

BOOK REVIEW

Blue Book of Religions: Annual Report on China's Religions (2008)

Reviewed by Roderick O'Brien

Blue Book of Religions: Annual Report on China's Religions (2008), edited by Jin Ze and Qiu Yonghui, published by Social Sciences Academic Press (China), 2008. ISBN 978-7-5097-0252-9. (In Chinese).

The Academy of Social Sciences publishes its first “Blue Book” on Religion. In recent years, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences has published a number of annuals in its “Blue Book” and “Green Book” Series. These have been useful for observers seeking to understand China, albeit through the restricted prism of the Academy. In 2008, the Academy published its first “Blue Book” on religion.¹ The English title proclaims it to be an annual report, so perhaps, like others in the Blue Book series, we can expect future issues.



¹ 金泽、邱永辉（主编）：《中国宗教报告（2008）》，北京，社会科学文献出版社，2008。

The editors are the deputy head of the CASS Institute of World Religions, Jin Ze, and Qiu Yonghui, one of the researchers in that department. The editors have provided us with two general reports (one by editor Qiu Yonghui), eight researches in special subjects, and six essays on “hot topics”. As might be expected from an Institute, which provides policy advice to the government about world religions, the Blue Book covers not only internal topics, but also international topics such as religion and China’s foreign affairs.

The Institute of World Religions is clearly struggling to adjust its research to the contemporary world situation. Far from disappearing according to Marxist dogma, religious issues have become more intrusive, especially in areas which impinge on China’s foreign policy. Gone are the days when China’s officials could flirt with religion in the Third World, while reserving their principal attention for the secular philosophies of capitalism and revisionist communism. Now the resurgence of political Islam is a key datum in China’s neighbourhood, and within China’s boundaries. Also, the policy-makers’ crude categorization of religion under the five officially approved religions is proving increasingly inadequate for responding to the growing complexity of belief in folk religions and in newly-emerging religions within China itself.

The articles show that researchers within the Academy are researching some of these topics. The hot topics include studies of religion and international security and international affairs. All of the articles would be of some interest to the readers of *Tripod*, but the article by Wang Meixiu on “Sino-Vatican Relations: Status Quo and Analysis” might be of special interest to some readers.

Each reader will have their own special interests: one of my interests is the development of China’s legal system. At the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China held in 2002, the then Secretary-General, Jiang Zemin, said that the Party was committed to building a complete system of law by 2010. But this target is far from being achieved. Liu Peng’s article “The Process of Legalization of Religions in China” surveys China’s regulations on

religion since the 1980s, and shows us how far away China still is from comprehensive legislation on religions. China's token legislature, the People's Congress, and its Standing Committee have yet to grapple with this topic. At present, China's regulations are not designed for the protection of the rights of believers, but for the guidance of China's officials. They are largely policy statements, giving wide latitude to the officials in administration. As Professor Liu points out, this is a key problem, which confronts the drafters of any law on religions. The officials can be expected to fight hard to maintain a system which gives them wide administrative discretion (and the opportunity to charge fees for the exercise of their discretion), while not giving believers any rights which might be enforceable against the state or its officials.

In his article on legalization, Professor Liu refers to the usual figure of 100 million believers in China. In fact, the number is certainly much higher. I have earlier written about the paucity of reliable data on religious belief in China.² There are some studies, published in China³ and abroad⁴, but this report contains just a few

² "Data on Religion in China," *Tripod*, vol XXVII (no. 147), pp. 28-34.

³ See, for example: [a] 孙轶玮：“当代中国人宗教信仰调查”，《瞭望东方周刊》2007年2月8日，28-33页。

[b] 王康：“在杭州高校大学生宗教信仰问题的现状及对策”，《当代宗教研究》2007年第1期；22-31，7页。

[c] 李晓宁：“校园‘宗教热’、‘民族热’现象对高校思想政治教育的影响及对策”，《云南民族大学学报（哲学社会科学版）》2008，9月，157页。

[d] 戴燕：“青海省基督教、天主教发展状况及社会影响研究”，《青海师范大学学报（哲学社会科学版）》2008，4期，41页。

[e] 冉益群：“民族宗教对倾销年思想道德的影响”，《中国青年政治学院学报》2008，5期，18页。

⁴ See, for examples, Paul Badham and Yao Xinzhong: *Religious Experience in Contemporary China*, University of Wales Press, 2007, and Brian Grim: "Religion in China on the Eve of the 2008 Olympics" (May 2008) <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=301>

items of data, without much context.⁵ This is in contrast with many other volumes in the Blue Book series, which are replete with data. Perhaps in future issues, we might see the Academy of Social Sciences take advantage of the growing availability of research data to change its overall approach to the study of religion in China and in the world.

The fact that the Academy of Social Sciences has now published a Blue Book on the topic of religion is itself encouraging. It brings the topic firmly into the mainstream of academic discussion, and provides a basis for academic and even public discussion of some of the issues. I look forward to the annual publication.

⁵ 金泽、邱永辉（主编）：《中国宗教报告（2008）》，北京，社会科学文献出版社，2008。This Report has some general data on religious adherents on page 72, some detail on Islam on pages 160-161, some detail on religious construction in Fujian on pages 193-194, and some data on Chinese sects at page 228。