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# Places of Worship in China

|| Some Observations  
from the Case of Christianity in the Taian Region  
of Shandong Province, PRC  
by Peter Tze Ming Ng

## Introduction

A few years ago, I met a French sinologist in Hong Kong. We talked about the places of worship in China. The scholar reminded me that Beijing was a holy place in China. There had been at one time in her history more than 10,000 temples in the city. We can still find traces of these today, like the Temple of Heaven (天壇), the Temple of the Earth (地壇), the Temple of the Sun (日壇), the Temple of the Moon (月壇), etc., etc. And we talked about the Temple of the Eastern Mountain (東嶽廟) in Beijing where the Emperors went to worship God in the old days when they were enthroned and when there were important decisions to be made. Then in 1999 I had a chance to visit Beijing and I deliberately planned to visit the Temple of the Eastern Mountain. I asked a friend of mine, who was working in the State Bureau of Religious Affairs, for help, assuming that she must know some of the important religious sites, but unfortunately she could not find its location. I was not frustrated yet; I bought a map of the city and luckily I found a street called »Way to God Street« (»Shenlujie = 神路街«), so I took a taxi there and walked all the way to the end of the road. There I found the old Temple of the Eastern Mountain. Later I started a research project on three Christian churches in the Taian region near Mount Tai (泰山) where the original Temple of the Eastern Mountain was located in the Shandong Province of China. The three sites are: the Beixinzhuang Church in Mazhuang (馬莊), the Catholic Church in Manzhuang (滿莊) and the Qingnianlu Church (青年路教會) in Taianshi (泰山).

There may be different ways of doing research in the sociology of religion.<sup>1</sup> Some may like to do empirical research, to make up questionnaires, to collect statistical data for analysis, etc. Some may simply do field visits, conduct open-end interviews and make direct observations. The former type is a quantitative approach based on a logical-positivistic style which is more suitable for theory-testing research. The latter type is a qualitative approach based more on a phenomenological-humanistic style which is more suitable for theory-building research. Both are significant and relevant to the study of the sociology of religion. They are indeed complementary to one another. The present investigation is a preliminary work on the study of Christian places of worship in China. We all understand that no one could formulate any workable hypothesis or draw up any relevant questionnaire for statistical research without first attempting to make some field visits and preliminary observations or interviews. So, the present study aims to start with some field work on a small region in China, to attempt to do intensive and open-end interviews,

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. M. B. MCGURIE, *Religion: The Social Context*, Belmont 1987: Ch. 1, »The Sociological Perspective on Religion«, 3-20; Keith A. ROBERT, *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, Belmont 1995.



and to include the researcher's more close-up observations. It is hoped that by means of this preliminary study some interesting findings can be obtained and some significant points for discussion can be discerned, so that it will help scholars to construct hypotheses or theories later and to work on more substantial theory-building research and theory-testing research which are yet to come.

## 1 Three Christian Churches in Taian

Below is some historical and social background information about the three Christian churches under study:

### 1.1 Beixinzhuang (北新莊) Church at Mazhuang (馬莊)

Beixinzhuang (北新莊) Church at Mazhuang (馬莊) is located at the south-west corner of Taian county, about an hour's drive from Taianshi. It was the birthplace of the Jesus Family which was a well known Christian sect in China (cf. Tao paper in the Social Sciences Journal). Its fame reached its peak in the 1940's and its members spread all over China. The church was restored after the open door policy in 1979. In 1999, Beixinzhuang Church was connected to 17 meeting points in Mazhuang with a total of 553 church members. The church remains as a small peasant village church in the county; theologically it is fundamentalist and Pentecostal. Since 2003 Beixinzhuang Church has been allowed to »re-furnish« (or »re-build«) in order to accommodate more members. The building should be completed by the end of 2004 and will then accommodate about 700 members.

### 1.2 Catholic Church at Manzhuang (滿莊)

The Catholic Church at Manzhuang (滿莊) is located 10 kilometer south of Taianshi, about a 40-minute drive from the city. The Catholic Church has a 400-year history dating from the time of Matteo Ricci and the Catholic missionaries during the Ming Dynasty. The church has remained a peasant church. By the year 1987 there were nearly 600 Catholics in the village, and by 2000 the number rose to 700, comprising almost 10% of the village population. They have re-built a double-towered Gothic-style church in the village. The church has been re-built in several stages since the 1990's and it can now accommodate 1000 people for worship. It is quite a huge church in the countryside and can be seen from far away. Inside the church building there hangs a certificate issued by the Pope in Rome in 2001 which bestows his blessings on the work of the priests at Manzhuang. Since the Catholics have been keeping their Christian faith for generations, they have incorporated the local Chinese customs and beliefs into their Catholics faith. They have, so to speak, indigenized their worship in a Chinese way.

### 1.3 Qingnianlu Church (青年路教會) in Taianshi (泰山市)

Qingnianlu Church (青年路教會) in Taianshi (泰山市) is located within the city of Taian, on the northern section of Qingnianlu. The Church can be traced back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Methodist Episcopal Mission set up a church and a school on No. 2 Dengyunjie (登雲街) in the same location of Taianshi. The Church was reopened in 1987 and is now registered under the National Three-self Patriotic Church. The church



structure was built with stones from Taishan and looks very much like a village church in England in the UK. At the front gate there are huge Chinese characters on the wall, »Aiguo Aijiao, zongshen Yiren« (愛國愛教, 榮神益人), which means »loving the country as loving one's religion, glorifying God as doing good to others«. Since Taianshi is not a big city, but just a small town in the Shandong Province, the Qingnianlu Church looks like something between a city church and a peasant church. There are around 700-800 members registered in this church.

## 2 Some Revealing Observations

When talking about Christian »places of worship« in China, people often classify them into three categories: (1) »Christian churches« – they are readily visible with distinctive church buildings, and they are registered with the government; (2) »Meeting Places« – they are places where Christians often meet in groups, mostly within a Christian family and attended by Christians from the neighborhood, and most of them are registered with the government; (3) »Family Churches« – they are so-called »underground Christian groups« who meet in families, and they are mostly not registered with the government.<sup>2</sup> The distinctions among these groups were obvious some twenty years ago, but over the years many family churches began to register with the government, and the development has been such that the distinctions are not as clear as before. The present situation is that a great variety of Christian groups exist in China, at least in the region under study, including: those who belong to the »Three-self Churches«; those who attend the Three-self Church on Sunday and maintain their own family worship (Bible-study and prayer meetings) during the other days of the week; those who are registered with the government and have their own church or meeting places, although they do not join the Three-self Church; and some Christians who believe that God is everywhere so that they can worship God anywhere they like. They may not join the Three-self Churches as they are suspicious of their relationship with the government. They may simply gather to form their own family churches.

People often think of three characteristic features when reflecting on Christian churches in China. They are, namely: »many women«, »many elderly« and »many uneducated«.<sup>3</sup> This is especially true in the rural villages like Mazhuang. The pastor Zhang of the Beixinzhuang Church, who was 68, reported that their young people have all moved out of the village for their university education in distant towns or cities (like Taianshi and Jinan), and that even when they were finished, they would have to find jobs outside. Very few come back to the village and hence only the elderly and the less educated remain in the village. This is a real problem in the remote villages of China. Another related problem is that the village church is in no way attractive to young people or young pastors. For instance, Pastor Zhang also reported that they had sent two young members of the church to receive seminary training at Shandong Theological Seminary in Jinan. However, upon their graduation, one went for further study at Nanjing Theological Seminary, which is the top, national seminary in China, and that student did not return to the mother church after his further studies; the other one went to start another church in a more populated

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. discussions in Joe DUNN, *The Protestant Church in China*, in: Julian PAS (Ed.), *The Turning of the Tide*, Hong Kong 1989; Alan HUNTER / Kim-Kwong CHAN, *Protestantism in Contemporary China*, Cambridge 1993.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Raymond FUNG, *Households of God in China's Soil*, Geneva 1982; Ka Lun LEUNG, *The Rural Churches of Mainland China Since 1978*, Hong Kong 1999.



town in Qingzhou. Worse still, Zhang explained that there was a tradition in the Jesus Family that they would not pay for the salary of their pastor so that the pastor has to have faith in God's providence. Such thinking discourages the young people from serving the church today. Furthermore, since most of the church members are elderly and uneducated, it is not attractive to young pastors who want more challenging and satisfying jobs in the cities. This remains a serious problem in the rural churches in China.

The situation was a bit better in Manzhuang. The Catholic Church has built stronger family ties among the members. Some of the young members have been sent to seminaries at the age of 15, and they have had to receive seminary training for 8 years. The Catholics are better organized and more properly prepared for their ministry. The seminarians have to be obedient under the direction of their church once they have committed themselves to a life-long career as priests. The churches require their seminarians to have practical training under their own priests and assign them to jobs in different churches. Hence, there were more different and more challenging jobs for the seminarians. I interviewed one of the seminarians at Manzhuang, and he was enjoying his practice training in the church and was looking forward to his new assignment in another church in Wuzhang upon his graduation in a few months' time.

As the churches under study are village churches, it was found that there are some characteristic features there. The Chinese farmers are very busy working on their farms, especially during harvest times. Though they have become Christians, they either cannot afford to give away their time for worship every Sunday, or they are not accustomed to attending church services every Sunday as we are in the cities. I visited one church in which the pastor admitted this fact and reported that though they have a few hundred church members, there are only 20 or so members at the Sunday services. Most of the Church members can attend the village church only once a month, so they have what they call »monthly meetings« on the first day of every lunar month. It may not fall on a Sunday, but on that first day of the lunar month, Christian farmers go to church for the whole morning. They come to the church early in the morning (they are rather hard-working) at around 5 a.m. They gather at the church to sing praise, give thanksgiving, listen to sermons, enjoy fellowship, and have »agape« lunch together. They have to go back to their farms after lunch. So these farmers may come to the church once a month, according to their village style of life. Nevertheless, the churches still holds Sunday services and Bible classes, and the Catholic Church has morning, lunchtime and evening prayers every day. The attendance for normal services was as small as 20 or 30, whereas the number attending the monthly meetings or great festivals reached as high as a few hundred to a thousand. A similar situation was found in the Beixinzhuang Church and the Catholic Church in Manzhuang. The situation at the Qingnianlu Church in Taianshi was a bit different and was found to be closer to that in the cities where church members are accustomed to attending Sunday services. There are about 300 members who attend Sunday services regularly and about 30 have joined the youth fellowship meeting every Sunday afternoon. Besides Sunday worship, there are morning prayers every day from 4:30 a.m. to 6:00 a.m., with the attendance of church members ranging between 20-30. In addition, church members are more eager to attend Bible study and prayer groups which are held at family homes or »meeting points«. There are more than 15 meeting points in the city of Taian, according to one member of the church, and each meeting place has about 10-20 members who gather for meetings on every Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings. So, unlike the village farmers, the city members are more willing to attend church or Christian activities.



Besides these church groups, there are also unregistered family groups in the Taian region. Some Christians may not be willing to join the Three-self Churches because there are problems in the church and the Christians may not like the way the problems are tackled. Some Christians chose to join the unregistered family groups because they believed that God is everywhere and so they can worship Him anywhere, even outside the Church, beyond the four walls of the church building. Also, they believed that the most important thing about becoming a Christian was not to become a member of the Three-self Church, but to have a good and proper relationship with God, to read the Bible daily, to learn to pray to God directly and daily, and to have fellowship with other Christians, and they could do all of this without joining the Three-self Church.

According to Rodney Stark, »social capital« is one of the most important factors for Christian conversions and for preserving the Christian faith.<sup>4</sup> So often before people converted, they were recruited to become members of a religious community and it was the establishment of friendship with the Christian members which resulted in Christian conversions. Indeed it was also this kind of interpersonal relationship/network (or social capital) that helped the one to keep the faith. This was especially so when the Chinese Christian church had to struggle to survive during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960's. For instance, though the churches had to be closed during the difficult years and no worship was allowed to be conducted in the churches, the Christians could still read the Bible privately (or secretly) in their homes. It may sound ironical, but Chinese Christians could keep their faith during the Cultural Revolution because of the interpersonal relationships (such social capitals) that kept Christians together. Despite all the efforts (persecution or education, etc.) by the Chinese government to suppress the spread of Christianity in China since the 1950's on to the 1980's, the Chinese Christians could still preserve their faith. They could meet at homes with family members, with their near kin, and with friends and close neighbors. All these Rodney Stark has classified as »social capital«. As for the Catholics, they could also keep their faith by reading their morning and evening prayers at home which could be done by laymen, without the presence of a priest. Especially in one village all the family members were Catholics. They could quietly continue their prayers and worship at home even when the church was closed. They lived in the house right next to the church. Members could not go to the church, but they could go next door for services. Indeed, it was reported that before the 1960's all Catholic church services were conducted in Latin, but then they were all changed (or translated) into Chinese during the Cultural Revolution. More responsive chants were adopted so that the church members could have greater participation and the chants were indigenized with more Chinese tunes (it sounds somewhat like Buddhist chanting). Hence the indigenization process was strengthened during the Cultural Revolution.

During my visits, I found out that many Catholics were third or fourth generation believers. This was especially the case in the Catholic Church in Manzhuang and the Beixinzhuang Church in Mazhuang. In other words, the Catholic faith had not been broken in China in the last two centuries even though the Qing government had stopped all missionary work in the eighteenth century and the Communist government had stopped all Church activities in the 1950's. The Catholics and Protestants were still able to

4 See Rodney STARK / Roger FINKE, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*, Berkeley 2000, 118-120.



survive those difficult years. And the concept of social capital is found to be most relevant to them. Especially in the Catholic Church in Manzhuang, there was a very strong clan linkage which has not only kept the social capital alive in the village, but also helped the church to survive throughout the centuries.

### 3 The concept of Conversion as understood by Stark

According to Rodney Stark, there are two kinds of »Religious Choices«, namely »Conversion« and »Re-affiliation«. »Conversion refers to shifts across religious traditions« and »Re-affiliation refers to shifts within religious traditions.«<sup>5</sup> Stark often compares his social-sciences approach with the approaches of religious theorists who base their interpretations on theological assumptions. According to Stark, most of the studies of conversion by the religious theorists tend to stress the rational aspects – hence, conversion is seen as the culmination of a conscious search for faith. However, social scientists like Stark have a different explanation. They would rather say that »most converts do not so much find a new faith as the new faith finds them.«<sup>6</sup> In other words, new converts are drawn to a religious community through their network ties to members as they are recruited by the religious community. It is when they are converted that they began to adopt a new theology to re-tell their conversion experiences as the end result of a self-conscious search for faith.<sup>7</sup> Stark discovers that »social networks make religious beliefs plausible and new social networks make new religious beliefs plausible.«<sup>8</sup> Thus he remarks, »conversion is seldom about seeking or embracing an ideology; it is about bringing one's religious behavior into alignment with that of one's friends and family members.«<sup>9</sup>

In his book, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*, Stark also suggests that, as far as conversion is concerned, rationality is only of secondary importance; relationship is more important than rationality. Hence, he introduces two new concepts, namely: »social capital« or »religious capital«. He explains, »social capital consists of interpersonal attachments«, and »in making religious choices, most people will attempt to conserve their social capital, i.e. their interpersonal attachments.«<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, religious capital consists of two parts which can roughly be identified as culture and emotions. »Religious culture refers to the sum total of human creation: intellectual, technical and moral« and »religious emotions refer to the effects of religious activities such as prayers, rituals, miracles and mystical experiences and build up over a period of time which in some ways helps to strengthen the emotional and cultural investments and become one's religious capital.«<sup>11</sup> One of Stark's propositions regarding the acts of faith states: »When people convert, they will tend to select an option that maximizes their conservation of religious capital.«<sup>12</sup>

Stark's theory is very useful for understanding Chinese conversion experiences. I will illustrate some examples from the three places under study to verify and comment on Stark's theory. Much of Stark's understanding correlates with Christian experiences in China, and there are a couple of areas in which the Chinese experiences can help enlighten Stark's theory.

5 *ibid.*, 114.

6 *ibid.*, 122.

7 *ibid.*, 122f.

8 *ibid.*, 117.

9 *ibid.*

10 *ibid.*, 119.

11 *ibid.*, 120f.

12 *ibid.*, 123.



#### 4 Some Points for Discussion

In the study of Christian conversion experiences in these three villages, Stark's theory has been found to be very helpful. Some points of special relevance for further discussions follow:

##### 4.1 Chinese Christian conversion experiences are shifts from non-Christian religions

According to Stark's classification, there are two kinds of religious choices, namely conversion and re-affiliation. Most of the conversion experiences found in China belong to the first type of conversion, namely »the shift of faith from other religions to Christianity«. Since the Cultural Revolution in the 1960's, China has moved beyond the era of Christian denominationalism; the situation now is what is called »the post-denominational period of Christianity« in China. The Chinese no longer need to consider any change of denominational affiliations within the Christian religion. So the conversion experiences are meant to be »changes from non-Christian religions to the Christian religions, whether it is Roman Catholicism (jiu jiao) or Protestantism (xin jiao)«. And in the cases found in the Taian region, they are mostly the conversion from the Chinese folk religions to Christianity. As the Taian region includes the different villages surrounding Mount Tai (Taishan), the popular Chinese beliefs found in the Taian region are the worship of The Goddess of Tai or Mother Tai in the company of other Daoist or Buddhist gods such as »Kwun Yin«, »Kwan Ti«, »Lu Zhu« and others. People converting to Christianity are mostly turning their beliefs in popular deities into the belief in Jesus Christ. It is interesting to note that Stark has one proposition which states: »when people convert, they will tend to select an option that maximizes their conservation of religious capital«. Stark mentions an example from Mormonism, saying that when people converted from Christianity to Mormonism, they could keep the Christian culture as well, preserving their religious capital while simply adding one more book to Scripture, the Book of Mormon.<sup>13</sup> Stark also quotes from Yang Fenggang, confirming that the Chinese Christian churches in the United States emphasized the compatibility of Confucianism and Protestantism which in some way helped Chinese converts preserve their religious cultural capital. Similar cases can be found on the Mainland where Christianity has been lived out in many incidences as a form of folk religion in China; when the Chinese are converted to Christianity, they need only add »the name of Jesus« to replace or to be placed on top of other names.<sup>14</sup> The Chinese converts still pray to Jesus in much the same way as they did to the other gods, so their choice can still be seen as that »which maximizes the conservation of religious capital«.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, 123.

<sup>14</sup> For reference, see also the discussion of Chinese religiosity in HOUJIE / FAN LIZHU, *Zhongguo Minzhong zongjiao yishi* (The Religious Consciousness of the Chinese People), Tianjin 1994.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, 127f.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, 117.

<sup>17</sup> For discussion, see also Peter Tze Ming NG, From Ideological Marxism to Moderate Pragmatism – Religious Policy in China at the Turn of the Century, in: Chung Ming LAU / Jianfa SHEN (Eds.), *China Review* 2000, Hong Kong 2000, 405-422. German version was published in: *ZMR* 87 (2003) 112-126.

<sup>18</sup> See e.g. Rodney STARK / R.I. LAURENCE / Roger FINKE, Religion, Science and Rationality, in: *American Economic Review Papers and Proceedings* (1996) 433-437; and Rationality and the Religious Mind, in: *Economic Inquiry* 36 (1998) 373-389.



#### **4.2 Social capital is of significant importance among the Christian converts**

Stark has reminded us that when religious choices are made, interpersonal relationship plays a more important role than rationality as such. For Chinese Christian conversion, the case is even more obvious since the Chinese people are more pragmatic about religious matters. They do not pay much attention to the philosophical or theological understanding of religious beliefs in the way Western people do. They are, so to speak, concerned more about interpersonal relationships. So, Stark's suggestion of focusing on social capital and religious capital is found to be very relevant here. Family relationship has played an important role for Chinese Christian converts, especially in helping them keep their faith in times of difficulties. There is a small Catholic village among the Taian villages. Family ties have been so vital that in the village with a population of 530 people 100 families were found that all claim to be Catholic. It is very much like the Mormons in Kirtland, Ohio in 1830, where conversions were mostly due to family influences, networks of kinship, and friends and neighbors.<sup>15</sup> Hence Stark is right when he says that conversion is not merely choosing a religious ideology, but more often related to one's social networks and social capital, for »conversion [...] is about bringing one's religious behaviour into alignment with that of one's friends and family members«.<sup>16</sup>

#### **4.3 Social capital and mass conversion**

Stark was interested in arithmetical counting and hence he studied the rapid growth of Christianity in the early years and the case of Mormons in the Kirtland era in particular. Stark approximated the rapid rate of growth in Christianity and Mormonism alike as 40 percent per decade. Interestingly, if we compare the rate of growth in China since 1949 with our present situation, we find a similar picture as well. There were about 700,000 Protestant Christians in China in 1949 and by 1999, the government report recorded a sum total of 10,000,000 Protestants in China. Of course, the government statistics did not include the family churches and those not yet registered with the government. The normal estimation would multiply the government figures 2-5 times; in that case we may estimate the Christian population to be 35 million.<sup>17</sup> This is precisely 50 times more in 50 years, thus greater than Stark's calculation: 40 percent per decade. Nevertheless, Stark's suggestion regarding »the network basis« proposition is of great relevance in the Chinese context. Despite the brainwashing and all the efforts (propaganda and education, etc., etc.) made by the Chinese government to suppress the spread of Christianity in China especially in the period between 1950 and 1980, the number of Christian converts was still growing rapidly. The fact that the Chinese converts have increased rapidly in the past 50 years is, according to the witnesses of the converts, partly due to family networks, networks of kinship, and friends and neighbors, which is precisely what Stark has suggested.

#### **4.4 Religious choices are also rational choices**

According to Stark, social scientists tend to regard religious choices as irrational.<sup>18</sup> Stark has suggested that interpersonal relationships/networks, hence social capital and religious capital, are more important than the role rationality plays in conversion experiences. This is especially true for the situation of the Chinese Christian converts. The Chinese are much more concerned about their relationships with family members, kin, friends and neighbors,



than about any logical or philosophical analysis of a religious faith. More than that, the Chinese people are much more pragmatic and practical when considering any change in religious beliefs. When making religious choices, they will attempt to conserve their social capital as well as their religious capital. When making religious choices, they will tend to select an option that maximizes their conservation of religious capital. More important still, when making religious choices, they are making rational choices. This is especially significant for Chinese Christian conversions. For even though the converts do not rely on abstract philosophical rationality, their choices are based on a pragmatic, sometimes even on an instrumental kind of rationality. As the Chinese always say: »Religion is true only if it works«.

### **Zusammenfassung**

Der Artikel beschreibt die Vorarbeiten zu einem religionssoziologischen Projekt, das sich in Festlandchina der Region Taian/Provinz Shandong drei christlichen Kirchen annimmt. Eine eher pfingstkirchliche, eine katholische sowie eine methodistische Gemeinde stehen im Blickfeld des Interesses, wobei vor allem das Stadt-Land Gefälle, die sozialen und familiären Banden und die Zeit der Kulturrevolution mit ihren ambivalenten Wirkungen in einem ersten Zugang thematisiert werden. Dem Vf. dient das »Religionsverständnis« Rodney Starks als Hintergrundfolie, v.a. seine Konzepte und Überlegungen im Zusammenhang mit Konversionsgeschehen, die für die betrachtete Region von besonderer Bedeutung sind, finden Beachtung (bzw. Bestätigung). Am Ende des Beitrags konstatiert der Vf. dieses Beitrags für China einen eher nüchtern-pragmatischen Zugang zur Religion.

### **Summary**

The article describes the preliminary work for a religious-sociological project that concerns three Christian churches in mainland China in the Taian Region of Shandong Province. A more Pentecostal church, a Catholic church, as well as a Methodist church are the focus of attention, and, in an initial step, the difference between the city and the countryside, the social and family ties, and the period of the Cultural Revolution with its ambivalent effects are discussed in particular. Rodney Stark's »understanding of religion« serves as a backdrop for the author who considers (or respectively confirms) above all Stark's concepts and reflections in connection with conversion events which are of special significance for the examined region. At the end of the contribution the author of the article demonstrates that there is a more sober-pragmatic approach to religion in China.

### **Sumario**

El artículo describe los trabajos preliminares de un proyecto de sociología de la religión que se ocupa de tres comunidades cristianas en la China continental de la región Taian en la Provincia de Shandong. En el centro del estudio se encuentran una comunidad más bien pentecostal, una católica y una metodista. Especial atención se presta en el primer apartado a la diferencia entre el mundo urbano y el rural, a los lazos sociales y familiares y al tiempo de la revolución cultural con sus ambivalentes resultados. Partiendo de la concepción de la religión de Rodney Starks, el autor nos explica sus conceptos y reflexiones relativas al acto de conversión, que son especialmente importantes para la región estudiada. Al final, el autor constata para China una relación más bien pragmática con la religión.