

Review Essay

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Counting Christians in China: A Critical Reading of “*A Star in the East: The Rise of Christianity in China*”

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A Star in the East: The Rise of Christianity in China. By Rodney Stark and Xiuhua Wang. West Conshohocken: Templeton Press, 2015.

Deciphering the number of Christians in China has been a particular fascination for Western scholars, church leaders, politicians, and journalists. Rodney Stark and Xiuhua Wang’s recent volume, *A Star in the East: The Rise of Christianity in China*, is the latest attempt to do just that. In addition, this slim volume (under 130 pages of text) attempts to provide a more precise demographic profile of Christians, both Protestant and Catholic, than population numbers alone reveal. The book begins with an overview of the state of religious belief in China in which Stark and Wang hope to avoid the “nonsense” offered by other authors by basing their discussion on “reliable statistics, properly interpreted” (pg. 2). The data from this initial chapter, which is actually based (over half of it verbatim) on a journal article by Stark and Eric Liu, discusses two recent surveys conducted in China in which the authors attempt to reconcile the fact that while many Chinese claim to have no religion, their actions may not support this assertion.¹ After looking at religion in China in general, Stark and Wang focus on the state of Christianity. While a 2007 survey reports 2.5% of the population as Christian (about 30 million), the authors massage this

number to suggest that there were “slightly more than 60 million” (p.11) Christians in China at that time.

Chapters two and three provide a bit of historical background on the situation of Christianity in China both before and after the founding of the PRC in 1949 and set the stage for Chapters four and five, which as the heart of the book look at factors such as education and urban or rural environments on the number of Chinese Christians. There are nuggets of novel statistical and analytical information found in these chapters. For example, survey results show that the religious revival in China is not predominantly rural, but that Christianity overall is growing among both rural and urban populations. As the authors summarize, “if there is an outbreak of religious fever in China, it is everywhere” (p.95). Stark and Wang also provide statistics that reflect the role of family networks in rural conversions. As they aptly remark, “[i]n the most literal sense, in rural China, Christianity is a family affair” (p.107). The authors further contend that higher education is positively correlated to being a Christian in today’s China. The sociological analysis of Chinese Christians is interesting, such as the assertion that conversion, as an act of conformity, usually follows social networks and family ties, or the refutation of the deprivation theory of conversion. However, these are the exact parts of the volume found in Stark’s other publications.² It would be of interest for future scholars to apply such sociological analysis to *local studies* and actually *show* how conversion works along such lines in modern China.

The final chapter offers projections of Chinese Christianity in the future and what this could mean for China. Stark and Wang predict just under 300 million Chinese Christians by 2030 and nearly double that number in 2040. The authors are more cautious in their prediction of what this growth may mean for China, but suggest it could encourage greater economic liberalization and

¹ The article by Stark and Liu (2011) was published in *Review of Religious Research* in 2011, but is neither referenced in the preface or in the bibliography. Similarly, portions of another article by Stark, Byron Johnson, and Carson Mencken (Stark, Johnson, and Mencken 2011) are also found verbatim throughout the book, though this article is likewise not referenced. In the Preface, the authors do state that the book grew out of a paper they co-authored, but this article (Stark and Wang 2014), the basis for chapter 4, is also not listed in the Bibliography.

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² For example, these points are examined in the *The Rise of Christianity* (Stark 1996), for which Stark was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize.

democracy, as well as influence within the Communist Party, especially stemming from Christian Party members, a phenomenon that seems to amaze the authors.

Overall, much of the tone in this volume tends to mirror most popular media accounts by focusing on “Repression and Christian Resistance” (the title for Chapter three). For example, in their historical vignettes of Chinese church leaders, the authors focus on those church leaders who were most opposed to religious policies, and thus tended to suffer persecution. Likewise, Stark and Wang mention how twenty-one pastors of “house churches” were arrested and sentenced to labor camps in 2008 in Shandong. However, the reference for this statistic is a Wikipedia page on the “Chinese house church.” Like the other Wikipedia references found in the volume (a total of six), there is no date given for when this information was accessed, and as of July 2015, this information was not included on the Wikipedia page referenced (nor on the page of “persecution of Christians” which the “Chinese house church” links to). Not to deny that the arrests and sentencing occurred, but for such a controversial and divisive topic, readers would have been better served with more reliable referencing. Another example is the authors introduce the True Jesus Church (TJC), an “indigenous” Chinese charismatic denomination, stating that the church grew throughout the repression of the early years of the People’s Republic, and after 1979 continued “as a group of unregistered house churches.” It is true that many TJC congregations are not registered, but it is also true that many *are* registered and belong to the TSPM (Three-Self Patriotic Movement). The authors chose to only mention the “house church” faction.

This approach seems to follow the Western evangelical bias of emphasizing the “house church” faction at the expense of legal, registered congregations. Daniel Bays, one of the foremost scholars of Chinese Christianity, argues that much of the media or popular coverage of Chinese Christianity, especially coming from the US, “continue[s] the established pattern of considerable romanticization of the unregistered church protagonists and basic demonization of the TSPM and the Chinese government” (2009, 11).

Furthermore, for authors who claim to be concerned with gathering reliable statistics and properly interpreting them, some of the numbers given in this volume seem to be used haphazardly. In the final chapter, the authors assert that by 2007 there were “as many Christians in China as there were members of the Communist party” (p.113). However, the volume’s calculation of about 60 million Christians in 2007 is substantially less than the over 73 million Party members at that time. More

significantly, though, when survey results did not support the authors’ assertions, the figures were seemingly explained away. For instance, based on supposed annual growth rate of 7% per year from 1980–2007, the authors calculated that the 61 million Christians in 2007 would be nearly 100 million by 2014. They checked their assumption against a 2014 survey. However, the results of the 2014 survey suggest there were the same number of Christians as in 2007. According to the authors, this meant the 2014 survey was “implausible” because it is “surely incorrect that no growth occurred” (p. 115). Could it not be possible that the 2007 survey was “implausible” or incorrect? The 2014 survey did report over 14% of respondents “believed in Jesus Christ,” which the authors understand as suggesting 200 million Christians. Stark and Wang also dismissed this as “nonsense” (p. 115). It is unclear why some survey results are “plausible” and others “nonsense,” but this reader, at least, was left with the impression that the statistics that were most convenient were used and those that did not corroborate with a narrative the authors hoped to present were discarded or explained away.

Some readers may be easily confused by the author’s dual usage of “adjusted” numbers and figures taken directly from survey results. For instance, Stark and Wang contend that “about 5 percent” (p. 90) of the population is Christian, but on the following page note that in the rural and urban regions 3 percent and 2.5 percent are Christian respectively, suggesting less than 3 percent Christian in the country overall. These second numbers, and presumably the other figures in this chapter (five) are “pure” results, not adjusted for “underreporting.”

More serious statistical problems are found in the predictions of future numbers given by Stark and Wang. They note that Christian belief, overall, is becoming less “intense” (because of less religious suppression) and that greater intensity leads to greater growth, however, they still project that the growth rate will continue at 7% a year. The 7% yearly growth rate is based on the increase from about 10 million Christians in 1980 to over 60 million in 2007, but is highly problematic for forecasting future growth. While the growth rate from 1980 to 2007 may have *averaged* 7% a year, as the authors note, it most likely fluctuated a great deal, depending on many external and internal factors. The authors simplify their calculations, not accounting for things such as overall population growth, but even using such approximations, their predictions are dubious because they only use 1980 and 2007 as reference points to predict nearly 580 million Christians in 2040. One could just as well use the same figures of 10 million Christians in 1980 and about

60 million in 2007 and suggest that the growth rate, because of decreasing restrictions, is slowing. If the growth rate was 8.4% in 1980 and decreased 0.1% per year, it would still result in just over 60 million in 2007. However, if that trend continued, the population of Christians in China in 2040 would be 226 million, less than half of Stark's and Wang's figure. I give this number not as a prediction, but to highlight the randomness in the simple method used by Stark and Wang.³

A major challenge for pollsters and scholars analyzing results of surveys on religion in China is how religious concepts are understood by respondents and those looking at the results. This is especially problematic when polling on Christianity in China with survey questions posed from a Western perspective. The authors acknowledge such challenges, pointing out that belonging, rather than believing, is the hallmark of most Chinese religious interactions, and that this is at variance with the standard Western approach to religion in which one person joins an organized religion at the expense of others. From the perspective of a non-monotheistic tradition, one in which the traditional norm is a belief in many deities, it should therefore not be strange to see some survey respondents "believe in" Jesus, but not identifying as Christian. As sociologist Fan Lizhu (2011, 105) has so aptly remarked, "The exclusivist orientation and emphasis on institutional membership so prominent in the West lack cultural significance within Chinese society."⁴

The problems of using Western methods and terminology to explain religious belief and practice in China is not novel, it is an issue that has been discussed by many scholars, from CK Yang (1961) to, more recently, Fan (2011). However, what I am suggesting we see in much of the analysis of the number of Christians in China is an eagerness for larger and increasing figures. In the early years of the PRC, CK Yang mentioned that Chinese

scholars downplayed the amount of religious expression out of a sense of pride, among other reasons. According to Yang (1961, 6), "perhaps an even stronger motivation for the assumption of an 'unreligious' or 'rationalistic' society for China lies in the Chinese intellectual's necessity of emphasizing the dignity of Chinese civilization in the face of the political and economic superiority of the nationalistically oriented Western world." The reverse of this often seems to be the case when Western scholars calculate the number of Christians in China. The numbers tend to be always adjusted "up." For example, Stark and Wang note that in the 2007 survey, some respondents expressed belief in Jesus, but did not self-identify as Christian. They then increase the number of Christians based on this. The problems with ascertaining accurate numbers and gathering reliable survey responses on such a sensitive issue is understandable and adjusting figures to account for underreporting is acceptable, but only when done fairly and from a position of objectivity. However, in this survey, there were other respondents who self-identified as Christians but also said they did *not* believe in Jesus.⁵ The figures were not adjusted downward to account for these cases. In fairness, this percentage was smaller, but I feel this seems to reflect a bias or a hope that the number of Christians is high and always increasing.

Another issue that gets lost in the macro view of total numbers of Christians in China is the tendency for rural groups to splinter into varying levels of quasi-Christian sects. Stark and Wang talk about the potential for greater denominationalism to be found in the future Chinese church, but they do not address the thorny issue of fringe groups that may claim to be Christian, but would not be recognized by most church bodies as Christian. For example, Eastern Lightning (also known as Church of the Almighty God), a fringe group that claims Jesus returned to Northern China as a woman in the 1980s claims to have millions adherents (Dunn 2009, 97). This group has been accused of kidnapping and seducing pastors, "stealing" members from other churches, and in a high profile case in 2014, even murder.⁶ As Bays (2009, 8) explains, there is a "strong tendency for rural Christian groups to become sectarian in their beliefs and behaviour, and in fact often to merge with persistent elements of folk religion or popular religion. This tendency is frequently accompanied by charismatic authoritarian leadership,

³ A recent Pew Research Center report (2015) based on projected demographic changes, acknowledges over 60 million Christians in China in 2010, quite similar to the numbers from Stark and Wang, but forecasts just over 70 million Christians in China in the year 2050, 5.4% of the population. It should be noted that this report does not, for lack of reliable data, account for religious switching (or converting) to (or from) Christianity.

⁴ Similarly, the problem of language is also apparent in conducting such surveys and can lead to misunderstandings. For example, in the 2007 and 2014 surveys analyzed by Stark and Wang, many respondents replied they "believed in Jesus Christ," but a more accurate translation of the Chinese question would be "Do you believe Jesus exists." For interesting anecdotal evidence of believing "in" Jesus, but not being Christian in China, see Cline (2010, 524) and Lee (2013, 103–5).

⁵ See Pew Research Center (2011), Appendix C, footnote 71.

⁶ The Wikipedia page for "Eastern Lightning" provides information and references for some such accusations: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Lightning [accessed August 18, 2015]

by claims that the founder or leader is divine, and sometimes by violence and coercion used against members, competitors, and even government authorities.” Such an issue is obviously not just a challenge for Stark and Wang’s statistics, but for any statistical survey of Chinese Christians (or other religious adherents). The point is, it seems like the broadest possible definition of Christianity is accepted and the resulting numbers are as high as possible. Of course this Western “hope” for more Christians in China is countered by a downplaying of the number of Christians by most Chinese official organizations. A large number of Christians does not bode well politically for the state or fit the narrative they hope to portray in which the Party is the vanguard of the people and attentive to their needs. Most scholars, both within and outside of China, put little stock in the official numbers of Christians reported by government agencies in China, or even by those given by the TSPM, seeing this group as only part of the total number.

In addition to the above criticisms of this book, there are numerous misspellings and factual errors. Many Chinese names and geographical places in particular are incorrect. Stark and Wang at times follow the *pinyin* convention of spelling, and at other times use an older system. For instance, Fujian is spelled in *pinyin*, as well as “Fukien” and also misspelled as “Fugian.” (pgs. 22 and 66). Watchman Nee’s name is not given in the *pinyin* version, but the names of his contemporaries (such as Wang Mingdao and Song Shangjie) are. Besides these inconsistencies, I have counted at least seven misspellings of names/places. For example, Jianrong Yu, “the distinguished Chinese researcher,” is twice referred to as Jainrong Yu.⁷ Similarly, in referencing Yang Huilin, the footnote and bibliography mistake Huilin as the scholar’s surname.⁸

Other factual mistakes plague the volume as well. Readers are led to believe that Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson, “two American missionaries,” attended the 1892 missionary convention in Shanghai and proposed the three-self model (p. 45). Venn was not American but British and neither attended the conference in Shanghai. In fact, both Venn and Anderson were dead by the time of the Shanghai conference, which was in 1890, not 1892. They were, however, as leaders of mission agencies (not missionaries), instrumental in developing the three-self concepts (see Shenk 1990).

⁷ Misspellings include: Heilongjiang (Heilonjiang, p. 25), Wang Mingdao (Wang Mindao, pp. 65 and 66), possibly Zhaoji (Zhaoj, p. 108), Jianrong Yu (Jainrong Yu, pgs. 75 and 100).

⁸ P. 129, chapter 4, footnote 21.

In terms of historical dates, the authors also often seem to miss the mark. Chapter two mentions treaties in 1859 and 1860 that “enabled Christian missionaries, Protestants as well as Catholics, to enter China and openly spread the gospel” (pgs. 13–14). The Treaty of Tianjin (1858) and the subsequent Convention of Peking (1860) did allow for greater missionary expansion into the interior of China, but the initial treaties following the First Opium War, most notably the Treaty of Nanjing (1842), provided a “legal” basis for missionary activity in five port cities. This treaty seems to be referenced (p. 15), but the date given is 1844. Catholic Bishop Pin-Mei Kung is also introduced and his death and birth dates are given as 1900 and 2000 respectively, but on the same page he is said to have passed away “at the age of ninety-eight.” Actually, Bishop Kung was born in 1901. Of course such inconsistencies or mistakes with historical dates are not central to the main points of the book, but they likewise do not instill confidence in readers, especially in terms of correctly understanding numbers.

The recent growth of Christianity in China is remarkable and in need of quality sociological inquiry, but estimating the number of Christians is wrought with many challenges. In a major report in 2011, the Pew Research Center acknowledged these issues in its analysis by relying on multiple sources and statistics.⁹ Stark and Wang do offer survey results that, when read carefully, may be helpful in understanding the demographics of Chinese Christianity. However, overall the volume, marred by poor editing and a prejudicial selection of material, reveals some of the dangers encountered in trying to count China’s Christians.

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⁹ Especially see Appendix C of this report. <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2011/12/ChristianityAppendixC.pdf>

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书评论文

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中国基督徒的数量：《东方之星：基督教在中国的兴起》的批判性解读

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《东方之星：基督教在中国的兴起》2015 作者：罗德尼·斯塔克，王秀华 出版社：West Conshohocken: Templeton Press

对于西方学者、教会领袖、政治家和记者而言，解密中国基督徒的数量一直具有独特的魅力。罗德尼·斯塔克和王秀华近期的著作《东方之星：基督教在中国的兴起》，就是关于这个主题的一次最新尝试。这本不长的著作（文本不超过 130 页）试图提供一个更精确的有关基督徒——无论新教徒，还是天主教徒——的人口状况，而非仅仅提供数据。本书首先对中国宗教信仰的状况作出概述，其中，两位作者希望能够避免因基于其他作者“可靠统计、合理解释”之类的论述而产生“荒谬之语”（第 2 页）。实际上，第一章的数据是基于（超过一半完全引用）斯塔克和埃瑞克·刘（Eric Liu）的一篇期刊论文，并且对近期在中国进行的两次调查作出讨论。而这两次调查旨在调和一个事实，即很多中国人声称没有宗教信仰，但他们的行为却不然。¹ 概览中国宗教情况之后，斯塔克和王秀华就把焦点聚集在基督教的现状上。根据 2007 年的一个调查报告显示，当时，2.5% 的人口是基督徒（约 3000 万），而作者对数据进行了改动，并暗示当时中国的基督徒数量“比 6000 万略高”。

第二章和第三章提供了少许中华人民共和国在 1949 年建国前后、中国基督教传播的历史背景，并为第四章和第五章营造阐述平台。而四五两章作为本书的核心，审视了诸多与中国基督徒数量相关的因素，如教育、城市与农村的环境。这几章中，可以发现不少异常的统计数据和分析信息。例如，调查结果表明，中国宗教复兴并非主要在农村，而是基督徒的数量在农村和城市都出现了增长。斯塔克和王秀华总结道，“如果中国爆发了宗教热，那么它是无处不在的”（第 95 页）。同时，还提供统计数据，以反映

1 这篇文章 (Stark and Liu, 2011) 出版于 2011 年的《宗教研究评论/Review of Religious Research》，但这并没有在本书的参考文献中标出。同样，斯塔克、乔森 (Byron Johnson)，麦克肯 (Carson Mencken, 2011) 的一些研究也可以在全书中窥见到不少，均无一列入参考文献。在前言中，作者们特意声明本书源于他们合写的一篇文章，但这篇文章 (Stark and Wang, 2014)，作为第 4 章的基础，也并没有收入参考文献。

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家庭网络在农村信教过程中的作用。并恰当地评价道，“最直接的感受就是，在中国农村，基督教是一个家庭的事”（第 107 页）。二人还进一步声称，在当代中国，高等教育与信徒身份呈正相关。而有趣的是有关中国基督徒的社会学分析，比如认为信教作为一种依从行为，通常遵循社会网络和家庭关系，还有对剥夺理论 (deprivation theory) 来解释宗教信仰改变的批判，然而，这些都可以准确地斯塔克的其他出版物中找到。² 对以后的学者应用这些社会学分析进行本土研究，或展示当代中国信教行为如何沿着该轨迹运作，会是很有意思的。

最后一章对中国基督教的未来做出了预测，并分析了它对中国的意义。斯塔克和王秀华预测，在 2030 年，中国基督徒的数量尚低于 3 亿，但到 2040 年，数字要将近多出一倍。而就这种增长对中国的意义，二人作出了更谨慎的预测。但他们认为这种增长能够鼓励进一步的经济自由化和民主化，并对中国共产党内部造成影响，尤其是基督徒党员的出现，此现象似乎让两位作者也大吃一惊。

总体而言，本书的主调倾向于反映出多数的大众媒体针对“基督教的镇压和反抗”的描述（第三章的标题）。例如，关于中国教会领袖的历史片段中，作者把注意力集中在最反对宗教政策的领袖身上，而他们也因此往往遭受迫害。同样，斯塔克和王秀华也提到 2008 年，山东“家庭教会”有 21 名牧师被逮捕，并判处劳教。然而，这一统计数据引自维基百科“中国家庭教会”网页。正如书中其他几处对维基百科的引用（共有六处）一样，本书没有提供任何访问该网页时的日期，而截至 2015 年 7 月，维基百科并没有提供该信息（“中国家庭教会”链接中的“迫害基督徒”页面也没有）。尽管不能否认逮捕和判刑的确发生过，但对于这样一个有争议、有分歧的话题，最好能为读者提供更可靠的参考文献。另一个例子是作者有关一个中国“本土”的灵恩派教会——真耶稣教会 (TJC) 介绍时，认为该教会产生于中华人民共和国建国之初的镇压之中，并在 1979 年继续“作为未注册的家庭教会群体”而存在。的确，许多 TJC 教会的聚会点没有进行登记，但也有不少注册登记的 TJC，属于三自教会（三自爱国运动委员会），而作者却仅仅提及“家庭教会”部分。

2 比如，这些观点在《基督教的兴起/The Rise of Christianity》(Stark, 1996) 进行过阐述，而斯塔克也因这本书获得普利策奖的提名。

这种方法似乎遵循了西方福音派的偏见，即在损坏合法的登记教会的情况下强调“家庭教会”部分。裴士丹 (Daniel Bays)，作为研究中国基督教最重要的学者之一，认为许多媒体或中国基督教的流行报道，尤其是来自美国的，“继续维持着把未注册教会浪漫化，把三自爱国运动委员会和中国政府基本被妖魔化的模式。”(2009: 11)。

此外，斯塔克和王秀华自称重视收集可靠的统计数据，并进行合理解释，但是本书提供的一些数字的使用似乎很杂乱。在最后一章中，两位作者认为在 2007 年，“中国的基督徒人数已经等同于共产党员的人数”（第 113 页）。然而，本书作出的 2007 年中国基督徒数量统计是 6000 万，事实上远远少于共产党员的人数，那时候党员人数达 7300 万。更重要的是，当调查结果无法支持作者的论断之时，这些数据却似乎都能得到解释。例如，基于 1980 年—2007 年年增长率 7% 的假设，作者们根据 2007 年 6100 万的基督徒人数，计算得出 2014 年有将近 1 亿的基督徒。接着，他们将此项假设与 2014 年的调查进行比较。然而，2014 年调查的结果表明，基督徒的数量和 2007 年的相同。而根据两位作者的观点，这意味着 2014 年的调查是“不合理的”，因为它“没有增长，肯定是错误的”（第 115 页）。那么，2007 年的调查“不合理”或不正确，是不可能的吗？2014 年的调查显示，超过 14% 的受访者“信耶稣基督”，作者则理解为存在 2 亿名基督徒。斯塔克和王秀华认为这也是“无稽之谈”（第 115 页）。我们不清楚为什么一些调查结果是“合理”的而其他则是“不合理”的，但至少这一点留下给读者的印象是，与作者的论点相符的统计数据得到了利用，而不能证实作者的展示的论述则被丢弃或曲解。

斯塔克和王秀华对“数字的调整”以及从调查结果直接引用数据——这种双重用法，可能很容易引起一些读者的困惑。比如，两位作者指出“大约有 5%”的人口是基督徒（第 90 页），但下一页就点明在农村和城市地区基督徒的比例分别是 3% 和 2.5%，也就意味着少于全国总人口的 3%。据推测，这一组数据和该章节（第五章）的其他数据都是“原始”数据，不适用于“佐证”作者的观点。

更严重的数据问题在于两位作者对未来基督徒人数的预测。他们认为，总体上，基督教的生存环境渐渐地不再像过去那样紧张（因为宗教镇压减少），（根据其理论）紧张的环境下才会导致迅速的增长，然而，他们推测增长率仍然会保持在每年 7%。7% 的年增长率是基于从 1980 年到 2007 年间，基督徒从约 1000 万增长到 6000 万得出的，但这很难据此来预测未来的增长趋势。虽然从 1980 年到 2007 年，平均每年有 7% 的增长率，正如作者所言，在内外两部分因素的影响下，增长率的波动性很大。两位作者将计算过程简化，并没有考虑整体人口的增长，但即使使用近似值，他们的预测也是可疑的，因为他们仅用 1980 年和 2007 年作为参考点，就预测出 2040 年有近 5 亿 8 千万的基督徒。那我们可以同样使用 1980 年的数据 1000 万和 2007 年的数据大约 6000 万，表明增长率由于限制减少正在放缓。如果 1980 年的增长率

是 8.4%，每年下降 0.1%，但人数仍然会在 2007 年超过 6000 万。然而，如果这种趋势继续下去，中国基督徒的人口到了 2040 年将是 22600 万，还不到作者们预计所得的一半。我给出这个数字并不是一个预测，而是为了显示两位作者在使用这种方法中的随意性。³

在分析中国宗教调查结果时，民意调查者和学者所遇到的一个重大挑战是，受访者和关注者是如何理解宗教概念的。而从西方角度设置中国基督教的调查问题时，尤显得问题重重。作者们承认这些挑战，并指出归属感才是大多数中国人信教的标志，而非信仰，这与西方信教情况的标准不同，在西方，个人加入一个有组织的宗教，是以排斥其它宗教为代价。从非一神论的传统出发，即多神信仰的传统规范，看到一些受访者“相信”耶稣，但不认同自己是基督徒，并不奇怪。正如社会学家范丽珠 (Fan Lizhu, 2011: 105) 如此贴切地评论道，“在西方，排外取向和对机构成员关系的强调如此突出，以至于其在中国社会缺乏文化的重要性。”⁴

用西方研究方法和术语来解释中国的宗教信仰和习俗，并不新奇。从杨庆堃 (CK Yang, 1961) 到最近的范丽珠 (Fan, 2011)，这是一个已经被许多学者研讨过的问题。然而，我的思考是，在中国基督徒人数的分析中，我们看到的是一种对加速递增数字的渴望。在建国初期，杨庆堃曾提到，中国学者淡化中国宗教信徒的人数，原因之一是出于一种骄傲。跟据杨庆堃 (Yang, 1961: 6) 的观点，“也许作出中国社会‘非宗教性’‘理性’假设的一个更强大的动机是，面对以民族主义为主的西方世界的政治、经济优势，中国知识分子有必要强调中华文明的尊严。”而其反面，似乎就是西方学者计算中国基督徒数量的行为。这一数字往往被调整为“上升”状态，例如，两位作者指出，在 2007 年的调查中，一些受访者表达了对上帝的信仰，但不认为自己是基督徒。然后，在此基础上，他们增加了基督徒的数量。确定准确数字和收集此类敏感问题的调查答卷所产生的问题，是可以理解的，鉴于漏报情况调整数据也是可以接受的，但只有在公平、客观的情况下才行。然而，在这项调查中，也有一些受访者自称是基督徒，但同时表示不相信耶稣。⁵ 这些案例的数字则没有向下调整。公平地说，这种情况发生的比例较小，但是我觉得这似乎反映出一种偏见或一种希望，想看到基督徒数量是高的，而且总是在不断增加。

³ 会众研究中心的最近一份报告 (Pew Research Center, 2015) 以突出的人口统计变化为基础，认为中国在 2010 年拥有超过 6000 万的基督徒，这和斯塔克与王秀华的数字极为相似，但是他们预测在 2050 年基督徒人数会超过 7000 万，占总人口的 5.4%。需要注意的是这份报告由于缺乏可靠数据，并没有考虑宗教信仰改变的情况，比如改教和脱教。

⁴ 类似地，语言问题在进行这些调查时也比较突出，并产生误解。比如，在斯塔克和王秀华分析的 2007 年和 2004 年调查中，许多受访者回答说“相信上帝”，但是更准确的译法可能是“你相信耶稣存在吗？”获取更多有关“信”耶稣却并非基督徒的轶事，可见 Cline (2010: 524) 和 Lee (2013: 103–5)。

⁵ 见会众研究中心 (2011)，附录，脚注 71。

另一个被掩盖在中国基督徒总数的宏观角度里的问题，是中国农村群体倾向于分裂成不同的基督教派别，甚至是异端。斯塔克和王秀华提及了未来中国教会出现大宗派主义的潜力，但他们并没有论及自称基督徒、但不被大多数基督教会承认的边缘群体这一棘手的话题。例如，东方闪电（也被称为全能神），这个边缘群体声称，耶稣在上世纪 80 年代以一名女性的形象降临在中国北部，并号称有数百万的信徒（Dunn, 2009: 97）。该群体被指控绑架和诱拐牧师，“偷取”其他教会的成员，并在 2014 年引发了一件令人瞩目的谋杀案件。⁶ 正如裴士丹 (Bays, 2009: 8) 所解说的那样，“对于农村基督徒群体，他们信仰和行为中有强烈的宗派主义倾向，而且事实上，这往往和民间宗教里的固有元素结合后而出现。这种倾向经常伴随着一位富有卡理斯玛的权威领袖，声称其神圣性，有时对其教众、对手甚至政府实施暴力和镇压。”很明显，这个问题不仅仅对于斯塔克和王秀华的数据来说是一个挑战，对于任何对中国基督徒（或其他宗教追随者）的统计调查，都是一个挑战。其中的关键点是，这些调查似乎接受基督教的有可能的最广泛的定义，并且最终数据是能高则高的。当然，对这种“希望”中国基督徒人数增长的西方式渴望的反面，则是大多数中国官方组织掩饰其基督徒数量，因为大量的基督徒从政治上并不能很好地显示国家想要刻画的形象，这个形象就是党是人民的卫士，对人民的需求无微不至。大多数学者，不论是国内还是国外，对中国政府机构报道的基督徒官方数字、或者甚至是三自给出的数据都不感到惊讶，反而把这些数据仅仅看作总数的一部分。

除了以上这些评论之外，本书还存在着大量笔误和事实性错误。尤其是许多中文名字和地理名称都是不正确的。斯塔克和王秀华一会儿使用拼音，一会儿又用旧式拼写法。比如，“Fujian”是福建的拼音写法，也可以写作“Fukien”，又错写为“Fugian”（第 22、66 页）。倪柝声（Watchman Nee）并没有给出拼音写法，但是他同龄人（如王明道/Wang Mingdao，宋尚杰/Song Shangjie）却给出拼音。并且，这种不统一的现象，我在书里的人名或地名中，至少发现 7 次。比如，于建嵘（Jianrong Yu），“这位著名的中国学者”，有 2 次写成了“Jainrong Yu”。⁷ 相似地，提及杨慧林（Yang Huilin）时，脚注和参考文献把惠林（Huilin）当成了这位学者的姓氏。⁸

[Correction added after online publication on 8 September 2016: the Chinese spelling of Yang Huilin was not correct (杨惠林). It has now been replaced by 杨慧林.]

⁶ 维基百科中“东方闪电”提供了关于这些指控的参考资料：https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Lightning [访问于 8 月 18 日，2015 年]

⁷ 笔误包括：黑龙江/Heilongjiang（误作 Heilonjiang，第 25 页），王明道/Wang Mingdao（误作 Wang Mindao，第 65、66 页），可能是 Zhaoji（误作 Zhaoj，第 108 页），于建嵘/Jianrong Yu（误作 Jainrong Yu，第 75、100 页）。

⁸ 第 129 页，第 4 章，脚注 21。

其他的事实性错误在本书泛滥成灾。书中告诉读者们，亨利·樊（Henry Venn）和鲁福斯·安德森（Rufus Anderson）是“两名美国传教士”，他们参加了 1882 年上海的传教会议，并提出了三自模型（the three-self model）（第 45 页）。但是樊并不是美国人，而是英国人，他也没有参加过上海的会议。事实上，樊和安德森在上海会议的那一年去世，而那时是 1880 年，也并非 1892 年。然而，他们的确和三自概念相关，不过他们是作为传教机构的领袖（而非传教士），对发展三自概念起了重要作用。（参见 Shenk, 1990）。

两位作者似乎也常常忘记标注历史日期。第 2 章提及 1859 年和 1860 年的条约中“允许基督教传教士，不论是新教还是天主教，进入中国传教并传播福音”（第 13–14 页）。《天津条约》（1858）和随后的《北京条约》（1860）允准传教士进一步往内地传教，但是第一次鸦片战争的早期条约中，尤其是《南京条约》（1842），为传教士在五个港口城市传教提供了“法律”基础。该条约似乎受到引用（第 15 页），但是时间却标注为 1844 年。天主教主教龚品梅（Pin-Mei Kung）也被提及，其出生、逝世的年份被分别标注为 1900 和 2000，但是在同一页，又称他享年“98 岁”。事实上，龚主教生于 1901 年。当然，这种历史日期上的矛盾情况和错误与本书的重点并不密切相关，但是对给读者造成不便，尤其是这些为人熟知的年份。

近年来，中国基督徒的人数增长是明显的，也需要质量相当的社会调查，但是基督徒数量的预测需要面对种种挑战。在 2011 年的主要报告中，皮尤研究中心承认它的分析依赖于使用多种资料和统计数据⁹。斯塔克和王秀华的确给出了调查结果，而在仔细阅读的情况下，对理解中国基督教的人口分布的确是有利的。但是，纵观全书来说，因低劣的编校水准和带有偏见的资料选择，显露出一些在试图计算中国基督徒人数的过程中的隐患。

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⁹ 详见本报告的附录 C <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2011/12/ChristianityAppendixC.pdf>

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