric variable is translated into a 0–1 scale (where "0" represents the lowest income level and "1" the highest). Family income refers to the respondent's total household income in 2003. The original scale ranges from one to 16, representing the range spanning from the lowest income level in 2003 (3,000 yuan) to the highest (200,000 yuan). This scale is converted to a 0–1 scale [(family income scale – 1)/15] for easier interpretation. Regional income and family income create immediate results in living standards. In this sense, they reveal the short-term impact of modernisation on religiosity.

Education is measured by the respondent's total years of formal education (0 to 23 years divided by 10). Urbanisation refers to the respondent's residential classification, including rural, urban and urban migrant. Unlike regional and family incomes, these two variables bring a more gradual change in life. They can be used to measure the long-term effects of modernisation.

---

[33] Tang, "Forum: How to Keep China Stable".

[34] Brian R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969).

[35] Sometimes "cults and sects" are referred to as "new religious movements (NRM)" or "minority religions". James T. Richard, *Regulating Religion: Case Studies from Around the Globe* (New York: Plenum Publishers, 2004). See also Rodney Stark and William S. Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987).

[36] Tang, "Religiosity in China and Taiwan".

[37] Inglehart, *Modernization and Post-Modernization.*

[38] Fan Lizhu, "The Cult of the Silkworm Mother as a Core of Local Community Religion in a North China Village: Field Study in Zhiwuying, Baoding, Hebei", *The China Quarterly* 174 (2003): 359–72.

In addition to economic modernisation, political control and cultural factors may also affect religiosity. The author used age and Communist Party membership to measure political control, and gender as a cultural factor. Finally, it is also necessary to examine whether institutionalised religions affect diffused religiosity.

Age includes four dichotomous variables (g4965, g6678, g7989 and post89), representing respectively those who turned 20 between 1949 and 1965 (59 and older in 2004), between 1966 and 1978 (46–58), between 1979 and 1989 (35–45) and those after 1989 (34 and younger). Each age group represents a layer of political geography in Chinese society. The 1949–65 group completed their political socialisation process in the socialist construction period, the 1966–78 generation during the radical period of the Cultural Revolution, the 1979–89 group during the post-Mao reform period, and the post-1989 group during the post-reform years.[39] In other words, different generations carry the social and political imprints of their times. In general, the socialist and Cultural-Revolution generations experienced more radical political education than their reform and post-reform counterparts. The political-context thesis predicts that people who grew up in the reform period may develop more religious values as the political environment becomes more relaxed.[40] But the conventional thought is that age is positively related to religiosity, because older people feel less ambitious to control their own lives and tend to become more religious.[41] In addition, the author used membership in the Communist Party as another measure of political context. Party members are expected to be less religious since they are indoctrinated with the CPC's atheist orientation.

Next, gender is used as a sociocultural factor at the individual level. Miller pointed out that although feelings of weakness, vulnerability and helplessness are common and natural in both women and men, in societies with a paternalistic tradition, men are more likely to deny these feelings whereas women are encouraged to cultivate them.[42] Thus, it is easier for women to acknowledge their weakness and turn to religion. Although the status of women had improved in the early years of the communist regime as socialist policies brought them more education, income and marital equality, women faced new stress and hardship with the beginning of market reform, such as discrimination in employment and the increased dual burden of career and household tasks.[43] Again, they may be more likely to turn to religion for help than men.

Finally, the author examined the role of institutionalised religions on diffused religiosity, using the respondents' reported religious denominations to represent institutionalised religions. Since institutionalised religions are characterised by their theologies and organisational structures, one may expect religious denominations to

---

[39] Tang and Parish, "Political Participation and Interest Articulation".

[40] Brown, *Christianity in the People's Republic of China*; Ladany, *The Catholic Church in China*; and Pas, *The Turning of the Tide*.

[41] David Fontana, *Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality* (Malden, MA: BPS Blackwell, 2003).

[42] Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976).

[43] Tang and Parish, "Political Participation and Interest Articulation".

have no relation to diffused religiosity. On the other hand, if institutional religions have to adapt in order to survive, religious denominations should also show characteristics of diffused religiosity.

Further details about these economic and sociopolitical variables are presented in Appendix 2, together with the two indices of diffused religious attitudes and diffused religious behaviour.

As shown in Table 3, modernisation has both short- and long-term effects on religiosity. In the short term, the increase in regional income stimulates the development of diffused religious attitudes and family income has a strong effect on increasing diffused religious behaviour.

Long-term modernisation factors seemed to work against religiosity. For each additional 10 years of education, diffused religious values drop by 4.4 per cent. Urban residents demonstrated a less diffused religious attitude and behaviour than both urban migrants and rural residents. These findings confirm the general pattern in other societies, where religiosity tends to decline with modernisation over time.

TABLE 3
SOCIOPOLITICAL FACTORS AND DIFFUSED RELIGIOSITY (OLS COEFFICIENTS)

	Diffused religious attitude	Diffused religious behaviour
Modernisation		
Short-term economic effects		
2003 per capita provincial income	.117***	.019
2003 family income	−.170	.463***
Long-term economic effects		
Education	−.044***	−.006
Urban	−.030***	−.021**
Migrant	.008	.018
Rural	comparison	comparison
Political and social factors		
Socialist generation (g4965)	−.032***	.005
Cultural Revolution generation (g6678)	−.013*	.014**
Reform generation (g7989)	.011*	.012*
Post-reform generation (post-89)	comparison	comparison
CPC membership	−.034***	−.040***
Female	.021***	.463***
Denominations		
Atheism	.189***	.263***
Catholicism	.080	.234***
Protestantism	.096**	.166***
Buddhism	.295***	.413***
Taoism	.328***	.433***
Folk religions	.253***	.382***
Islam	comparison	comparison
Constant	.433***	.157***
Adj-R square	.110	.086
N	6766	7484

*p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01.
Note: See Table 2 for the items included in diffused religious attitudes. Diffused religious behaviour includes the four items in Table 2 and two more questions from the 2004 survey, fortune-telling by friends and picking auspicious days for important events. Regional dummy variables are included in each equation but not shown.
Source: The 2004 Values and Ethics Survey.

Age has a clear effect on diffused religiosity. The socialist generation (g4965), exposed to political control for the longest time, reported less interest in diffused religious attitudes and behaviour than the younger generations. The Cultural Revolution generation (g6678) also showed less interest in diffused religious values than the younger generations, although it was ironically more likely to engage in diffused religious behaviour than both the oldest and youngest generations. The reform generation (g7989), which experienced less political control than the older generations, demonstrated higher levels of both diffused attitude and behaviour. The youngest generation (post89) also showed more interest in diffused religious values than the two oldest groups, but perhaps was too busy to actually practise diffused religion.

As a result of the officially atheist ideology's direct influence, members of the Communist Party are less religious across the board than the general public. Also as expected, women are more religious than men. Women are particularly active in diffused religious activities.

Finally, the findings concerning the function of religious denominations in shaping diffused attitude and behaviour are more interesting. Religions that either are indigenous or had a long history in China (such as Taoism, Buddhism and folk religions) exerted a considerably stronger influence on the promotion of diffused attitude and behaviour than did foreign religions that entered China more recently (such as Protestantism, Catholicism and Islam). It is interesting that even seemingly non-religious "atheists" demonstrated higher levels of diffused religious attitudes and behaviours than Protestants, Catholics and Muslims. In other words, having no religious denomination does not mean one is not religious. Equally interesting is the fact that both Catholics and Protestants reported greater participation in diffused religious activities than did Muslims. These findings confirm that Catholicism and Protestantism had adapted themselves to the Chinese cultural context, at least to some extent. Finally, Islam as the comparison group in Table 3 displays fewer diffused religious practices than the other denominations. This finding does not mean Islam was not influenced by diffused religiosity. It only shows that it was relatively less influenced by diffused religiosity, particularly when compared with native religions and Buddhism. Islam has long adapted itself to Chinese society and culture, perhaps just as much as Catholicism and Protestantism. In fact, the difference in diffused religious attitude (not behaviour) was very small between Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism.

To summarise, this section describes the effects of selected economic, political and social factors on diffused religiosity. The role of economic modernisation confirms the author's expectations. While short-term economic benefits increased diffused religiosity, long-term economic benefits such as improved education and urbanisation reduced such religiosity. When measured by generational difference, political relaxation was effective in increasing diffused religiosity. Finally, it is interesting to find that institutionalised religions in China promoted diffused religious attitudes and behaviours. In order to survive and promote the spread, these institutionalised religions had to operate in the Chinese cultural context.

IMPACT OF DIFFUSED RELIGIOSITY ON POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ATTITUDES

The final objective of this study is to explore how diffused religiosity leads to any change in individual political and economic attitudes. In particular, these attitudes include support for the current regime, political efficacy, economic efficacy and tolerance.

It is not easy to predict the relationship between diffused religiosity and regime support. Focusing on different literature may lead to opposing hypotheses. On the one hand, religiosity may lead to greater acceptance of the current regime. Marx stressed the passive side of religiosity.[44] He argued that religion served as justification for oppression in society and consolation for the oppressed. This argument indicates that religious people, being politically conservative, tend to accept the status quo and support the existing political system. In France, for example, Catholic Church members have consistently voted for the Right and against the Left.[45] Historically, totalitarian and authoritarian regimes often relied on the church to consolidate their powers.[46]

However, this may not apply to all situations. Some religious doctrines, such as Protestantism, converge with certain democratic values, such as individualism and respect for human rights,[47] which may encourage believers to develop anti-establishment sentiment and challenge the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes.[48] Johnston and Figa showed how the rebellious Catholic churches encouraged and aided political opposition to authoritarian regimes.[49] According to their work, Catholics may be inclined to mobilise people to fight against repressive regimes for moral and evangelical reasons. In post-communist Russia, religiosity had a negative impact on trust in the government and support for political institutions.[50]

In China, it is equally difficult to predict the relationship between diffused religiosity and regime support. On the negative side, there are ample examples of anti-government rebellions in Chinese history initiated by religious groups, such as the Taiping Rebellion.[51] That rebellious tradition would lead to a hypothesis that

---

[44] Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right.*

[45] Michael Lewis-Beck, "Class, Religion, and the French Voter: A 'Stalled' Electorate?", *French Politics and Society* 16, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 43–51.

[46] The author expresses his gratitude to one of the anonymous reviewers who made this point.

[47] Max Weber, "The Social Psychology of the World Religions", in *From Max Weber: Essays in Social Theory*, ed. H. Gerth and C.W. Mills (London: Routledge, 1970); and John Anderson, "Does God Matter, and If So, Whose God? Religion and Democratization", *Democratization* 11, no. 4 (2004): 192–217.

[48] Potter, "Belief in Control".

[49] Hank Johnston and Jozef Figa, "The Church and Political Opposition: Comparative Perspectives on Mobilization against Authoritarian Regime", *Journal for Scientific Study of Religion* 27, no. 1 (1988): 32–47.

[50] Hesli, Erdem, Reisinger and Miller, "The Patriarch and the President: Religion and Political Choice in Russia".

[51] Robert Weller, *Resistance, Chaos and Control in China: Taiping Rebels, Taiwanese Ghosts and Tiananmen* (London and Seattle: Macmillan Press and University of Washington Press, 1994).

a negative relationship existed between diffused religiosity and regime support. On the positive side, it is also easy to find examples of cooperative relationships between religious groups and the government. For example, folk religious groups are often involved in local governance. Based on his extensive fieldwork in 600 villages in rural Fujian, Kenneth Dean showed how local folk religious activities formed a second tier of local governance by providing public services, raising funds, and mobilising community development and villager participation.[52] Involvement in these folk religious activities gave villagers a sense of community solidarity and political efficacy.[53] If these studies are a realistic reflection of religious practices in China, the author expects the respondents to the 2004 Ethics and Values Survey to demonstrate a positive relationship between diffused religiosity and regime support, because these diffused believers are likely to seek harmony with the existing social order.

Religiosity can also affect political efficacy either positively or negatively. Again, according to the Marxist analysis, religion discourages its believers from struggling for their rights and serves as an instrument for political control,[54] which further suggests that religiosity may reduce political efficacy. Frazier and Reed took on the same perspective and held that religious teachings suppressed political activism.[55] Laymen, on the other hand, argued that attendance at churches and participation in religious activities may help believers to develop their mobilisation skills and provide organisational resources that were essential to political efficacy.[56] In the Chinese context, the co-option of diffused religiosity into the establishment may provide believers with a sense of belonging and empowerment. As a result, diffused religiosity is expected to promote political efficacy.

According to Weber, certain religious views, such as Protestant Christian beliefs, may increase economic efficacy because Protestant ethics consider worldly success as a sign of salvation.[57] They emphasised rational pursuit of economic gains and hard work, which eventually contributed to the development of capitalism in Europe. In China, diffused religiosity may also share the same this-worldly orientation with Protestantism, as suggested by Berger in his discussion on how diffused Confucianism

---

[52] Kenneth Dean, "Local Communal Religion in Contemporary Southeast China", *The China Quarterly* 173 (June 2003): 336–58.

[53] Lily Tsai, *Accountability without Democracy: Solidarity Groups and Public Goods Provision in Rural China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Lily Tsai, "Solidary Groups, Informal Accountability, and Local Public Goods Provision in Rural China", *The American Political Science Review* 101, no. 2 (May 2007): 355–72.

[54] Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right.*

[55] E. Franklin Frazier, *The Black Church in America* (New York: Knopf, 1974); and Adolph Reed Jr., *The Jesse Jackson Phenomenon: The Crisis of Purpose in Afro-American Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).

[56] Geoffrey Laymen, *The Great Divide: Religious and Cultural Conflict in American Party Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

[57] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).

TABLE 4
IMPACTS OF RELIGIOSITY ON POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ATTITUDES (OLS COEFFICIENTS)

	System support	Political efficacy	Economic efficacy	Social tolerance
Diffused values	0.031***	0.067***	0.113***	−0.022***
Constant	0.601***	0.510***	0.565***	0.329***
Observations	7,404	7,251	7,380	7,488
R-squared	0.045	0.058	0.070	0.056

***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, *p < 0.1.
Note: The dependent variables in each OLS regression equation are system support, political efficacy, economic efficacy and tolerance. The main independent variable is diffused religious attitude. The control variables are provincial income, family income, education, urban/rural/migrant residents, age groups, CPC membership, gender, regions and religious denominations. See Appendices 1 and 2 for further details.
Source: The 2004 Values and Ethics Survey.

(or "vulgar" Confucianism) promoted East Asia's economic boom.[58] Compared to believers of institutional religions, believers of diffused religiosity are pragmatists. They engage in diffused religious activities in order to find immediate solutions to this-worldly problems and achieve economic prosperity. Consequently, diffused religiosity may play a positive role in its believers' sense of economic efficacy.

Finally, a number of researchers have shown that social tolerance is largely associated with religious commitment.[59] Allport distinguished intrinsic from extrinsic religious orientations. Intrinsic orientations, which emphasise love, brotherhood and compassion, increase tolerance, but extrinsic religious orientations tend to be exclusivist and ethnocentric. Empirically, Johnson found that the intrinsic orientation of religious commitment—religious importance measured by interest in religion and the importance of religion in one's philosophy and life—was positively related to tolerance.[60] His results showed that church involvement and orthodoxy were negatively related to prejudices. Diffused religiosity, in contrast, is parochial by nature. It is often particularised based on the local or kinship tradition. It seems to resemble extrinsic religious orientation and therefore should lead to less social tolerance.

Using the data from the 2004 Ethics and Values Survey, Table 4 presents four multivariate ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions in which regime support, political efficacy, economic efficacy and tolerance serve as dependent variables (see Appendix 1 for measurements), and a diffused religious attitude serves as the independent variable. Other variables controlled but not shown in Table 4 include the 2003 provincial per

[58] Peter L. Berger, "An East Asian Model?", *The Economic News* (September 1984): 17–23.
[59] T.W. Adorno, E. Frenkel-Brunswick, D.J. Levinson and R.N. Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper, 1950); Samuel Stouffer, *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties* (New York: Doubleday, 1955); Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966); and Gordon Allport, "The Religious Context of Prejudice", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 5 (1966): 447–57.
[60] Doyle P. Johnson, "Religious Commitment, Social Distance, and Authoritarianism", *Review of Religious Research* 18, no. 2 (1977): 99–113.

capita income, as well as 2003 family income, education, urbanisation, age, Party membership, gender, geographic origin and religious denomination. The summary statistics for the variables in the regression analysis are presented in Appendix 2, and the full models with the controlled variables are shown in Appendix 3.

As shown in Table 4, diffused religiosity led to greater acceptance of China's current political system and stronger feelings of political and economic efficacies, but less social tolerance. Regime acceptance and social intolerance seem to suggest that diffused religiosity serves little function in China's potential for democratisation. But the fact that diffused religiosity also generated stronger feelings of political and economic efficacies should not be easily neglected. Diffused religiosity may serve to strengthen people's political and economic confidence and stimulate the feelings of self-empowerment, which may become favourable conditions for the development of a civic culture.

CONCLUSIONS

Three conclusions emerge from this study. First, the findings only partially confirm the commonly held belief that religiosity is weak in China compared with other countries. This gap between China and other societies may be the result of political control under an authoritarian communist government, as shown by the crackdown on the Falun Gong. Yet the political control argument becomes shaky if religiosity is further defined as diffused. While institutional religiosity, particularly Christianity, was low and remained unchanged during the 1990s and 2000s, diffused religiosity had revived rapidly since the early 1990s. This may be disappointing news for those who study the house church movement among Protestants. While such a movement developed rapidly from non-existence to tens of millions of alleged followers, it is important to remember that its percentage is still less than five per cent of China's population. The fact that even the self-claimed atheists were actively involved in diffused religious practice points at the danger of defining religion in China only by institutional standards. It is easy to criticise the Communist Party for the country's low level of institutional religiosity, but this criticism cannot explain the popularity of diffused religion under the same Communist Party.[61] Cultural tradition that favours diffused religiosity has to be taken into consideration.

The second conclusion is related to the contributing factors behind religiosity. The findings partially confirm the impact of political control in suppressing religiosity, as Party members and pre-reform generations were less religious. But more interestingly, the findings also show that political control seems to be more effective in switching on and off diffused religiosity than suppressing institutional religiosity. In other words, diffused religiosity was sensitive to the fluctuation between political control and liberalisation,

[61] One may believe that diffused religious activities are more difficult to control. Yet it may not be the case in an authoritarian state if the government is determined to do so, as that was what happened during the Cultural Revolution when all religious activities were effectively banned.

whereas institutional religiosity, particularly Islam and Christianity, remained more resistant to changes in the external political climate. One similar case is Taiwan, where the Christian population remains low even after democratisation.[62]

The findings also present some interesting effects of modernisation. While long-term modernisation (education and urbanisation) results in a reduction in religiosity, short-term modernisation, such as increased regional living standard and family income, may stimulate diffused religiosity. Based on these findings, one can probably predict a continued low level of institutional religiosity in China but a further increase in diffused religiosity in the near future, even if the current authoritarian political system continues unchanged. In the long run, both types of religiosity will possibly decline under economic modernisation.[63]

The third conclusion addresses the political and economic consequences of religiosity in China. As mentioned above, market reform and economic growth are likely to bring a further increase in diffused religious practice. This should be welcoming news to human rights activists and people who were denied the freedom to practise religion during China's repressive political past. Yet the development of such religiosity has both pros and cons. If withholding a challenge to China's authoritarian regime means withholding support for democratic changes, then diffused religiosity encourages anti-democratic tendencies because it promotes political obedience as well as social intolerance. In other words, diffused religiosity seems to promote short-term political stability in China. On the other hand, diffused religiosity also seems to lead to favourable conditions for the development of a civic culture in the long run, since it also encourages political and economic efficacies. Only future political development can prove whether the positive impact of diffused religiosity in promoting political and economic efficacies will promote democratic change. For the time being, promoting diffused religious practice seems to work in favour of the current communist regime by maintaining the status quo.

Marx fought hard against religion as the "spiritual opium" that kept the unjust capitalist system in order. Ironically, the CPC, while still adhering to Marxism in theory, has defected from Marx by relying on religion to keep itself in power.

APPENDIX 1: MEASURING POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ATTITUDES

The 2004 Values and Ethics Survey contains many questions related to the above concepts. Regime support is measured by the respondents' trust in China's political and social institutions, including consumer associations, the courts, the National People's Congress, the legal profession, complaints bureaus, village councils and workplace supervisors, the Communist Party, the Procuratorate, government offices, trade unions,

---

[62] Kuo Cheng-Tian, *Religion and Democracy in Taiwan* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008).

[63] In a separate regression analysis, both education and urbanisation have statistically significant negative effects on the institutional religiosity index (not shown).

the news media, the Women's Federation and the police. Each respondent's answers are added together and converted into a 0–1 scale, in which "1" represents the highest level of regime support.

Political efficacy is based on the respondent's agreement with the following statements:

1. Hiring a lawyer can win a lawsuit more easily.
2. People like me can affect government decision-making.
3. Local people's congresses listen to the opinions of people like me.
4. People are capable of expressing their opinions on complex issues in a modern society.
5. In most times, the government can solve the problems of people like me.
6. The government should not decide whether an idea can be circulated in a society.
7. In most times, the police can solve problems of people like me.
8. Ordinary people should question the government.
9. One should not simply obey the government.

Agreement with the above statements indicates greater efficacy. The nine questions are combined in a factor analysis and the resulting political efficacy has a 0–1 scale, with "1" representing the highest level of political efficacy.

Economic efficacy is measured by looking at whether or not the respondents agree with the following statements:

1. The gap between the rich and the poor is acceptable.
2. So long as one works hard, one can succeed in life.
3. The main goal in life is to get rich.
4. One's livelihood is one's own responsibility and not that of the government.
5. Competition is good because it can motivate people to work harder.
6. Relationships are easier to handle if business partners are from outside the family.

The sum of all responses is converted into a 0–1 factor index, and "1" indicates maximum economic efficacy.

Lastly, social tolerance is measured by asking whether respondents could accept the following types of people as their neighbours: criminal record holders, foreigners, extremely conservative people, drunks, radicals, mentally ill patients, persons of other ethnicities, migrant workers, drug addicts, AIDS patients, homosexuals and religious fanatics. Again, all the items are combined into a factor index with a 0–1 scale, with "1" representing the highest level of social tolerance.

To avoid losing important information, the author imputed a small number of missing values in responses according to replies to all other items that constitute the same index. For example, when creating the variable for tolerance, if a respondent fails to show his attitudes towards criminal record holders, the author imputed this missing value with the same respondent's tolerance towards other groups.

APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY STATISTICS FOR TABLES 3 AND 4 AND APPENDIX 3

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Diffused attitude	6894	.5810044	.2181114	0	1
Diffused behaviour	7647	.3456257	.2351807	0	1
Provincial income 03	7714	.532494	.2277447	0	1
2003 family income	7714	.0113999	.0201089	0	1
Education (year/10)	7639	.6755858	.3996262	0	2.3
Urban	7714	.2071558	.4052944	0	1
Migrant	7714	.044335	.2058516	0	1
Rural	7714	.7928442	.4052944	0	1
g4965	7714	.0876329	.2827786	0	1
g6678	7714	.2805289	.4492868	0	1
g7989	7714	.3205859	.4667321	0	1
post89	7714	.3112523	.4630357	0	1
CPC membership	7714	.0693544	.2540723	0	1
Female	7714	.5002593	.5000323	0	1
Beijing	7714	.0025927	.0508557	0	1
Tianjin	7714	.008167	.0900073	0	1
Shanghai	7714	.0102411	.1006854	0	1
Chongqing	7714	.0213897	.1446889	0	1
Guangzhou	7714	.0080373	.089296	0	1
North	7714	.0986518	.2982133	0	1
Central	7714	.266658	.4422407	0	1
Northeast	7714	.085818	.2801133	0	1
East	7714	.1616541	.3681571	0	1
Southwest	7714	.1742287	.3793306	0	1
Northwest	7714	.0697433	.2547305	0	1
South	7714	.0928183	.2901964	0	1
Atheist	7622	.902519	.296631	0	1
Catholic	7622	.00328	.0571809	0	1
Protestant	7622	.0179743	.1328666	0	1
Buddhist	7622	.0637628	.2443459	0	1
Taoist	7622	.0055104	.0740319	0	1
Muslim	7622	.0035424	.0594163	0	1
Other religions	7622	.0034112	.0583094	0	1
System support	7602	.725633	.1598958	0	1
Political efficacy	7714	.713445	.1907936	0	1
Economic efficacy	7410	.6295978	.1554624	0	1
Tolerance	7630	.5962514	.0691289	0	1

Source: The 2004 Values and Ethics Survey.

APPENDIX 3: RELIGIOSITY ON POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ATTITUDES (OLS COEFFICIENTS)

	System support	Political efficacy	Economic efficacy	Social tolerance
Diffused values	0.031***	0.067***	0.113***	0.022***
Province	0.000	0.000	−0.001*	−0.001***
faminc01	−0.063	0.053	0.064	0.190**
edyr10	−0.006	−0.043***	−0.042***	0.018***
Urban	−0.024***	−0.019***	−0.021***	0.025***
Migrant	−0.034***	−0.022*	0.017	0.027***
Rural as comparison				
g4965	0.032***	0.030***	0.008	−0.006
g6678	0.026***	0.031***	0.011**	−0.009**
g7989	0.014***	0.019***	0.014***	−0.007**
Post-reform generation as comparison				
CPC	0.034***	0.024***	0.005	0.011*
Female	0.008**	0.012***	−0.008**	−0.014***
Beijing	0.003	0.048	0.087**	−0.037
Tianjin	−0.005	0.049**	0.059***	0.003
Shanghai	0.087***	0.046**	−0.009	−0.081***
Chongqing	0.040***	0.052***	0.048***	0.017
Guangzhou	−0.043*	−0.049**	−0.077***	0.025
North	0.075***	0.053***	0.017*	−0.064***
Central	−0.004	0.028***	0.006	−0.050***
Northeast	0.015*	0.037***	0.052***	−0.014**
East	0.011	0.012*	−0.011	−0.033***
Southwest	0.031***	0.029***	0.015**	−0.060***
Northwest	0.029***	0.048***	0.024***	−0.034***
South as comparison				
Atheist	0.078**	−0.04	0.024	−0.022
Catholic	0.099**	−0.064	0.055	−0.04
Christ	0.046	−0.061*	0.036	−0.02
Buddhist	0.092***	−0.036	0.035	−0.008
Taoist	0.098**	−0.071*	−0.037	−0.046
Religoth	0.048	−0.027	0.068	−0.012
Islam as comparison				
Constant	0.601***	0.510***	0.565***	0.329***
Observations	7,404	7,251	7,380	7,488
R-squared	0.045	0.058	0.070	0.056

***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, *p < 0.1.
Source: The 2004 Values and Ethics Survey.