



Religious Change in Post-Mao China

Yanfei Sun

This talk presents insights from a forthcoming book that synthesizes two decades of ethnographic, archival, and historical comparative research to examine religious transformation in post-Mao China. Focusing on five major religions, the study tackles key questions regarding their growth dynamics in a specific political context. Why did Protestantism experience rapid growth while Catholicism lagged behind? How to explain the profound changes experienced by Chinese popular religion in its post-Mao revival? Why did New Religious Movements fail to become a major player in the religious landscape of post-Mao China, despite their great potential? Why did the Chinese Buddhist community's development diverge from its Republican-era and post-1949 Taiwanese counterparts? The talk will introduce an “institutions-in-context” theory that not only allows me to explain all these questions but has the potential to be used to understand the growth dynamics of religions across the globe.

Yanfei Sun is currently associate professor of sociology at Zhejiang University. She graduated from University of Chicago with a PhD in sociology in 2010. She was a Mellon Research Fellow of Columbia University Society of Fellows (2010–2013), a fellow at Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (2023–2024), a visiting associate professor at Harvard University, and a lecturer at the University of Chicago. Her fields of interest include sociology of religion and political sociology. She studies religious changes, religious movements, religious toleration, secularism, and religious nationalism. Her recent research has extended to historical comparative study of empires and nation-states. Her work has appeared on *American Journal of Sociology*, *Theory and Society*, *Modern China*, *Social Compass*, and leading Chinese sociological journals such as *Sociological Studies*, *Sociological Review of China*, as well as many book chapters. Her 2017 article on *American Journal of Sociology* and her 2019 article on *Theory and Society* received the Distinguished Article Award from the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in 2018 and in 2020 respectively. Her forthcoming book will be published by University of Chicago Press.

This talk is organized by James Farrer (Professor of Sociology, Sophia University).

Date: April 17, 2025

Time: 18:30–20:00

Venue: Room 301

In person only

No registration required

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