Religious Renaissance in China Today
Richard Madsen

Abstract
Since the beginning of the Reform Era in 1979, there has been a rapid growth and development of religious belief and practice in China. A substantial new scholarly literature has been generated in the attempt to document and understand this. This essay identifies the most important contributions to that literature and discusses areas of agreement and controversy across the literature. Along with new data, new paradigms have developed to frame research on Chinese religions. The paradigm derived from C. K. Yang’s classic work in the 1960s came from structural functionalism, which served to unite research in the humanities and social sciences. However, structural functionalism has been abandoned by the new generation of scholars. In the humanities, the most popular paradigm derives from Michel Foucault, but there are also scholars who use neo-Durkheimian and neo-Weberian paradigms. In the social sciences, the dominant paradigms tend to focus on state-society relations. None of these paradigms fully captures the complexity of the transformations happening in China. We recommend greater dialogue between the humanities and social sciences in search of more adequate theoretical frameworks for understanding Chinese religions today.

Keywords
China; religion; humanities; state-society conflicts

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Religious practices in ancient China go back over 7,000 years. Long before the philosophical and spiritual teachings of Confucius and Lao-Tzu developed. Ghosts played a very important role in Chinese religion and culture and still do. The ritual still practiced in China today known as Tomb Sweeping Day (usually around 4 April) is observed to honor the dead and make sure they are happy in the afterlife. If they are not, they are thought to return to haunt the living. The Chinese visit the graves of their ancestors on Tomb Sweeping Day during the Festival of Qingming, even if they never do at any other time of the year, to tend the graves and pay their respects.

Journal of Current Chinese Affairs 2011. Religious Renaissance in China Today. Richard Madsen. Keywords: Social sciences , China , religion , humanities , state-society conflicts , 200 . China , Contemporary. Along with new data, new paradigms have developed to frame research on Chinese religions. The paradigm derived from C. K. Yang’s classic work in the 1960s came from structural functionalism, which served to unite research in the humanities and social sciences. However, structural functionalism has been abandoned by the new generation of scholars. In the humanities, the most popular paradigm derives from Michel Foucault, but there are also scholars who use neo-Durkheimian and neo-Weberian paradigms.