

The World Humanities Report

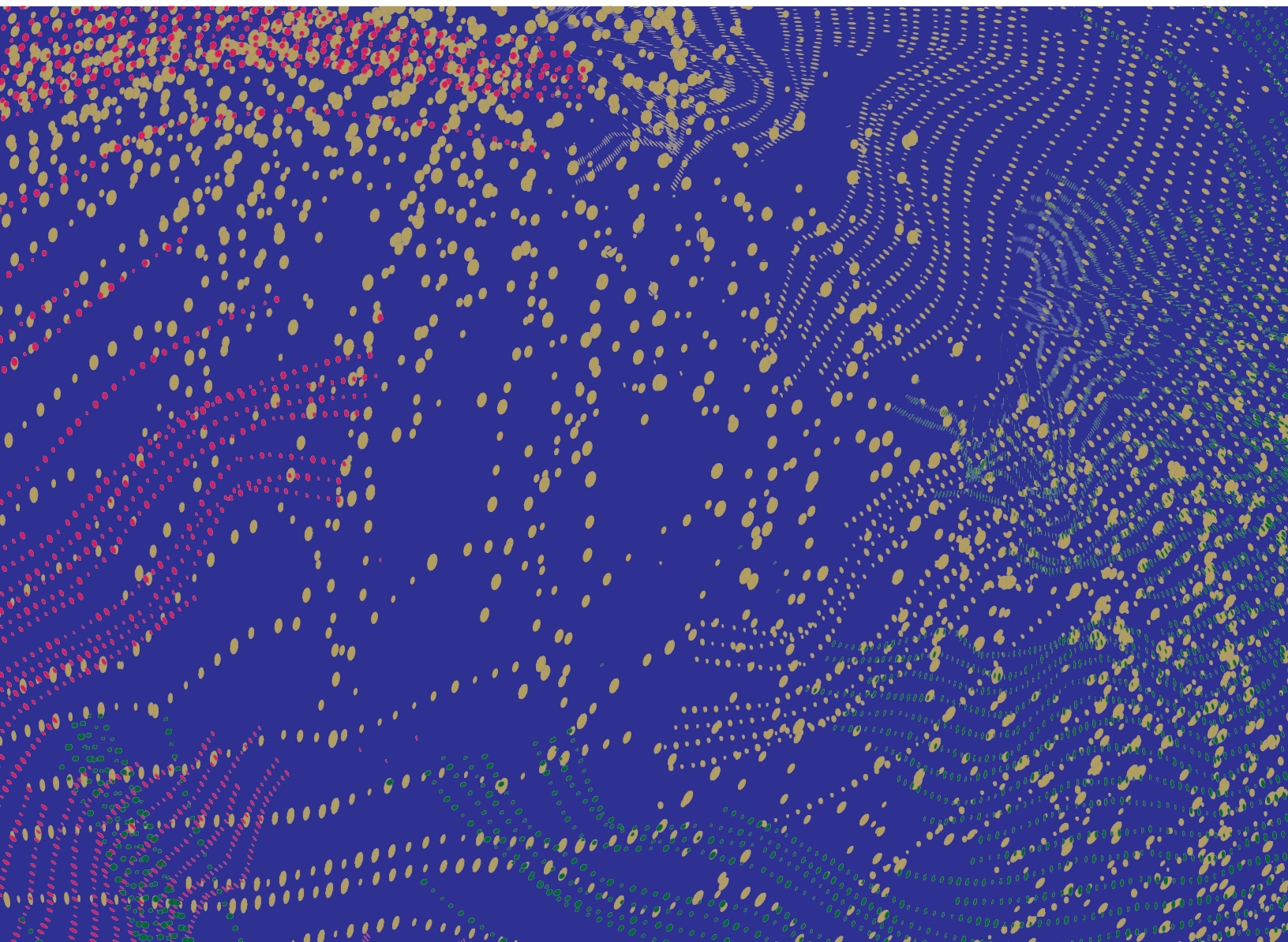
# Religious Studies in Contemporary China

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# Religious Studies in Contemporary China

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In 1873 Friedrich Max Müller published *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, which marked the beginning for modern comparative religion and the study of the history of religion.<sup>1</sup> Today, religious studies are an independent and interdisciplinary discipline with various subfields, which include the Phenomenology of Religion, Sociology of Religion, Anthropology of Religion, Geography of Religion, Ecology of Religion, Psychology of Religion, Philosophy of Religion, Religious Criticism, and Religious Theology, as well as History of Religion and Comparative Religion.<sup>2</sup> Since religious studies are interdisciplinary and even transdisciplinary, the boundaries are open and receptive. Archeology of Religion, linguistics, jurisprudence, and literature are also rising subfields.

## The Rise and Development of Religious Studies

The beginning of religious studies in China can be traced back to the late nineteenth century. To celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus's "discovery" of America, the World's Columbian Exposition was held from May 1<sup>st</sup> to October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1893, in Chicago, Illinois. Various congresses were held in conjunction with the Exposition, and the largest was the World's

<sup>1</sup> This essay is an abridged version of Liu Guopeng, Chen Jinguo, and Ding Ruizhong, "Dangdai zhongguo zongjiao xue xueke fazhan xianzhuang fenxi" [An analysis on the disciplinary development of religious studies in contemporary China], in *Annual Report on Religions in China: 2019–2020*, ed. Qiu Yonghui (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, in the process of publication).

<sup>2</sup> For more background information on religious studies in the west, see Zhuo Xinping, *Zongjiao xue shilun: Zongjiao xue de lishi yu tixi* [Discussions on the history of religious studies: The history and systems of religious studies] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2020), 11–27.

Parliament of Religion, with ten religious groups represented.<sup>3</sup> The articles presented at the conference, and some additional ones, were published as a book.<sup>4</sup> Among them was a long article titled “Confucianism” by Peng Guangyu (aka Pung Kwang Yu), the first secretary of the Chinese legation in the United States. It was translated into English by Rong Kui (aka Yung Kwai) and read aloud by William Pipe at the conference. In the piece, Peng explained the origin and development of Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism and their similarities to and differences from Christianity. Eight other articles in the conference proceedings discussed Confucianism, Daoism, and Christianity in China, including six written by missionaries—Issac T. Headland, W. A. P. Martin, George T. Candlin, Y. K. Yen, Ernest Faber, Henry Blodgett—and two others Kung Hsien Ho (aka Kong Xianhe) “Confucianism,” and Li Baoyuan’s “Taoism.”<sup>5</sup> The World’s Parliament of Religion was a milestone and the starting point of research on religions in China.

The rise of religious studies in modern China was at first closely related to its enthusiastic promotion by missionaries. American missionary Gilbert Reid founded the International Institute of China in Beijing in 1897, which mainly engaged in the comparative studies of religions. In 1903 the Shanghai branch of the International Institute of China invited representative figures from Chinese religious communities—Such as the Buddhist background of [the ninth] Panchen Lama [(Thubten Choekyi Nyima, 1883–1937)], Taixu (1890–1947), the Confucian background Wang Kaiyun (1833–1916), Zhang Taiyan (1869–1936), and the Islamic background Ha Decheng (1888–1943) etc.—to give lectures.<sup>6</sup> This indicates that religious studies were already in progress in China. In 1925 the School of Theology at Yenching University was renamed as the School of Religious Studies and focused on studying local religions and culture, with Liu Tingfang, Zhao Zichen, and Wu Leichuan as the leading figures from

<sup>3</sup> The ten religions were Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Daoism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

<sup>4</sup> John Henry Barrows, ed., *The World’s Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World’s First Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Parliament, 1893), <https://archive.org/details/worldsparliament04barrgoog>. —Ed.

<sup>5</sup> Kung Hsien Ho and Li Baoyuan did not attend the conference; rather, their papers were winners of an essay competition run by Timothy Richard of *Globe News Magazine* [*Wanguo gongbao*]. Li’s paper, however, was not included in the conference proceedings. —Trans.

<sup>6</sup> Wang Leiquan, Zhang Qingxiong, and Li Tiangang, “Jicheng yu chaoyue: Zongjiao xue xueke fazhan baogao” [Continuity and surpass: A report on the development of the religious studies discipline], in *Zongjiao, Daode, yu daxue jiaoyu: Guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* [Religion, morality, and college education: The Proceeding of an International Academic Forum] (2005), 200.

the faculty. Scholars either began to pay attention to theories about the religious studies, or to research and compile historical religious texts. Liang Qichao, Xia Cengyou, Cai Yuanpei, Hu Shi, and Chen Duxiu were included in the former, Chen Yuan, Chen Yinke, Tang Yongtong, Zhang Xinglang, Xu Dishan, and Fang Hao belonged to the latter.<sup>7</sup>

The formal launch and inauguration of religious studies in China, however, did not occur until the 1960s. After Mao Zedong ordered the establishment of an academic institute to study world religions in late 1963. Ren Jiyu was appointed to establish the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Sciences and served as the Director. In 1979 a nationwide academic organization, namely the Chinese Association of Religious Studies, was established under the Institute's leadership, with Ren Jiyu, Zhao Fusan, and Zhuo Xinping serving as the successive presidents.

At present, religious studies in China belong to four distinct systems: institutions that are affiliated with national and provincial academies of social sciences; institutions that are affiliated with universities that integrate research and teaching; research organizations that are part of the state and party administration of religious affairs; and research organizations, universities, and departments that are founded by religious organizations.<sup>8</sup> In recent years, administrations of religious affairs in every province (such as the United Front Work Department and the Committee for Ethnic and Religious Affairs) have also established think tank-type research organizations, which have emerged as a new force in religious studies.

## The Institute of World Religions

The Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences is the only religious studies organization established within the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences system, and the only national-level organization for religious studies. The original purpose for the institute was to enhance the overall understanding of various conceptions of human society and of the development

<sup>7</sup> Zhuo Xinping, "20 shiji de zhongguo zongjiao xue fazhan" [The development of religious studies discipline in the twentieth-century China], in *Zongjiao xue shilun: Zongjiao xue de lishi yu tixi* [Discussions on the history of religious studies: The history and systems of religious studies] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2020), 145–46.

<sup>8</sup> Zhang Xiuxiu, "Zhongguo zongjiao xue yanjiu zhuangkuang ji weilai fazhan qushi: Fang Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan shijie zongjiao yanjiusuo Wu Yungui xiansheng" [The current situation and future trends for religious research in China: An interview with Mr. Wu Yungui of the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences], *Chinese Religions*, no. 4 (2001), p.13.

of cultures through the study of the fundamental theories of religious studies, historical and modern religious teachings, canons, history, and the current situations of religions within China and globally. Another purpose was to understand the relationships between religions and traditional Chinese cultures from a scientific perspective, and to increase our understanding of the world and China, contributing to the modernization of the country and the construction of social spiritual civilization.

The institute has the most fully developed array of majors and academic systems, with ten subunits covering many different subjects, such as Marxist theories of religions, religious theories, Buddhism studies, Daoism and folk religions, Confucianism, Christianity, Islam, contemporary religions studies, the study of religious arts, digital humanities in religious studies, and the study of public discourses on religions (the last one was established in 2019). The Institute of World Religions has about seventy researchers, two-thirds of whom are senior and midcareer researchers. Most of these researchers have acquired doctoral degrees, and a few under the age of forty have overseas studying experience. In the meanwhile, how to expose them to more international scholarship and exchange is an important issue that needs to be addressed. In terms of research methodologies, the institute has started to intentionally practice methodologies developed in branch subjects of religious studies, such as philosophy, history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and the arts.

In the meanwhile, the Institute also serves as the host for two important national-level journals: *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* [The Study of World Religion] and *Shijie zongjiao wenhua* [Religious Culture of the World; from 1980 to 1994 it was published under the name of Materials of World Religions]. Together, these publications constitute the foundational works in religious studies in China. In addition to the above-mentioned publications, research institutes and centers affiliated with the Institute of World Religions have also published many other journals, such as *Jidu zongjiao yanjiu* [Studies of Christianity], *Zongjiao yu zhhexue* [Religions and Philosophy], *Zongjiao xinli xue* [Religious Psychology], *Zongjiao shehui xue* [Religious Sociology], *Ru Dao yanjiu* [The Study of Confucianism and Daoism], *Bentu zongjiao yanjiu* [The Study of Indigenous Religions], and *Dongnan ya zongjiao fazhan baogao* [The Report on the Development of Religions in Southeast Asia]. *Zongjiao renlei xue* [Anthropology of Religion] and *Jidu jiao yanjiu* [The Study of Christianity] are two central journals for innovative projects established by the Institute. In addition, the Institute also has published annual reports on religious studies, such as

*Zhongguo zongjiao yanjiu nianjian* [The Annual Report of Religious Studies in China] and *Zongjiao lanpi shu: Zhongguo zongjiao baogao* [Bluebook of Religions: Report on Chinese religions]. These organizations and journals have offered a robust platform for advancing religious education and theoretical studies.

### Provincial Academies of Social Sciences

Provincial academies of social sciences are regional research organizations subordinated to local provincial or municipal government and party administrations dedicated to the studies of philosophy and social sciences. They are important think-tanks and brain trusts for local party and government administrations. The establishment purpose for them is to contribute to the political, economic, and cultural development of the local areas. Fourteen out of thirty-one provincial academies of social sciences—in Qinghai, Ningxia, Shanghai, Xinjiang, Yunnan, Xizang, Jiangxi, Shanxi, Neimenggu, Guangdong, Sichuan, Henan, Shandong, and Anhui Provinces—have established relevant organizations for studies. Seven of such organizations are dedicated to only one religion, while six of them focus on religious studies through intradisciplinary methods, with the remaining one focusing on a just one specific subject of religious studies. Only one of the fourteen academies mentioned above has the qualification to grant master's degrees in talents training (see table 1 in the Appendix for details).

### The Establishment of Religious Studies Major in Chinese Higher Education

Aside from the religious studies organizations established by national and provincial academies of social sciences, Chinese higher education institutions have, since the 1980s, begun offering courses in religious studies, creating master's and doctoral degree programs, and founding institutes, centers, and interdisciplinary organizations dedicated to the study of religion.

In September 1980, Sichuan University became the first university in China to establish an institute for religious studies and to serve as the host for an organization for religious studies. In 1982, Peking University became the first Chinese university to launch an undergraduate program for religious studies, which, since 1985, has been working with the Institute for World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences for the relevant undergraduate program training. A total of thirty-seven colleges and universities across the country have



created standalone religious studies majors or established religious studies programs within the philosophy major (see table 2 in the Appendix for details). In the meanwhile, however, Fujian Normal University and Yunnan Nationalities University canceled the undergraduate and graduate programs in religious studies in 2018 and 2019 respectively. Peking University, Renmin University of China, Sichuan University, Minzu University of China, Fudan University, Shandong University, Wuhan University, and Nanjing University have all owned the credentials to grant Master's and Doctoral degrees in religious studies.

Since the late 1990s, universities without a religious program, have begun to offer the interdisciplinary courses in religious studies through the resources in other subjects such as philosophy, history, or literature. Such universities include Sun Yat-sen University, Zhejiang University, Nankai University, Northwest University, Shanxi University, Central China Normal University, Beijing Normal University, Shaanxi Normal University, Shanghai University, Soochow University, Jinan University, Henan University, and more. Some of these universities have also established special centers for religious studies and even obtained qualifications to grant Master's and Doctoral degrees in religious studies in the present day.

## Characteristics of Religious Studies

### *Themes and Approaches*

In the early years of religious studies in China, this field was highly political and ideological, with approaches of Marxist religious studies blending with Chinese religious studies. In 1979 Ren Jiyu outlined the mission of Marxist religious studies as comprising three key aspects - to criticize faithism and obscurantism to clear obstacles in the progress of realizing socialist modernization (i.e., religious criticism); to properly study the objective laws and theoretical support focusing on the origin, evolution, and decline of the religion (i.e., understanding the essence of religions); and to contribute to enhancing international solidarity through improvement of the understanding for the historical and current situations of religions in different countries (i.e., following religious trends).<sup>9</sup> At the same time, the researching interests of religious studies scholars in mainland

<sup>9</sup> Ren Jiyu, "Wei fazhan Makesi zhuyi de zongjiao xue er fendou" [Strive to develop the Marxist religious studies], *Zhexue yanjiu*, no. 4 (1979), pp.42-50.

China centered around the dynamics between theism, religion, and superstition, as well as topics such as “Whether Religion Exists in China.” Ya Hanzhang, You Xiang, and Liu Junwang are considered as typical representative scholars in this early period.

As China opened up after 1976, Chinese scholars began exploring and establishing theoretical systems, research characteristics, and discipline divisions for religious studies in China as they obtained more knowledge of the theoretical approaches and methodologies in Western religious studies. Back then, there were three main approaches in religious studies in China – special religious studies (descriptive research), generalized religious studies (normative research), and an eclectic approach. The first approach focused on “objective descriptions” and emphasized that scholars did not make valuable judgments about religions. The second approach maintained that religious studies should define the fundamental nature of religions and make valuable judgments. The third approach stressed that the former two approaches should not be favored, and instead, they should be integrated to complement one another.

The prevailing interests of religious studies centered around a few themes, including “religion as opium,” “the definition of religion,” “whether Confucianism should be considered a religion,” “religious cultures and how religions should be induced to stay compatible with a socialist society,” etc. Discussions on “religion as opium” occurred in the early and mid-1980s based on Karl Marx’s famous pronouncement that “religion is the opium of the people.” The practical concern of this discussion lay in the fundamental nature of religion and the definition of religion. Discussions on the “definition of religion” took place throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The focus was about scattering the constraints of concentrating overly on the ideological natures of religions. This endeavor to define religion focused on the fundamental nature, social presence, and functions of religion. It had many characteristics of Sociology of Religion. Research on religions and culture emerged in the 1980s, bringing attention of numerous scholars while generating the largest number of researches and building unique features. This theme treated religions as components of the spiritual culture of the human world and conducted studies with that as the basis. This approach directly reflected the further de-ideologization in Chinese religious studies and implicitly indicated the reasonable transition of religious researchers from being identified as religious believers to being identified as researchers in the humanities and social sciences.

### *Government Policy toward Religion*

Since the economic reform movement in the 1990s, according to the reference in document No. 6 of 1991 of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, the stance of mainland China in administrative guidance and policy regarding the development of religion has been to “actively orientate the mutual accommodations of religions and the socialist society.” This positioning dealt with two points of emphasizing. First, the Communist Party and the government should actively guide religious groups and their followers. Second, religious personnel should voluntarily accommodate contemporary China’s political realistic situation as well as political characteristics under the socialist system of governance. This positioning had limited connection with the theoretical development and construction of Chinese religious studies.

In 2012 the slogan “Upholding the Sinicization of Religions” began to circulate around. What was more, in 2018, all five major religious groups in China organized and drafted a five-year plan on the “Sinicization of Religions” as the contributions to the construction of the Core Ideology of Socialism,<sup>10</sup> “to moisten Chinese religions with excellent traditional Chinese culture” and to actualize the profound transition of religions from the “Religions of China” to “Chinese Religions.” Their respective documents indicated new directions for the development of the five major religious groups (aka Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism). According to the *Reader for the Study of the Socialist Theory of Religion with Chinese Characteristics* [Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi zongjiao lilun xuexi duben], which was compiled and edited by the United Front Work Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, religious-related work in contemporary China at that time included the following - “Learning and dealing with religious problems properly”; “upholding the party’s fundamental directions in religious tasks”; “upholding the Sinicization of Chinese religions”; “building healthy and positive religious networks”; “improving the legalization of religious work”; “supporting religious groups in self-development and talent training”; and “solidifying and improving the party’s leadership in religious tasks.”

The relation between politics and religion in China since the Reform and

<sup>10</sup> The Core Ideology of Socialism, first promoted at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party in 2012, “comprise a set of moral principles summarized by central authorities as prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, the rule of law, patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendship.” *China Daily*, February 26, 2014, [http://np.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/News/201402/t20140226\\_1583694.htm](http://np.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/News/201402/t20140226_1583694.htm). —Ed.

Opening-up has been advancing toward a new paradigm of “politics builds regulations, and religions follows them,” in the place of the old paradigm of “politics subordinates religion.” This new paradigm puts emphasis on the legal and policy-making dimensions of the civil society, with religious organizations and groups identified as nongovernmental organizations and civil society groups. The state treats religious beliefs as public and societal affairs, and manages, coordinates them with legal regulations and documents of policy. The legitimacy and sustainable development of religious organizations and groups are determined by their adherence to and alignment with legal regulations and policy documents. Religious gatherings and activities cannot violate the interests of the nation, the state, or the public, as it has been specified in the legal regulations and policy documents. Managing religious affairs in accordance with legal regulations and policy documents while allowing citizens to enjoy freedom of religious beliefs are two sides of the same reality, as well as supplementary double-track governance model based on “legal regulations” (legal administration) and “policy documents” (policy or document administration). This new paradigm shows that the governance model that contemporary China adopts in administrating religious affairs is steadily shifting from the inertial system of “mobilizational campaigns” toward “normalized governance.”<sup>11</sup>

### *The Disciplines of Religious Studies*

From the early stages of religious studies in China, specifically from 1964 to the 1980s, establishing Marxist religious studies as a field, according to Ren Jiyu’s perspective, involved examining the history, teachings, schools, canons, theories, and social impacts of all major religions, as well as researching atheism, which is considered the opposite of specific religious theologies.”<sup>12</sup> Religious studies were divided into several subunits over the years, namely Buddhism (1964), Christianity (1964), Islam (1964), Scientific Atheism (1977),<sup>13</sup> and

<sup>11</sup> Chen Jinguo, “Zheng gui jiao/xin sui: Zongjiao zhongguo hua Shijian yu zhongguo de duoyuan zongjiao shengtai geju” [The politics regulate and religions follow: Practices in the Sinicization of religions and the pluralist ecosystem of Chinese religions], in *Zhongguo zongjiao baogao, 2019–2020*, ed. Chen Jinguo (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, forthcoming).

<sup>12</sup> Ren Jiyu, “Wei fazhan makesi zhuyi de zongjiaoxue er fendou,” p.42.

<sup>13</sup> This sector was later renamed as Sector on Studying Religious Principles and Sector on Studying Religious Theories in 1980 and 2002, respectively. See Lü Daji and He Guanghu, “Zongjiao xue lilun yanjiu tuohuang qishi nian” [Seventeen years of pioneering in the studies of religious theories], *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu*, no. 4 (1994), p.10; Lü Daji, “The History of the Sector of Religious Theories,” in *Zongjiao yanjiu sishi nian: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan shijie zongjiao yanjiusuo chengli 40 zhounian (1964–2004) jinian wenji* (Forty years of religious studies: On the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 1964–2004) (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2004), 15.

Daoism and Chinese folk religions (1979).<sup>14</sup> At the end of 1978, Ren Jiyu proposed that Confucianism was a religion, which triggered a debate themed Confucianism as academic knowledge [*ruxue*] versus Confucianism as religion [*rujiao*], which lasted for over thirty years. In 1981, Confucianism was established as a distinct religious subunit with a status equal to that of the other subunits.

In 1992, two additional subunits were added to the Institute of World Religions, one for contemporary religions and one for religious arts. These were consistent with the positioning of Chinese propositions in Marxist religious studies, as described by Ren Jiyu. He stated that “in addition to general studies on the fundamental essence and common development patterns of all religions, Marxist religious studies also advance specific research on the unique aspects of different religions. The primitive religions, Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, Islam, religious psychology, religious arts, and many other things should all be categorized as one part of Marxist religious studies.”<sup>15</sup>

As universities established the religious studies majors and departments across the country, many experts proposed that the religious studies subject should be categorized as first-level discipline. Currently, religious studies are still categorized as a second-level discipline, below the ranking of philosophy. However, religious studies have been categorized separately in the review processes for research funding at both the provincial and national levels.<sup>16</sup> Xi Jinping remarked in his 2016 speech titled “Speech at the Symposium of the Work of Philosophy and Social Sciences” as follows – “The disciplinary systems for philosophy and social sciences in China are largely established, but there remain several issues to address. In many cases, the disciplinary divisions do not align closely with societal development, the structures are incomplete, and newer and interdisciplinary fields are underdeveloped. To address this, we should accelerate the refinement of disciplines supporting philosophy and social sciences, including philosophy, history, economics, politics, jurisprudence, sociology, ethnology, journalism, demography, religious studies, psychology, and others. The goal is to create a disciplinary system that reflects Chinese characteristics

<sup>14</sup> See editorial board of *Chinese Religions*, “Zhuan ye zongjiao yanjiu jigou de dansheng: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan shijie zongjiao yanjiusuo chengli jingguo” [The birth of a professional Institute for Religious Studies: On the formative process of the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences], *Chinese Religions*, no. 1 (2019) pp.80-81.

<sup>15</sup> Ren Jiyu, “Wei fazhan makesi zhuyi de zongjiaoxue er fendou,” p.42.

<sup>16</sup> Zhang Zhigang, “Zongjiao zhexue de zhongguo yiyi” [The meaning of Philosophy of Religion in China], in *Zongjiao yu zhexue* [Religion and philosophy], ed. Jin Ze and Zhao Guangming (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2012), pp.31–32.

while also possessing universal significance.”<sup>17</sup> These remarks highlighted the urgency of addressing the disciplinary status, structure, and system of religious studies. They also set the tone and provided potential directions for the future development of the field.

So far, the discipline establishment for religious studies in China has still not moved beyond the initial disciplinary division paradigm adopted at its inception, which organizes itself by individual religions rather than adhering to the conventions of religious studies disciplines globally. However, the discipline divisions and subunits established at the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences use a hybrid system. This approach primarily follows the division by religious denominations while also incorporating the logic of the religious studies discipline. Among the three major Chinese journals for religious studies, for example—*Zongjiao xue yanjiu* [Religious studies] edited by the Institute of Daoism and Religious Culture Studies at Sichuan University—focuses on a specific religious denomination due to the institute’s expertise in Daoism. The Institute of World Religions also serves as host for some academic journals that focus on the history of specific religious denominations, such as *Jidu zongjiao yanjiu* [Studies of Christianity], *Rujiao yanjiu* [Studies of Confucianism], and *Bentu zongjiao yanjiu* [the Studies of Indigenous religions]. Often, researchers emphasize integrating religious studies with the humanities but have not sufficiently engaged with the social sciences. Fields such as Sociology of Religion, Anthropology of Religion, Psychology of Religion, and so forth, have been rapidly developing. They have even published academic journals such as *Zongjiao renlei xue* [Anthropology of Religion], *Zongjiao zhexue* [Philosophy of Religion], *Zongjiao shehuixue* [Sociology of Religion], and *Zongjiao xinlixue* [Psychology of Religion]. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences have even listed one of these journals, the *Zongjiao renlei xue* edited currently by Chen Jinguo for the Institute’s innovative projects. However, the subfields of religious studies, in general, are still not well explored. Work in these areas remains an extension of anthropology, sociology, psychology, and philosophy into religious studies, rather than the other way around. Jurisprudence of Religion, Archaeology of Religion, and other more recent subfields are also in this pattern.

To develop and deepen both domestically and internationally, religious studies must align with the standards of a modern discipline while preserving the

<sup>17</sup> Xin Jinping, *Speech at the Symposium of the Work of Philosophy and Social Sciences*, People's Press, 2021, pp.22–23.

distinctive characteristics and advantages of Chinese academic research

### **The Current Crisis of Legitimacy of Religious Studies in China**

By reviewing the history and current situation of religious studies in China, the fundamental characteristics of Chinese religious studies have become clear. It is organized by religious denominations and supplemented by interdisciplinary research, aiming to uphold an academic and objective perspective. The discipline is becoming more detailed and refined. It has produced significant research output and fostered a group of outstanding researchers. However, at the same time, a series of shortcomings and problems have become increasingly obvious in the process of establishing Chinese religious studies.

The first issue is that Chinese religious studies are divided based on specific denominations. Researchers often study only one religious tradition at a time. This practice contradicts the analytical feature of the religious studies as a discipline, which deals with comparison of multiple religions. It also leads to the overshadowing of research on religions other than the five major ones—Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism—including regional, ethnic, and emerging religions. Hence this fundamental feature of this field prevents religious studies in China from keeping in pace with the trends in global religious studies.

Secondly, dividing religious studies into groups based on religious denominations might lead to unexpected consequences, such as awakening, strengthening, and deepening the religious self-identification of their research subjects, and encouraging a focus on their differences. Such influence might lead different religious groups to institutionalize within their own communities or to strengthen existing organizations. The consequences of this pursuit can lead to an increased consciousness of difference and exclusivity, which can cause barriers for the harmonious relationships between different religions. When the discipline is divided into specific religious denominations, researchers inevitably take the history, doctrines, branches, documents, and organizational structure of a single religion as their primary research objects. These research activities overlap with the educational and research efforts of academic centers operated by the major religions. As the policy on the freedom of religion is further implemented, following social development, religious schools run by major religions can be expected to continue to increase the investments in academic research. This growth may well make them intolerant of nonbelievers that study their religion from an objective perspective, which would not be

conducive to the innovation and independent development of the discipline of religious studies. Moreover, it will also cause the duplication and waste of educational resources in the academic and religious circles, which will further trigger tensions between them in the future.

Thirdly, the current-existing religious studies discipline, which often focuses on one religious denomination, may cause confusion. Classes offered in universities and colleges might appear to provide religious instruction rather than education in religious studies. In addition, researchers often have long-term and close contact with the religious denominations and groups they study, and this kind of closeness might cause them to become sympathetic, and become psychologically and emotionally close, toward the study objects. Moreover, due to the lack of comparative research with other parallel religions, religious researchers may have blind spots in their academic judgment. The boundaries between research within and outside of religion may become blurred, potentially causing concern and suspicion from religious administrative offices. Such confusion could also hinder the healthy development of the discipline.

The division of the disciplines based on denomination can also result in confusion in self-identification and self-positioning for religious departments in Chinese universities when their researchers engage in international cooperation and exchanges. These departments tend to have more opportunities to participate in scholarly exchanges or joint training with divinity schools, Buddhist institutions, or Islamic institutions that are established for and by the faithful than when they work with nonreligious international institutions in the field of religious studies. Over time, a few scholars may inevitably begin to sympathize with and convert to the religious denominations they are studying.

Such situations are now commonplace in the professional education of religious studies in Chinese colleges and universities. Here are a few examples. One university has established training programs in collaboration with both international and domestic institutions, including a partnership between its philosophy department and the Chinese program at the Regent College of Canada in 1997. Regent College has offered many opportunities for their PhD students, including a year-long or six-month-long visiting student program. From 2003 to 2012, the *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum* in Hong Kong offered scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students to study for one to years at the Salesian Pontifical University in Italy. Since 2000, the Jade Buddha Temple has provided a Juequn Scholarship for Religious Studies Education to the Temple's undergraduate students majoring in religious studies. Other two scholarships—the



Master Zhumo (1913–2000) Scholarship on Buddhist Studies and Tangshi Zhendao xueyuan Christianity Education Scholarship of the same Temple, — have also offered funding for the best undergraduate students in religious studies. The Hong Kong Tao Fong Shan Christian Center Scholarship has also been sponsoring graduate students wishing to pursue a career in Christian studies. In each of these examples, it is not difficult to see that the institutions providing the scholarships or academic support are all religious groups or organizations based on particular religious beliefs.

Fourthly, the division of the disciplines to focus on individual religions can fracture or hinder communication between religious studies and related disciplines. For example, studying major religions with historical, philosophical, and philological approaches is the traditional merit of Chinese religious studies. However, parallel exchanges between religious studies and other related disciplines are lagging and becoming quite beyond connection. Research for religious studies have often failed to keep abreast of the latest theoretical and methodological developments. Take religious historiography as an example. By taking a particular religion as the research object, researchers may easily overlook developments, changes, and evolution in the study of history, including research approaches and methodologies that have emerged to the surface (e.g., the Annales school, social history, cultural history, and new historicism). These new research methods and approaches have barely had influence on the studies of religious history in China.

Contrary to these tendencies, the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences has been promoting new approaches such as Marxist religious theories, Anthropology of Religion, Sociology of Religion, Psychology of Religion, and Law and Religion. The researches have studied public opinions on religions by adopting data available online. Focused on the security and risks of religions in neighboring countries, they have also started examining religions based on nations, continents, or regions. Religious strategies and religious policies are also taken into consideration. Various subfields of religious studies have made progress in this regard. However, due to limited staffing and the relatively marginal status of these subfields, recent achievements have not been enough to disrupt or transform the existing disciplinary system, which divides religious studies based on specific religious denominations.

The fifth and final problem is that since its inception, religious studies in China have been one level lower than philosophy. This is very different from international practices, which tends to treat religious studies as equal to philosophy and

theology. In international academia, especially among the A-list universities and research institutes in Europe and the United States, theological seminaries with Christian backgrounds are often independent from the Departments of Philosophy and Departments of Religion, as these three disciplines differ significantly in their discipline characteristics and nature qualities.

### *The Dilemma of Sustainable Development*

As the national policy of “the Chinafication of Religions” is unfolded, the administration of all major religions has become increasingly standardized and legalized. Religious studies, too, have been influenced, and the relationship between religion and religious studies has experienced some impacts. The biggest impact is that it is very difficult for religious studies scholars to publish monographs and journal articles across the nation. Due to the pressures of self-censorship, many Chinese presses and journals in the Chinese Social Science Citation Index (CSSCI) have drastically reduced the number of monographs and articles published on religious studies. The pool of scholarly works from which *Zongjiao* [Religions], a famous journal stored in the China Social Sciences Excellence database, selects articles for reprinting in a fraction of its former scope. And there are only three core journals for religious studies across the country, *the Study of World Religion*, *Religious Culture of the World*, and *Religious Studies*. Researchers largely are not aware about journals and collected papers that are not considered as core journals. Some religious journals have been either suspended or postponed. Forums on the frontiers of the discipline, academic lectures, and invitations to international experts have also declined steadily. Some university libraries and regional libraries have started removing religious books off their shelves. Some religious studies scholars have begun to switch careers to engage in other research topics. These phenomena will inevitably lead to adverse effects and negative consequences for Chinese religious studies in terms of performance appraisals, job title appraisals, and work-related benefits.

If the situation continues like this, the shrinking of talent in the field of religious studies within a few years and the phenomenon of talent drain will only get worse. In 2018 and 2019, the Department of History and Culture at Fujian Normal University and the Department of the Humanities at Yunnan Nationalities University canceled their Master’s Degree programs in religious studies. The faculty and staff were moved into the disciplines of history and sociology, while religious studies used to be key discipline area at these two schools (see

table 2 in the Appendix). Moreover, few students have responded when the religious studies program in the Department of Philosophy at Renmin University of China recently have decided to divide its students into several classes. Over time, these cutbacks will have a severe impact not only on the discipline setting of religious studies but also on the field of religious studies in China. The basic and applied research in religious studies that is urgently needed by the country may be diminished or lost.

If religious studies continue to be mired in such circumstances in contemporary China, the direct consequence would be that the academic world will develop “communication breakdown” or unawareness towards important religious issues. If that becomes the case, expecting religious studies scholars to do the following would be little more than an unrealistic fantasy. – to analyze and address real-life religious issues from an objective, neutral, and high-level standpoint, with both historical depth and practical relevance; to consider international comparisons; and to offer well-supported recommendations and advice to various offices based on solid academic training—such expectations may lead to the disciplines of religious studies and Chinese discourses on religious studies becoming nothing more than empty shells.

Lastly, The aforementioned voices and influences, coupled with the natural affinity between religious studies researchers and the religious community, can easily lead politicians to perceive religious researchers as either natural defenders of religions or as individuals likely to cause problems for the religious community. These perceptions can heighten religious administrators' concerns and suspicions toward religious studies researchers, which may adversely affect the healthy development of the discipline, its construction, and its social responsibilities.

Here are a few cases. First, in an article signed with the name Chuntong<sup>18</sup>, an unidentified author accused Zhuo Xinping, a leading figure in the field of religious studies, of being partial to the religious community discussed in Zhuo's article, “The Responsibility of ‘Scholar’ and the Future of Religious Studies.”<sup>19</sup> But in fact, this author blurred the distinction between the religious studies community and the religious community, using this confusion as a pretext to

<sup>18</sup> Chun Tong, “Shiping Zhuo Xinping dui ‘Makesizhuyi zongjiaoguan’de ruogan ‘chuangxin’” [A Trial Review of Zhuo Xinping's “Innovations” on the “Marxist View of Religion”], 2020-01-08, <http://www.wywxwk.com/Article/sichao/2020/01/412360.html>

<sup>19</sup> Zhuo Xinping, “‘Shi’ de dandang yu zongjiaoxue de weilai” [The Responsibility of ‘Scholar’ and the Future of Religious Studies], *Chinese Cultural Studies*, Spring, 2018.

express hostility. Taking a step back, this critique exploits such pretexts to stir up trouble primarily because the discipline of religious studies has divided itself into categories based on individual religious denominations. Additionally, various debates—such as those on the relationship between party members and religious faith, the debate between scientific atheism and militant atheism, and the discussion on what constitutes Marxist religious theory—sparked by scholars like Zhuo Xinping and Mou Zhongjian, are criticized by people with limited knowledge who make hasty generalizations

In 2017, the seventh volume of the innovative core journal of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences *Zongjiao renlei xue* [Anthropology of Religion] was also falsely accused of “promoting superstition” and “spreading religious faiths,” and its authors had labels pinned on them for “citing inflammatory sensitive opinions.” This criticism basically caused barriers for the researchers from studying the development of emerging religions globally and brought much trouble to the organizations that persist in the publication of scholarly works on religious studies. It has also forced researchers to hesitate before following the latest research trends in the study of Christianity, Islam, and more. This deleterious atmosphere in academia is one of the consequences of a long-term obsession with a one-fold research paradigm, which lacks comparative perspective and lateral thinking and clings to misconceptions in the classification of disciplines. As a result, the public often equates religious studies with theological studies and mistakes religious studies scholars for religious figures.

The situation has been deteriorating since 2016, and there has become an urgent need for an overall adjustment or partial reform of religious studies in China. The principles and methods to be used for such an adjustment and reform can be found in the formative years of religious studies during the early years of the People’s Republic of China. The rules include using practical, realistic, and objective research theories— from which Marxist religious theories developed—as theoretical guidelines. We need to move away from the outdated practice of dividing religious studies based on specific religions, strengthen the application of research methods that integrate humanities and social sciences approaches, and enhance opportunities for both objective interdisciplinary observation and subjective experience

### Concluding Remarks

On May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016, in his speech, Xi Jinping outlined the direction for constructing a system of philosophy and social sciences that reflects Chinese

characteristics: “highlight research advantages, expand research areas, address shortcomings, and improve and perfect the system.” Since then, Chinese religious studies scholars have been focusing on how to address these shortcomings within the discipline. How should a religious studies discipline with Chinese characteristics be constructed and developed in an orderly manner? What are the difficulties and crises facing religious studies in contemporary China? In the future, should Chinese religious studies maintain its traditional disciplinary classification, or should it be reorganized according to the internal logic of the discipline? Should it adopt a dual-track or hybrid model, allowing various systems to coexist and develop? These questions remain unresolved and merit careful reflection by all scholars of religious studies.

Of course, expecting a complete overhaul in the development of religious studies as a discipline is unrealistic. A more practical approach is to adopt a compromise. We can respect the dual-track system currently used in other disciplines and introduce gradual, tailored supplements and innovations. This should consider the historical sympathies and approaches developed by scholars, as well as research from different regions “If you can one day renovate yourself, do so from day to day. Let there be daily renovation.”<sup>20</sup> Religious studies scholars should focus on finding ways to navigate the challenges facing Chinese religious studies and promote healthy, objective, neutral, and normalized development. They should also seek to establish guiding principles for organizing the discipline.

*Translated from the Chinese version by Zuoting Wen*

<sup>20</sup> These words were inscribed on the bathtub of Cheng Tang, the founding monarch of the Shang dynasty (1600–1046 BCE). —Ed.

Table 1. Religious Studies Institutes Affiliated with Provincial Academies of Social Sciences

No.	Academy	Institute	Founding date	No. of staff	Laboratory	Specialty	Postgraduate program
1	Qinghai Academy of Social Sciences	Institute of Ethnicity and Religious Studies (and Institute of Tibetan Studies)	Oct. 1978, Laboratory of Ethnicity and Religious Studies June 1996, changed to current name	3	None	Tibetan Buddhism, Islam, folk religions	None
2	Ningxia Hui Muslim Autonomous Religion Academy of Social Sciences	Institute of Hui Muslim Studies (and editorial board of the <i>Journal of Hui Muslim Minority Study</i> )	1962, Laboratory of Ethnicity History of Ningxia Studies 1964, renamed Ningxia Institute of Philosophy and Social Sciences 1979, reopened, with the addition of the Laboratory of Ethnicity and Religious Studies 1981, renamed Ningxia Academy of Social Sciences. The Laboratory of Ethnicity and Religious Studies was renamed the Institute of Ethnicity and Religious Studies 1990, renamed the Institute of Hui Muslim and Islam Studies 2016, renamed the Academy of Hui Minority Group Studies	11	None	Islam	None
3	Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences	Institute of Religious Studies	1981	22	3 laboratories on religious theories, religious history, and contemporary religious studies	Five major religions and folk religions, with a focus on studies of contemporary religious issues	Yes
4	Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Academy of Social Sciences	Institute of Religious Studies	1981	10	None	Islam, religious history of Xinjiang, religious situation in Xinjiang, religious issues, and religious policies	None

5	Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences	Institute of Religious Studies	1984	10	6 laboratories for religious theories, Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, Islam, and folk religions	The five major religions in Yunnan, history and current situations of folk religions, religions and culture of the minority society, religions and the harmonious development of Yunnan, religious culture, and the economical and societal development of Yunnan	None
6	Tibet Academy of Social Sciences	Institute of Religious Studies	1985 (preparation started in 1980), the Institute of Religions and Philosophy Studies  1988, changed to the current name	20	None	Tibetan Buddhism, Bon, religious philosophy	None
7	Jiangxi Academy of Social Sciences	Institute of Religious, Studies affiliated with the Center for Religious Studies at the Institute of Philosophy Studies	1996	No official researchers, 50 part-time researchers.	None	Buddhism, Daoism	None
8	Shaanxi Academy of Social Sciences	Institute of Religious Studies	1985, Buddhist Studies Group of Chang'an  1986, remade the Laboratory of Religious Studies  1994, renamed the Institute of Religious History Studies  1999, changed to current name	12	Center of Buddhist Studies in Chang'an, Center of Northwest Daoist Studies	Buddhism, Daoism, Catholicism, folk religions	None
9	Inner Mongolia Academy of Social Sciences	Institute for Studying Philosophy and Religions. Some researchers are affiliated with the Institute of History Studies	1979, Institute of Philosophy Studies  2008, renamed to current name	3	Laboratory of Religious Studies, Laboratory of Marxist Philosophy and Ethnicity Studies, Laboratory of Mongolian Philosophy, Societal and Intellectual History Studies	Tibetan Buddhism, the religious situations of Inner Mongolia	None

10	Guangdong Academy of Social Sciences	Institute of Philosophy and Religious Studies. An Institute of Buddhism Studies was founded in 2010.	2012	3	None	Religious theories and religious communication	None
11	Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences	Institute of Ethnicity and Religious Studies and the Institute of Mythology Studies (with 9 researchers)	2012	17	None	Daoism, Buddhism, Religions of Ethnicity minorities	Master's program in anthropology
12	Henan Academy of Social Sciences	Institute of Philosophy and Religious Studies	Founded in 1917 1979 as the Institute of Philosophy Studies renamed the Institute of Philosophy and Central Plain Culture Studies.  In 2012, renamed as Institute of Religions and Philosophy Studies	5	None	Islam, Daoism	None
13	Shandong Academy of Social Sciences	Institute of Contemporary Religious Studies	2017	9	None	Five major religions	None
14	Anhui Academy of Social Sciences	The Center of Buddhism Studies, affiliated with the Institute of Philosophy and Culture Studies	2017	1	None	Buddhism	None
15	Beijing Academy of Social Sciences	No institute for religious studies. Researchers are affiliated with the Institute of History and the Institute of Philosophy.					
16	Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences	No institute for religious studies. Researchers are affiliated with the Institute of Philosophy.					
17	Chongqing Academy of Social Sciences	No institute for religious studies.					
18	Zhejiang Academy of Social Sciences	No institute for religious studies. Buddhist and Daoist researchers are affiliated with the Institute of Philosophy.					
19	Jiangsu Academy of Social Sciences	No institute for religious studies. Buddhist researchers are affiliated with the Institute of Philosophy and Culture Studies.					
20	Fujian Academy of Social Sciences	No institute for religious studies. Researchers on the history of religions are affiliated with the Institute of History Studies.					



21	Hebei Academy of Social Sciences	No institute for religious studies.
22	Shanxi Academy of Social Sciences	No institute for religious studies.
23	Liaoning Academy of Social Sciences	No institute for religious studies. Religious researchers are affiliated with Institute of Philosophy and Institute of History Studies
24	Jilin Academy of Social Sciences	No institute for religious studies.
25	Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences	No institute for religious studies. Center of Jewish Studies was founded in 2000. Jewish History and Culture of Harbin was approved to become a leading discipline branch of the Heilongjiang Province. There are 11 researchers here. Center of Anti-Heretical Religions is also affiliated with this center.
26	Hainan Academy of Social Sciences	No institute for religious studies.
27	Gansu Academy of Social Sciences	No institute for religious studies. Religious researchers are affiliated with Institute of Silk Road Studies.
28	Hunan Academy of Social Sciences	No institute for religious studies. Religious researchers are affiliated with Institute of Philosophy.
29	Hubei Academy of Social Sciences	No institute for religious studies.
30	Guizhou Academy of Social Sciences	No institute for religious studies.
31	Guangxi Academy of Social Sciences	No institute for religious studies. Researchers working on mythologies and totems are affiliated with the Institute of Culture Studies.

Source: This table was compiled from information found on public websites and acquired through phone and email requests.

Table 2. Religious Studies Majors in Chinese Higher Education Institutions

No.	University	Department/ school	Founding date	No. of researchers	Laboratories	Research interests	Postgraduate program	Journals	Note
1	Sichuan University	Institute of Daoism and Religious Culture Studies	1980	26	None	Chinese Daoism, Chinese Buddhism, religious theories, religions of ethnic minorities in Southwest China, Christianity	Yes	<i>Religious Studies, Academic Journal of Laozi, Daoism Studies</i>	First religious studies major in Chinese higher education. One of the three bases for the studies of religions subordinate to the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China.
2	Minzu University of China	Department of Philosophy and Religions Institute of Religious Studies	1986 2008, changed to current name	29	Marxist Philosophy, Chinese Philosophy, Western Philosophy, Religious Theories, Religions of Ethnic Groups, World Religions	Religious theories, religions of ethnic groups, major religions	2012, PhD program in the First-Level Discipline 2014, Mobile Station of Postdoctoral Researchers		
3	Southwest Minzu University	Religious studies major in the Department of Philosophy	1986	2	None	Religions of ethnic minorities	Master's degree	None	Key-Level Discipline in Sichuan provincial education system
4	Northwest University	Department of History, Institute of Buddhism Studies	1992	7	None	Buddhism	Master's degree and PhD in Chinese history	None	
5	Peking University	Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies Institute of Advanced Religions Studies	1995	6 (many researchers work on religious studies in the departments of sociology, history, and literature)	Teaching and Research Office of Christianity and Religious Theories	Religious studies, religious philosophy, sociology of religion, history of Christianity in China, Eastern Orthodox Church, Russian philosophy	Master's degree and PhD in philosophy	None	The first bachelor's degree for the religious Studies major in China, the first School of Religious Studies

6	Wuhan University	Religious studies major in the Department of Philosophy	1996	6	Teaching and Research Office for Religious Studies	Christianity	PhD in Chinese philosophy (Second-Level Discipline of the Nation), PhD in philosophy (Key First-Level Discipline of Hubei)  Mobile Station of Postdoctoral Researchers in Philosophy  The philosophy major is a national training base for researchers in the basic discipline of the nation, and a national training and research center for philosophy researchers.
7	Jilin University	Religious studies major in the School of Philosophy at the Department of Philosophy and Sociology	1996	3	None	Buddhism, Daoism	Master's degree
8	Renmin University of China	Religious studies major in the Department of Philosophy  Prospective First-Level Discipline	1998, Religious studies major was founded  1999, School of Religious Studies was founded  1999, PhD Program in Religious Studies and a Mobile Station of Postdoctoral Researchers	15	Research Office of Religions Studies		Yes  National - Level Key Discipline  Key Research Base for the Humanities and Social Sciences Subordinated to the Ministry of Education.
9	Xiamen University	Institute of Religions Studies in the School of Philosophy in the Department of the Humanities	1999	18	None	Chinese Daoist culture, Chinese Buddhist culture, Chinese folk religions, religious theories, contemporary religions  Christianity and Catholicism are also their specialty	Yes  PhD in Philosophy (First-Level Discipline) and Mobile Station of Postdoctoral Researchers in Philosophy
10	Tsinghua University	Religious studies major in the School of Philosophy	2000	4		Buddhism, Christianity, religious philosophy	Yes

11	Sun Yat-sen University	Religious studies major in the School of Philosophy	The school was founded in 1924. It was revoked in 1952 during the structural reorganization of the higher education institutions. The School of Philosophy reopened in 1960.  The philosophy major was selected as one of the programs for the national implementation of Double First-Class Initiative in 2017	64 (as of 2017)	19 research institutions are affiliated with the Department of History, 3 of them are related to religious studies, including the Institute of Comparative Religious Studies, the Institute of Chan Buddhism and Chinese Culture Studies, and Center of Buddhist Studies	Buddhism, Christianity, religious philosophy	Yes  PhD in Philosophy (First-Level Discipline)		
12	Shandong University	Religious studies major in the Department of Philosophy and Social Development	2001	13	Teaching and Research Office of Religious Studies	Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, religious philosophy, religious theories	PhD in the First-Level Discipline and Mobile Station of Postdoctoral Researchers in Philosophy  Religious studies major is a key discipline funded in the Shandong provincial level foundations	Jewish Studies	Center of Judaic and Inter-religious Studies is a key research base for the humanities subordinate to the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China

13	Nanjing University	School of Religious Studies in the Department of Philosophy	It was built based on the School of Philosophy of the former National Central University and the School of Philosophy of University of Nanking	7	10 research organizations are affiliated with this department, 5 of which are related to religious studies, including the Center of the Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism and Traditional Chinese Culture Studies, Xuri Buddhist Research Center, Institute of Judaic Studies, Institute of Chinese Philosophy and Religious Culture Studies, Center of the Comparative Studies of Confucianism and Christianity	Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, folk religions, religious theories	Philosophy in the First-Level Discipline in 2002  Philosophy in the First-Level Discipline was selected as a key discipline of Jiangsu in 2008 and a national key Discipline in 2009	<i>Zen Studies, Religious Studies</i>	The Department of Philosophy was founded in the 1920s  It was revoked in 1952 during the structural reorganization of the higher education institutions. The School of Philosophy reopened in 1960, with the addition of a political science major  The philosophy major was reestablished as its own school in 1977  The School of Religious Studies was established in 2000
14	Yunnan University	Institute of the Religious Culture Studies in the Department of Ethology and Sociology	2002	7	None	Religions of Southwestern minority and Southwestern Buddhism	Master's degree		
15	Qinghai Minzu University	School of Religious Studies in the Department of Ethnology and Sociology	2003	10	None	Anthropology of Religions, religious management, Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan society, contemporary religious issues	Master's degree in religious studies		
16	Shaanxi Normal University	Center of Religious Studies	2004	11	None	Religious theories (Psychology and Sociology of Religions), Buddhist studies, Islamic studies, Christianity studies, Daoism and folk religions, emerging religions	Master's and PhD degrees	None	

17	Tongji University	Religious studies major in the Department of Philosophy  Institute of Christianity Studies	2005	6	None	Christianity, religious philosophy	Yes
18	Xidian University	Religious studies major in the Department of Philosophy	2005	8	None	Buddhism, Daoism, religious philosophy	Master's degree
19	Shanxi University	Office of Chinese Philosophy and Religious Studies in the Department of Sociology	2005	5	None	Buddhism, Daoism, Philosophy of Religions	Yes
20	Nankai University	Teaching and Research Office of Religious Studies in the School of Philosophy  Center of Religious Culture Studies  Institute of Religious Studies	2006	5	None	Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, religious theories	PhD in the First-Level Discipline
21	Dalian University of Technology	Religious studies major in the School of Philosophy	2006	3	None	Traditional religions, Philosophy of Religions	Yes
22	Yunnan Normal University	The Institute of Buddhist Studies in the Department of Philosophy, Politics, and Law	2006	5	None	Buddhism, Religions of Minority Ethnicity	Master's degree

23	Anhui University	Teaching and Research Office of Religious Studies in the Department of Philosophy	2006	5	None	Buddhism, Daoism	Master's degree in philosophy in the First-Level Discipline  PhD in Chinese philosophy in the Second-Level Discipline
24	South Central University for Nationalities	Religious studies major in the Department of Ethnology and Sociology	2006	3	None	Traditional Chinese religions, religions of ethnic minorities of China	Master's degree
25	Xinjiang Normal University	Religious studies major in the Teaching and Research Office of Historical Issues of Xinjiang in the Department of Marxism	2009	15	The University-Level Center for the Study of Chinafication of Islam in Xinjiang was founded in 2020; the Autonomous Region Level Center for the Study of Religions in Xinjiang was founded in 2021	Policies on ethnicity and religions, the history of religions in Xinjiang	Master's degree
26	Lanzhou University	Center of Religious Culture Studies in the Department of Philosophy and Sociology	2010	4	The Institute of Comparative Religions Studies and Philosophy of Religions, the Institute of Islamic Culture Studies, the Institute of Christian Culture Studies, the Institute of Buddhist Culture Studies, the Institute of Traditional Chinese Culture and Religions Studies, the Data	Comparative religions, Islamic culture of Northwest China, Christian culture of Northwest China, Buddhist culture of Northwest China, traditional culture and religions of Northwest China, religions and the social development in Northwest China	Master's degree

						Room of Religions and Social Development of West China and the Religious Culture of Northwest China Studies, Document Database of Religious Culture in Northwest China Studies			
27	Northwest Minzu University	Center of Religions of Ethnic Minorities in Northwest China Studies	2010	10	None	Islamic culture, Tibetan studies	Master's degree, PhD in ethnology in the First-Level Discipline	<i>Northwestern Journal of Ethnology</i>	<p>The Center is a provincial key research base in the humanities and social sciences. It is affiliated with Gansu Academy of Social Sciences.</p> <p>The major of religious studies is a key discipline of Gansu.</p> <p>A research base feducation and development in ethnic minority regions studies, subordinated to the Ministry of Education was also affiliated with the Center.</p>
28	Huaqiao University	Religious studies major in the School of Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy and Social Development  The Center of Religions of Overseas Chinese Diasporas, Minnan and Taiwan	2010	5	None	Buddhism, Daoism, folk religions	Master's degree, PhD in the First-Level Discipline  Mobile Station of Postdoctoral Researchers		



Studies								
29	East China Normal University	Teaching and Research Office of Religious Studies in the School of Philosophy	2010	6	None	Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity	Mobile Station of Postdoctoral Researchers in Philosophy in the First-Level Discipline 7 PhD programs, 7 master's programs	
30	Guizhou University	Religious studies major in the Department of Philosophy and Social Development	2011	3	None	Buddhism, Philosophy of Religions, Sociology of Religions	Master's degree	
31	Shanghai Normal University	School of Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy, Law, and Politics  Institute of Religious Studies	2016	8	None	Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, Islam	PhD in the First-Level Discipline, 7 other PhD programs  Mobile Station of Postdoctoral Researchers	<i>Buddhist Textual Material Outside the Canon</i>
32	Beijing Normal University	Institute of Religion and Culture Studies in the Department of Philosophy	N/A	4	None	Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, Eastern Orthodoxy	PhD in the First-Level Discipline	
33	Heilongjiang University	Major of religious studies in the School of Philosophy	2003	3	Yes	Christianity, comparative religions, Chinese religions, religious theories	Mobile Station of Postdoctoral Researchers  PhD program in the First-Level Discipline, Master's program in the First-Level Discipline	The religious studies major is known as an approved key research center for religious issues of the Heilongjiang province since 2003

34	Fujian Normal University	Center of Chinese Christianity Research	Formerly known as the Institute of Religious Culture Research. Preparation started in 1983, founded in 1994. Changed to current name in 2009. Affiliated with the Department of Sociology, History, and Culture	8	None	International relations, history of Chinese Christianity		None
		Major of religious studies major in the Department of Sociology, History, and Culture	Major of religious studies was founded in 2000. It was changed to special history major in 2018 to be a part of the university's implementation of Double First-Class Initiative	9	None	History of Chinese Christianity, Chinese Daoist culture, Chinese Buddhist culture, Chinese folk religions, Minnan and Taiwanese religious culture	Master's Degree	None
35	Yunnan Minzu University	College of the Humanities	Founded in 1998, revoked in 2019.	7	None	Religious studies theories, Anthropology of Religions, Islam, religious culture of ethnic minorities, Chinese Daoism, Sociology of Religions, Buddhism, Dongba cultural studies, religious theories, development of cultural and tourist resources	Yes	None

36	Southwest University	Institute of Religious Studies Center of Religious Affairs Management	2003	10	None		Master's and PhD degrees in religious studies (Daoism and health culture, religious affairs management, religious music)	None	
37	Tibet University for Nationalities	Department of Philosophy Institute of Religious Studies in the Institute of Minorities Research	2004	15	Religious Studies Office	Management of minority and religious affairs, Marxist religious theories, Catholicism, Tibetan Buddhism	None	None	None

Source: This table was compiled from information found on public websites and acquired through phone and email requests.

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