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理解華人宗教的新路徑

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# A New Approach to Understanding Chinese Religion

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## Abstract

In China and Taiwan, “religion” is recognized from the perspective of the West, which defines religion from the pattern of Christianity. An analysis of the parameters of Christianity demonstrates that it is unique in the context of religions worldwide. The Christian model either skews the understanding of other religions or implies that they are not religions. Thus, Chinese Religion is either not recognized as a religion or is understood to be a “folk religion,” meaning the religion of the uneducated, or as “popular religion,” meaning a religion other than the established religion of a culture. Neither term fits Chinese Religion, as it initially was the religion of the elite and became the state religion as well as the foundation of Chinese culture and society.

Chinese Religion, the oldest documented religious modality in human history, can be delineated by twelve behavioral, social and ideological characteristics, which are or were central to most religions. These characteristics delineate the second oldest religion arising with horticulture and early agriculture, which could be labeled “Familism,” in relation to the earliest religious construct found in gathering-hunting traditions. This approach offers a new means of understanding Chinese Religion from a global perspective, resolves the many contradictions causing Chinese Religion to be either neglected or misunderstood, and is pertinent to evolving government policies regarding religion in Taiwan and China.

**Keywords:** *huaren jiao*, Chinese Religion, Familism

## Prolegomena<sup>1</sup>

The following is not a typical scholarly article but an essay based on over a half century of studying religion in China from the standpoint of comparative religion. Accordingly, the many relevant studies of Chinese and Western scholars are neither discussed nor, when appropriate, critiqued, and references are not given for understandings based on direct observation. For to do so would turn this paper into a full-length book, given the number of topics dealt with.

I have been studying Chinese traditional culture since 1959, and spent two full years living in Taiwan both as a graduate student (1965–66) and as a visiting professor (1973–74), visiting Taiwan for shorter periods of time every few years since then. I have been visiting the Mainland since 1983. I have been at the forefront of arguing for the acceptance of Chinese Religion as the religious basis of Chinese culture and society and am gratified that the following generations of Western scholars of religion in China in general have adopted this viewpoint.<sup>2</sup> But it is to be noted it remains the case that in Taiwan few scholars of religion study Chinese Religion, and on the Mainland, Chinese Religion is studied at Folklore institutes and Minority Culture departments but not within Religious Studies. Of course, there are Chinese scholars who do understand the Chinese religious situation. In 1995, I met Zhong Jingwen 鐘敬文 at his folklore institute and found that we were in complete accord on the understanding of religion in China.

Prior to focusing on Chinese religion, I studied Christianity at a major U.S. divinity school, and the list of Christian parameters in Part I have been approved

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on a series of lectures given at Beijing Normal University in May, 2012, after being encouraged to suggest alternative ways for the government to deal with indigenous mainstream religion. The positive responses to these lectures accompanied by useful suggestions, which I greatly appreciate, have been integrated into this version. An early version was presented at the Republic of China Centenary International Conference on Retrospects and Prospects: Religion in Taiwan, Taipei, May, 2011, entitled “The Impact of the West on the Understanding of Chinese Religion.” Again I am grateful for the critical responses to the paper.

<sup>2</sup> “In this role of founding father [of the serious scholarly study of religion in China] his [Daniel Overmeyer’s] contribution, along with Jordan Paper and the late Laurence G. Thompson, has plainly been crucial.” T. H. Barrett, “Review of *The People and the Dao: New Studies in Chinese Religions in Honour of Daniel L. Overmyer*,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* (Third Series) 20.3 (2010): 392–93.

by devout Christian comparative religion scholars. My awareness of Western government understandings in part is based on serving as an expert witness on Chinese religion and on religion in general in Canadian court cases both for and against the government, depending on the particular case.

This essay is divided into two parts. The first part discusses how Chinese religion has been misunderstood due to the widespread use of Christianity as a model for religion in general, aspects on which I and others have written a number of times. The second part suggests an alternative model for understanding Chinese and many other similar religions; this part presents a new model for the study of religion not only in China but in general.

## **(1) The Christian Imposition on the Understanding of Chinese Religion**

### *Introduction*

Because of Christian missionizing, Chinese Religion has remained virtually invisible both to scholars and governments inside and outside of China for dual reasons. The first reason is due to the needs and attitudes of Christian missionaries for the last half millennium who either deliberately falsified Chinese Religion or deemed it ignorant superstition, as well as the work of the Devil. The second reason is that religious studies began as essential knowledge for Christian missionaries, and even when secularized less than a half century ago, continues to delineate religion according to the model of Christianity. Both approaches either deliberately served the colonial enterprise or are an instance of the continuation of a colonial attitude, even if unconscious, towards other cultures. For the Chinese people, scholars and governments to impose this understanding is to inflict on themselves the mentality of a colonized people.

By Chinese Religion (*huaren jiao* 華人教), I am referring to the religion based on *jing zu* 敬祖 (reverencing ancestors) in the Chinese mode. This foundational core is summed up by an aphorism that already was archaic when it was inserted into the beginning of the *Lun yu* 論語 (I.9) twenty-five hundred or so years ago: *shen zhong zhui yuan* 慎終追遠 (“Carefully attend to the last [rites of parents] and follow up when [they are] long gone [with offerings]”). Chinese Religion is based on the understanding of the family and clan as numinous, as well as the model for society and government. The primary ritual

is the offering of a meal to the departed to be shared by the living. Individuals are subordinated to family, and life after death is based on the understanding of family as including the past and future members of the family. The religious imperative is to have sons (now moving towards daughters as well) to carry on the family line.

This central aspect has been synthesized with the worship of deities, and Buddhism and Daoism have become major adjuncts. In other words, religions in China aside from the central core focusing on family should not be understood as separate religions, but serve to enhance this core, even though they are carried on outside of the family and clan structures, in temples, monasteries, etc. As will be discussed later, some initially functioned separately, but only those that synthesized with family rituals survived over the many centuries. To use the Chinese metaphor of trunk and branches, Chinese Religion is the trunk and the various regional variations, as well as the adjunct religions, are the branches. To continue the metaphor, the root of the tree is the global religion of Familism (*zuxianjiao* 祖先教) that will be introduced in the second part of this paper.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to point out that the problem in coming to terms with religion in China is not a problem for current specialists in Chinese Religion or religion in China. Rather it is a problem for those in religious studies in China and Taiwan who are unfamiliar with the realities of Chinese religion and history or who have not realized that their own personal and family experiences are relevant, and for those in government who are trying to manage religion in China, and to a lesser extent in Taiwan, while not according authenticity to the fundamental Chinese mode of religious expression. Moreover, it is a problem in North America as the religion of ethnic Chinese are not accorded recognition, and therefore legitimacy, by the Canadian and United States governments.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Christian Missionary Understanding of Chinese Religion*

A detailed history of the Christian depiction of religion in China can be

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed analysis of Chinese religious rituals, as well as their defining Chinese Religion, see my *The Spirits Are Drunk: Comparative Approaches to Chinese Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 1–22.

<sup>4</sup> David Chuenyan Lai, Jordan Paper, and Li Chuang Paper, “The Chinese in Canada: Their Unrecognized Religion,” in *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada*, eds. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak (Toronto: Pearson Longman, 2005), 89–110.

found in my early publications.<sup>5</sup> In summary, Mateo Ricci, the first Jesuit to be allowed to enter China at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, followed the Jesuit scheme of focusing on the elite, with the understanding that if the leaders were converted to Christianity, then the rest of the population would be required to follow.<sup>6</sup> He quickly realized that conversion would be impossible if becoming Christian meant being unable to take part in family, clan and state rituals, since these rituals determined socio-political status. Ricci presented Christianity as an overlay on Chinese Religion similar to Buddhism. In order to do so, he created an understanding of religion in China that deliberately ignored most of Chinese religiosity. Ricci used the term *san jiao* 三教 (“Three Teachings”) to mean Three Religions, one of which, Confucianism as a religion, was a Jesuit invention. This was further advantageous to the Jesuit missionaries as some took on government positions, which meant that they would, as a matter of course, take part in state rituals. If these religious rituals were understood as religious, then these missionaries would have been burned at the stake for heresy upon returning to Europe, this being the time of the Inquisition. Over the course of a half millennium, the Jesuit invention of “Three Religions in China” became scholarly dogma; to deny its validity until quite recently amounted to academic heresy.

In the Jesuit writings sent to Europe (*Relations*), “Confucianism” was treated in two different ways. On the one hand, the Jesuits declared it to be a religion compatible with Christianity but missing the element of the Trinity. So the Chinese elite were ready and waiting for the Christian truth, thus arguing for the continuation of support for their mission. On the other hand, they treated Confucianism as a socio-political philosophy, but one that was superior to the divine right of kings then prevalent in Europe. Their idealized rendering of Chinese political philosophy promoted an enlightened quasi-democracy, with a monarch that reigned but did not rule, and was highly influential on a number of

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<sup>5</sup> Especially in my *The Spirits Are Drunk*, 23–50.

<sup>6</sup> Barrett has recently written, “Particular credit for identifying the relevance of Ricci for twentieth-century scholarship on Chinese religion must go to Jordan Paper (*The Spirits are Drunk*, 4–12); my own observations are intended to go further to fill in the picture by adding references to nineteenth-century sources, and demonstrating wherever possible the filiations between sources, in order to show how Ricci’s paradigm persisted.” T. H. Barrett, “Chinese Religion in English Guise: The History of an Illusion,” *Modern Asian Studies* 39 3 (2005): 511n.9.

European intellectuals, such as Voltaire and Leibnitz, who in turn, influenced Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine in America. These writings depicting a highly idealistic and romanticized Chinese government stimulated both the American and French revolutions. Particularly important, these writings provided the basic idea of modern democracy, that government exists for the benefit of the people governed, first articulated in the *Mengzi* 孟子, some twenty-five hundred years ago.

The Jesuits were followed by Dominican and Franciscan missionaries who ignored the elite and sought to convert the masses. They understood normative Chinese religion not to be a religion. They deemed it to be both gross superstition and the work of the Devil to be replaced by the true religion of Christianity. Those who converted were expected to act as Europeans rather than Chinese. This was accentuated by the treaties contingent on the so-called Opium Wars of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, especially the French language version of the treaty following the second war that accorded Chinese converts extraterritoriality—Chinese who converted to Christianity were no longer legally Chinese and not subject to Chinese laws.

The Americans through their Open Door policy came to understand that all of China belonged to them through the work of American Protestant missionaries and even deployed gunboats to the furthest reaches of the Yangtze River to protect them. To today, American foreign policy towards China, stimulated by conservative Republicans acting hand in hand with evangelical Christians, continues to press for the rights of foreign controlled Chinese Christianity and other subversive modes of religion in China to ultimately bring China under American sway.

This understanding of Chinese Religion, when it is recognized at all, maintains that it is superstition to be replaced by Western thinking. Thus, it is called a “folk religion,” meaning the ignorant religion of an uneducated, barely civilized people. Tellingly, the term folk religion is virtually only applied to Chinese Religion, as a perusal of Internet search engines will verify. Hinduism (literally the religion of the Indus River valley), also a foreign construct, is not called a folk religion because the British colonized South Asia solely for economic not ideological reasons, and Christian missionary activity was discouraged by the English East India Company so as not to further upset the population and threaten the corporation’s profits. Hence, Hinduism, rather than considered

superstition, ended up by being romantically idealized by many British and Americans.

Calling Chinese Religion a folk religion derogates Chinese Religion and is logically absurd, as it is the very opposite of a folk religion. The essential features of Chinese Religion, the oldest religion in the world for which we have documentary evidence, was the prerogative of the aristocratic clans from the Xia through the Zhou eras. Only in the Han period did the non-elite come to have family names and thus directly participate in Chinese Religion. Moreover, the central rituals of the Emperor and Empress up to a century ago were identical with the primary rituals of the peasantry, save being considerably more elaborate. The heads of provinces and districts not only had governmental functions but priestly ones as well. In the provincial and district government quarters there were several temples where the officials led rituals for the benefit of the region and to celebrate literati culture.

A modern replacement for “folk religion” is “popular religion,” which is often applied to Chinese Religion in scholarly writing. According to *A New Dictionary of Religions*:

There is no single definition of what constitutes ‘Popular Religion.’ Some scholars have defined it as rural in contrast to urban forms of religion, the religion of the peasant in contrast to that of the ruling classes; or, in a variation of this definition, the religion of the masses as contrasted with that of the intellectual or sophisticated classes. If, however, popular religion is seen in contrast to ‘official’ religion, the latter defined as religion founded on authoritative documents and propagated and maintained by religious specialists, priests or hierarchy, then the term ‘popular’ can apply to any layperson, whether peasant or ruling-class, who adopts beliefs and practices which may be at odds with the religious specialist’s views . . .<sup>7</sup>

Of course, none of these meanings are relevant to Chinese Religion. Thus, the term, probably unwittingly for most scholars who use it, perpetuates the

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<sup>7</sup> John R. Hinnells, ed., *A New Dictionary of Religions* (print publication date: 1995), Blackwell Reference Online, ([http://www.blackwellreference.com/public/book.html?id=g9780631181392\\_9780631181392](http://www.blackwellreference.com/public/book.html?id=g9780631181392_9780631181392)).



Christian missionary contempt for Chinese Religion and Chinese culture.

Hence, a current Chinese term to designate Chinese Religion, *minjian zongjiao* 民間宗教, when referring to Chinese culture, should not be translated as “folk religion” or “popular religion,” both of which imply the religion of the uneducated or religion other than the mainstream religion of the culture, but should be translated as “Chinese [Han] ethnic religion.” “Ethnic” in this usage means the characteristics of a people or culture. It should be noted that the term *minjian zongjiao* copied the Japanese usage, as did the term for religion itself, *zongjiao* 宗教, and many of these borrowings poorly fit the Chinese language context and have caused much confusion over the years.

### *The Development of Religious Studies*

The earliest students of comparative religion were the Jesuits, who wrote their *Relations* to Europe from their missionary centers in (present-day) China, Canada and Paraguay describing the religion and other features of non-Western cultures as they perceived them. Eventually non-Western religions began to be taught in divinity schools, institutes for the training of Protestant ministers and missionaries. Within European and American universities, it was taught under the umbrella of knowing the enemy to better convert the “natives.” As late as 1960, when I wished to study comparative religion in the Divinity School of the University of Chicago under the tutelage of Eliade and Kitagawa, I had to leave after a year because as a non-Christian I could not honestly pass the faith-based examinations designed for the Christian ministry required before one could specialize in non-Christian religions. As I discovered, the same requirement was also to be found at such universities as Harvard and Princeton. Accordingly, I shifted to the study of classical Sinology with a focus on intellectual history. When I was able to move back into religious studies in the early 1970s, I approached religion not from a Christian or even a Western perspective but from a Chinese one. This allowed me to more readily perceive Native American and African religions than my colleagues trained in divinity schools, and these studies, in turn, further heightened my understanding of Chinese Religion.

The religious studies situation only began to change in the mid-1960s with the development of religious studies programs in state-supported American universities. But even in the 1970s at the University of Toronto, for example, those who taught East Asian religions were retired Christian missionaries from

China and Japan, and one was replaced following retirement by a former Catholic nun with close ties to an influential European Catholic theologian. She was a major influence on turning the Center for World Religions at the Chinese Academy for the Social Sciences for a while towards Christian theology rather than religious studies—the two fields considered distinctly separate in the West.

Thus, students who came out of these programs were indoctrinated to understand religion from a Christian perspective, often without understanding the degree of the indoctrination and how it influenced their understanding of non-Christian religions. With regard to Chinese Religion, a change took place beginning in the 1960s when scholars began to either intensively study literary, Daoist or Buddhist Chinese, and thus begin to think in Chinese terms, or became fluent in spoken Chinese and studied Chinese Religion in situ, that is, did actual field work, particularly in Taiwan, and perceived how Chinese live their religion. Most Western scholars of religion in China now do understand Chinese Religion, but this understanding has not by and large influenced contemporary Chinese thinking on religion in their own culture, an understanding which is rooted in a non-Chinese Christian model.

The contemporary rise of fundamentalism in the monotheistic traditions, however, is now having an impact on some Western scholars of Chinese civilization. Several decades ago, a few neurobiologists and psychiatrists were arguing that the concept of a monotheistic deity is hardwired into the brain. Two proponents moved from biology to the new cognitive approach to religion to argue that Christ is a part of all human minds.<sup>8</sup> Recently, a classical Sinologist working with a Protestant theologian has understood the new cognitive science of religion to posit as a fact that “a high, moralizing god with strategic knowledge who exercises of kind of high moral providence”—that is, the God of the Hebrew Bible—is an essential feature of human cognition. They analyzed pre-Han dynasty texts and found ample proof that a punitive monotheistic deity was present in early Chinese culture.<sup>9</sup> It is not being suggesting that those in the

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<sup>8</sup> Eugene G. d’Aquili and Andrew B. Newberg, *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Religious Experience* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1979), 87.

<sup>9</sup> James Clark and Justin T. Winslett, “The Evolutionary Psychology of Chinese Religion: Pre-Qin High Gods as Punishers and Rewarders,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (hereafter *JAAR*) 79.4 (2011): 928–60. See also my response in *JAAR* 80.2 (2012): 518–21 and their rejoinder in *JAAR* 80.2 (2012): 522–24.

cognitive study of religion themselves would state this, for the logical corollary is that polytheists—in this case, most Chinese from the Han dynasty on—are sub-human, the ultimate paradigm of the colonialist-imperialist mindset. One hopes that this is an isolated development and not a trend. I am not the only Sinologist who has noted the ethnocentric bias of the new cognitive studies of religion. Harold Roth, for example, has also argued that the cognitive approach is often a matter of unreflective ethnocentrism and cognitive imperialism.<sup>10</sup>

*Defining Religion According to the Christian Model and Its  
Relationship to Chinese Religion*

The effect of studying non-Western religion through a Christian lens is to understand religion both in general and in various cultures on the model of Christianity. But Christianity, as I will argue, is an anomaly among religions worldwide and is so idiosyncratic that it is the worst possible model for understanding religion globally.

An analysis of Christianity presents at least twelve determining factors, most of which are unique to Christianity:

1. Belief: Belief is fundamental to Christianity in general (and is crucial to most Protestant traditions in distinction to Catholicism as they understand salvation by faith alone) because adherence to a creed is essential to membership, especially the belief in a triune, singular deity, which is inherently illogical and thus requires faith. Thus, most dictionary definitions of religion focus on belief. Religions are often called “faith traditions.” No other religious tradition centers on faith; for example, in Judaism, behavior—performing *mitzvah*—is far more important than belief. If one accepts the existence of God, which is not required, then God is necessarily understood to be singular. This is acceptance rather than belief. In Chinese Religion, belief is utterly meaningless, because knowing one has parents and grandparents, the numinous focus, is not a matter of faith but basic knowledge learned in infancy. A recent Supreme Court of Canada decision defined religion solely by individual belief.<sup>11</sup> Thus, now in Canada there is

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<sup>10</sup> Harold D. Roth, “Against Cognitive Imperialism: A Call for a Non-Ethnocentric Approach to Cognitive Science and Religious Studies,” *Religion East & West* 8 (2008), 1–26.

<sup>11</sup> *Syndicat Northcrest v. Amselem* [2004] 2 S.C.R. 551.

- freedom of belief but not necessarily freedom of religious behavior or practices without belief in the Christian sense.
2. Singular truth: Arising from monotheism is the understanding that there can only be a single Truth. Therefore, all other religious traditions are necessarily wrong, misguided or incomplete. Other traditions or viewpoints, accordingly can be understood as a threat; hence, the justification for inquisitions and crusades. Polytheistic traditions are necessarily relativistic with regard to truth. Thus, in Chinese culture there is no potential tension between religious and other kinds of knowledge, such as scientific understandings, because truths are understood as multiple.
  3. Life-cycle sacraments: Catholicism has seven sacraments necessary for salvation, including marriage (due to the doctrine of “original sin,” sexual intercourse is sinful save when sanctified by the marriage ritual solely for the purpose of reproduction). In other traditions, salvation, let alone salvation through sacraments, is uncommon, and the number of life-cycle rituals is far more limited and not sacramental. Traditionally in China, for example, marriage is a matter of relationships between families and the bringing of a new member into the patrilocal family, not to sanctify otherwise evil sexuality.
  4. Focus on individuals: Although Christianity understands the Church to be the body of believers, the focus on individual salvation, along with a celibate priesthood, denigrates the family, an attitude found as early as the letters of Paul and the Gospels. Missionaries have informed Chinese that family rituals are the work of the Devil. This is contrary to all other major religions. Christianity focused on individual salvation because in its first generation it was expected that the world as we know it would come to an end. Because Roman religion included religion of family and state, Christianity’s focus on the individual was perceived as a threat to the social order. Chinese culture is opposite to Christianity and the focus is on the family, clan and group, and individualism is secondary to family membership. Salvation as such is through the continuation of the family.
  5. Creation myths: Creation myths are also part of the related traditions of Judaism and Islam, but most other religious traditions have instead origin myths, which may be of a clan, a culture, a city-state, etc. In these traditions, existence is a given prior to the particular origin narrative. It was often

assumed by Western scholars that China had lost its origin myths (other than the popular Pangu 盤古 version originally from India). What was not understood is that China has clan origin myths, as well as myths regarding the creation of humanity, rather than cosmic creation myths. Instead Sky and Earth 天地, as well as Yin and Yang 陰陽, are dual creators. They arise from Nothingness 無 becoming Somethingness 有, but they are not created from it. Moreover, this understanding is philosophical and experiential rather than mythic.

6. Immutable sacred written texts: Of the few religions outside of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic complex, or those influenced by them in this regard such as Sikhism, as in Buddhism, where there is a body of sacred texts, it is continuously augmented. The Vedas functions as a fixed, sacred oral text, but since Hinduism supplanted Vedism, it functions more as sacred utterances than as a text. The closest in China would be the Classics 經, but while they are highly respected, they are not revered as sacred.
7. Focus on abstruse ideology: Due to the development of theology in Christianity necessitated by ambiguous creeds and later influenced by the rebirth of Aristotelian logic in the Islamic universities which was passed on to Christian theologians by Jewish ones, other religions are taught in the West almost exclusively utilizing texts unknown to the vast majority of the studied religion's practitioners. Of course, this is also true of Christianity itself, especially pre-modern Catholicism, when all but a select few could read sacred texts. In China, the Classics primarily involve socio-political philosophy, and formal logic was laughed out of existence by such early texts as the *Zhuangzi* 莊子. In China, religious texts per se are pragmatic descriptions of ritual ranging from the three ritual 禮 texts in the Classics 經 to Zhu Xi's 朱熹 *Family Rituals* (*Jiali* 家禮).
8. Founder: There is a strong tendency to assume that all religions are founded. Thus, Jesus (or Paul) founds Christianity, Gautama founds Buddhism, Mohammed founds Islam, etc. But most religions are organic to and coexistent with specific cultures, and a consideration of a beginning is meaningless. Jesuit missionaries in China created the religion of Confucianism, assuming Kongzi 孔子 to be the founder of religious rituals that had been in existence for well over a millennium prior to his life. Religious movements, however, do have beginnings and may, as

Christianity, become major religious traditions. Chinese Religion is the oldest documented religion in the world, but its actual age would probably extend back to the beginning of agriculture, if not horticulture. Thus, to speak of a founder is nonsensical.

9. Ritual specialists as intermediaries between humans and the divine: The Catholic notion of the priest leads to the assumption that religious leaders in other traditions are understood to have similar sacred authority. This has led to many misunderstandings of the role of religious functionaries in other religions. In Chinese Religion, from a functional standpoint, the priests were the eldest males and females in the family and clan, and the chief priests of China in traditional times were the emperor and his consort (with ritual specialists to assist them), but none acted for the divine. Instead, the spirits of the family dead and divinities engaged directly with humans through entranced mediums, who often had and have no priestly aura.<sup>12</sup>
10. Professional religion competing or sharing power with secular authority: Christianity begins by denying the religious fundamentals of the Roman world (the family and the state as sacred) and was thus perceived as a threat to the common good and persecuted accordingly. This led the early Church to perceive itself as completely separate from the state. When the Roman Empire collapsed, the Church replaced the state, leading to a clash between state and religion when later European rulers sought independence from Church authority. (The eastern European and later English solution was for the secular ruler to become the head of the Church.) This expectation has created grossly misleading understandings of other traditions. For example, so-called shamanistic cultures have been portrayed as having two authorities: a chief and a shaman, each vying for authority. Often these cultures are egalitarian and have no authorities. When they do, such as Manchurian culture, the shaman had no authority but served the political and clan authorities. Perhaps more important is the general assumption that religion can be separated out of culture, with the remainder termed “secular,” and that there is a necessary tension between the two. In many traditions, as was

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<sup>12</sup> See my “The Role of Possession Trance in Chinese Culture and Religion: A Comparative Overview from the Neolithic to the Present,” in *The People and the Dao: New Studies in Chinese Religions in Honour of Daniel L. Overmyer*, ed. Rosamund Allen (Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serika, 2009), 327–45.

the case in traditional China, the secular ruler was the chief priest of the society.

11. Religion is a male activity: Misogynist influences from Christian founders as Paul and Augustine, a male celibate priesthood, and the doctrine of Original Sin blaming women for the existence of sin combined to create the understanding that religious practitioners must be male. Indeed, early Western sociologists of religion, such as Durkheim, defined religion as solely within the male socio-cultural sphere. As a counter-example, in patriarchal China, until a century ago, when the emperor performed religious rituals outside of the palace, his consort simultaneously and necessarily performed the same rituals inside the palace. In the early Chinese courts, the only exclusively religious functionaries were commonly women.<sup>13</sup>
12. Religious rituals take place in special sacred structures: Even though the earliest Christian rituals took place in synagogues, which are not sacred structures, there developed a tradition of churches, on the model of Roman temples and perhaps the Jerusalem temple, as the proper place for religious rituals. In the Hellenistic-Roman world, more rituals took place in the home than in temples, as is the case in many other parts of the world. Usually, such rituals are ignored in Western studies of religion, as rituals which do not take place in an assumed sacred structure are not considered religious rituals. In Taiwan, religions are categorized solely by buildings: temples (寺, 廟) for Chinese religions and churches (教 [會] 堂) for foreign religions.<sup>14</sup> This is one of the major reasons that Chinese Religion is not recognized, for the majority of rituals take place in the home, and secondarily in clan temples, which are not sacred structures in themselves. American courts have denied protection for Native American sacred sites because they are usually not buildings.

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<sup>13</sup> See my *Through the Earth Darkly: Female Spirituality in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Continuum, 1997), chapters 4–5.

<sup>14</sup> County and City Government. Government Information Office, ROC: 各宗教教務概況 (General Condition of Religions), no date.

### *Implications*

After a century of so-called “humiliation,” in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Mainland China removed the remnants of colonial domination, including most Christian missionaries. China has since become an equal of all the previous colonizing nations and is on the way to becoming the most powerful nation on earth. In certain areas, as in economics and political structure, it has gone its own way, eventually to its advantage. But in other areas, such as political philosophy, it relies on the thinking arising from non-Chinese traditions, even where the non-Chinese way of thinking originated in China. With regard to religion, based on its past colonialist experience, the Chinese government does not allow religious institutions controlled or instigated by foreign nations. Yet China continues to understand and define religion from a colonialist perspective.

The Chinese government to date only recognizes religions recognized by the West, that is, religions which are perceived to accord with the Christian model. The only Chinese religion recognized is Daoism but from the skewed perspective of Christianity. Traditionally, most Daoists were hereditary, initiated part-time priests who served families and communities within Chinese Religion, as did Buddhist monks and nuns. Presently, the Daoism which is recognized in Mainland China is the aspect more closely modeled after Buddhism, itself of Indian origin, that is, the monastic mode of Daoism and those aspects which focus on individual salvation. Because Christian missionaries in general still consider Chinese Religion evil, it seems that China continues not to recognize its own religion. This amounts to a continuation of China being a colony of Christian nations, at least with regard to understanding religion.

More important, religion is the foundation and central core of cultures. Although some modern nations purport to be secular, alongside recognized religions they have created quasi-religions which have the same function. Thus, in the United States, Americanism, with its own mythos, rituals and festivals, was created to allow for those of different religions to have a common ethos. During the Cultural Revolution in China, there was an attempt to replace the family in Chinese Religion with the Chinese people in general. This not only failed but led to a generation with little sense of moral values. Chinese Religion is now on the upswing on the Mainland. Yet it still is not officially recognized as the central core or root of the Chinese ethos, in effect, because it is Chinese.

We must also recognize that the Chinese Communist Party, following



Marxist-Leninist principles, considers membership in a religious institution as contrary to being a communist. Marx and Lenin, living in a Christian context, understood religion entirely on the Christian model. Marx opposed religion, specifically the religion preached to the proletariat, as an ideology used to persuade workers not to better their lot in this world but to await a better life after death. Hence, he understood that “Religion is the opium of the people” for the benefit of the factory owners in which the proletariat toiled in horrible conditions. Lenin perceived that the Russian Orthodox Church supported the aristocracy’s maintenance of a feudal system with the peasants being serfs on the aristocratic estates. Thus for Lenin, religion also functioned to suppress the masses, and he consequently promoted atheism. Neither would necessarily condemn the liberal aspects of Western religion today and certainly were not specifically condemning such religious phenomenon as Chinese religion.

If, in the Chinese context, *zongjiao* 宗教 (“religion”) is more specifically defined as “institutionalized religion,” which is how Marx and Lenin understood religion, and another term is utilized to refer to non-institutionalized religion (called by some scholars “diffused religion”), that is, religion as conterminous with culture in general, the problem of not recognizing normative Chinese religion as religion is resolved. Rather than refer to normative Chinese religious practices as *mixin* 迷信 (superstition) or “folk religion” which denies the actuality of a tradition over five thousand years in age for both the elite and the masses, a term such a *wenli* 文禮 or some other similar term, meaning “ritual practices of the culture,” could be used. This would obviate the contradiction of supporting traditional Chinese ritual practices while not recognizing its existence. Many of the traditionally educated Chinese were atheists, in the sense of Marxist-Leninism, and yet supported offerings to the family and in state rituals. They perceived no contradiction between a disinclination to accept the divine powers of popular deities while reverencing the deceased of their clan, leading rituals to spiritually support the area under their authority, and ritually honoring literati heroes.

## **(2) Chinese Religion From A Global Perspective**

### *Introduction*

Western scholars who study Chinese Religion often assume they are doing

comparative studies, but the time invested in mastering Chinese usually leaves little time for studying religions other than their specialty. Accordingly, not having a real comparative perspective, the tendency for most of these scholars is to understand Chinese Religion as unique.

My own research has had a different path. As I was working on defining and delineating Chinese religion, I came to study other traditions as well. Due to several disparate factors which coincided, I began to become familiar with an ever increasing number of Native American traditions. At the same time, involvement in a team-taught course which included material on Condomblé led to my becoming interested in African-Brazilian and African-Caribbean religions and subsequently Central West African traditions, which are their roots.

At first I noticed little commonality between Native American traditions and China, as my experiences were in northern Ontario, although that later changed when I began to look at the horticultural and agricultural traditions to the south. But as soon as I looked at the Central West African traditions I noticed a close parallelism with Chinese Religion and related concepts of sacred kingship. But how could that be, since diffusion was not a viable option? Later when studying Polynesian traditions, I again found the same religious construct. Colleagues pointed out to me similar patterns in ancient Greek and Roman traditions, and a graduate student of mine, with no prompting from me, found hints of it in early Israelite religion. Finally a dozen years ago, it all came together when at the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara I learned that at Çatalhöyük, the earliest excavated major horticultural village, some dead adults were buried within the earthen platform beds, while others, especially children, were buried under the floors of dwellings.

The common construct which I consequently perceived I call “Familism” (*zuxianjiao* 祖先教 / in Japan: *jiajiao* 家教 / Zhu Xi 朱熹: *jiali* 家禮), a term others have used to designate Chinese Religion alone, and a term now used in business studies with a different focus. Familism can be delineated by twelve common behavioral, social and ideological characteristics, not all of which will be found in every instance:

- 1) nuclear and larger families exist within a clan structure
- 2) individuals are psychologically as well as socially subordinate to family and clan
- 3) on death one theoretically continues in the family as a spirit to

assist the living

- 4) most religious rituals are family, clan and, where relevant, state affairs
- 5) homes and clan structures are the primary settings for most rituals
- 6) senior members of the family and clan hold the primary priestly roles
- 7) main ritual feature: living members of the family feeding the dead members
- 8) the living can communicate with dead family members through spirit possession
- 9) alcohol (or equivalent) is common in rituals and may facilitate spirit possession
- 10) kingship falls on the most senior of the clan that has hegemony over other clans
- 11) justification for kingship is the king being chief priest and parent of the nation
- 12) anthropomorphic deities derive from concept of spirits of the family dead.

### *The Evolution of Religion*

In the last few years, the subject of the evolution of religion has again become popular. Although these new approaches seek to avoid the value-laden studies of the past, which understood a movement from primitive religion to the ultimate true religion of Christianity, they unconsciously continue to delineate religion from the Christian pattern and seek equivalents in the past. The theory which follows instead understands religion as arising from socio-economic-cultural patterns contained within and determined by geographic, climate, and related factors (religio-ecology) and does not require belief, anthropomorphic deities, ur-monotheism, etc.

The reason for the development of identical religious constructs in diverse regions can be understood from the standpoint of religio-ecology, particularly with the shift from semi-nomadic gathering-hunting to semi-sedentary horticulture-hunting. The construct becomes full-fledged with the development of agriculture and permanent habitations. Herding cultures tend to be anomalous

in these regards. The development of horticulture initiated the most profound revolution in human history, with significant effects on religion, society, governance, culture and the economy.

Prior to horticulture or other sedentary patterns (extensive wild grains, abundant maritime resources), gathering-hunting communities generally consist of small extended families with the concept of clan, when present, attenuated. In these traditions the dead are left behind, such as the scaffold burials on the North American Plains, as the community migrates from one source of subsistence to another in seasonal rounds, at least in those areas that have seasons. The dead are often feared. In some cultures, the name of the dead is never spoken. In others, after the end of the mourning period, the dead are sent off with a feast and asked never to return. The effective spirit realm consists of weather and cosmic spirits, as well as the very animals and plants on which subsistence depends. The means of communicating with the numinous is through ecstatic states in which volition and memory are maintained—classic “shamanism”—different from classic spirit possession.<sup>15</sup> Spirit possession is probably not possible with non-anthropomorphic spirits, as what would it mean for an other-than-human being to take control of a human? (Non-human spirits that are latter anthropomorphized can possess humans.) This religious construct appears to be ubiquitous in gathering-hunting cultures and can be understood as the first global religion in human history.

The bulk of subsistence comes from gathering by women—plants, small mammals, fish and birds. In the early stages of human development, males hunted mammals, mammals that are much larger and more dangerous than exist today—mammoths, mastodons, huge bison, aurochs and so forth. A single hunter cannot bring down such animals; rather it requires highly cooperative endeavors of a group, especially if serious injuries and deaths are to be kept to a minimum. To enable close cooperation and the fortitude to accomplish the task, rituals that enable group trances are required, such as circa-polar heat rituals (“sweat lodges”) of considerable antiquity.<sup>16</sup> Later, as in Mesoamerica and the Amazonian forest, group trances are facilitated by the use of psychoactive

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<sup>15</sup> For a general overview of Native American religions, see my *Native North American Religious Traditions* (Westport, Conn., Praeger, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> See my “‘Sweat Lodge’: A Northern Native American Ritual for Communal Shamanic Trance,” *Temenos* 26 (1990): 85–94.

substances.<sup>17</sup>

A revolution occurs with the inception of horticulture. The gathering-hunting pattern is maintained in that females shift from gathering to gardening and males continue to hunt. The sedentary residential pattern, however, means that humans can live to a very old age and become a repository of cultural knowledge and history. As the dead are disposed of in the vicinity of the dwellings, the dead remain with the living and can continue to advise them. The obvious reason for burying the adult dead within the sleeping platforms at Çatalhöyük is so that the living members of the family can communicate with the dead members through dreams. This may have been the original impetus for spirit possession.

The excavations at Çatalhöyük also indicate the development of clan organization and structures for clan religious rituals. The dead were not evenly distributed among the homes but tended to be concentrated in a home around which other homes without burials were clustered. Certainly this strongly suggests a clan socio-religious structure, as well as selected homes serving as ritual centers for the clan as a whole.

In horticulture-hunting traditions (or the northwest coastal North American and mid-west coastal South American village traditions with their abundant maritime resources), clans become more important than families, with multiple families often living in clan longhouses. The head of the clan takes on a more commanding leadership role than in the volunteerism of gathering-hunting situations. More important, the head of the clan becomes the symbol of the clan itself. This role continues after death, so that dead “clan mothers” or dead clan chieftains and their spouses become more important spirits than those of ordinary members of the clan.

Knowledge too expands. Male hunters still need their specialized knowledge, but the gathering knowledge of females expands to incorporate the knowledge that horticulture requires. With the greater knowledge of women and with women’s “ownership” of the gardens, along with the clan longhouses, these cultures are generally matrilineal, matrilineal, and matrifocal rather than gender egalitarian as before.

Religion also changes radically. Seasonal rituals become more important,

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<sup>17</sup> For an early 20<sup>th</sup> century example, see F. Bruce Lamb, *Wizard of the Upper Amazon: The Story of Manuel Córdova-Rios* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1974).

outside of the equatorial regions, as planting and harvesting fertility rituals are celebrated. The spirit realm now includes the dead of the clan and the controlling spirits of the garden. The very act of preparing gardens and planting leads to an understanding of limited control over subsistence. This in turn leads to a notion of controlling subsistence spirits, such as the Mother of the Garden, rather than the individual spirits in the gathering-hunting situation. (A similar transformation takes place in the shift from hunting to herding, for example, the Reindeer Mother in north-central Siberia.)

Gardening leads to the fermentation of starches or sugary fruits to provide alcohol for ritual group inebriation. Alternately, kava was raised on the Pacific islands, chocolate was farmed in Mesoamerica, coca was grown in the Andes, tobacco was planted throughout much of the Americas, and so forth. Such inebriation-stimulated trances promoted an intimate interaction between the living and the dead, and in some cultures, as in early Chinese elite culture, facilitated some becoming possessed by the dead of the clan.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the dead, and later deities, could now be directly spoken to and touched.

The development of agriculture led to further major changes in human culture although not as radical as the earlier transformation. Settlements became even more permanent as humans learned to fertilize and irrigate the agricultural fields. Male farming shifted the economic focus from females to males, and surplus productivity allowed for the development of non-subsistence occupations and thus class distinctions. The first non-productive class was of warriors who used non-hunting weapons, such as chariots, that required long-term specialist training and led to a male dominated society as the leading warrior, usually a male, became a king. The need to protect the surplus productivity was extended to warfare against other agricultural communities to create kingdoms. The patrifocal nature of kingdoms led to patriarchy in some but not all such cultures.

The king and the later expanded role of emperor continued the function of the superior clan chieftain as political head, symbol of the group and chief priest. The concept of family and clan is expanded to include kingdom and empire. The emperor and his consort become the ultimate parents. Rituals become more complex and state rituals develop as expanded clan rituals. Upon death, the

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<sup>18</sup> See my *The Spirits Are Drunk*, 111–15.

former king or emperor becomes an even more powerful clan spirit, although not a deity. Anthropomorphic deities are non-family dead human spirits with powers capable of benefitting humans in general and also able to possess mediums in order to interact with the human realm.

### *Familism*

An excellent, concise statement of the understanding of ancestral spirits from within one of these traditions can be found in the words of a female Hawaiian elder when asked to explain the meaning of *aumākuā*, meaning “ancestral spirits” but not “deities,” which are termed *akua* (her English language statement is somewhat misleading in this regard, for if stated in Polynesian *aumākuā* would not be conflated with *akua*):

In *Pō* [the infinite, timeless spirit realm] there dwell our ancestors, transfigured into gods. They are forever god-spirits, possessing the strange and awesome powers of gods. Yet they are forever our relatives, having for us the loving concern a mother feels for her infant, or a grandfather for his first-born grandson. As gods and relatives in one, they give us strength when we are weak, warning when danger threatens, guidance in our bewilderment, inspiration in our arts. They are equally our judges, hearing our words and watching our actions, reprimanding us for error, and punishing us for blatant offense. For these are our godly ancestors. These are our spiritual parents. These are our *aumākuā*.

You and I, when our time has come, shall plunge from our *leina* [special seaside cliff from which the spirit on death plunges into *Pō*] into *Pō*. If our lives have been worthy, our *aumākuā* will be waiting to welcome us. Then we too shall inhabit the eternal realm of the ancestor spirits. We in our time shall become *aumākuā* to our descendants even yet unborn.<sup>19</sup>

When I read this passage, without the Polynesian words, at a conference of specialists on living Chinese religion, everyone without exception assumed I was presenting a statement from a Chinese informant.

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<sup>19</sup> Mary Kawena Pukui, Mary Kawena, E.W. Haertig, and Catharine Lee, *Nānāl Ke Kumu (Look to the Source)* (Honolulu: Hui Hānai, 1972), 35.

This religious pattern, which can be termed “Familism,” can be found in East Asia (China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam), sub-Saharan African traditions, Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia, early Israelite religion, classical Greek and Roman religion, in some Native American agricultural traditions (e.g., western South America), and undoubtedly in others with which I am unfamiliar. The interrelated monotheistic traditions, particularly Christianity, moved away from Familism to embrace its ideological opposite: individual salvation. Anti-family statements can be found as early as the letters of Paul and the words attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. Similarly, Buddhism earlier began with individuals seeking release from the cycle of existence who rejected their own families. Buddhist monasticism, as early Chinese critics readily pointed out, denied the very basis of Chinese religion and society, until it became Sinicized.

If this pattern is as common as I am arguing, how come it has not been previously acknowledged? Since religious studies arose in Christian culture, Christianity became the model for normative religion as discussed in Part I, and Familism meets none of the resultant expectations. First, Christianity is institutional, the institution called the Church. Familism is non-institutional: there is no clergy save for assisting ritual specialists under certain circumstances. Second, Christian rituals primarily take place in special buildings, churches, that are normally open to all adherents. In Familism, the primary rituals take place in the home or in clan temples that are not open to the public; hence, they remain unseen to outsiders. Third, Christianity focuses on a single deity in three aspects who is omniscient and omnipotent. In Familism, rituals are oriented towards the family or clan itself with a focus on the deceased of the family.

From the common Western perspective, it is difficult to understand how religion can be a matter of family, since it is understood that religion is about the belief in God or gods. Furthermore, it is assumed that all cultures value families as important to the social order. But the difference is in the degree of valuation. In Christian cultures, the family is not revered, rituals are not directed towards the family, and the continuation of the person after death is understood to be a matter of individual salvation, not a matter of integration into the spiritual dimension of the family. Thus, those in the West are culturally and religiously programmed not to recognize Familism.

Moreover, the West is antagonistic to Familism, as it runs counter to contemporary Western values. The “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” of



the United Nations is entirely about the rights of individuals, separate from family, and where family is mentioned, it is only the nuclear family which is meant. Indeed the “Declaration” if actually carried out would wrest the individual from being integral to family, and thus is inimical to the social structure and philosophy of such recent enemies at that time it was promulgated as Japan. It is a boon to Christian missionaries, for if actually enforced, it would destroy family religion, encouraging only the religions of individual salvation.

A further answer to the question “If Familism is so obvious, why has it not been more recognized?” is more complex and lies in the nature of religious studies, which developed in Europe far earlier than in North America. The late 19th century theorists were stuck in the then anthropological ideology of racism and in its corollary ideological context justifying European colonialism. Accordingly, it was assumed that Greco-Roman civilization was superior to Chinese civilization and both were far superior to sub-Saharan African civilizations, which must, due to dark skin color, be primitive. A contrary approach was made by the forerunners of religio-ecology, such as Pettazoni and later Hultkrantz, but they tended towards simplistic studies linking early economic patterns to theology. Others, such as Eliade, created patterns from the Christian experience in which to slot other religious traditions, often forcibly.

### *Comparative Perspectives*

Most religionists tend to focus on studying particular traditions in depth, taking time to master the requisite languages. Consequently, they tend to view their subject of study as cultural isolates, being unique instances of religion. The exceptions are scholars of Christianity, who often assume that their subject matter is a superior version of a common form of religion, other religions missing essential elements that can only be supplied by Christianity.

Perhaps my own difference in this regard is that I began a study of comparative religious studies methodologies only after becoming immersed in Chinese language and culture and thus approached the enterprise from a Chinese perspective rather than a Western one. Also, when I first had the opportunity to live in Chinese culture in Taiwan in my sixth year of graduate studies, after being there but a few days, I was most fortunate in being invited by a fellow student to a lunar bi-monthly *baibai* 拜拜 (ritual offering). This was at the home of a family friend. Chinese tend not to invite anyone but the most intimate

of friends to their homes, using restaurants in urban areas for social gatherings. Thus, at the very beginning of my directly experiencing Chinese culture, I was able to observe the basic ritual of Familism normally hidden behind residential walls. That experience became the foundation of my study of Chinese culture and religion.

Later, after becoming engrossed in the Native American Anishnabe religion, I added that to my perspectives. Especially important was through intense participation to be able to internalize an understanding of polytheism. By the time I was looking at African and Polynesian traditions, I was already psychologically multi-cultural, imbued with Jewish-Western, Chinese and northern Native American essential understandings.

From these multiple perspectives, I perceived that all cultures arose from a single commonality—the human being—and humans are all essentially the same. Such a viewpoint accepts that cultures became increasingly complex but that humans themselves have not changed for at least the last fifty thousand years, and probably the last hundred thousand years, as has been recently been borne out by the earliest upper Paleolithic finds, and that most cultures are no better than any other, each being a response to its ecological situation. The same is the case for religion, each a product of a particular religio-ecology but created by humans, all similar to each other.

### *A New Approach to the Study of Religion*

This approach reverses the usual way of looking at religion. Instead of looking at a religion as a unique complex, we can look at most religions as variations on a common theme, not too different from musical compositions that are variations on a theme. Hence, if we look at Chinese Religion, for example, from this perspective, we would not consider the major structure and rituals unique but perceive that they are one with this horticultural-agricultural religious complex. What we can then examine are those aspects that are different from others, those aspects not to be found in other traditions, save those shared with other East Asian cultures due to diffusion. Thus, as examples, the way other religions such as Buddhism have been Sinicized and integrated or how individual religious concerns have been dealt with are of considerable interest. For example, Daoism as an adjunct institutionalized religion, initially focused on individual transformation. But when Daoism integrated with normative Chinese

religion, it became in effect, aside from the monastic stream modeled on Buddhism, rent-a-ritualist family corporations. Traditionally, those called Daoists in China, aside from the monastic variant, are initiated members of a hereditary priestly lineage, who work as part-time ritual specialists when hired to conduct funerals or village renewal rituals.

Understanding Chinese Religion from this perspective explains how Familism provided an ideological basis for unifying the first functional Chinese empire. As Asoka consolidated the Maurya Empire in India by promoting Buddhism, and Constantine attempted to consolidate a reunited Roman Empire with Christianity, so the government of the Han Empire unified a hitherto fragmented semi-feudal socio-political situation by expanding Familism to include the state through expanding the meaning of *xiao* 孝 (“filial piety”) to include the emperor as on a par with one’s father and mother.

Of interest too is how Chinese Religion, given its religio-ecological basis, accords with modernity, such as the industrial and post-industrial milieus and the shift away from imperial government. For example, both on the Chinese mainland and in Taiwan, heads of state or their delegates are now starting to take on the nation-wide parental-priestly roles of the past a full century after the collapse of the imperial regime. Such developments indicate how strong the religious roots are. Perhaps most telling in this regard was when two decades ago, the deceased Mao Zedong 毛澤東, the foremost Chinese communist and Marxist-Leninist atheist, became the new deity of capitalistic wealth (he has since, I have been recently informed, become a protecting deity as well).

This approach to the study of religion reverses even the usual approach to the study of the monotheistic traditions. Rather than seeing them as the norm, they can be viewed as a radical change from this second major global religion. While Judaism and Islam have only moved partially from this core, with family remaining important and an understanding of the entire religious community as an enormous clan, Christianity in its inception seems to have been anti-family, with a focus on individual salvation. Thus, until it became the dominant religion, Christianity was perceived by the larger culture as a threat to the social order. Even today, the heads of the Roman Catholic and of the various Orthodox Christian traditions are, at least theoretically, celibate. Tension between religion and state remained throughout Christian history, save when the two coincided, with the head of the state and of the state religion being one and the same, as in

Orthodox Christianity and the Church of England.

To the contrary, Buddhism too began with a focus on individual salvation and a disinterest in family—we must keep in mind that Gautama left his wife and children and his duties to his parents and state in order to seek his own salvation. But as Buddhism became a religion with a community beyond those who also left family, it slowly changed towards concern for the larger community. With the development of Mahayana, the situation was reversed and individual salvation was rejected as selfish and the goal was salvation of all living beings simultaneously, a notion even larger than humanity itself. Thus, only the Mahayana modes of Buddhism were able to successfully integrate into and merge with the religions of Central and East Asia.

In contrast, save in Korea, Christianity has been remarkably unsuccessful in East Asia, in large part because of the attitude towards this common notion of family. In Central Africa, Christianity has been relatively successful but only after European countries destroyed traditional African governments and social structure through colonialism and replaced local languages with European ones among the elite.

In French-controlled Polynesia, the Catholic Church forcibly destroyed the indigenous religion; the French government destroyed the traditional government; and the modern economy has wiped out the colonial imposed economy which replaced the traditional one. Only in Hawaii and New Zealand did Polynesian religion survive underground and is now very slowly rising in a modern context as indigenous peoples there gain a modicum of behavioral freedom.

Regarding Mesoamerica and South America, the familial religious complex continues within a Christian overlay in Yucatan after an accord was reached following Mayan revolts from the mid-19th through the early 20th centuries. Contrastingly, in Chiapas, the struggle continues. The election of an indigenous president in Ecuador recently has seen a public resurgence of Andean rituals. In North America, the Pueblo cultures reached an accord allowing for parallel religions following a successful revolt against the Spanish in the late 17th century, and the Hopi continued their traditional religion partially due to inaccessibility. The Hopi have been successful in controlling religious tourism, while the Huichol further south, who maintained their traditions by fleeing to the mountains and then killing missionaries who followed them, have seen the commercialization of their religion due to this type of tourism. These are but a

few examples of how Familism has been impinged upon by religions that do not focus on family.

Thus, the basic religious substrate of Familism is largely unrecognized in religious studies because it is contrary to Western understandings. Where it continued, the Christian West has set about to deliberately destroy it through the missionary-colonial enterprise or inadvertently by its contemporary touristic variant. Hence, the question remains as to whether religious studies will ever move from considering the Christian model to be normative and thus allow for genuinely comparative studies.

### *A Chinese Approach to Studying Religion*

With regard to Chinese culture, imagine the difference if religious studies scholars in China and Taiwan understood Chinese Religion to be the major example of a global religious complex with a 10,000-year history. Chinese Religion then would not be negatively perceived from a Christian colonial perspective but as a religion with a far longer history and far greater connections to other cultures than the Western religions.

Besides, the study of religion did not begin with Christian missionaries in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Early Greek and Roman scholars were interested in studying religion, and Chinese scholars were the first to study religion from what is now considered a social science perspective. Twenty-four hundred years ago, Xunzi 荀子 studied ritual from the perspective of its social role and ritual studies continued in China to the present. Chinese scholars should be aware of other cultures' approach to the study of religion, but for the roots of religious studies, they need go no further than their own scholarly traditions.

The word religion, it is generally albeit not universally agreed, derives from Roman times with the Latin word *religāre*, meaning “to bind.” It was used in medieval Christianity to apply to monks who are bound to their order by a vow of obedience. Thus, the explicit Christian use of the term is in accord with Xunzi's understanding of *li* 禮 (“ritual”): it is rituals that bind individuals to family and bind the family together; secondarily rituals bind families to the larger socio-cultural matrix; and finally, rituals derived from the family rituals bind the state or, in modern terms, the nation together.

After Xunzi's time, as Buddhism and Daoism became part of the Chinese cultural matrix, aside from the transformative rituals for individuals, they

provided additional, adjunct family and community rituals, along with temple worship. Since the Song dynasty, Chinese deities are understood as parallel to the family and clan spirits, being dead humans who can assist living humans of all clans. This concept may have been stimulated by the transformation of Bodhisattvas into deities, such as Guanyin. Chinese Islam and Judaism also assimilated to the religion of family, adding further rituals to the one's they brought with them to China.<sup>20</sup> When Catholic Christianity was first introduced by Jesuits, they promulgated a Christianity that also served in conjunction with the family and state rituals. Although this approach was later repudiated by the Vatican, it was brought back with Vatican II in the 1960s.

Thus, normative Chinese religion, however it is named, has been the only practice and ideology that has bound together the enormous, relatively speaking, geographical extent and population of China. Moreover, Chinese Religion, rather than being distinctly different from socialism, posits socio-economic understandings—including a relatively equitable distribution of economic resources—that have been part and parcel of Chinese *rujia* 儒家 thinking since at least the time of the writing of the *Mengzi* 孟子, some twenty-four hundred years ago.

## Conclusion

Understanding their own religion, the basis of their culture and social structure, from a foreign, often negative, Christian perspective, has led modern Chinese governments to marginalize if not ignore it. This attitude continues, even though government officials in both Taiwan and China take part in public religious rituals. This lack of recognition encourages Chinese scholars in religious studies to study non-Chinese religions, as well as Buddhism and Daoism, but to disregard Chinese Religion itself. Moreover, this lack of recognition of Chinese Religion in China supports Western governments' tendency to not recognize Chinese Religion which has deleterious effects on their own constituents of Chinese background.

Understanding religion based on the Christian model, which lacks general

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<sup>20</sup> See my *The Theology of the Chinese Jews, 1000–1850* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012).

applicability, however, is not necessary. Other models of religious modalities, such as Familism, are available which allows for a comparative understanding of Chinese Religion. Familism places Chinese Religion within a global construct which arose over ten thousand years ago with the inception of horticulture and continues in the present to varying degrees in religions other than Christianity. There is now a growing interest among the younger generation of Chinese scholars in their own traditions; is it not time for a Chinese approach to the study of religion in China?

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# 理解華人宗教的新路徑

Jordan Paper

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## 摘要

在中國與台灣，「宗教」被視為是來自西方對於基督教類型定義的觀點。放在全世界宗教的脈絡裡來看，對基督教特徵的分析顯示其獨特性。但是基督教的模式若不是扭曲了對於其他宗教的理解，就是意味著他們並非宗教。因此，華人宗教不是被認為其並非為一個宗教，要不就是被理解為一個屬於民風未開的「通俗宗教」，或者被理解為「民間宗教」，意味著其區別於該文化中已然建立的宗教。不論哪一個詞彙，都不適用於華人宗教，因為它起初是屬於精英的宗教，並且成為國家宗教，也同時是華人文化與社會的基礎。

在人類歷史中，有著最古老被記載宗教形式的華人宗教，可以藉由十二個行為的、社會的以及意識形態的特徵來呈現，而這些特徵不論在過去或是現在，都還是大多數宗教最重要的部份。這些特徵描述了接下來伴隨著園藝以及早期農業而興起的宗教，也可以稱之為家庭主義，與在採集狩獵傳統中所發現的最早的宗教概念相關連。這個路徑提供了一個從全球觀點了解華人宗教的新工具，解決了許多造成華人宗教不是被忽略，要不就是被誤解的矛盾之處。這個新路徑對於台灣與中國，政府推行宗教政策是中肯的。

**關鍵字：**華人教，中國宗教，家庭主義