

None of this is to suggest that this research is entirely convincing, however. I have some doubts about the wisdom of research carried out entirely by Chinese interviewers and supervised by the Research Centre for Contemporary China in Beijing University. The questions being asked of the population do go to the heart of the CCP post-Mao “project”, and the nationalism rife amongst Chinese students and in so many quarters of the Chinese intellectual establishment does make me wonder whether the interviewees have been “pushed” towards offering a more positive view of China than is the reality. I would have been a little less uneasy if Western-based social scientists had supervised the interviewing process.

I think also that some of the interpretations offered by Whyte are a little Panglossian. After all, one of the key findings is that around 72 per cent of those interviewed thought Chinese income inequality was excessive. In the hands of a different scholar, that sort of finding could be given a very different “spin”. However, Whyte chooses to understate that conclusion, and focuses more on other issues such as what interviewees saw as the reasons for the high degree of inequality.

It is also a pity that Whyte did not explore in more detail one of the most interesting results of his research—namely that, although 72 per cent thought inequality excessive in China as a whole, only 30–40 per cent thought it excessive in their neighborhood or workplace. That suggests to me a perception that the main cause of inequality in China is spatial, which opens up a whole range of questions that could usefully have been explored further. In fairness, Whyte discusses the urban–rural issue in some detail, but the more general issue of spatial inequality deserved a fuller treatment.

These quibbles notwithstanding, this is a fine book and an invaluable contribution to the debates on inequality and social stability in China. It is written in an accessible style and will be read with great profit by anyone interested in these issues. Whyte’s work is based on scholarship of a high order, and it is only the clarity with which he outlines his methodology that allows me to question some aspects of his work. A lesser scholar would have hidden away some of these assumptions and the more inconvenient pieces of data.

Chris Bramall
School of Oriental and African Studies

China: A Religious State, by John Lagerwey. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010. viii + 237 pp. HK\$125.00/US\$16.95 (paperback).

Is China a religious state? Some armchair students suggest not. They think that China is perhaps the least religious society in the world. However, in his vibrant new book, *China: A Religious State*, John Lagerwey offers a different picture: that China is a sacred state where religion has had strong and pervasive influence.

The book first probes why Westerners held that China had no religion of its own. According to Lagerwey, the Jesuits played important roles in constructing China’s image as a philosopher’s republic and a state without religion. The Jesuits

thought that Confucian rites, focusing on remembrance of the ancestors, were not a kind of worship, so that Confucianism was not “religious” in nature; Buddhism was not only foreign but also in decline; Daoism was nothing more than a gathering of superstitions; in sum, China had no religion comparable to the Roman Church. Arguing against this view which once dominated Western studies of China, Lagerwey suggests that “Confucianism is a religion involving blood sacrifices to the ancestors, to the gods recognized by the state, and to Heaven (by his Son, the emperor); Buddhism was indeed of foreign origin but not only did it ‘conquer’ China, it rapidly Sinicized and became an integral and permanent part of Chinese religion and society; the Daoist religion is a complex synthesis of Chinese cosmology, Daoist philosophy, Confucian ethics, Buddhist philosophy and rituals, and shamanistic practices” (pp. 6-7). To summarize, China is a religious state, a sacred space inhabited by divine energies. If we use a word to describe China, *Shenzhou* would be a good choice, meaning literally a “continent of the spirits”.

One of the book’s most important contributions is its bridging of history and ethnography. When investigating religion, historians are interested in the past and in what has changed, while ethnographers pay more attention to the contemporary and to functionality. This book is “the product of an internal dialogue” (p. 172) between the two disciplines. The four substantial chapters are organized to challenge the conventional wisdom that China had no religion. The first two chapters are based on the historical data, and the next two are mainly the analysis of ethnographic findings.

The first chapter provides a historical examination of ancestors and gods in state and local religion and politics, finding that the state exerted much influence on the fate of gods and ancestors. In the Shang era, ancestors were important; each time when the Shang conquered a new area, they set up an earth god altar and made sacrifices to the ancestors. The power of the ancestors, however, diminished over time, especially during the Ming dynasty which stressed supreme duties without family relationships. The decline of the ancestors’ importance illustrates that politics defines the features of Chinese religious history, and that no religious movements or gods could become successful without government recognition and support.

Government involvement did not lessen the importance of religion in China, however. On the contrary, religion shaped Chinese society and politics. Chapter 2 looks at Daoist rituals in Chinese history, arguing that Daoism was not only “central to political legitimacy” (p. 173) but also an integral part of social life. The strength of Daoism came from its bureaucratic system, its ability to continually create scriptures, and its flexibility in absorbing beliefs popular in local societies. Daoist scriptures were so universal in China that many novels, such as *Fengsheng bang*, reflected Daoist gods and themes. In a sense, Lagerwey argues, China “is essentially Daoist” (p. 93).

In Chapter 3, Lagerwey shows us Chinese local society as a “god-generating machine” (p. 54) by presenting the richness of ethnographic materials related to festivals in southeastern China. He identifies several kinds: village festivals,

market town festivals, county seat festivals, mountain temple festivals and religious festivals whose attendees are primarily women. Each kind has a couple of subtypes. For example, among county seat festivals, we can find festivals celebrating Chinese New Year or the *duan wu* and festivals worshipping the city god. Lagerwey provides details in each case: the god or gods to which it is dedicated, its organization, its values and its relationship to Buddhism and Daoism. The themes and gods presented in historical Daoist liturgies are still alive in contemporary China; although the state bureaucracy tries to exert influence on these festivals, they are to a large degree the people's religion, and people organize and finance the festivities themselves.

Chapter 4 looks at the rational character of local religion. To facilitate the discussion, Lagerwey generates an imaginary village as a Weberian "ideal type". This village is occupied by a couple of surname groups, who compete with each other for limited resources of land and water. Geomancy and religious rituals are developed against this competitive background. For Lagerwey, religion in Chinese local society has been "a complex system of symbolic acts [that] maximized the chances of the actors for survival" while also offering some chance of "justice, fairness, equality, and luck" (p. 154). In this sense, Chinese religion is rational.

The only criticism that I can offer concerns the concluding chapter. Overall, Lagerwey's historical studies, ethnographic data and theoretical training allow him to discuss the religious dimensions of China in depth, but he does not return to the core question that he asks in the beginning: is China a religious state? Instead, he concludes the book by asking, "what happened to the Daoist church?" (p. 172). I can understand that Lagerwey, a specialist in Daoism, would like to say more about this subject. However, I am interested in the following questions: if China was and is a religious state, what are the differences between China and Judeo-Christian societies with regard to "religion"? How could this argument contribute to a theoretical understanding towards China's religion? What should we study in future? Unfortunately, it seems that Lagerwey is not interested in these questions.

This weakness is, however, far outweighed by the book's contribution to the field, and I was thoroughly convinced by the argument that that China is a religious state and that we should study and understand China's religion rather than "laughing at it or destroying it" (p. 154).

Yunfeng Lu
Peking University

Celebrity in China, edited by Louise Edwards and Elaine Jeffreys. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010. xii + 286 pp. HK\$395.00/US\$50.00 (hardcover), HK\$195.00/US\$25.00 (paperback).

The New York based pop artist Andy Warhol once commented that in the future everyone would be famous for fifteen minutes. More recently, the celebrity pundit Germaine Greer opined that a new journal called *Celebrity Studies* would not last