Focus on Global China

In the last decade, many well-known and influential scholars in the United States and Europe have stepped out of their comfort zone by visiting China to give lectures on the social scientific study of religion (SSSR). They are not necessarily China experts per se but have made important theoretical and methodological contributions to the empirical research on religion in their own societies. To visit China, they must overcome many barriers, including the physical difficulties of climate, diet, and jetlag; the language problems; and the ideational differences of discipline, philosophy, and ideology.

Just take food for example. While it can be fun to try eating with chopsticks and no fork/knife/spoon, it can also be surprising to see some of the culinary oddities on the table, such as Peking duck, baby pig, and dog meat. Last summer, I was fortunate to have two Italian scholars give lectures in English at the Eighth Summer Institute of the SSSR. At one lunch, I ordered some donkey meat for them, a popular local delicacy. But I was puzzled when they became silent and agonized. After much hesitation, one of them said, “Fenggang, you know, they are so close to us humans, like our human cousins. Eating them would be like cannibalism.” Suddenly I realized this was a moment of double barriers of food and language. “It’s donkey, not monkey!” We all had a good laugh.

The exchange between Chinese and Western scholars is not easy, but its fruits have enriched the SSSR in general. Contributing to this enrichment, we have pulled together some enlightening writings of engaged scholars from China and the West to produce two edited volumes, *Social Scientific Studies of Religion in China: Methodology, Theories, and Findings and Confucianism and Spiritual Traditions in Modern China and Beyond* (Brill, 2011).

The world has indeed become flat in this era of globalization. However, many scholars of religion remain parochial in their research and cling to exceptionalism in their explanations. There are plenty of Americans who think that the United States is exceptional, Europeans who think that Europe is exceptional, and Chinese who think that China is exceptional. But exceptionalism is a dead end in scientific enterprise, betraying the universal nature of science and humanity. Without denying some possibly distinct or unique characteristics of religion in each society, we nonetheless should seek to develop scientific theories that explain the common patterns and their variations.

I have tried to put this scientific principle into practice in my new book, *Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule* (Oxford University Press, 2012), which presents a political economic theory to explain the religious changes in China. The focus is on global China, that is, on situating China in the globalizing world. Religion in China is not unique or inescapable. It shares the commonalities of religious oligopoly with more than half of the countries in the world today. Moreover, just like other peoples, the Chinese share the same tendencies in their spiritual pursuits.

Fenggang Yang
The second research training workshop of CSSP was held from July 17- August 16, 2011 at Purdue University. Seventeen principal investigators of the awarded projects, two of the team members, and our Center's advisor, Professor WEI Dedong of Renmin University, participated. The workshop began with a Welcome Dinner held on July 19. Vice President Kimon Sargeant of the John Templeton Foundation, Provost Timothy Sands of Purdue University, Dean Mike Brzezinski of International Programs, and Dean Irwin Weiser of the Liberal Arts College at Purdue were invited to give welcome speeches at the event. The workshop consisted of four components: lectures given by leading scholars in the field of the social scientific study of religion, project reports and discussions, visits to faith-based social service organizations in the Greater Lafayette Area, and a two-day International Symposium of the Survey Research on Religion and Society.

The invited lecturers included Jose Casanova and Thomas Banchoff of Georgetown University, Corwin Smidt of Calvin College, Carsten Vala of Loyola University in Maryland, Fenggang Yang of Purdue University, Philip Goff of Indiana University-Purdue University in Indianapolis, Yuting Wang of the American University of Sharjah, UAE, Shuming Bao of the University of Michigan, and George Hong, Co-Director of our Center.

During the project report sessions, each of the 17 PIs made a presentation on their project progress reports and others provided comments and suggestions for improving the projects. The participants made straightforward comments and offered constructive suggestions.

The third component of the Research Workshop was visiting faith-based social service organizations in the Greater Lafayette Area. These visits provided opportunities for the Chinese scholars to learn about how American religious organizations operate, giving them an opportunity to have a better understanding of American religion and society.

The fourth component was a two-day International Symposium of the Survey Research on Religion and Society. More than thirty scholars from Hong Kong, Macau, mainland China, and the United States participated in the symposium. Professors Roger Finke and Christopher Bader from the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) gave two presentations on the construction, function, application, and future perspectives of the ARDA database. Four senior scholars in religious studies from Taiwan, Professors Yen-ren Tsai, Ping-Yin Kuan, Hsing-kuang Chao, and Cheng-tian Kuo, each shared the results of the Religious Experience Survey in Taiwan.
The Context of Religion and Superior Methodology: 
Summary of 2011 Workshop on the Chinese Spirituality and Society Program

By LI Xiangping

In the summer of 2011, for an entire month, the Research Training Workshop of the “Chinese Spirituality and Society Program” held by the Center on Religion and Chinese Society at Purdue University, unfolded a series of lectures and discussions revolving around the subjects of the study of Chinese religion and society.

Among these lectures and discussions, Professor Fenggang Yang’s lecture on the theory and methodology of the sociology of religion, Professor Corwin Smidt’s American politics, religion, and civil society, Professor Carsten Vala’s religious politics, civil society, and study of Chinese religion, and the study of religious space by Professors George Hong and Shuming Bao, expanded the scholarly scope of the known fields and inspired discussion on significant problems with the theories and practices as they encompass the research and analytical methods of the fields of sociology of religion and social science.

These courses covered the areas of spiritual capital, religious belief, attitudes on religion, religious psychology, religious behavior, religious politics, religion and American society, religion and American participation in public life, religion and American foreign policy, the study of religious politics, religious space, and methodology of religious study.

In terms of contemporary Chinese religion and social transition, and the problems and challenges of Chinese religious study, the curriculum (of the summer workshop) offered a further understanding of the phenomenon of Chinese religion as well as more advanced methodology in turning theories of related fields into practices. Especially intriguing were the free exchange of the research interests and accumulated knowledge of the participating scholars and the exceedingly active participation in the courses and even vehement debates on various subjects.

One may say that it was the inspiration of theory, expansion of scholarly scope, and mutual exchange of research experiences that characterized the curriculum of this workshop, which was a unique interaction of thought in the field of social scientific study of religion. Its significance and value will have a profound and lasting impact on the progress of the topics of individual scholars, as well as the construction of the disciplines of Chinese sociology of religion and Chinese social scientific study of religion.

The pursuit of a scientific methodology and a universal scholarly model as a prevailing concept of the value of the methodology of social scientific study of religion or sociology of religion have been established since Max Weber raised the concept of “value neutrality.” Based on this pursuit, we hope our efforts will cross over the differences of religions, societies, states, and even ideologies to grapple with the problems of religious belief related to all these differences in order to move the studies of sociology of religion and social science to the territory of international academic study.

In spite of the heat of August in the mid summer, we felt the refreshing breeze of wisdom. With the passing of time, the intense and in-depth lectures and discussion took root in the minds of every participating scholar. This is because the curriculum managed to fully present religion in its context and the superiority of methodology. It seemed to ask each scholar to go beyond the bondage of context, to master the deeper significance of each research topic in context, and to eventually produce scholarly results of superior methodology and universal model. This workshop in the summer of 2011 is a great beginning. In the coming year, I anticipate the progress of our research will grow deeper and will further enrich the scientific methodology.
Notes on Fieldwork in the Greater Lafayette Area

By WEI Dedong

From July 17 to August 16, about twenty scholars from China attended the “2011 Research Training Workshop of the Chinese Spirituality and Society Program” held by the Center on Religion and Chinese Society at Purdue University. In addition to lectures on special topics and class discussion, the workshop arranged a series of religious fieldwork observations, which greatly enriched our personal experience of American religion.

The fieldwork observations included four Sunday worship services at Christian churches, one Muslim jumu’ah, three visits to Christian charity organizations, one Christian baptism, two volunteer practices, and one visit each to a Catholic church and a Methodist Church.

In chronological order of our visits, the five Christian churches were the Upper Room Christian Fellowship, Covenant Church, Faith Baptist Church, White Horse Christian Center, and Greater Lafayette Chinese Alliance Church. Some participants visited St. Thomas Aquinas, the Catholic Center at Purdue (on campus) during lunch break. These churches, as they belong to various denominations and religious traditions, each has its own characteristics. The Upper Room is an independent church with a slight charismatic bent. On the day of our visit, many murmured and quietly wept, while about half of the congregation waved and clapped to the music during the service. The style of the worship of Covenant Church is more formal and solemn, accompanied by an organ, a well trained choir, and a music band of professional level. Faith Baptist Church is a large church. They have three Sunday worship services with a congregation of 1,800 in total. The last Sunday of our visit, we went to a worship service at White Horse Christian Center, a lively charismatic church. This was my first experience of this type of worship, which made an exceedingly deep impression on me. There were about 500 people in the congregation, mostly middle aged and elderly. The makes of the cars in the church parking lot indicate that their owners belong to the middle or lower-middle class of society. During the service, some cried out in loud voices, many were filled with the Holy Spirit while they prayed, some wept, some sobbed, some shouted, some stayed quiet, and some fell on the ground.

The workshop also arranged for us to visit a mosque. We attended a jumu’ah at the Greater Lafayette Islamic Center, which is also the site of the Islamic Society of Greater Lafayette. During the service, males and females sat in different rooms. The major hall of worship was divided into two sections by a glass wall. Visitors could find seats behind the glass wall. On the other side of the glass wall, believers worshiped on their knees on the carpet. After that, an imam preached for about an hour. In my observation, about 70% of the participants were Middle East immigrants, while the others were Caucasians, Africans, Chinese, and other Asian descendants. The Chinese who told us about this service belonged to the Han ethnic group, but had converted to Islam. This visit gave me an opportunity to experience American Islam in person.

We visited three faith-based social service organizations. The first one, located in downtown Lafayette on the other side of the (Wabash) River from Purdue University, was the Lafayette Urban Ministry. LUM is a cross denominational charity supported by several religious charity groups which focus their mission on serving children, low income families, and the homeless. Last year, 42 churches out of their 48 members ran the organization on a budget of activities costing more than $600,000. LUM has a food pantry that provides free food including canned food, bread, and some fresh vegetables. Last year 7,600 families received free food from this food pantry. The food is distributed according to the size of the family. Currently, there are 50-75 families who come to get food every day.

The other programs of LUM are housed in a two-story building. The after school program is located on the first floor and the homeless shelter on the second floor. The goal of the after school program is to shorten the gap in education between the children of low income families and those of high income. Their daily work constitutes three tutors working with 40 children for two hours after school by helping the children with their homework. During the summer, they offer free tutoring for these children called “The Fifth Season.” The homeless shelter on the second floor is among the most important parts of this organization. The Greater Lafayette area has a standing population of about 400-500 homeless people, some of whom have mental illness or drug addiction. This shelter has about 40 beds and offers two free meals for the homeless. In the evening of the visit, some of my fellow workshop participants and I worked for an hour as volunteers at this shelter.
We also visited two organizations established by religious groups: Trinity Mission and Faith Ministries Campus. The major service of Trinity Mission is to help drug addicts overcome their addictions with the help of the Bible. Faith Ministries Campus is a multi-functional community center, which includes a counseling program and women's ministry. Clearly, religious charity and civic activities are major components of American religions.

This intense schedule demonstrated the high proficiency of the workshop organizers and deepened the Chinese scholars' understanding of American religions.

International Symposium of the Survey Research on Religion and Society: a Summary

By HUANG Haibo

The International Symposium of the Survey Research on Religion and Society, held at Purdue University from August 11 to 12, was no less than a feast of learning to all the participants of the “Chinese Spirituality and Society Program.” The symposium consisted of three major parts. The first part was two lectures given by Professors Roger Finke and Christopher Bader from the Association of Religion Data Archives on the construction, function, application, and future perspectives of the ARDA database. The second part consisted of Professor Tsai Yen-ren of National Chengchi University and his colleagues from Taiwan who introduced the results of the Religious Experience Survey in Taiwan. The third part consisted of the 17 PIs’ presentations on their research in English. During the two-day symposium, in their exchange with the first rate international scholars, all the participants of CSSP achieved an understanding of the latest developments in religious practices and expansion of vision and thinking.

The ARDA, established in 1998, aims at providing all researchers, news media, religious groups, and educational institutes with the most systematic and latest religious data gathered from first rate international research institutes. At present, the ARDA has collected and uploaded 600 questionnaires and pertinent data for free download and analysis, which covers a rich content of religious development, and the relationships among religion and politics, economy, and society in all the countries of the world. Every survey in the ARDA includes three basic components: basic conclusion of data analysis, process and methods of data collection, and questionnaires, which offer multi-perspective investigations to facilitate researchers’ access to the content of their interests. ARDA offers an open platform for researchers to comprehend in detail the goal, research design, data collection, analysis, and conclusion of every survey. On the basis of these questionnaires, researchers can collect related questions and make their own questionnaires according to the goals of their own research. They can dig deeper into the data of ARDA, open up comparative studies, or form new insights. As far as current surveys are concerned, they can evaluate them, revise and improve them, and develop new tools for gauging religious belief. In all, the ARDA database represents the cutting edge of internet applications in the field of religious studies, embodies the ancient Chinese saying, “scholarly learning is a tool for the world to share,” and will strongly empower the global development of social scientific study of religion.

The Religious Experience Survey in Taiwan (REST), directed by Professor Yen-ren Tsai of Chengchi University, is the first religious experience survey in the academic field of Taiwan. At present, it has completed all the data collections and analysis and produced a number of research reports. At this symposium, Professor Tsai and his colleagues on the team, Professors Ping-Yin Kuan, Hsing-kuang Chao, and Cheng-tian Kuo each shared the results of their research. Based on their survey of various groups of Christian, Daoist, and Confucian followers, the team of the REST project discovered the syncretistic characteristics of the religious beliefs of the people of Taiwan. It indicated that the boundaries of belief of the people of Taiwan are vague, religious beliefs and practices are open, and followers of various religions sense the existence of supernatural forces of religions other than their own. In other words, the model of syncretistic religious experience is consistent in religious identity and religious practice and belief in Taiwan. It exists in both institutionalized and diffused religions. In the meantime, these professors also stressed that the syncretism was not stagnant. Rather, it was a process of constant changes. To a certain degree, the results of this research attest to the open and tolerant characteristics of traditional Chinese religions. Their study also touched upon the Taiwanese people’s views of life and death, crisis and religion, regional
differences of folk beliefs, religion and political conservatism, concepts of the mandate of heaven and fate, and other topics. In spite of imperfections in its research design and analysis of the results, this survey is undoubtedly extremely inspiring.

At this symposium, the 17 principal investigators presented in English the progress of their own research and engaged in exchanges with Professor Roger Finke and the Professors of REST. For most participants of CSSP, this was not only a rare experience of international communication in English but also a rare opportunity for exposure to leading scholars in the field of social scientific study of religion.

The two-day symposium drew a perfect period at the completion of the CSSP workshop. As all the project participants enjoyed this scholarly feast, they achieved a more systematic understanding of the research methods, tools, theories, and experience of social scientific study of religion. They gained a sense of mission in promoting active participation in international dialogue on the basis of Chinese religious study, which offers powerful assurance for accomplishing high-quality CSSP projects.

The 8th Summer Institute for the Social Scientific Study of Religion

The 8th Summer Institute for the Social Scientific Study of Religion was held July 4-15, 2011 at Renmin University of China, Beijing. The keynote lecturers this year included Jay Demerath of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst; Roberto Cipriani of the University of Rome Three; and Giuseppe Giordan of the University of Padua, Italy.

The 8th Conference of the Social Scientific Study of Religion in China

The 8th Conference of the Social Scientific Study of Religion in China was held July 1-2, 2011 at Fuzhou University in China. It was co-sponsored by our Center and the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Fuzhou University and the Institute for the Study of Buddhism and Religious Theories at the Renmin University of China. The theme of the conference was “Spiritual Capital and Public Goods.” More than 100 scholars from around the world attended the conference and presented papers.
Global China Forum

Title: Influences of Religion on the Family in China’s Northern Dynasties (II)
SHAO Zhengkun, Jilin University
On September 7, our visiting scholar, Professor SHAO Zhengkun, gave a presentation on influences of religion on the family life in China’s Northern Dynasties. This presentation was the second part of her lecture of March 9.

Title: William Simpson and the Rise of the Assemblies of God in China
CHEN Shengbo, Lanzhou University
On September 14, Professor CHEN Shengbo, our visiting scholar, gave a presentation on the missionary story of William Wallace Simpson, an American missionary, in China, and explored the influence of his missionary approach on the rise of the Assemblies of God in China.

Title: Understanding Organizational Identity from Ecological and Interpretive Perspectives: NGOs in Contemporary China
Huijun Suo, Purdue University
On September 28, Huijun Suo, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Communication, gave a presentation discussing how NGOs achieve their civic goals in China by deliberately constructing and communicating organizational identities in certain ways.

Title: Three-In-One Sect
HE Shanmeng, Zhejiang University
On October 12, Professor HE Shanmeng, a visiting scholar at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, visited our center and gave a presentation about Three-In-One Sect. He discussed the development of the sect today and the problems it is encountering. HU Anning, a Ph.D. student of our center, served as the respondent.

Title: The Threefold Truth as the Basic Pattern for T’ien-t’ai Buddhist Philosophy
Paul Swanson, Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture at Nanzan University
On October 19, Professor Paul Swanson gave two lectures: “The Threefold Truth as the Basic Pattern for T’ien-t’ai Buddhist Philosophy” and “Takagi Kenmyo and Buddhist Socialism: A Meiji Martyr.” These two lectures were co-sponsored by CRCS, the Asian Studies Program, and Religious Studies at Purdue University.

Title: The Interaction between Confucianism and Christianity, and the Transformation of Chinese Culture: An Economic Approach
ZHANG Qingjin, Shandong Academy of Social Sciences
On October 26, Professor ZHANG Qingjin discussed the interaction between Confucianism and Christianity, and the transformation of Chinese culture from an economic approach. He believes that Christian values can compensate for some of the inadequacies found in Confucian ethics, and that the rapid development of Christianity in China is likely to lead to significant transformations of Chinese culture.

Title: The Encounter and Cross-Cultural Interpretation of the Catholic and Confucian Views of the Soul
WANG Ding’an, Zhejiang Industrial University
On November 10, Dr. WANG Ding’an, our visiting scholar, discussed the Catholic view of the soul and the Confucian view of hun-po (soul, spirit, etc.), and pointed out that a “fusion of vision” continued to take form in this interpretive cycle, which has constituted a vital part of Chinese thought since the late Ming Dynasty.
This website has been developed into a center of information and resources on Chinese religion, spirituality, and society. It includes an archive of government documents, scholarly articles, and short essays on Chinese spirituality, religion, and society.

Recent Publications

**Director**

Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule
*Authored by Fenggang Yang*
Oxford University Press, 2012

Confucianism and Spiritual Traditions in Modern China and Beyond
*Edited by Fenggang Yang & Joseph Tamney†*
Brill Academic Publishers, 2011


**Co-Director**


**Post-Doctoral Fellow**

*Authored by Joy Kooi-Chin Tong*
London: Anthem Press (1 Feb, 2012)

Affiliated Research Fellow


**Grant Award**

Jack Shand Research Award from the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion
Proposal Title: Chinese Charismatic Entrepreneurship in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore
*By Joy Kooi-Chin Tong and Fenggang Yang*