



## Folk Religion in Contemporary China

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### Introduction and General Overviews

Folk religion has always been an indispensable component in the Chinese religious landscape; however, it is not a uniquely Chinese phenomenon, but rather common in all societies. Some scholars of Chinese religion have often referred to it as “popular religion.” We prefer to use “folk religion,” as it is in contrast to “world religions” or “institutionalized religions,” whereas “popular religion” in Western contexts may be in contrast to the “official religion” of certain Christian churches. A consensus definition of folk religion is almost impossible, and what has been studied as Chinese folk religion or popular religion is extremely diverse. Typical practices and beliefs of folk religion include feng shui watching, fortune telling, and ancestor worship, to name a few. In general, various beliefs, practices, and social interactions may be differentiated into three broad types of folk religion: communal, sectarian, and individual. Different types of folk religion may have different social functions and different trajectories of change in the modernization process. In the modern era, practices and beliefs pertaining to folk religion have been criticized for its antagonism with modernity. Later under Communist rule since 1949, folk religion has been suppressed as *fengjian mixian* (feudalist superstitions) and *fandong huidaomen* (reactionary sects and cults). However, along with the economic and social reforms since the late 1970s, folk religion has revived throughout China, even though the proportions of folk religious believers and practitioners remain substantially smaller than in Taiwan. The revivals of various folk religions in various parts of China have attracted attention from scholars in different disciplines and fields, including but not limited to religious studies, sociology, anthropology, political science, Asian studies, and cultural analysis. Only in recent years have there been quantitative studies of various folk religious beliefs and practices. This article assembles major studies that have a common focus on Chinese folk religion, providing readers with an overview of the current state of this field. It is not our intent to exhaustively include all studies, which, in light of the versatile practices and beliefs of Chinese folk religion, is almost impossible. Instead, we set our priority on timeliness, selecting and reviewing studies in this article that have implications for the contemporary conditions of Chinese folk religion.

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### Journals

In addition to monographs, empirical research on Chinese folk religion is increasingly published in academic journals. In this section, several major English and Chinese journals are introduced. Among those journals, *Journal of Chinese Religions*, as well as three Chinese journals (*Shijie zongjiao wenhua* 世界宗教文化, *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* 世界宗教研究, and *Zongjiaoxue yanjiu* 宗教学研究), gravitates toward the discipline of religious studies, which is a contrast to the four outlets that lean more toward the social-scientific approaches on religions (*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review*, *Review of Religious Research*, and *Review of Religion and Chinese Society*). In addition to these, *Journal of Asian Studies* publishes area-study articles, and *American Ethnologist* focuses on the anthropological approach, both of which welcome studies on themes related to Chinese folk religion.

#### ***American Ethnologist.***

This is a journal of the American Ethnological Society, the anthropological organization founded in 1842 in the United States. *American Ethnologist* is a quarterly journal connecting ethnographic research with theoretical insights in the contemporary world.

#### ***Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion.***

As the official journal of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* has always been the flagship journal in the field of the social-scientific study of religion, serving as the outlet for state-of-the-art empirical research on Chinese religions.

***Journal of Asian Studies.***

On behalf of the Association for Asian Studies, the *Journal of Asian Studies* publishes academic papers on various topics of Asia, including but not limited to history, the arts, social transitions, and philosophy.

***Journal of Chinese Religions.***

This is an academic outlet established by the Society for the Study of Chinese Religions (SSCR), an international scholarly society with a specific focus on the research of Chinese religion. The *Journal of Chinese Religions* accepts original studies on all aspects of Chinese religions in all periods.

***Review of Religion and Chinese Society.***

This is an international peer-reviewed journal that publishes articles and book reviews in both social sciences and humanities disciplines, with a particular focus on the research on Chinese religions.

***Review of Religious Research.***

As the official journal of the Religious Research Association, *Review of Religious Research* provides a forum for publication of research that concerns broad research themes, including but not limited to the variations in religious beliefs and practices, the relationship between personal spirituality and institutional religions, religion and family life, etc.

***Shijie zongjiao wenhua* 世界宗教文化.**

English title, *Religious Cultures in the World*. One of the leading Chinese journals that specializes in religious studies. This journal aims to be a forum for introducing religious knowledge, commenting on religious foci topics, and discussing the development of religious theories.

***Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* 世界宗教研究.**

English title, *Studies of World Religions*. This is a top religious studies journal in mainland China, with focuses on religious theories, Chinese Buddhism, Chinese Daoism, Chinese Christianity, Chinese Islam, Chinese folk religion, and Confucianism, to name a few.

***Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review.***

This is the official journal of the Association for the Sociology of Religion and has a focus on empirically grounded sociological studies of religion. From this journal, readers can expect to find studies of Chinese religions that bear theoretical implications.

***Zongjiaoxue yanjiu* 宗教学研究.**

English title, *Religious Studies*. This is the professional journal of religious studies located in China that is sponsored by the Institute of Daoism and Religious Culture at Sichuan University. Besides Daoism, this journal publishes studies of other major Chinese religions.

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## Conceptualizations of Folk Religion or Popular Religion

One major challenge to the studies of Chinese folk religion or popular religion is its conceptualization. This section provides some well-known studies that address the notion, both in history and in contemporary Chinese societies. Early scholars depicted the religious landscape of China to be a dichotomous one, where folk religion was for the masses and better-institutionalized religions was for the elites, but since the 1960s, a strand of scholarship started to emphasize the common foundation and logic of these two types of religions in China. This point of view is systematically articulated in Freedman 1974, and Feuchtwang 2001 embodies the idea of the metaphorical concordance between folk rituals and official bureaucracies, and Yang 1961 presents the functional paradigm of Chinese diffused religion. A more detailed discussion on the academic background of Freedman's works can be found in Wang 2000. An antithesis to the unity paradigm is the school of diversities. One important theory in this regard is the trinity of god-ghost-ancestor, as laid out in Wolf 1974 and Jordan 1972. The diversities can be also revealed by the syncretic features of Chinese folk religion. In this regard, Clart 2003 and Leamaster and Hu 2014 provide illustrative cases. A detailed review of the history of the understanding of Chinese folk religion can be found in Bell 1989 and Clart 2007. Weller 1987 provides one attempt to circumvent this unity versus diversities debate, as does the survey-based sociological approach adopted in Yang and Hu 2012.

**Bell, Catherine. "Religion and Chinese Culture: Toward an Assessment of 'Popular Religion.'" *History of Religions* 29.1: (1989) 35–57.**

This is a seminal review about the development of the idea of Chinese popular religion. Three stages have been highlighted: the first stage stresses the dichotomy of elite religion and popular religion, the second stage is featured by the emergence of a holistic view of Chinese culture, and the third stage shifts toward a dynamic view of the unity and diversities of Chinese popular religion.

**Clart, Philip. "Confucius and the Mediums: Is There a 'Popular Confucianism'?" *T'oungPao: International Journal of Chinese Studies* 89.1–3 (2003): 1–38.**

Based on detailed description of the phoenix halls in Taiwan, this study addresses the Confucian aspect of Taiwanese folk religion. Specifically, phoenix halls in Taiwan are called popular Confucianism because they take a syncretic approach to reading the Confucian classics and to appropriating elements from Daoism, Buddhism, and sectarian teachings into Confucianism.

**Clart, Philip. "The Concept of 'Folk Religion' in the Study of Chinese Religions: Retrospect and Prospects." In *The Fourth Fu Jen University Sinological Symposium: Research on Religions in China; Status Quo and Perspectives*. Edited by Zbigniew Wesolowski, 166–203. Xinzhuang, Taiwan: Furen University Press, 2007.**

Responding to Bell's seminal work on folk religion, Clart argues that the early studies of Chinese folk religion held a holistic perspective and the bifurcation of elite-folk religions did not emerge until after World War II. Different from the cultural approach to examining Chinese folk religion, Clart emphasizes the merits of the conception of folk religion.

**Feuchtwang, Stephan. *Popular Religion in China: The Imperial Metaphor*. Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2001.**

This book focuses on local festivals and territorial cults based on the author's field research that can be traced back to the 1960s in Taiwan. In this book, Feuchtwang provides a typology of local rituals and, as one major theoretical contribution to the study of folk religion, compares the official and local cults, arguing that their juxtaposition creates meanings and drama in both political and religious fields.

**Freedman, Maurice. "On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion." In *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*. Edited by Arthur P. Wolf, 19–41. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974.**

This book chapter reviews early Sinological research on Chinese folk religion as well as Ch'ing-K'un Yang's seminal work, upon which Freedman articulates the idea of "Chinese religion," a common foundation and logic underlying the seemingly diverse religious practices in China.

**Jordan, David K. *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors: The Folk Religion of a Taiwanese Village*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.**

This monograph is based on the fieldwork conducted in an agricultural village of southern Taiwan in the middle 1960s, with a specific focus on the religious beliefs and practices centering on gods, who serve as protectors; ghosts, who are mainly spiritual enemies; and family dead, who can themselves become either gods or ghosts.

**Leamaster, Reid, and Anning Hu. "Popular Buddhists: Predicting Popular Religious Belief and Practice in Contemporary China." *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review* 75.2 (2014): 234–259.**

This article looks into the eclectic mixing of folk religion and other religious traditions in contemporary China and interrogates the social factors predicting popular religious belief and practice. A clear and robust relationship between self-identifying as a Buddhist and participating in folk religion in contemporary China is affirmed.

**Wang Mingming 王铭铭. "Zongzu, shehui yu guojia: Dui fulideman lilun de zaisikao (宗族、社会与国家：对弗里德曼理论的再思考)." In *Wang Mingming zixuanji* (王铭铭自选集). By Wang Mingming 王铭铭, 70–109. Guilin, China: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2000.**

This article examines the classical idea of Freedman on the Chinese religion by placing it into the framework of anthropological methodology. Instead of viewing the term of Chinese religion as a type of research paradigm, this article argues that Freedman intends to use Chinese religion as a case to show that the functional approach that has been prevalent in studies of African religions is insufficient to examine religions like the one in China. The reason is that African religions are often autonomous entities, while Chinese religions have a dynamic relation with the state.

**Weller, Robert P. *Unity and Diversity in Chinese Religion*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987.**

Providing insightful theoretical reflections based on the fieldwork in Taiwan between 1976 and 1979, this study discusses the folk religious activities surrounding ancestors, gods, and ghosts. Also, this study attempts to respond to the unity-diversity debate on the studies of Chinese religion.

**Wolf, Arthur P. "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors." In *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*. Edited by Arthur P. Wolf, 131–182. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974.**

This book chapter examines the three major figures in Chinese folk religion—gods, ghosts, and ancestors—based on field research conducted in Taiwan. Wolf provides very detailed descriptions about the unique functions, rituals, and people's expectations pertaining, respectively, to the three types of supernatural entities in Chinese culture.

**Yang, Ch'ing-K'un. *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961.**

This classic study proposes a widely acknowledged theoretical distinction between diffused religion and institutional religion in Chinese society. Also, the author presents rich examples of diffused religion that is related to the family, guilds, and the state.

**Yang, Fenggang, and Anning Hu. "Mapping Folk Religion in China." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51.3 (2012): 505–521.**

This article differentiates and articulates three major types of folk religion: communal, sectarian, and individual. This is also the first comprehensive, quantitative study that presents the current situation of different types of folk religion in both mainland China and Taiwan.

Drawing on the Chinese Spiritual Life Survey, Taiwan Social Change Survey, and the Religious Experience Survey of Taiwan, this study profiles the sociodemographic characteristics of followers of the three major types of folk religion.

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## Individual Folk Religions

Individual folk religion denotes beliefs and practices that are independent of any collectivity, such as fortune telling, feng shui, and the worship of the god of wealth. However, it is precisely because of this independence from collectivity that practices of individual folk religion can be diverse, subject to both temporal and regional variations. In this regard, Paper 1995 addresses the practices of shamans and spiritual mediums from the historical perspective, which helps to place readers in perspective. More recent studies in contemporary mainland China can be found in Bruun 2003 and Chen 2005, both providing affirmative evidence for the popularity of the feng shui practices in the post–Reform Era of China.

**Bruun, Ole. *Fengshui in China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003.**

This book provides a historical account of feng shui practices in Chinese societies and highlights its current prevalence in contemporary China based on fieldwork in rural areas. The author argues that feng shui constitutes an alternative tradition of the cosmological knowledge in China.

**Chen Jinguo 陈进国. *Xinyang, yishi yu xiangtu shehui: Fengshui de lishirenleixue tansuo* (信仰、仪式与乡土社会:风水的历史人类学探索). Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2005.**

Based on fieldwork conducted in Fujian, this book investigates feng shui practices and beliefs in local society. It describes the dynamic of different traditions of feng shui and underscores how feng shui is embedded in local cultural networks to establish a type of popular belief, serving to construct the local cultural space and promote local solidarity.

**Paper, Jordan D. *The Spirits Are Drunk: Comparative Approaches to Chinese Religion*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1995.**

This study approaches Chinese religion from the historical perspective of Chinese culture and civilization. Specifically, Paper articulates the meaning of ecstatic and mystic experience in Chinese religious rituals as well as in the practices of shamans and spiritual mediums. Also, the author addresses the role of female deities in the Chinese religious system and analyzes people's perception of Christianity from the perspective of Chinese religion.

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## Communal Folk Religions

Communal folk religion refers to those beliefs and practices in a collective mode based in a locale or a clan. A communal religion may adopt some symbols and practices from the more organized religions such as Buddhism, but often worship local deities or ancestral spirits. Many folk religion practices in China surround a particular type of community, based on either blood tie or spatial proximity. For the former, the typical communal folk religion is ancestor worship; Ahern 1973 presents a detailed description of ancestor worship rituals based on the author's field research in Taiwan, and Hu 2016 shows a survey-based picture for contemporary mainland China. For the latter, the typical communal folk religion would be some form of worshipping local deities. For this, Chau 2006, Fan 2003, and Overmyer 2009 present the ritual processes as observed in the western and northern parts of China, while Dean 1993, Sangren 1987, Wang 2000, and Watson 1985 attempt to understand the characteristics of local communal folk religion by bridging it with broader social, economic, and political environments.

**Ahern, Emily. *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1973.**

Ahern bases this study on the fieldwork conducted in an agricultural village in Taiwan with four unrelated lineages. Specifically, Ahern provides detailed descriptions about ancestral temples, tablets, funerals, burials, worship at the gravesite, and reburial rituals, to name a few. Through this fieldwork, Ahern shows the capricious nature of ancestral spirits and how ancestor worship can change as a response to individual, lineage, and communal life.

**Chau, Adam Y. *Miraculous Response: Doing Folk Religion in Contemporary China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006.**

This book concerns the revival of the Black Dragon King Temple in northern Shaanxi Province, describing the local religious habitus and the interaction between temple clergies and local elites. A major theoretical contribution of this book is to propose the various “modalities” of doing religion in Chinese society, that is, different meaning frames and models that selectively encourage some religious behaviors insofar as to better express the religious imagination.

**Dean, Kenneth. *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of Southeast China*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.**

Against the backdrop of the religious revival in Chinese society, this book, based on a ten-year fieldwork, describes the history and current revival of three cults of Taoist gods in the coastal regions of southeastern China. The author analyzes the fenxiang networks of the three cults to highlight the social forces underpinning their flourishing, and argues that Taoist rituals constitute the main structuring element of local religious festivals.

**Fan, Lizhu. “The Cult of the Silkworm Mother as a Core of Local Community Religion in a North China Village: Field Study in Zhiwuying, Baoding, Hebei.” In *Religion in China Today*. Edited by Daniel L. Overmyer, 53–66. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.**

This article provides a case study of a local folk religion in northern China. Through a detailed description of a female spirit-medium who was believed to represent a local goddess, the Silkworm Mother, this study adds evidence for the prevalence of folk religious revival in contemporary China.

**Hu, Anning. “Ancestor Worship in Contemporary China: An Empirical Investigation.” *China Review: An Interdisciplinary Journal on Greater China* 16.1 (2016): 169–186.**

Based on the Chinese Spiritual Life Survey, this article provides a systematic research on ancestor worship in contemporary China. It provides empirical evidence pertaining to the extent of popularity of ancestor worship, the basic socioeconomic features of ancestor worship practitioners, and the type of citizens who are more likely to be attracted by the magical elements in the ancestor worship tradition.

**Overmyer, Daniel L. *Local Religion in North China in the Twentieth Century: The Structure and Organization of Community Rituals and Beliefs*. Boston: Brill, 2009.**

This book surveys the historical development, leadership and organization, temple festivals, deities, and values of local communal folk religions in North China villages in the 20th century, highlighting commonplace communal religious practices and rituals in spite of their local variations.

**Sangren, Steven. *History and Magical Power in a Chinese Community*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987.**

Sangren conducted fieldwork in a market town in Taiwan. The critical idea is the conception of hierarchy, which is embodied by the hierarchical connection of the field site with a higher-level economic region, and by the hierarchical connection of local cults with broader-territory cults.

**Wang Mingming 王铭铭. “Weiwang yu chaosheng: 1986nian zhongguo dongnan yanhai de chaoduyishi (危亡与超生: 1896年中国东南沿海的超度仪式).” In *Wang Mingming zixuanji* (王铭铭自选集). By Wang Mingming 王铭铭, 250–289. Guilin, China: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2000.**

This article provides a detailed description of the salvation rituals that were prevalent in the Chinese southeastern coast in 1896, through which Wang illustrates how this ritual is associated with the social crisis and the local efforts to counter such a crisis after the failure in the First Sino-Japanese War.

**Watson, James. “Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of T’ien Hou (“Empress of Heaven”) along the South China Coast, 960–1960.” In *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*. Edited by David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, and Evelyn S. Rawski, 292–324. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.**

Watson presents a detailed historical description about the approval of Tianhou (“Empress of Heaven”) by the state authorities, with specific attention paid to the potential cooperation from local elites who ensure that religious cults conform to the nationally accepted models. Watson also discusses the different meanings of local deities for different individuals in the hierarchy of power.

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## Sectarian Folk Religions

Sectarian folk religion refers to folk beliefs and practices that have an organizational structure of networks beyond local or clan boundaries. Perhaps the most debatable type of folk religion is the sectarian one. On the one hand, sectarian groups have been banned by the state from the entire society of mainland China since the 1950s; on the other hand, most sectarian folk religion organizations are well organized to such an extent that their distinction from conventional institutionalized religions is increasingly subtle and blurred. Most empirical studies on contemporary sectarian folk religion are conducted in Taiwan, mostly because sectarian groups were allowed to openly operate since the lift of the martial law in 1987. Representative studies include Lu 2008 on Yiguan Dao and Jordan and Overmyer 1986 on spiritual writing societies. In mainland China, the sectarian groups examined in Dean 1998 are largely regional, and so also are the sectarian activities examined in Dubois 2005 in Cangzhou area, Hebei Province. An excellent review of various sectarian groups in the history of China is Ma and Han 2004.

**Dean, Kenneth. *Lord of the Three in One: The Spread of a Cult in Southeast China*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998.**

This book depicts the revival of the Three-in-One Teachings in Southeast China and Southeast Asia, a folk religious sect that claims to be a combination of Confucian teachings, Taoist alchemical techniques, and Buddhist Chan philosophy. Based on fieldwork, the author illustrates the revival of the worship of Lin Zhao’en, the lord of the Three-in-One Teachings.

**Dubois, Thomas D. *The Sacred Village: Social Change and Religious Life in Rural North China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005.**

Combining historical archival evidence with ethnographic work, this book examines local cults and sectarian activities in the villages of Cangzhou County, Hebei Province. According to Dubois, village society constitutes an independent sphere of local culture, which results in a highly local and personal religious life.

**Jordan, David K., and Daniel L. Overmyer. *The Flying Phoenix: Aspects of Chinese Sectarianism in Taiwan*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986.**

This book is a joint work between David Jordan and Daniel Overmyer, with a focus on the sectarian popular religious activities that center on spiritual writing in Taiwan. In addition to presenting a historical introduction to sectarian folk religion in China, this book provides several case studies of the spiritual writing societies, such as the Hall of the Wondrous Dharma, the Compassion Society, and Yiguan Dao.

**Lu, Yunfeng.** *The Transformation of Yiguan Dao in Taiwan: Adapting to a Changing Religious Economy*. Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2008.

This study is based on fieldwork conducted in 2002 in Taiwan. In this book, Lu provides relatively detailed information about the history of Yiguan Dao, its operation under the suppression during the martial law period in Taiwan, and how this sectarian folk religion revived in the deregulated religious market since the 1990s.

**Ma Xisha 马西沙, and Han Bingfang, 韩秉方.** *Zhongguo minjian zongjiaoshi (中国民间宗教史)*. Beijing: China Social Science, 2004.

This is a comprehensive introduction to a variety of folk religious sects in China, including but not limited to White Lotus Movement, the Green Gang, the Three-in-One tradition, etc.

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## Modern Transition of Folk Religion

In this section, studies are reviewed that investigate the transition of folk religion in modern times. The major theoretical discourse pertaining to the transition of folk religion in China is the modernity paradigm, which argues for the decline of folk religion as China undergoes the process of modernization. As a result, many studies document the public and state suppression of folk religion practices and beliefs, as in Duara 1991, Goossaert and Palmer 2011, and Nedostup 2009. A related theme to the modernity paradigm concerns the interaction between the state and folk religion since 1949. The general trajectory follows the pattern of “survival and revival,” where folk religion, once labeled feudalist superstition and repressed, obtains the opportunity to develop in the market-oriented Reform Era. This is described in Overmyer 2001 and Fan 2003, and integrated in a theoretical framework of triple-religious markets in Yang 2012. For the influence of the market force on folk religion, Lin 2015 is informative. The religious economies theory is also relevant to the research on the transition of folk religion. The basic idea is that folk religion cannot win over institutionalized regions on the religious market due to its loose organization. Lu, et al. 2008 illustrates this point of view, and the researchers’ major arguments were challenged in Hu and Yang 2014 and Hu and Leamaster 2013.

**Duara, Prasenjit.** “Knowledge and Power in the Discourse of Modernity: The Campaigns against Popular Religion in Early Twentieth-Century China.” *Journal of Asian Studies* 50.1 (1991): 67–83.

Placing the discussions of suppression of popular religion in early-20th-century China in the theoretical framework of modernity, Duara identifies two stages of the anti-popular-religion campaigns (1900–1915 and 1927–1930) and brings to the fore the multiple forces in these campaigns.

**Fan, Lizhu.** “Popular Religion in Contemporary China.” *Social Compass* 50.4 (2003): 449–457.

This article reflects on the revival of popular religion since the economic reforms in the People’s Republic of China, including but not limited to temple cults, local deities, temple festivals, and popular beliefs. In addition to the examination of rural popular religion revival, this article suggests further study in urban popular religion.

**Goossaert, Vincent, and David A. Palmer.** *The Religious Question in Modern China*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011.

This book addresses the question of how religion and the modern political-social framework of Chinese societies mutually adapted since the 1890s. Integrating historical, anthropological, and sociological perspectives, this work presents a unified story about the variety of forms of religion in the Chinese religious landscape. Following this line, the book discusses not only Chinese religions but also many relevant redemptive societies and secularized traditions, such as martial arts, Chinese medicine, and qigong.



**Hu, Anning, and Reid Leamaster.** "Longitudinal Trends of Religious Groups in Deregulated Taiwan: 1990–2009." *Sociological Quarterly* 54.2 (2013): 167–190.

This study draws on comprehensive survey data to describe the longitudinal trends of various religious traditions since the 1990s in Taiwanese society. In addition to affirming a significant growth in folk religion in deregulated Taiwan, this study also highlights the growth of religious commitment among Taiwanese Buddhists—evidenced by a decrease in the overall number of Buddhist adherents and an increase in the proportion of Buddhists who are formal converts.

**Hu, Anning, and Fenggang Yang.** "Trajectories of Folk Religion in Deregulated Taiwan: An Age-Period-Cohort Analysis." *Chinese Sociological Review* 46.3 (2014): 80–100.

Using the intrinsic estimator, this study presents the transition of folk religion in Taiwan. A temporal growth in Taiwanese folk religion from the early 1990s to the mid-1990s is detected, but it is followed by a downward trend in the 2000s. Moreover, the cohorts experiencing the martial law era in their formative age are found to be more likely to practice individual type instead of communal type of folk religion.

**Lin, Weipin.** *Materializing Magic Power: Chinese Popular Religion in Villages and Cities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015.

From the perspective of materialization, Lin studies the interaction between god statues and spirit mediums and how this interaction gives rise to the efficacy and magical power of deities. Moreover, Lin makes a comparison between rural and urban settings, suggesting the increasing significance of spirit mediums in configuring magical power in cities.

**Lu, Yunfeng, Byron Johnson, and Rodney Stark.** "Deregulation and the Religious Market in Taiwan: A Research Note." *Sociological Quarterly* 49.1 (2008): 139–153.

Following the religious economies paradigm, this study examines the religious trends in Taiwan after the deregulation of the late 1980s. It finds that the religious regulation suppresses organized religion but enhances the popularity of unchurched folk religion. Deregulation is also detected to be associated with the rise of congregational faiths.

**Nedostup, Rebecca R.** *Superstitious Regimes: Religion and the Politics of Chinese Modernity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009.

This book adopts a historical perspective and examines the interaction between religion and the state in the process of modernity construction between 1927 and 1937, the Nanjing Decade of Nationalist rule in China. Based on detailed historical archives, this work illustrates how secular nationalism influences the religious lives of local societies.

**Overmyer, Daniel L.** "From 'Feudal Superstition' to 'Popular Beliefs': New Directions in Mainland Chinese Studies of Chinese Folk Religion." *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 12 (2001): 103–126.

This article reviews some major studies of Chinese folk religion that have been conducted by domestic Chinese scholars since the 1990s, highlighting the emergence of the academic research of Chinese folk religion that shifts away from viewing folk religion to be superstition.

**Yang, Fenggang.** *Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

This book offers a political economy model of triple religious markets in China. While the supply of institutional religions are suppressed or constrained by the party-state, the demand for religion among the people becomes awakened and increasing in reform-era China, resulting in the legally approved "red market," the illegal but persistent "black market," and the legally ambiguous "gray market." Folk religion is prevalent in the gray market and some sectarian folk religions are in the black market.

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## Social Significance of Folk Religion

Studies reviewed in this section show the social consequences of folk religion in different fields. In general, the social effects of folk religion are still understudied. Among the limited number of studies, some focus on how folk religion is associated with people's public life, such as civic engagement and donation in Hu 2014, legal culture in Katz 2009, transcendence of political boundary in Yang 2008, and improvement of accountability of local government in Tsai 2007. It is noteworthy that folk religion can be the area for highlighting women's significance in a patriarchal society since there are many female deities in folk religion. This point of view has been addressed in Sangren 1993.

**Hu, Anning. "Gifts of Money and Gifts of Time: Folk Religion and Civic Involvement in a Chinese Society." *Review of Religious Research* 56.2 (2014): 313–335.**

This study investigates the potential effect of various types of Chinese folk religion on volunteering. Practicing ancestor worship is negatively associated with the likelihood of giving to secular organizations. Sectarian group membership has a positive effect on religious donation. Individual types of folk religion adherents donate more, and the major targets for them are Buddhism, Taoism, and folk religion.

**Katz, Paul R. *Divine Justice: Religion and the Development of Chinese Legal Culture*. London: Routledge, 2009.**

This book examines how folk religious beliefs and practices interact with the formation of Chinese legal culture. The author argues that the popular belief about retribution fosters the judicial idea of prevailing justice. Besides, many popular religious rituals have been integrated into legal practices, such as oaths, chicken beheadings, and underworld indictments.

**Sangren, Steven. "Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 9.1 (1993): 4–25.**

Sangren addresses the nuanced connection between female deities in Chinese folk religion and the unique role of women in society. Unlike the conventional theories about the parallel between secular and supernatural realms, Sangren points out that female deities are more powerful than women. Moreover, they mostly reflect the positive aspect of women's social life.

**Tsai, Lily. *Accountability without Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.**

Using both ethnographic and quantitative data, this book examines and highlights the positive functions of folk religion, as embodied by solidary groups and lineages, on the provision of public good and governance in local societies in contemporary China, even in case of weak formal democratic institutions of accountability. It finds that folk religion serves to provide norms and meanings to sanction local officials.

**Yang, Mayfair. "Goddess across the Taiwan Strait: Matrifocal Ritual Space, Nation-State, and Satellite Television Footprints." In *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation*. Edited by Yang Mayfair, 323–348. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.**

Following the pilgrimage organized by a prominent Mazu temple in Taiwan to Fujian Meizhou, Yang addresses how the polytheistic regional cult of Mazu transcends the monological, secular, and centralized national imaginary, which converges with the trans-strait expansion of the media space. In this fieldwork, Yang also discusses the characteristic female-centered kinship ritual space and its implications for the logic of matrilineal descent.

**Yang, Mayfair. "Shamanism and Spirit Possession in Chinese Modernity: Some Preliminary Reflections on a Gendered Religiosity of the Body." *Review of Religion and Chinese Society* 2.1 (2015): 51–86.**

This article argues that unlike shamanistic cultures in other societies, most spirit mediums in Wenzhou today are women who do not engage in the bloody and violent public ritual performances where male shamans predominate. It suggests an explanation of shamanism in

modern society by focusing on the bodily performances and gender of shamans, and places Chinese shamanism in the larger global context of a shared reconfiguration of the human body in global modernity.

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