

## *The Rise of Field Studies in Religious Research in the People's Republic of China\**

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### **Abstract**

The revival of religious practice in the post-Mao era has become an important topic in Chinese social life, attracting serious attention both domestically and internationally. To explore the contemporary Chinese religious scene, scholarship from within the P. R. China has embraced social science research that distinguishes itself from traditional textually based research on religion. While there was a growing focus on the scientific principles of neutrality and objectivity in Chinese religious research in the 1980s and 1990s, the first decades of the 21st century have seen a dramatic rise in the number of ethnographic and field-based studies. They employ participant observation and face-to-face interviews to supply empirical findings about religious communities that are little known or stereotyped by official state discourses and categories. The article shows how such fieldwork-based case studies may help transform religion into a multidimensional empirical concept in the P. R. China. It also highlights their significance for negotiating the institutional identity of Chinese religious research under institutional and ideological restrictions.

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