

can be afforded from the source material and current state of knowledge, a circumstance, which, however, reflects the state of scholarship on the subject, where broad historical narratives are often presented. And finally, footnotes for more detailed or specific information would have been extremely useful and welcome, but due to the format and perhaps the intended readership of the book, these are regrettably not included. In such cases, the reader has best to refer to the bibliographical references arranged according to the treated topics.

To conclude, Michaels's volume is an important and very welcome contribution to the field of Nepal studies, providing a long-awaited updated history of Nepal, following earlier works with a similar aim from the last century, such as the general histories by Sylvain Lévi and Dilli Raman Regmi, and Mary Slusser's cultural history of the Kathmandu Valley. Despite the dense and complex interrelationships that are depicted, the work is clearly written and enjoyable to read, with vibrant descriptions of social, cultural and religious contexts and accounts of historical events. The volume also contains numerous translated text passages from original sources, which give insights into specific cultural and political events and satisfyingly pull the reader from the grand narrative to the specific source material, also for those who do not read the original languages. The volume also refers to often neglected and, for many, less accessible yet important scholarship of Nepalese scholars (see, e.g., pp. 244–249). While the volume has been written for a broader audience and will be extremely valuable for students or scholars of interrelated subjects such as art history or religious studies as well as for general historians, it is also of great interest to experts engaged directly in Nepal studies, as it provides new insights into cultural and historical developments (particularly of the 18th–20th centuries), brings together the main issues and latest directions in the field, and is accompanied by an extensive and up-to-date bibliography. For now, the volume has been published only in German; it is hoped that an English translation will soon follow to make this work more widely available.

*Nina Mirnig*

FENG YANGGANG, *Atlas of Religion in China: Social and Geographical Contexts*. Leiden: Brill, 2019. 247 pages, 154 maps, €229.00. ISBN 978-90-04-35885-0 (hardback), ISBN 978-90-04-36990-0 (e-book)

This book is a major accomplishment by a prominent student of religious life in the contemporary People's Republic of China (hereafter PRC), assisted by his graduate students, post-doctoral researchers and further specialists in

transferring information to maps. As I am a big fan of putting information into maps, but quite illiterate in modern map-making programs, I was very pleased at the opportunity to review this book. Having read it I am still quite happy, although predictably I have my comments and criticisms as well. Generally, I would not recommend the atlas as an introduction to the topic, but in combination with a general introduction to Chinese religious life today that uses a different conceptual framework. Similarly, Feng is well known for his personal connections to the Protestant church (including extensive funding by the John Templeton Foundation) and this is evident in the clear-cut institutional categories that he has adopted in this atlas and his own earlier research. This is not a fundamental objection in my eyes, but it is something to be kept in mind when using this excellent atlas.

Feng Yanggang is not the first to analyse Chinese religious life by means of maps. That honour should go to Father Willem Grootaers (1911–1999) of the Flemish missionary order “Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary” (or Scheut). Inspired by the work of his father, the dialectologist Ludovic Grootaers (1885–1956), he analysed local temples in northern China using detailed maps. His publications (including marvellous maps) from the late 1940s and early 1950s can be found amongst others in *Monumenta Serica* and *Folklore Studies* as well as partly in book format. Grootaers used maps on the county or city level to discover very local, detailed variations in the arrangement of shrines and other devotional phenomena. Feng Yanggang operates on a much higher level of abstraction, from the county to (mostly) the province or even the entire country. The reader should be aware of the kind of simplification that using such large units entails, especially when using this atlas for teaching or further research.

Counting means making choices about what to include and what to leave out, and mapping means drawing clear borders. Feng is well aware of this and spells out very clearly in the beginning of the atlas his particular framework for doing so, which is therefore crucial reading material. He divides religion in China into a legal or “red” market (as defined by the PRC state), a “grey” market (where he includes Confucianism and Folk Religion – his terms) and a “black” market (the illegal religions, again as defined by the PRC state), developed on the basis of the religious market theory of R. Stark and W.S. Bainbridge. The notion of a grey market is Feng’s most relevant adaptation of the theory, to make it applicable to the Chinese case in which the seemingly clear-cut institutions that we have in the West are not always present, but where there are still a large number of diffuse religious activities (captured here under the term “folk religion”). The legal – or red – and illegal black markets both remain labels for countable forms of religious activity, although the black market is much less understood for want of reliable surveys. After all, to take the most persecuted group of them all, the Falun Gong still has adherents

in China today, but nobody really knows how many and where. The brief discussion of this movement (pp. 64–65) also illustrates the pitfalls of using materials on persecution, since all the estimates for its original followers are extremely speculative and most likely too high. All in all, the topographical approach works well with the kind of large-scale data we have for the PRC, since Chinese researchers generally focus explicitly on religious institutions and specialists, rather than on actual believers. Different understandings of a religious dimension of life in general or of a particular religious institution might yield different results, but would be hard to carry out in the specific political context of the PRC.

In many respects including Taiwan as a methodological counterpoint would have been quite interesting, as there is much more available data to allow a more detailed geographical approach. Taiwan has had complete freedom of religion since the late 1980s and relative freedom before that (as compared to the PRC), which yields a different religious situation (in addition to any other regional specificities) and allows very detailed sociological surveying. Furthermore, this could have provided a much more nuanced investigation into religiosity without adhering to a specific institution, something that has proven quite important in the Western European scene, with a decrease in institutional strength over the last century, but not necessarily a complete loss of religiosity *per se*.

Using Feng's framework yields some interesting, though sometimes debatable results. Thus, by accepting the PRC notion of the five legal religions of Buddhism, Islam, Daoism, Protestantism and Catholicism, he defines religious life first and foremost as bound up with institutions. While this may work for Protestantism and Catholicism (but only in so far as we succeed in including the hard-to-track house churches of the first and the semi-underground church of the second), it does not work for Buddhism and even less for Daoism. These traditions were always first and foremost providers of ritual (something that could also be argued for some aspects of Catholicism, certainly those above ground) and whether a layperson was or is also Buddhist or (very rarely) Daoist is extremely hard to ascertain. I would myself call many traditional lay religious groups such as the Non-Action Teachings which I studied extensively myself, and which still linger on in the south and on Taiwan (though nowhere discussed in this book), or the Red Yang Teachings that still linger on in eastern China (around Tianjin) lay Buddhist in nature. The many volunteers in Buddhist monasteries and/or ad hoc followers of prominent monks are probably also not effectively captured in the statistics, whether in the red or legal market, or in the grey or informal market. Defining lay Buddhists as those who have taken a vow (p. 19) does not entirely solve the problem of measuring the larger impact of Buddhist ritual specialists, as opposed to Buddhist believers. And one might wonder whether taking a vow is so crucial in label-

ling someone as a lay Buddhist believer. Historically at least, it was not. Only very few people took a vow and far more people relied on Buddhist practices or rituals in more informal or even ad hoc ways (for instance sutra recitation by elderly people or hiring priests for funerals). Alternatively, accepting the PRC definitions makes Protestant Christianity appear very strong (p. 12) and while this certainly conforms to fears within the Communist Party apparatus, it is also partly shaped by the choice of what to measure as religion. Feng pays considerable attention to such issues, so it is important to read the detailed narrative that comes with the maps and not just to look at the maps for quick and often mistaken conclusions.

What cannot be caught in the maps are differences between urban and rural regions. Feng is certainly aware of this, pointing it out for Buddhism (p. 20) and Protestantism (p. 32), for instance. Here we are talking about the red market; since we do not know the size or spread of these and other religions in the grey market, such distributions are of course of limited usefulness. Similarly, one wonders how reliable the systematically mentioned self-reporting of membership in the Chinese Communist Party or Chinese Communist Youth League is (pp. 20, 27, 33, 39, 43). As the author points out, members are supposed to be atheist, so people who are religious (especially if only at home) would usually hide this fact. In the future, given the current repression of religion in general and of membership of religious organisations for party members and government officials in particular, this discrepancy between real religious identity and public confession to this identity will only grow. Thus, as far as the party is concerned we could say that even the official legal religions belong to the grey market, rather than the red one.

The problem of definitions is different still for Confucianism. The labels Buddhism, Confucianism as well as Daoism are Western labels that only came into being as -isms since the very late 18th century, in the sequence mentioned here. Buddhism and Daoism are actually labels for ritual specialists and monastics (only very few of them were “believers” in the post-Reformation sense), but at least we tend to agree roughly on what they meant in the 19th and 20th centuries or even before the invention of these terms. This is not the case for Confucianism, which was initially taken by mostly missionary authors to refer to religious activities such as the worship of Confucius and ancestors, and only much later came to refer more selectively to a philosophical tradition. When we include ancestor worship within this label (as Feng does, and I agree this makes good sense within his framework), we face the problem that the Chinese state does not. I also doubt that many Chinese would identify ancestor worship as Confucian, and indeed it is traditionally much more strongly connected with Buddhist and even Daoist ritual practices. Moreover, there are different degrees of worship as well, according to the specific social history of this practice in the late imperial period. In southern China (especial-

ly the cultural regions where Hakka, Fujianese and Cantonese language variants were spoken) the lineage could be several generations deep, creating rather large meaningful kin groups. In other parts of China collective ancestor worship was much more limited in generational depth. Thus, the requisite survey for a hypothetical map of ancestor worship would have to differentiate between these degrees and would also need to take Buddhist and/or Daoist aspects into account.

Another aspect that is not easily captured in maps is the relevance of the unit of a religious site. For example, there is a highly varying ratio of sites of any religious background to the size of the population. When two counties have ten sites and one of the two has 100,000 inhabitants and the other has 1,000,000 inhabitants, then the relevance of having ten sites is quite different, but that would not show up on the map. Similarly, given that Buddhist and Daoist institutions are inhabited by a varying number of specialists, whereas churches are not, a single Buddhist or Daoist site might be able to serve far more people than a church, at least as far as life cycle rituals are concerned. This also means that the weight of such an institution is very different from a Christian one.

The distribution of sites in the maps also raises interesting questions. In Map 6 (p. 28) the whole region of Beijing is shown without any Protestant sites, but this is corrected on pp. 76–77 and is evidently a mistake. In the same map the province of Shandong is also surprisingly sparsely covered by Protestant sites. The region has had a long tradition of Western missionary activity since the late 19th century, much like neighbouring Henan, where Protestant sites abound (see two maps on p. 28 and p. 150). The maps here conform with the more detailed description of Shandong elsewhere (pp. 142–146), suggesting that Protestant sites are largely limited to the western part of the province. I find it hard to believe that a place like the former German colony of Qingdao would not have more than the single Protestant site that is now shown on the map. The same section also introduces a new place name (Shangdong, which I assume is just a typo) and refers to the existence of indigenous Christian sects (pp. 145–146). These sects cannot be captured in maps due to a lack of information, but this again points to a further difficulty in this kind of exercise. While people in the field, including Feng himself of course, are well aware that a map of Protestant sites can only refer exclusively to officially recognised sites, the uninitiated reader (such as our students) will easily jump to the conclusion that they in fact reflect real distributions of actual beliefs. As a larger religious force, Protestant traditions may well be much stronger in Shandong than the maps can show.

As a keen lover of maps and admirer of the work of Willem Grootaers, there is a final observation I would like to make in concluding this review. Provinces are very large units, more akin to states in Northern America and

countries (or groups of countries) in Europe. To take the above example of Shandong, if the figures are right and Protestant sites are largely limited to specific parts of the province, then providing a provincial distribution of religious sites (Figure 23 on p. 145) is quite meaningless. A much more interesting map would be to relate the present state of officially recognised Protestant sites as well as the present state of prohibited and/or indigenous Protestant sites to the history of Western missionary activity or various economic criteria. What the work of Grootaers showed (and I have been able to make similar observations in work of my own), is that religious phenomena are not necessarily distributed according to political boundaries such as those used perhaps unavoidably in this atlas, but according to natural borders (think of mountains that block and rivers that can both block and connect), trade routes, economic development and so on. Missionary history may be another factor here. Large units such as provinces and probably even prefectures do not allow us to see the kind of gradual change and difference that usually occurs with religious phenomena. The Putian region in central coastal Fujian, studied in detail by Ken Dean and Zheng Zhenman in their magnificent *Ritual Alliances of the Putian Plain* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), is really the exception that proves the rule. Here we do have a fairly detailed (and undoubtedly still incomplete) analysis. Indeed, it may be the only region in China for which we have a topographical analysis that includes not only official religious institutions within the state framework (such as presented on pp. 133–137), but also a wealth of others, some more Buddhist and others indeed more Confucian – if we wish to stick to these problematic labels. Indeed, Dean and Zheng present extensive topographical information, showing how local temple associations help to integrate larger geographical units based on socio-economic needs. Such detail is not evident in the atlas under discussion.

After the work by Willem Grootaers, this atlas by Feng Yanggang is a major step forward. He and his team have stuck their necks out and provided us with a useful and innovative tool for understanding religious culture in contemporary China. I for one will certainly use it in teaching and research, both to agree with it and to take it as a point of departure for further debate. I also hope that others will feel inspired to use more maps in understanding religious culture in China today. When they do they will find that a surprising amount of the available research deals with a very small set of places, usually urban and usually mainstream officially recognised institutions. Let us stop treating China as a single analytical category, but give it the detailed and localised understanding that its many constituent parts deserve.

*Barend ter Haar*