

## Post-secularity within contemporary Chinese philosophical contexts

PFISTER, Lauren F

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LAUREN F. PFISTER, professor, Religion and Philosophy / Humanities, Hong Kong Baptist University; Founding Fellow of the Hong Kong Academy of the Humanities; Associate Editor, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*. Specialities: Qing dynasty philosophy; Ruist (“Confucian”)-Christian dialogue, hermeneutics. E-mail: [feileren@hkbu.edu.hk](mailto:feileren@hkbu.edu.hk).

**Lauren F. Pfister**

## **Post-secularity within Contemporary Chinese Philosophical Contexts**

### ***I. Interdisciplinary by Ironies within the PRC in the First Decade of the 21<sup>st</sup>***

#### ***Century***

Though political ideologies promoting a contemporary form of Chinese communism continue to be expressed, the capitalization of mainland Chinese society with its two thriving stock markets in addition to the continuing capitalist structures operating in Hong Kong and Macau simultaneously exist; where sixty years ago there would be intense and public ideological critique of alternatives to the Chinese Marxist form of life, now there is less public but extensive reflections on these elements in their undeniable socio-cultural transformation. As Arif Dirlik has poignantly characterized the general situation in an article published in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Chinese Culture* in 2008:<sup>1</sup>

The world of contemporary global modernity is no longer the world of the early twentieth century, when socialism appeared both as a vision of the

future and a practical ingredient of nation-building. It is not the world of imperialism against which socialism promised national liberation and autonomy. Neither is it the world of the Cold War, which pitted capitalism against socialist efforts to keep it at a distance. It is the world of a global capitalism that is willing to accommodate socialism as long as it plays by the rules of capitalism. And it is a world in which the meaning of capitalism itself is sufficiently blurred to allow self-professed socialists a modicum of ideological self-respect in their claims to socialist commitments even as the societies they lead are progressively reshaped by the forces of capitalism. Whether or not the accumulating crisis of global capitalism will once again inject vitality into this socialism remains to be seen. If so, it is likely to be socialism of a different kind from the one that was born of the struggles of a century or more of imperialism, nation-building and Euro/American cultural hegemony.

The changes of the ideological context of Chinese Marxism in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, which Dirlik locates within the larger centennial framework of socialist ideological development starting in earnest during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>2</sup> are undeniable, but the nature of “global capitalism” he refers to above has also been changing and demonstrating that its greedy reach is neither truly global nor always expressed in its most inhumane and harshest form.<sup>3</sup> In spite of some who might be nostalgic for the earlier historical and cultural settings of Chinese Marxism and its ideological developments during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>4</sup> the Chinese sociologist, Ambrose King (or Jin Yaoji 金耀基) points out that in spite of those who dream of returning to forms of life which represent a “cultural China” of the pre-revolutionary period, the majority of contemporary Chinese persons have accepted the values of a Post-Enlightenment Europe.<sup>5</sup> That is to say, they have accepted these values as their

own, as contemporary Chinese values, indicating at the same time that they want to be/become modern, independent, economically stable and educationally informed persons.

What this has meant for persons involved in Chinese philosophical circles within contemporary mainland China is worthy of further exploration. We will approach this discussion by a less direct route. First, an account of the emergence of post-secularity within the last two decades within a larger international context will be described, leading to the identification of four relatively distinct categories of post-secular intellectuals. One of the earliest uses of the term by philosophers appeared explicitly in the title of a volume published in 1998, *Post-Secular Philosophy*,<sup>6</sup> which sought to address secular philosophical attitudes and concepts with an informed alternative Christian theological point of view. A functional definition of the character of post-secular intellectuals goes beyond this specific usage and indicates the following: In the context of a plurality of modern worldviews within which secular positions are no longer considered neutral and/or unbiased, post-secular intellectuals recognize that these modern worldviews include those representing religious traditions, and so reevaluate them on the basis of their preferred interpretive position. As we will demonstrate, the “context of a plurality of modern worldviews” arises in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century as a result of a documented

de-secularization process within the majority of modern social contexts internationally, and so highlights the social presence and cultural roles of contemporary religious traditions. Following this first section, the prevailing Marxist epistemological categories which essentially link philosophical and religious studies under the assumption of an Marxist ideological critique of religion. This will be done in order to highlight why contemporary religious studies must adopt a philosophical deconstruction of Marxist religious critiques in order to address the de-secularizing trends within contemporary Chinese societies. One major illustration of this form of post-secular intellectual discourse will then be offered in order to highlight both the critical reappraisal of Marxist accounts of religious experience and the assertion of a practical philosophical reorientation of cadre officials who are urged to adopt a particular kind of post-secular point of view. Finally, the understanding of post-secularity we have described will be applied to recent reflections of philosophical developments within mainland China during the past three decades of the post-Mao era, that is, from 1978 to 2008.

## ***II. The Emergence of Post-secularity in International Contexts***

The academic turn which a number of contemporary scholars within China and elsewhere are making in relation to the vitality of religious traditions in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century has been described by the noted American sociologist, Peter

Berger, as a “desecularization” process.<sup>7</sup> Notably, Berger’s shift has been followed by Chinese sociologists<sup>8</sup> through Chinese translations of some of his key works, but in a manner which is selective and not fully representative.<sup>9</sup>

Regarding the general nature of the post-secular interpretive trends to be described in the following section, the basic justification for their existence rests on an understanding of the de-secularization processes evident in contemporary societies including the PRC. Summary statements about de-secularization made by Berger and Zijderveld in their recent book published in 2009, *In Praise of Doubt: How to Have Convictions without Becoming a Fanatic*,<sup>10</sup> are helpful in this regard because they are supported by many illustrations and further generalizations. Here we will focus on several further clarifications of this de-secularization process especially as they relate to contemporary and past Chinese cultural attitudes which are also mentioned within this particular book.

In offering illustrations of the “passionate religious movements” which influence our contemporary international settings, Berger and Zijderveld start by Muslims,<sup>11</sup> but then proceed to discuss a wide range of other religious traditions, including the international influences of Protestant Christians, the resurgence of “Eastern Christian Orthodoxy” in Russia, Orthodox Judaism in the USA and Israel, Hindu revivals in India, Buddhist expansions in Asia as well as in “Western countries”, and Ruism

(“Confucianism”) in China and the Chinese diaspora.<sup>12</sup> This last reference is particularly interesting in the light of the fact that Ruism has not been included among the state sanctioned religions within the People’s Republic of China, and so it suggests an area of further exploration with Chinese sources to understand what the ideological concerns related to the religious expression or spirituality of Ruism might be.

Another major point which should be highlighted is that the Berger and Zijderveld argue that modernity leads to a set of beliefs and values that support “plurality”. The choice of words here is self-conscious and precise: they are not promoting a “pluralism” (which is normally rendered in Chinese as *duoyuanhua* 多元 化). Notably in their work they are concerned to oppose a radical form of epistemological relativism, arguing that this doctrinaire form of skepticism easily becomes absolutized. Instead, they persistently seek to argue for a form of moral certitude based upon universalizable rational claims related to the nature of humans and their inherent dignity. They go on to argue that this approach to moral certitude allows for a “healthy form of doubt”, meaning not a principled skepticism, but an empirical openness to new questions which will allow for theoretical refinements based on careful observation and justified arguments drawn from broad ranging field work and cross-cultural dialogue.<sup>13</sup> This claim related to cultural plurality and its implications for the account of post-secularity will be elaborated further in the

following sections.

### ***III. Four Interpretive Positions of Post-secular Intellectuals and Their Philosophical Provocations***

Berger and Zijderveld present arguments in line with the second trend of Berger's own thoughts, and provide the following summary statements about the nature of secularization theory and the post-secular condition:<sup>14</sup>

It's fair to say that secularization theory has been massively falsified by the events of the decades since World War II. . . . As one looks over the contemporary world, it's not secularization that one sees, but an enormous explosion of passionate religious movements. . . .

It cannot be plausibly maintained that modernity necessarily leads to a decline of religion. . . . If modernity, then, doesn't necessarily lead to secularization (except in Sweden and in the faculty club of Delhi University), what does it lead to in the area of beliefs and values? The answer, we think, is clear: *It leads to plurality.*

If a full-fledged post-secular mentality will recognize the fact of an "enormous explosion of passionate religious movements" within contemporary life and so can document the social pluralities which are a result of these cultural developments, according to Berger and Zijderveld, what other ways may a post-secular attitude be manifest within academic circles where such explicit claims are either shunned or considered ideologically inappropriate? Certainly it is the case that that many contemporary academics serving in universities and research institutions in very different cultural settings have become avid advocates of secularization theories



within their own disciplines, especially during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

How would these intellectuals begin to display the impact of post-secular attitudes within their own writings even though they would not be advocates of post-secularity?

What Berger and Zijderveld suggest is that a recognition of plurality – philosophically, religiously, and cultural – will be a factor which they have to contend with, so that their forms of secularism will develop to the point that worldview alternatives as well as the possibility of some kind of spiritual options may be considered that a principled secularist would generally not consider justifiable or palatable two decades earlier.

It is precisely this diversity of positions found within recent writings of academics and intellectuals related to post-secularity which have become manifest during the past decade, and they are becoming explicit in notable publications within philosophical and religious studies within contemporary Chinese contexts as well. In order to generalize from these phenomena and analyze the multiformity of these developments, we need once more to step beyond the particular circles of philosophers in mainland China and look at a much wider international and cross-disciplinary set of materials. Having done this, we will return to discuss some notable examples of the presence of a new diversity of positions within Chinese philosophical and religious studies in mainland China.

This epochal shift in academic discourse can be summarized in the following

manner: there are at least four distinct major positions represented by those who participate in the post-secular mentality. Notably, the first two positions are taken by those who are not advocates of post-secular values and their worldviews, but while recognizing their presence they set themselves the task of either entrenching themselves ideologically or adjusting their own positions pragmatically in the light of these manifest social realities. The last two positions are actually advocating the vital philosophical and religious significance of the post-secular mentality and the concrete cultural influences which it wields, making significant adjustments in their own theoretical positions, and often times advocating specific forms of practical social engagement and political reorientations in order to deal wisely and fairly with these major cultural trends. Having made these more general claims about two major subdivisions within these four post-secular positions, it is to be emphatically underscored that all four are in fact participating in this epochal shift which is formulated under the rubric of the “post-secular age”. Summarily speaking, these four interpretive positions can be described as follows.

The first interpretive position involves those secularists who admit that their theoretical positions related to religious life do not match up to the contemporary revitalization of religious communities, but nevertheless continue to assert their secularist biases. They do so while at the same time taking some effort to explore

non-standard (or non-orthodox) versions of post-modern spirituality, often involving very individualistic accounts of the nature of reality relying on an eclectic mixture of various “spiritualities” (and not institutionalized religions or religious systems, as some of them explain emphatically). This is to say that they are post-secular in context, but unwilling to accept the post-secular interpretive position as an academically, intellectually or politically acceptable form of interpreting social and cultural realities.<sup>15</sup> We will refer to this position as *resistant post-secular secularists*. Those in the PRC who represent this position include Marxist cadres who continue to maintain their secularist Marxist worldviews as “leftist” and promote atheistic communist alternatives as the best position among a host of others. Numerically they currently include a minority even among Communist Party members, and in terms of the PhD dissertations written in philosophy, they probably include another leftist minority among all those who reach this stage as Marxist philosophers, or about one third of all such trained PhDs in philosophy in the PRC.<sup>16</sup> If there was an ideological retrenchment of leftist Chinese Marxism in the future, these numbers could rise, but due to the advancement of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” and a developing capitalist driven economy, this may not be expected to occur within the next forty to fifty years.

The second interpretive position involves those secularists who, having admitted

the vitality of religious traditions, choose to participate in them as “strategic participants” while still holding relatively fast (but not necessarily so dogmatically as in the former case) to their secularist principles and biases.<sup>17</sup> They may attempt to offer reasons for this religious vitality, but generally find the relevant phenomena hard to interpret even though they are culturally engaged and manifest cultural influences unanticipated by secularist theories. This is to say that these persons are post-secular not only in context but also in action. Though they are not unwilling to recognize the post-secular realities around them, they do not find it easy to explain them, and so only are involved in various religious traditions or spiritualities as a matter of strategic engagement in the contemporary social contexts in which they live. We will refer to this position as *strategic post-secular secularists*. Under the current ideological climate it is arguably justified to claim that a growing majority of Chinese Communist cadre as well as many other humanist secularists among Chinese intellectuals fit within this category. Due to the intellectual challenges related to affirmation of international de-secularizing trends, which now are being publicly described and advocated in major Chinese books (as will be documented below), it can be expected that this dimension among Chinese intellectuals in general and among Chinese philosophers in particular will continue to grow during the coming decades. The practical reason that this can be anticipated is that this position involves the least

amount of ideological adjustment while also allowing for an intellectual flexibility which will support “harmonious” attitudes and practices within de-secularizing trends in the PRC. As a consequence, it does not threaten their current status as cadres or their future retirement pensions, a matter related to life-long security which many feel may be threatened if a more explicit post-secular advocacy is adopted.

On the other hand, there are also secularists in university academies who have, like Berger, come to realize that their previous theoretical stances were inadequate, and so they have begun to readdress their theoretical positions as those “biased” by secularist values and worldviews. While they might remain secularist in orientation, they are no longer secularist in practice. That is to say, they are no longer unwilling to engage intellectual representatives of religious traditions (whether of long-standing traditions or of newly emerging religious communities), and realize that this must be done in a manner that is fair in its interactive dynamics and dialogically open.<sup>18</sup>

These may be considered mainline participants in the post-secular interpretive discourse, and display not only a tolerance generated by a self-conscious awareness of cultural pluralities (and not a secularist account of pluralism), but also a genuine sympathy for particular religious traditions. Nevertheless, unlike Berger they would not necessarily be involved as advocates for any particular religious tradition.<sup>19</sup> We refer to these as *engaged post-secular intellectuals*. Perhaps as many as half of all

those teaching in religious studies programs (which still is normally found associated with philosophy departments as a subdivision within universities) and pursuing research in religious studies, along with one third of all Chinese philosophers, would currently fit into this category. If political liberalization and cultural diversity increases in the PRC during the next two to three decades, we can anticipate that this group will grow significantly in intellectual influence as well as in numbers.

Nevertheless, it is very difficult to identify any contemporary Chinese philosopher in the PRC who has experienced a major theoretical shift in intellectual and spiritual realms and has written about it as extensively and consistently as Peter Berger. In this light, then, it still would be the case that this group of engaged post-secular intellectuals amounts to a relatively smaller group of active advocates.

The final category is constituted by a much broader range of persons who might be counted as authentic religious intellectuals who are advocates for particular religious values and worldviews. Some of them, while advocating their religious preferences, simply refuse to discuss or engage problems faced within their own modern social settings, and so have not adopted a post-secular understanding of their own religious and cultural situations, remaining relatively minor influences within larger cultural circles.<sup>20</sup> Many times this form of traditional intellectuals or religious advocates are criticized not only by principled secularists, but also by engaged

post-secular intellectuals and other religious post-secular intellectuals who challenge their lack of relevance to contemporary society. These latter figures are those who adopt religious forms of life as advocates, while simultaneously being self-conscious in addressing modern social problems and contemporary ideological orientations all influenced by various kinds of secular perspectives. As a consequence, they will promote either a return to traditional religious traditions<sup>21</sup> or advocate a contemporary alternative to religious traditions in the form of a new spirituality which has absorbed some of the critical aspects of a post-modern orientation.<sup>22</sup> Many times these figures also are involved in inter-religious dialogues, so that they adopt this fourth position in relation to their own preferred religious values and worldviews, while generally standing in the third position in relationship to other religious traditions in which they do not participate except through research, writing and inter-faith dialogue and other forms of interactions.

All of those involved in this fourth interpretive perspective recognize that a transformative cultural passage has occurred within non-traditional societies, often influenced by internationalized and relatively mobile populations. They believe that the post-secular reemergence of religious traditions reveals some glaring inadequacies of a secularist worldview (in personal, communal and political contexts), and so feel driven to address these inadequacies with intellectual responses and practical

engagement by means of religious practices and institutions derived from their own spiritual communities and subcultures. We will refer to this fourth position as *engaged post-secular religious intellectuals*. It is possible to identify these Chinese intellectuals who advocate particular religious traditions, particularly among the current “five major religions” (wu da zongjiao 五大宗教), meaning the five designated state-authorized religious traditions authorized by the PRC government: Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism. Nevertheless, they are currently an even smaller group than the engaged post-secular intellectuals, and will only grow larger if political liberalization and cultural diversity increase within the PRC during the next two or three decades.

Bound up in the last three positions is a more or less self-conscious awareness that a secularist position – for there are many forms of secularism that are not necessarily compatible – can no longer be seen as a hermeneutically neutral or value-free interpretive orientation.<sup>23</sup> As a consequence, on the one hand, those who present a secularist account of social realities without any other qualifications become vulnerable to critiques. Critics of these secularist positions assert the greater complexities of the cultural phenomena in which these writers are involved. Consequently, they make appeals to the religious and spiritual activities, values and worldviews, which have been previously bracketed by principled opposition or



learned blindness to these matters. On the other hand, there is an openness (especially in contemporary cultural China in the modernizing cities) toward a new recognition that religious realities are more complicated and multiform than they have been assumed by secularist critiques, and so there is an effort to understand and explain how religious life within China has become manifestly culturally constructive as well as socially and critically engaged in recent years.<sup>24</sup>

#### ***IV. Challenging Chinese Marxists' Principled Critiques of Religious Traditions***

Some sense of this on-going negotiation of interpretive positions can be seen in the most recent *Annual of Religious Studies in China* for the two year period from 2007 to 2008.<sup>25</sup> This is a publication of the Institute of World Religion at the Chinese Social Sciences Academy in Beijing, and so seeks to offer a comprehensive account of both religious studies in public educational institutions as well as related studies prepared under the dictate or guidance of the Chinese Communist Party; this latter material is generally referred to as internal publications or “confidential literature” which is generally not readily available in public bookstores.<sup>26</sup> Nearly 700 pages in length, it offers materials in three categories: specialist essays,<sup>27</sup> religious studies theoretical research,<sup>28</sup> and studies of particular religious traditions.<sup>29</sup> The volume ends with the republication of government documents related to the management of religious affairs in the PRC.

From this summary of the content, one will recognize that the general overview of intellectual work in religious studies within the PRC for this designated period is sandwiched between beginning and final sections devoted to Chinese Communist policies related to religious studies and religious affairs. In addition, the initial subsections under the second and third sections begin with summaries of theoretical issues aligned with Chinese Marxist ideology, supported at times by other essays within the subsections devoted to specific religious traditions referred to as “descriptive evaluations”.<sup>30</sup> Of interest is the fact that they constitute almost 18 pages of articles, while the subsequent categories include nearly 90 pages of other materials on different religious topics, including specialized studies in particular religious traditions.

The most significant essay from a post-secular interpretive standpoint in the first major section of this volume is prepared by the noted religious studies scholar and major administrative figure within the Chinese Social Sciences Academy, Zhuo Xinping 卓新平, and is entitled “On ‘the Relationship Between Government and Religion’ – ‘Globalized’ Religion and Contemporary China”.<sup>31</sup> The internal quotation marks within the title suggest that the first phrase, *zheng jiao guanxi* 政教关系, is a key concept within contemporary parlance in the Chinese Communist Party, and the term “globalization” (*quanqiu hua* 全球化) as a qualifying phrase to describe religion

or religious traditions is a key concept within his analysis. Zhuo's essay is a carefully reasoned example of balancing perspectives drawn from both the strategic post-secular secularists and engaged post-secular intellectuals. Dividing his essay into four sections dealing with religion and some dimension of politics within the government,<sup>32</sup> he highlights the "complexity" of the current religious situation as it applies to government policy, and argues that past forms of aggressive opposition to religious traditions by the Chinese Communist Party have now been revised and sublated (using the Hegelian term, *yangqi* 扬弃).<sup>33</sup> Zhuo does so not by arguing about a major philosophical shift in party ideology, but by claiming that the European form of an aggressive atheistic critique of religions was found in practice to no longer apply in various ways to the Chinese context. In addition, he notes in the same context that the interreligious dialogues have moved away from an explicit theistic vision of religious life to one that focuses on an "ultimate reality" (*zhongji shizai* 终极实在) or "eternal existence" (*yongheng cunzai* 永恒存在) which illustrates the plurality and relativity of religious claims. In this sense Zhuo is appealing to cadre to adopt a "strategic post-secular secularist" stance, arguing that the relativization of values in both party ideology and inter-religious engagements have transformed the Chinese cultural setting into a context where the former principled oppositions are no longer relevant.

Noting that there is an unquestionable development of religious life beyond the confines of the “five great religions” 五大宗教 or the five designated state-authorized religious traditions, Zhuo goes on to argue that the vast majority of these religious groups have no political goals or interests, and have emerged and extended among the masses in a “natural” manner.<sup>34</sup> As a consequence of these and other evaluations of the relationship between the political dimensions of government and religious traditions, Zhuo concludes that religious traditions under the context of globalization are bringing about significant changes and complications within the relationship between government and religion in the PRC. Adopting a phrase calculated to gain the sympathetic attention of government officials, he suggests that the new problems that arise in relationship to religious traditions should be handled in a manner similar to Confucius’ Lu State prime minister Ji Wenzhi 季文子, who was commended by Master Kong because he “contemplated three times before acting” (*sansi er houxing* 三思而后行) in his capacity as prime minister.<sup>35</sup>

When interpreted from a post-secular perspective, what Zhuo accomplishes in this seminal essay is a critique of principled secularism in its Marxist and Chinese Marxist forms. He then argues that any strategic post-secular secularist within the PRC government (which he suggests should be the most acceptable interpretive position for a non-religious cadre member who supports the atheistic ideology) should

be aware that there are important political reasons for adopting a more open minded attitude which appreciates the religious traditions already active and growing within Mainland China. In this regard, Zhuo is serving as an engaged post-secular intellectual within the Mainland Chinese context of politically guided research on religious studies; essentially, he argues that Chinese Communist Party members should open up their religious policies in order to face major contemporary cultural questions with a new historical self-consciousness and informed cultural sensitivity. Only this will help them handle the growing and vital plurality of value systems and institutions already existing with the contemporary PRC, a vitality which includes an increasingly complex group of religious traditions influential within local communities and massive cities, while also building stronger alliances with those of similar mindset internationally.

#### ***V. Post-secularity within Contemporary Chinese Philosophical Contexts***

In 2008 there was a flurry of activity in many sectors of Chinese publishing world reflecting on the previous thirty years, a period initiated by the demise of Chairman Mao and the Gang of Four and the beginning of reform. Realizing the opportunity it provided the Chinese Social Sciences Academy in Beijing also sought to document the development of various academic disciplines in the PRC during the same period of time. Among these various works was a volume edited by Li

Jingyuan 李景源, an academician in the philosophy division in the Chinese Social Sciences Academy in Beijing, entitled *Thirty Years of Studies on Philosophy in China, 1978-2008*.<sup>36</sup>

As might be expected, the initial section of this volume of just over 400 pages of summaries of philosophical studies in mainland China were devoted to “The Principles of Marxist Philosophy” and “The History of Marxist Philosophy”.<sup>37</sup> Notably, the summary of Chinese Marxism seeks to highlight the contributions of Chinese philosophers to the international development of Marxist theory, emphasizing their distinctions from other trends and traditions in Marxist thought.<sup>38</sup> The content is strictly involved with Marxist philosophical traditions and their internal development, describing Chinese Marxist participation in these traditions as a creative and orthodox Marxist school, and so casting no doubt on its validity or authenticity. Nevertheless, these two chapters account for less than one fifth of the whole volume, and so while the placement of these discussions in the volume undoubtedly give them the pride of place, the subsequent accounts in the rest of the volume are more varied.<sup>39</sup>

Issues addressed in the rest of the volume include developments in the study of the history of Chinese and foreign philosophies, as well as sections summarizing work in contemporary foreign philosophical traditions, and “Eastern” philosophical traditions.<sup>40</sup> Following these realms of discussion, specific chapters are devoted to

aesthetics, logical studies, ethics, philosophies of science and technologies, and philosophy of culture.<sup>41</sup> Notably, the section related to the study of the history of Chinese philosophy, while taking up a significant amount of space to explore the importance of textual discoveries in archeological digs which have stimulated many new discussions related to the understanding and assessment of ancient Chinese philosophical traditions,<sup>42</sup> also highlighted the works of three major philosophical figures who wrote “general histories” (*tongshi* 通史) that were more or less in line with Chinese Marxist principles. These included the works of the traditional philosopher who adopted Marxist categories to publish his final six-volume work in this area, Feng Youlan 冯友兰 (1895-1990), the traditional Chinese Marxist intellectual and Librarian of the Beijing Library, Ren Jiyu 任继愈 (1916- ), and the creative Marxist philosopher from Shanghai, Feng Qi 冯契 (1915-1995).<sup>43</sup>

In dealing with these three major works of elderly philosophical statesmen in the history of Chinese philosophy, the volume focuses on all the elements that affirm the basic doctrines of Chinese Marxism. While noting the creative alternatives advanced by Feng Qi in his later years (what might even be considered as a development of a post-Chinese Marxist synthesis), there is no mention of Feng Youlan’s posthumously published seventh volume in his *New Edition of the History of Chinese Philosophy*, which dealt with *The History of Contemporary Chinese*

*Philosophy*<sup>44</sup> and included a balanced critique not only of Feng Youlan's own philosophical system, but also an ideological critique of Mao Zedong's 毛澤東 revolutionary excesses. This latter critique came from an explicit Ruist point of view, relying on teachings promoted by the Song Ru scholar, Zhang Zai 張載 (1020-1077).<sup>45</sup> In addition to this manifest neglect of important critical trends within Feng Youlan's own work, it is notable that the pattern of the volume tends to emphasize the productivity and publications of the most elderly of philosophical scholars in China, often to the neglect of many other creative and alternative studies produced by younger and similarly productive Chinese philosophers.

When this volume is taken in this light, it is obvious that Li and his censors were not willing to allow elements directly critical of Chinese Marxist philosophical traditions within their accounts of the study of the history of Chinese philosophy. Nevertheless, the fact that the vast majority of the volume presents summaries of a large number of other areas of philosophical research and writing indicates precisely how even the resistant post-secular secularists represented here by Li Jingyuan have had to move toward a strategic post-secular position. It is no longer possible for them to deny the diversity of philosophical studies which are actually taking place in numerous universities and research centers within the PRC. In fact, in many places they highlight the fact that since the early 1980s that diversification has taken place to



the benefit of philosophical studies in the PRC.

Though much more could be written to provide details of these strategic shifts even within this volume, the plurality of philosophical studies in China at large, augmented by the strategic critiques of the traditional Marxist critique of religion, reveal the extent to which a post-secular intellectual stream is flowing through many dimensions of Chinese philosophical circles.

HONG KONG BAPTIST UNIVERSITY  
Hong Kong, China

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Arif Dirlik, “Socialism in China: A Historical Overview”, in Kam Louie, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Chinese Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 169-170.

<sup>2</sup> See his discursive recounting of these ideological developments in Dirlik, “Socialism in China: A Historical Overview”: 154-169.

<sup>3</sup> A revealing look into the discursive elements of the so-called “global” economy, which is internationalizing but rarely every truly global, was published the same year as the *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Chinese Culture*, and portrays a prophetic vision which is still being worked out as we enter into the year 2011.

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Consult David M. Smick, *The World is Curved: Hidden Dangers to the Global Economy* (New York: Portfolio, 2008). Smick's title is intent on challenging the ideological claims of Thomas Friedman's popular volume, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005) and so sets up an important counterpoint to discussions of what actually serves as appropriate accounts of any globally-extensive form of economic forecasting. Notably, the hyperbole inherent in the American title was qualified in its British version, so that the subtitle was changed, first as "a brief history of the globalized world in the twenty-first century", and then "the globalized world in the twenty-first century" (see Friedman, *The World is Flat* (London: Allen Lane, 2005) and the "updated and expanded version" of 2006). Even though Friedman wrote in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of his work that "I know that the world is not flat", his sanguine assessments of "globalized economy" stand in stark contrast to Alan Greenspan's *The Age of Turbulence: Adventures in a New World* (London: Allen Lane, 2007) and Smick's intentionally oppositional imagery. Further tensions within this capitalist ideological rhetoric arise after Greenspan supported Smick's thesis, suggesting just how hard the "global economic crisis" left a gaping wound in his own economic principles, and how far off the track Friedman's economic idealisms run. Is there any irony in the fact that there were by 2007 eight different Chinese versions of Friedman's book, while only one Chinese version of each of Smick's and Greenspan's volumes was published by 2009?

<sup>4</sup> Hints of this are suggested not only in the quotation above, but in the claim by Dirlik that "If the [Chinese] Communist Party in power offered anything of theoretical interest, it was with the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s." (Dirlik, "Socialism in China": 167. Though not sanguine about these developments, Dirlik's "theoretical

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interest” stands in stark contrast to the adamant concern of the vast majority of Chinese citizens not to fall backward again into the ideological chaos caused by the Cultural Revolution.

<sup>5</sup> Summaries of these attitudes were obtained from questionnaires taken in mainland China about every decade, according to King, and started to appear probably sometime in the late 1970s. See his comments in the volume edited by Chen Lai 陈来 and Gan Yang 甘阳 *Kongzi yu Dangdai Zhongguo* 《孔子与当代中国》 (Master Kong (“Confucius”) and Contemporary China) (Beijing: *Shenghuo, Dushu, Xinzhi Sanlian Shudian* 生活,读书,新知三联书店 (Life, Reading, New Knowledge Three Links Book Store), 2008): 40-43. The subsequent discussion also refers to this same passage.

<sup>6</sup> Consult Phillip Blond, ed., *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> This term appeared in a short monograph published in 1999, a series of essays edited by Berger. It includes an introductory essay by Berger from a “global overview”, and then has other articles by major scholars discussing Roman Catholicism, the Evangelical Protestant movement, Judaism, and the complicated settings in Europe, the People’s Republic of China, and international contexts in which “political Islam” is involved. The final two essays are notably written by Harvard’s Tu Weiming and Emory University’s Abdullahi A. An-Na’im. The fact that the book was supported by the “Ethics and Public Policy Center” in Washington D.C., and then published by a major Protestant Evangelical company two years before the monumental 9-11 event “shook the world” is notable; there was foresight in these writings that already presaged the possibility of that watershed event in requiring a much more informed understanding of religious realities in a broader international context. Consult Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Especially through translations of his works into Chinese, including from Taiwan renderings by Zhou Limin (1991), Wang Baihong (2002), Huang Shuren and Liu

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Yaling (2005); and from mainland China renderings by Gao Shining (1991 and 1996), Wu Zhisheng and Liao Qing (1999), Li Junkang (2000), Kang Jingtai, Lin Zhenxi, and Ke Xiong (2002).

<sup>9</sup> A Chinese version of Berger's edited volume mentioned in the previous footnotes was produced in 2005, see 彼得·伯格等著 李骏康译《世界的非世俗化: 复兴的宗教及全球政治》, 上海:上海古籍出版社, 2005年。 Notably, the term “desecularization” (*fei shisuhua* 非世俗化) is rendered in Chinese as “non-secularization”, and so terminological clarification is needed along with a new translation which would indicate the reversal of secularization processes, what would be more appropriately described in Chinese by the term *fan shisuhua* 反世俗化.

<sup>10</sup> See the bibliographic details in last volume mentioned in the previous footnote.

<sup>11</sup> Berger and Zijderveld, *In Praise of Doubt*: 4. What they would say about the new political movement which have challenged dictatorial regimes in Islamic-oriented contexts during the Spring of 2011 would be a matter worth considering as an interpretive challenge to these assumptions. Still one could imagine that a response could be made that there is still a large majority of Muslims citizens in many places, including the contemporary People's Republic of China, who are not moved toward any form of political involvement even though they are more or less aware of these recent developments.

<sup>12</sup> Summarizing statements and descriptions found in Berger and Zijderveld, *In Praise of Doubt*: 4-6 *in passim*.

<sup>13</sup> These themes are taken up in chapters within their book devoted to discussing “relativism”, “certainty and doubt” and “the limits of doubt”. See Berger and Zijderveld, *In Praise of Doubt*: 49-68, 89-120 and 121-146 respectively.

<sup>14</sup> Cited from Berger and Zijderveld, *In Praise of Doubt*: 4, 6-7 *in passim*.

<sup>15</sup> A poignant example of this form of post-secular spirituality is illustrated in some of the final works of Jacques Derrida, where he discussed the nature of prayer and its

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impossibility, while also admitting that there was a need to address personal spirituality in some form. Derrida's dilemma regarding prayer I have heard discussed in Chinese within the past five years by a liberal theologian from Taiwan within the PRC context. For other examples of this form of post-secularity, see his volume on *Religion* published as an editor along with Gianni Vattimo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) and the dialogic interview arranged by Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Another approach which portrays this point of view is found in Sergio Paulo Rouanet, "Religion and Knowledge", *Diogenes* 50:1 (2003): 37-50.

<sup>16</sup> This is based on estimates of PhD dissertations written in the PRC up to 2003 made by John Hanafin at Melbourne University.

<sup>17</sup> The terminology placed within quotation is exactly the way in which a South American academic, Juan Vaggione, described his own conclusions with regard to why and how he was taking political action within the context of religious communities which, as a secularist, he would not have normally associated some years earlier. See Juan Marco Vaggione, "Reactive Politicization and Religious Dissidence: The Political Mutations of the Religious", *Social Theory and Practice* 31: 2 (April 2005): 233-255.

<sup>18</sup> Here I am specifically referring to the position adopted by Jürgen Habermas soon after the 9-11 event, a position which he has continued to address and elaborate in subsequent writings. See accounts of this developments in Richard Wolin, "Jürgen Habermas and Post-secular Societies", *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 52:5 (23 September 2005): B16; also a rare account in Chinese by a Chinese scholar, Tong Shijun 童世骏, "'Houshisu Shihui' de Pipan Lilun – Habeimasi yu Zongjiao" 〈「后世俗社会」的批判理论 – 哈贝马斯与宗教〉 ("Critical Theory [in the Era of] Post-secular Society – Habermas and Religion") in *Shehui Kexue* 《社会科学》 (*Social*

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*Sciences*) No. 1 (2008): 4-15, 188; as well as selective accounts in Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan, eds., *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> These can involve essays by those in literary criticism who describe the alternative spiritualities of post-secular writers. For example, consult Alyda Faber, “Post-secular Poetics and Ethics of Exposure in J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*”, *Literature and Theology* 23:3 (September 2009): 303-316. Another form of this post-secular openness may be advocated by those who are advocates of other religious traditions, but work in the context of inter-religious dialogue or interactions with an openness accepting the fact of the contemporary plurality of religious and other value-orientations, even while advocating their own traditions. This is described as one of the relatively diverse expressions of the fourth position, to be described below.

<sup>20</sup> While this position appears unattractive to those engaged in the post-secular discussions, this is not to indicate that they are just a few. Many persons from a wide variety of religious traditions continue to advocate their preferred values and worldviews without any serious engagement with the contemporary world in which they live.

<sup>21</sup> See for examples of this sort the following works: Graham Ward, ed., *The Post-modern God: A Theological Reader* (Malden: Blackwell Pub., 1997); Phillip Blond, ed., *Post-secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998); C. John Sommerville, “Post-secularism Marginalizes the University: A Rejoinder to Hollinger”, *Church History* 71: 4: 848-857; John Stenhouse and Brett Knowles, eds. *Christianity in the Post Secular West* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2006); B. Keith Putt, “Poetically Negotiating the Love of God: An Examination of John D. Caputo’s Recent Postsecular Theology – A Review

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Essay”, *Christian Scholar’s Review* 37:4 (Summer 2008): 483-497.

<sup>22</sup> As found in writings such as the following: Gregory Wolfe, *The New Religious Humanists: A Reader* (New York: Free Press, 1997), and W. Franke, “Franz Rosenzweig and the Emergence of a Postsecular Philosophy of the Unsayable”, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 58 (2005): 161-180.

<sup>23</sup> As poignantly discussed in a number of works already mentioned above, but made the major theme of discussion and readings in Janet R. Jacobsen and Ann Pellegrini, eds., *Secularisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> See for example the volume produced by Sun Xiong 孙雄 著 *Sheng Su zhi jian: Zongjiao yu Shehui Fazhan Hudong Guanxi Yanjiu* 《圣俗之间：宗教与社会发展互动关系研究》 (Between the Sacred and the Secular: Studies in the Interrelationship of Religion and Social Development) Harbin: Heilongjiang People’s Press, 2005. Further mention will be made below of attitudes representing these developments within the most recently published *Annual of Religious Studies in China* for the two year period including 2007 and 2008 prepared by the Institute for World Religion in the Chinese Social Sciences Academy.

<sup>25</sup> This is the volume edited by Cao Zhongjian 曹中建, *2007-2008 Zhongguo Zongjiao Yanjiu Nianjian* 《2007-2008 中国宗教研究年鉴》 (2007-2008 Annual of Religious Studies in China) Beijing: Religious Culture Press, 2010.

<sup>26</sup> The section on the bibliographic lists of “confidential literature” covers a section of nearly 120 pages, constituting a major subsection in the “Materials” section of the volume. More details about this section will be presented below.

<sup>27</sup> Found in Cao Zhongjian, ed., *2007-2008 Annual of Religious Studies in China*: 1-44.

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<sup>28</sup> Presented in Cao Zhongjian, ed., *2007-2008 Annual of Religious Studies in China*: 45-80.

<sup>29</sup> Found in Cao Zhongjian, ed., *2007-2008 Annual of Religious Studies in China*, stretching from 386-684.

<sup>30</sup> As in essays on Buddhist and Daoist studies, located in Cao Zhongjian, ed., *2007-2008 Annual of Religious Studies in China*: 100-112 and 211-216 respectively.

<sup>31</sup> This is Zhuo Xinping 卓新平 “*Lun ‘Zhengjiao Guanxi’ – ‘Quanqiuhua’ de Zongjiao yu Dangdai Zhongguo*” 〈论“政教关系” – “全球化”的宗教与当代中国〉 as found in Cao Zhongjian’s edited volume, *2007-2008 Annual of Religious Studies in China*: 19-44. Subsequently I will refer to this article as Zhuo Xinping, “On ‘The Relationship between Government and Religion’”.

<sup>32</sup> There is more than rhetorical flair in the fact that Zhuo places the term “religion” first in each of the four subsections of his article, as will be seen in the subsequent analysis. These sections are entitled “Religion and Political Rule (*zhengzhi* 政治)” (p. 19), “Religion and the Political Party (*zhengdang* 政党)” (p. 26), “Religion and Political Authority (*zhengquan* 政权)” (p. 33), and “Religion and the Government (*zhengfu* 政府)” (p. 36).

<sup>33</sup> Stated in Zhou Xinping, “On ‘The Relationship between Government and Religion’”: 31.

<sup>34</sup> Stated in Zhou Xinping, “On ‘The Relationship between Government and Religion’”: 41.

<sup>35</sup> Cited from Zhou Xinping, “On ‘The Relationship between Government and Religion’”: 44, quoting from Analects 5:20.

<sup>36</sup> Having previously published a volume on Chinese Marxism and edited a three



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volume work of over 2200 pages of collected essays in 2005 dealing with *Fifty Years of Philosophical Studies in the New China* (*Xin Zhongguo Zhexue Yanjiu 50 Nian* 新中国哲学研究 50 年), Li Jingyuan 李景源 is a senior academician who had appropriate credentials and so could be named as the chief editor of this further summary published in 2008. The title of the work in Chinese is *Zhongguo Zhexue 30 Nian, 1978-2008* (中国哲学 30 年, 1978-2008), and was published by the Chinese Social Sciences Press in Beijing.

<sup>37</sup> Found in Li Jingyuan, *Zhongguo Zhexue 30 Nian, 1978-2008*: 1-82.

<sup>38</sup> Two sections in the first chapter are devoted to these themes. The first is entitled “The Sinification of Marxist Philosophy” (*Makesizhuyi Zhexue de Zhongguohua* 马克思主义哲学的中国化) and the latter is involved in a broader discussion of “Discussions and Comprehensive Harmonies [Achieved] between Chinese and Western Marxist Philosophies” (*Zhong Xi Ma Zhexue zhi jian de Duihua yu Rongtong* 中西马哲学之间的对话与融通). See Li Jingyuan, *Zhongguo Zhexue 30 Nian, 1978-2008*: 23-27 and 30-35 respectively.

<sup>39</sup> Though this does not mean that Chinese Marxist or other Marxist philosophical themes were not addressed elsewhere in the volume, it is notable that the editor obviously sought to keep a balance for all eleven sections found in the volume, so that each section was about 40 pages in length. The total length of the work is 418 pages, and so the 81 pages strictly devoted to Marxist philosophical themes is just a little less than one fifth of the tome.

<sup>40</sup> The longest of these sections deals with “the history of Western philosophy” (46 pages), and the shortest with “Eastern philosophy” (33 pages). Notably, in the former there are sections devoted to ancient Greek philosophy, the philosophical

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traditions of the European middle ages, early modern European philosophies, and then fairly lengthy accounts of 18<sup>th</sup> century French philosophical traditions and “German classical philosophy” (*Deguo Gudian Zhexue* 德国古典哲学), without any mention of Marxist traditions in this section. Under the rubric of “Eastern philosophy” there are discussions of Indian, Korean, and Japanese philosophical traditions. Consult Li Jingyuan, *Zhongguo Zhexue 30 Nian, 1978-2008*: 124-170 and 209-243 respectively. Though the coverage of “contemporary foreign” philosophical traditions deals with Anglophone, European, and Soviet Union/Russian developments in philosophical traditions, including a section on political philosophy, it is notable that there is no recurring reference to earlier Marxist traditions anywhere in the globe within this section. We should take this as a clear sign of the recognition of the “plurality” of philosophical traditions which a post-secular understanding of the current intellectual climate in the PRC would have to confirm.

<sup>41</sup> These appear in the last five chapters of the volume, and so are found in Li Jingyuan, *Zhongguo Zhexue 30 Nian, 1978-2008*: 244-418.

<sup>42</sup> As found in Li Jingyuan, *Zhongguo Zhexue 30 Nian, 1978-2008*: 90-95.

<sup>43</sup> See these summaries and discussions in Li Jingyuan, *Zhongguo Zhexue 30 Nian, 1978-2008*: 86-91.

<sup>44</sup> This was the volume entitled in Chinese as *Zhongguo Xiandai Zhexue Shi* 中国现代哲学史, which was first published in Hong Kong in 1992, and then was later republished in Shanghai and elsewhere in 1996.

<sup>45</sup> Find these sections in Chapters 7 (Mao Zedong) and Chapter 9 (Feng Youlan), as well as in the final pages of the volume where Feng employs Zhang Zai’s teachings that “enemies must be resolved through harmony” (*chou bi he er jie* 仇必和而解) to

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reject Mao Zedong's extreme leftist teachings and practices. Consult Feng Youlan, *Zhongguo Xiandai Zhexue Shi* ([Guangzhou]: Guangdong People's Press, 1999), pp. 136-172, 199-217, and 249-254.