UNDERSTANDING FAITH

Understanding Chinese Religions

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SERIES EDITOR: PROFESSOR FRANK WHALING

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Joachim Gentz

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To Gerd Schimmelpfennig
who gave me my first book on Buddhism

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Preface

Moving from Chinese to Religious Studies ten years ago I decided to give a series of lectures that combined introductions to Chinese religions and to Religious Studies. When Frank Whaling asked me whether I would like to write an introduction to Chinese religions in the Dunedin series I immediately agreed. I planned to rework and publish those lectures. Meanwhile, and working again in Chinese Studies, my research had driven me into new areas of Chinese religions. Instead of the earlier lectures I have therefore included some of my more recent research in this book. In Chapter 1 I developed my article on Chinese notions of ritual (Gentz, 2006b) as well as some of the discussion on the Chinese discourse on the unity of the Three Religions (*sanjiao heyi*) (Gentz, 2011). Chapter 6 is, in large part, based on 'Buddhism and Chinese religions' (Gentz, 2008a), while Chapter 8 also makes use of earlier material (Gentz, 2009a).

Although very little from my 2002 lectures found its way into *Understanding Chinese Religions*, the basic objective of presenting the Chinese material as a series of conceptual questions still underlies the composition of this book. This is one of the reasons why there is a long reflective chapter at the beginning and a general weakness in historical details. During my years of teaching Chinese religions to Western students (especially when compared to teaching other non-Western religions, such as Hinduism and Islam, to students), I have felt increasingly that Chinese religions are particularly difficult to understand. This is another reason why I have tried to approach Chinese religions more from the systematic than from the historical side. My German academic training might have also contributed to a preference for this approach.

Frank Whaling, Joanna Chisholm and David McLeod have in a most supportive way and with kind patience helped to bring the book into a publishable form and to minimise at least the linguistic traces of my Germanisms.

In transliterating Chinese terms this book uses the Hanyu pinyin system. Some Chinese terms are more commonly known in English according to other systems of romanisation. In those cases the traditional versions have been added in brackets behind the first pinyin transliterations.

Joachim Gentz
Spillersboda, 2012

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The Complete Works of Chuang-Tzu, translated by Burton Watson. Copyright 1968 and reproduced by permission of Columbia University Press.

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Unless otherwise credited the translations of Chinese texts used in this book are by the author. I also wish to thank David Keightley and David Jordan who have kindly allowed me to quote from their works.

Timeline of Important Events

Shang (*c.*16th century–1045 BCE)

1250–1045 BCE	Divination texts inscribed in Oracle bones

Zhou (*c.*1046–256 BCE)

Western Zhou (*1046–771* BCE)

9th century	'Ritual revolution'
9th–8th centuries	'Heaven' (*tian*) moves in the centre of religious concerns as highest power
8th century	Earliest layers of Confucian classics: *Yijing*, *Shijing*, *Shangshu*
771 BCE	Downfall of the power of the Zhou, decline of the power of the ancestors

Eastern Zhou (*770–256* BCE)

Spring and Autumn Period (*722–481* BCE)

551–479 BCE	Confucius

Warring States Period (*475–221* BCE)

5th century onwards	Early phase of Confucianism
	Mo Di (*c.*470–*c.*391 BCE), founder of Mohism, author of the early parts of the book *Mozi* (5th–3rd century)
4th century onwards	Early Daoist philosophy
4th century	*Guanzi* 'Inward Training' (Neiye)
	Lao Dan (5th–4th century?), the alleged author of the *Laozi* (*Daode jing*) (4th century)
	Meng Ke (*c.*370–*c.*290 BCE), author of the *Mengzi* (*Mencius*)
	Zhuang Zhou (fl. *c.*350–300 BCE), author of the earliest part of the *Zhuangzi* (3rd century)
	Xun Kuang (*c.*300–*c.*230 BCE), author of the *Xunzi*
3rd century	Development of *yinyang* and Five Phases (*wuxing*) correlative cosmology
3rd and 2nd century	Hemerological almanacs, omenology and magical arts (*fangshu*)

Qin (221–206 BCE)

	Unification of China
219 BCE	Imperial Feng and Shan sacrifices at Mount Tai
	Cult of immortality

Han (206 BCE–220 CE)

Western Han (206 BCE–23 CE)

2nd century	Confucianism established as state ideology, new synthesis of Han-Confucianism which combined the Confucian canonical works with yinyang and wuxing cosmology
*c.*150–140 BCE	*Analects* (*Lunyu*) edited
136 BCE	Doctoral Chairs of the Five Confucian Classics at the Imperial Academy
2nd /1st centuries BCE	Correlative cosmological schemes and omenology fully developed
2nd /1st centuries BCE	Masters of recipes and methods (*fangshi*) trained as specialists in occult and divinatory techniques as well as shamanistic priests performing powerful rituals
100 BCE	*Shiji* written by Sima Qian (*c.*145–86 BCE)

Eastern Han (25 CE–220 CE)

1st century	Growing popularity of the cult of the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu)
27–*c.*97	Sceptical philosophy of Wang Chong
1st–2nd centuries	Introduction of Buddhism
2nd century	Divinisation of Laozi as 'Lord Lao' (*Laojun*)
142	Laozi vision of Zhang Daoling, founder of the Celestial Masters (*tianshi*)
184	Yellow Turbans rebellion
215	Celestial Masters submit to Cao Cao (155–220 CE)

Six Dynasties (220–589)

Wei-Jin (220–420)

3rd century	Neo-Daoism (Xuanxue, Learning of the Dark)
*c.*300	Guo Xiang (*c.*252–312) edition of the *Zhuangzi* in 33 chapters
*c.*317	Ge Hong (*c.*283–343), author of the *Baopuzi*
	Buddhism leading state doctrine in some of the dynasties
364–370	Revelation of Shangqing (Highest Clarity) texts to Yang Xi (330–386)
4th century	Discourse on the harmony of the three teachings (*sanjiao heyi*)
	Sun Chuo (314–371), early syncretist
	Shi Daoan (312–385), early syncretist, Buddhist translation theory
	Shi Huiyuan (334–416), early syncretist, first patriarch of Pure Land Buddhism
5th century	Beginning of the Pure Land school of Buddhism

401	Translator Kumārajīva (344–413) arrives in the northern capital Chang'an
	Ge Chaofu (397–402) produces corpus of Lingbao (Numinous Treasure) scriptures
414	Faxian (337–*c.*422) returns from his pilgrimage to India with Buddhist texts and images
	Northern and Southern Dynasties (420–581)
446	The first great persecutions of Buddhism (446–452 and 574–578)
471	First Daoist canon submitted to the emperor by Lu Xiujing (406–477)
492	Tao Hongjing (456–536) retires to Mount Mao (Maoshan) to compile the Shangqing texts
	Pure Land doctrine gets a philosophical basis with the writings of Tanluan (476–542)
	Zhiyi (538–597), philosopher of Tiantai-Buddhism
555	Confucius temples in every district capital
	Dushun (557–640), the first Patriarch of the Chinese Huayan school
574–578	Great Northern Zhou persecution against Daoism and Buddhism
	Sui (581–613)
	Unification of China
	Ministry of rites (*li bu*) set up to deal among others with religious affairs
	Religious policy of balance
	Tang (618–907)
early 7th century	Revival of the cult of Confucius, re-establishment of the official education system, standardisation of the Confucian canon
	Imperial support and consolidation of Buddhism and Daoism
	New religious policy keeps state cult separated from the religious practice outside the imperial court and defines a set of state-tolerated religions by adopting and propagating the idea of an identity and harmony of these religions
6th/7th centuries	The term *sanjiao* is used in imperial edicts
*c.*630	The official Sui dynastic history includes Daoist and Buddhist texts (*dao* and *shi*) in its book catalogue (*Jingjizhi*)
635	Emperor Taizong allows Nestorians to settle in China, imperial edict refers to Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism and Nestorianism as a *jiao*-teaching

	Fazang (643–712), philosopher of Huayan-Buddhism
645	Xuanzang (*c.*602–664) returns from his pilgrimage to India with 657 Buddhist texts
	Huineng (638–713), sixth and last patriarch of Chan-Buddhism, author of *Platform Sutra*
	Shenhui (670–762), founder of the Southern School of Chan
683–4	Introduction of examinations for Buddhist priests
687	Cities erect Confucius temples
7th /8th centuries	Buddhism achieves what is called its 'golden time'
739	Posthumous title of a king is conferred on Confucius for the first time
748	First official Daoist canon compiled by imperial order
	Han Yu (768–824), strengthens Confucianism and fights against Buddhism
	Li Ao (772–836), Confucian syncretist approach to Buddhism and Daoism
	Zongmi (780–841), Chan and Huayan patriarch, syncretist classification of doctrines including Daoist and Confucian doctrines
845	Great persecution of Buddhism, destruction of 4,600 monasteries and 40,000 temples
868	First printed book: the *Diamond Sutra*
9th/10th centuries	All of the major Chinese schools of Buddhism established, syncretist and popular tendencies, historiography and new codices of monastic rules

Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (907–979)

	Yongming Yanshou (904–975), ecumenical model of Buddhism, synthesis of Tiantai, Chan and Pure Land Buddhism

Song (960–1279)

	Chan Buddhism and Quanzhen Daoism start to grow. Syncretic ideas within all three main traditions but also in the newly emerging sectarian lay movements

Northern Song (960–1127)

10th century onward	Development and consolidation of Daoist Inner Alchemy *neidan*
11th/12th centuries	Sudden increase of titles granted to gods, concretised conception of celestial hierarchies, of the blessings of Heaven and the punishments of Hell, vernacularisation of ritual, feminisation of compassion in rising devotional cults to feminine deities and a worldly devotion for Buddhist temples by many literati

985	Introduction of examinations for Buddhist novices
	Zhou Dunyi (1017–1073), Neo-Confucian cosmology based on Daoist models
	Zhang Zai (1020–1077), Neo-Confucian theory of *qi*-matter, author of the Western Inscription
	Cheng Hao (1032–1085) and brother Cheng Yi (1033–1109), Neo-Confucian philosophers
	Zhang Boduan (?–1082), author of the classic of Inner Alchemy *Wuzhen pian*
	Southern Song (1127–1279)
	Wang Zhe (1112–1170), founder of Quanzhen Daoism
	Zhu Xi (1130–1200), most important commentator and synthesiser of Neo-Confucianism
1223 and 1227	Quanzhen master Qiu Chuji (1148-1227) receives special privileges by Genghis Khan
1241	Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucian doctrine becomes state orthodoxy
1258	Mongol rulers turn from Quanzhen Daoism to Tibetan Buddhism
	Yuan (1279–1368)
1281	End of polemic inter-religious *sanjiao* debates
1313	Neo-Confucianism established as state ideology
13th/14th centuries	European travel accounts regard Chinese religion as superstitious and idolatrous
1352	Red Turbans seize great parts of China
	Ming (1368–1644)
	Tightening of religious policy, reduction of Daoism to Quanzhen and Zhengyi schools, growth of sectarian movements
	Zhu Yuanzhang (1328–1398, reigned 1368–1398), *Essay on the Three Teachings* (*Sanjiao lun*)
1445	Zhang Yuchu completes the final version of the Daoist canon (supplements added in 1607)
	Wang Yangming (1472–1529), founder of the Heart-Mind school of Confucianism
1579	First Jesuit missionaries to China
	Yunqi Zhuhong (1535–1615), anti-Jesuit reformer of monastic Buddhism, synthesiser of Buddhist schools, promoter of lay Buddhism

Qing (1644–1911)

17th century	Rites controversy between the Jesuit and the Domenican missionaries
1704 and 1742	Papal prohibition of Christian attendance at any performance of Chinese rites
	Ouyi Zhixu (1599–1655), criticism of Jesuit Mission, syncretism of Buddhist schools
1851–1862	Chinese Buddhism in the Yangzi Delta nearly destroyed by the Taiping Rebellion
1860	'Religion' translated into Chinese characters by Japanese translators: *shūkyō* (Chin.: *zongjiao*)
	Kang Youwei (1858–1927), reformer, vision of Confucianism as state religion
19th century	Strengthening of the economic forces in Europe, growing eurocentrism, demystification of Asia
1906	Civil service examinations abolished
1911	Last emperor resigned

Republican + (1911–1949)

1913 and 1929	New religious laws enacted, formalising religious practice of the Qing dynasty
1920s	Anti-Confucianist movement
1922	'Great Federation of Anti-Religionists'
	Taixu (1890–1947), reformer and moderniser of Buddhism, promoter of engaged Buddhism
	Yin Shun (1906–2005), promoter of engaged or humanistic Buddhism

People's Republic of China/Republic of China (1949–)

1953	Chinese Buddhist Association
1957	Chinese Daoist Association
1966	Public religious practice suppressed by the Red Guards
1966–1976	Cultural Revolution
1970s	'Performative turn' in cultural studies
1975	Death of Chiang Kai-shek, liberalisation and democratisation with Chiang Ching-kuo
1978	Institutionalisation of research on religions in the People's Republic of China
1979	Bureau of Religious Affairs reopened in Beijing
1982	Document 19 defines five central characteristics of Chinese religion
1983–1993	Golden age of the founding of new religious movements (1992 Falun Gong)

1987	End of martial law in the Republic of China, increasing pluralism of religions legally endorsed
1994	Formerly flexible legal regulations replaced by detailed regulations governing registration procedures in the People's Republic of China
1990s	Confucianism in the People's Republic of China receives strong support from the Communist State, sacrifices to Confucius and the Yellow Emperor
1999	Suppression and persecution of the Falun Gong movement
2007	Order No. 5 issued 3rd August. All reincarnations of Tibetan 'Living Buddhas' must get government approval to be legal and valid
	The word 'religion' mentioned for the first time in the CCP constitution on 21st October, amendment guarantees religious freedom
since 2011	94 self-immolations of Tibetans as a sign of political protest, most of them young monks

Introduction

'Understanding' a phenomenon as complex as 'Chinese religions' requires the application of terms and concepts that are familiar and appropriate to the task. These two objectives do not always fit easily – especially in cases that lie outside our cultural experience. 'Understanding' thus requires proof of historical and empirical data while we reflect on the analytical concepts and terms that we apply. Chinese religions are not just 'out there' waiting to be put into words. The world of Chinese religions is so overwhelmingly rich and complex that we are forced to reduce this complexity in any presentation of it. This presentation therefore necessarily has to be limited.

This book follows a twofold approach: it combines historical and empirical data with reflections on the main analytical keywords and concepts applied. What is Chinese? What is religion? What is/are Chinese religion(s)? If everything that has its cultural origin in the geographical area that today is called 'China' is called 'Chinese', and if any belief system that is ritually performed by a community and concerned with questions of death is 'religion', then 'Chinese religions' would have to include all the variants of the local religions of ethnic minorities as well as all forms of sinicised religions of non-Chinese origin such as Chinese Buddhism, Islam and Christianity.

This book is restricted to the set of religions that have officially been recognised by the pre-modern Chinese state. Apart from the state cult these are mainly the so-called 'Three Teachings' – Confucianism, Daoism (also known as Taoism) and Buddhism – but also the many variants of what for a lack of a better designation is referred to as 'popular religions'. The focus will be on some of the main themes of these. Chinese Islam and Christianity are not dealt with in this book, because these faiths have been written about in the parallel volumes on Islam and Christianity in this 'Understanding Faith' series.

1

What is Chinese Religion(s)?

Notions of Chinese Religion(s) in the West

An early European view on China was that the country was a rational and atheistic one without proper religions or that religion played only a marginal role and mostly took the form of indistinct syncretisms and superstitions in the realm of popular belief and practices (Faber, 1879, p. viii; Paper, 1995, p. 13).

Another assumption was that the traditions of Chinese religions were not clearly distinct. They seemed to share a common character, so were often referred to as *the* Chinese religion – in the singular. Scholars have tried to identify Chinese Daoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam and popular religion as variants of one big unified system of Chinese religion called Chinese universism, Chinese belief or simply Chinese religion (De Groot, 1912; Granet, 1922; Yang, 1967; Freedman, 1974).

Historically, only the many variants of Chinese so-called 'popular religion', Daoism and Confucianism have their origin in China. All other religions have been imported. So do they count as 'Chinese' religions? Are Tibetan or Mongolian religions Chinese? Is Confucianism a religion? Would we classify Qigong (also known as Ch'i-kung) as religious practice? Would we accept the many forms of popular religious and ritual practices that operate without organised churches, without holy scripts and without professional priests as 'religions'? These are some of the questions that the term 'Chinese religions' raises and to which different answers have been given. In recent years some scholars have started to doubt the validity of applying Western notions of religion to China. Others argue that the religious landscape of China offers an enriching environment for a further differentiation of religious studies concepts and methodology (Feuchtwang, 2010; Yang and Lang, 2011).

Whereas, at their core, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism refer to a particular teaching that is based on a set of canonical scriptures, other terms such as 'Hinduism' refer to religions of a particular geographical and cultural space (Michaels, 2004, pp. 12–15). The term 'Chinese religions' is analogous to the idea of religion of a particular space. 'Chinese religions' used to refer only to Daoism, Buddhism, Confucianism and the popular religions, and thus excluded Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Nestorianism, Zoroastrianism/Mazdaism, Manichaeism and the other religions practised in China. Although in recent years 'Chinese religions' has come to include Islam and Christianity and to exclude Confucianism, it still is a term that comprises several rather different religious traditions that share the common feature of being practised within the political boundaries of Greater China.

Yet their existence in China has also created a number of shared features that allow us to identify all these faiths and practices as *Chinese* religions. There is, first, the Chinese written language that unites them in a common framework of a shared basic terminology and religious concepts.

Secondly these religions share, especially in the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC), common institutional features and legal restrictions that have an impact on their organisational structures, their economics and politics, their local power, self-representations and identity.

Thirdly a vast arsenal of aesthetic features is common to Chinese religions, especially the three traditional religions of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. Images and sculptures of all Chinese religions draw on the tradition of Chinese brush painting and sculpture. While Indian and central Asian Buddhist art had a great impact on shaping this arsenal, these forms have been adapted also in the artworks of other religions (Clunas, 1997, p. 103). In late imperial China professional artists produced religious artworks for the art markets of all religious traditions. Religious music of all traditions continues to share tunes and instruments. Temple architecture, especially of the three traditional religions, has much in common. Spatial arrangements of ritual procedures following traditional cosmology, geographical positioning according to feng shui rules and the uses of a number of olfactory and visual items (incense, oil lamps etc.) are also similar.

Fourthly, body concepts and practices, medical ideas, gymnastics, breathing and meditation practices have been applied and used in religious practices across all faiths in China.

Finally, religious staff and believers basically share a common educational background as well as basic cultural values and world views. This extends not only to assumptions about the structure and operations of the cosmos (*yinyang*, *wuxing* and *qi* concepts), of legal, social and moral norms

(loyalty, filial piety, social hierarchies and gender roles), but also to conceptualisations of the sometimes quite fluid distinction between animals, humans, ancestors, ghosts and gods (Sterckx, 2002). These commonalities make Chinese understandings of Chinese religions much more coherent than might be expected from the diverse understandings of Christianity in China, Scotland, Africa and South America.

Any introduction to Chinese religions has to extract a coherent view from this vast mass of cultural material. Most introductions to 'Chinese religions' combine a historical presentation with more specific theoretical sociological, religious studies approaches with others that are culturally comparative, functionalist and practice focused. *Understanding Chinese Religions* however supports its historical overview with discussions on systematic questions about these methodological approaches and the particular character of Chinese religions.

Notions of Religion in Pre-Modern China

Before reflecting our own perspectives on Chinese religions it is important to ask how the Chinese understood or defined their own religions in pre-modern times? Is there an equivalent of the Western notion of religion in Chinese tradition? Was religion regarded as something distinct, and if so what counted as religion in pre-modern China?

Religion is a Western notion and was introduced to China via Japan only in the late nineteenth century. Like all other non-Western languages the Chinese language had no indigenous term for 'religion'. In 1860 the term 'religion' was translated for the first time into Chinese characters by Japanese translators, who created the Japanese neologism *shūkyō*. This new Japanese term was then taken over into the Chinese language, where the same two characters are pronounced *zongjiao* (Barrett and Tarocco, 2012).

But does the absence of the term 'religion' mean that the concept of religion did not exist in pre-modern China? Do we find on the side of members of religious traditions an awareness that they belong to some kind of group, institution, practice or idea that was comparable with the groups, institutions, practices and ideas that Westerners would call religious?

Zongjiao does not reflect the pre-modern understanding of religion in China. Two different approaches are to explore the etymology of *zongjiao* and to ask for Chinese pre-modern equivalents for a Western modern notion of religion. The nineteenth-century translation of *zongjiao* can be helpful in discovering a particular pre-modern discourse of Chinese religion, but it should not blind us for other ways of speaking about religions in pre-modern China.

The academic literature broadly distinguishes six religious fields or core traditions in China, while acknowledging that these are artificial distinctions and that in many cases considerable overlap exists. These six traditions are:

- Ancient religion;
- state religion;
- Daoism;
- Confucianism;
- Buddhism;
- popular religion.

Smaller non-core-Chinese religious traditions also exist, such as:

- Islam;
- Christianity;
- Judaism;
- Nestorianism;
- Manichaeism;
- Mazdaism
- minority religions.

Following the question of Chinese indigenous notions of religion, do the Chinese sources provide any evidence that a similar understanding existed in pre-modern China? Do they show that at least the six core traditions constitute a larger conceptual unit, that they share something that makes them belong together? These questions can be approached from four different angles:

- Discourses: were there references to these religious fields in pre-modern discussions on religion that group them together?
- Institutions: were there institutions that dealt with these religious fields as a unit or did the religions share institutions?
- Classifications: were these religious fields classified together as a distinct unit or, at least, in the same category in book catalogues, ritual compendia or other sources that reflected the order of knowledge in pre-modern China?
- Terminology (this plays a central role in all of the previous perspectives): were there generic terms that referred to these six religious fields that we call religions in China?

Discourses

The concept that different philosophies and religions followed different paths but each in its own way talked about the same *dao* (way, method, principle, Tao) is old and formed part of an established inter-religious discourse in the third and fourth centuries CE. This identification of common

values and goals in the teachings of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism reflected an early awareness that these traditions belonged to a common category and were not just distinct social formations. The idea of the common goal of different paths in these discourses is often traced back to a quote in the 'Xici' chapter (fourth to second centuries BCE) of the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*, also known as *I Ching*): 'Different paths lead to the same goal'. The authorship of this chapter in these early discourses was linked to Confucius (551–479 BCE), the quote is thus a rather powerful reference. We can see that Buddhists also alluded to this passage in their own texts. Shi Huiyuan (334–416) wrote in his 'On the Monks not paying homage to the ruler' (*Shamen bu jing wang zhe lun,* dated 404 CE):

> As to the relation of Daoists and Buddhists to Confucianists, the Buddha to Yao and Confucius. Although their initial points are quite apart, they latently correspond to each other, their starting points are quite different but eventually they are the same.

Shi Huiyuan referred to the Three Religions as *sanjiao* in his discussion with the emperor (Eichhorn, 1973, pp. 198–9).

The term *sanjiao* as a conceptual unit was established, by the fourth century CE, as a comparative and generic reference to the Three Teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism in the discourses of inter-religious debate. In the sixth and seventh centuries CE the term *sanjiao* was used in imperial edicts (Eichhorn, 1973, p. 198), so it was, by then, officially established as a discursive term. An early imperial edict from 635 CE that referred to Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism included also Nestorianism as a *jiao*-teaching since it formulated a general definition that legitimated the Nestorian teaching of a Persian monk by the emperor:

> The Dao has no fixed name and the Sage has not always the same incarnation. According to locations and circumstances a particular teaching (*jiao*) opens up to save all living beings (Eichhorn, 1973, pp. 255–6).

Three concepts in this passage defined characteristics of religion: *dao*, the nameless that religions deal with; sages, *sheng*, human incarnations with insight into this *dao*; and teachings, *jiao*, that are instrumental to save living beings. Thus *jiao* could be taken as an early term also for religious doctrine here.

Whereas the term *jiao* denotes any kind of teaching, the term *sanjiao* referred exclusively to the Three Religions with focus on the compatibility of

their doctrines. Christianity was never included into the canon of enumerable *jiao* in pre-modern China. The term *sanjiao* has led to further cultural *sanjiao*-institutions such as *sanjiao*-temples, *sanjiao*-festivals, *sanjiao*-images. Only in the twentieth century were Islam and the two Christian churches included in the official Chinese religious landscape.

The term *jiao* was also used in inner-religious discussions on the compatibility and order of their own diverse traditions, most famously in the discursive context of the Buddhist inner-religious differentiation of distinct traditions (*panjiao*, sometimes even including Confucianism and Daoism).

Institutions

From the Sui dynasty (581–613), the Ministry of Rites (*li bu*) was set up to deal with general affairs of state religion such as state rituals, classification of auspicious and inauspicious signs (omina) and sacrifices, and also with affairs of other religions, mainly legal issues such as the regulation of Daoist and Buddhist monasteries and the official registration of monks. The imperial ancestral cult was not included (Eichhorn, 1973, p. 213). In addition the Ministry of Rites dealt with state examinations, official etiquette and the provision of food and service for members of the royal family and state guests. Therefore the concept of rites *li* was a general category that seemed to include nearly all of the religious aspects, although it excluded some of those that Westerners would call religious and included non-religious matters. Li is thus not equivalent to 'religion' or 'religious'.

During the Tang dynasty (618–907) an office for foreign religious teachings was located in a temple in Chang'an. The officials there were priests of the fire cult (Mazdaeans), who regulated the affairs of foreign cults (Eichhorn, 1973, p. 260). Insofar as they acted as general representatives for a number of cults it can be concluded from this institution that a general notion of foreign religious teaching existed.

In the Tang dynasty an officer for the Worship of the Mysterious Dark (De Groot, 1963, p. 105) was responsible in Beijing for the genealogical registers of the imperial family. At the same time he also enrolled the Daoist clergy and regulated the Buddhist and Daoist sacrificial masses celebrated by the clergy on the order of the government. Buddhist monks from Korea and Japan residing or studying in the capital for more than nine years had to be registered by him. As with the Ministry of Rites, responsibility for the office for the affairs of the clerics and the imperial family developed out of an earlier office that managed the registration and monitoring of all Daoist monk activities in the capital from Sui to Song (960–1279 CE) times. Thus,

as the responsibilities of the Worship of the Mysterious Dark changed, so did the concept of that office.

Within the imperial bureaucracy this office was first subordinate to the Court of Dependencies, which managed the reception of tributary envoys of non-Chinese people (during the Sui dynasty 581–613). Later it became subordinate to the Court of State Ceremonial (during the Tang dynasty until 694), to the Ministry of Rites (until 736), to the Court of the Imperial Clan (until 743) and finally to the Ministry of Personnel until between 788 and 807 when the office was apparently subordinated to special Commissioners for (religious) Merit and Virtue (*Gongde shi*) (Hucker, 1985, p. 196). These were eminent Buddhist monks, who, under the supervision of the Court of State Ceremonial, were charged with regulating the issuance of ordination certificates and the obligations of Buddhist monks throughout the country. These dignitaries also controlled the religious duties performed on behalf of the dynasty. In 807 the Daoist clergy were also placed under their direction and control (De Groot, 1963, p. 106).

In this instance the office initially dealt with Buddhist affairs and had Daoist affairs added later. It gradually evolved into a supervisory controller of adherents of other religions as well: for example, Islam and Manichaeism. It became loosely subordinated to the Court of State Ceremonial in the later ninth to the thirteenth century, in the Tang and Song dynasties, and was then absorbed into the Commission for Buddhist and Tibetan Affairs during the Mongolian rule of the Yuan in 1329 (Hucker, 1985, pp. 295–6). It seems that, during that dynasty, foreign religions were managed by the *Chongfu si*, the Commission for the Promotion of Religion, a relatively autonomous agency of the central government of the Yuan responsible for supervising Nestorian, Manichaean and other untraditional religious communities in China. This large agency directed seventy-two local religious offices (*zhangjiao si*) (ibid., pp. 108, 196).

Another example is the administration of single religious traditions. In Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) times, Buddhists and Daoists were supervised by different offices at different local levels all under the Ministry of Rites: for Buddhists the Senglu si in Beijing, the Senggang si at prefectural level, the Sengzheng si at the sub-prefectural level, and the Senghui si at the district level (Hucker, 1985, pp. 404–5). This structure had an exact counterpart for Daoist priests, with the Daolu si in the capital, the Daoji si at the prefectural level, the Daozheng si at sub-prefectural level and the Daohui si for the districts (ibid., pp. 488–9). Members of smaller traditions such as Muslim priests (imams) had no special administration but came under the general control of the Ministry of Rites. People practising

y*inyang* methods such as geomancy, astrology, divination (or a combination of these) were also under the control of a special officer in their locality, also at provincial, prefecture and district level (Yang, 1967, p. 190).

These examples show neatly how (what Westerners would understand as) religions had no fixed place in the classification of the bureaucratic order. Different types of religious affairs were administered in quite distinct ways. Religious affairs could be subordinated to the Court of Dependencies, the Ministry of Rites or to the imperial clan, and they were shifted between these bureaucratic offices over many centuries. There was not a single official post related to religion that started with the character *jiao*. *Jiao* in official posts always related to the educational functions of secular teaching.

However, these institutional orders do demonstrate that there had often been a clear association of religious groups. In 1309 an exemption from taxes was officially declared for Buddhist, Daoist, Nestorian and Islamic institutions (Eichhorn, 1973, p. 313). Confucianism was not one of these institutions since the state embodied a huge Confucian institution itself. While the Buddhist and Daoist churches were treated like state organisations without state interference, large numbers of their monks were sometimes employed for state rituals (ibid., p. 340).

The second strong association was the notion of the Three Teachings (Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism), even though Confucianism was sometimes also associated with state ritual. There were several instances in which foreign religions appeared as a distinct concept, but if they were incorporated into the field of official religions then they were grouped with Daoism and Buddhism. I have seen no instance where foreign religions and Confucianism shared the same institution.

Religious law mainly provides negative notions that demarcate the line between permitted and prohibited teachings. Laws against deviant or perverse sects or heresies are traceable back to at least the Code of the Ming dynasty (fourteenth century). It was taken over literally into the Code of the Qing, so it was in place for the last 600 years of the imperial system in China.

A representative passage of one Qing anti-heresy law with a typical listing of deviant features in fully descriptive mode is:

> [Religious] leaders or instructors, and *wu*-shaman priests, who, pretending thereby to call down deviant gods, write charms or pronounce them over water, or carry around palanquins (with idols), or invoke saints, calling themselves authoritative leaders, chief patrons, or female leaders; further, all societies calling

> themselves at random White Lotus communities, Buddha Maitreya, the Mingzun religion, or the School of the White Cloud etc., together with all that answers to practices of *zuo dao* or *yi duan*; finally, they who in secret places have prints and images, and offer incense to them, or hold meetings which take place at night and break up by day, whereby the people are stirred up and misled under the pretext of cultivating virtue shall be sentenced, the principal perpetrators to strangulation, and their accomplices each to a hundred blows with the long stick, followed by a lifelong banishment to the distance of three thousand miles. If anyone in the army or among the people [in another passage Buddhist and Daoist monks are explicitly mentioned as well] dress or ornament the image of a god, and receive that god with the clang of cymbals and the beating of drums, and hold sacrificial meetings in his honour, one hundred blows with the long stick shall be administered, but only to the principals [...] However services of prayer and thanksgiving [for the harvest] in honour of the common local gods of the Soil, performed in spring and autumn respectively, do not fall under these restrictions (mostly following De Groot, 1963, pp. 137–8).

The issue discussed in these sources is not whether a certain practice was religious but whether it was in accordance with the law. There was no discrimination between degrees of deviation or heresy, only a distinction between leaders and secondary followers. The greatest perceived threat of such practices was that they mislead and stirred up the people. Most of the 'deviant features' are described not in terms of wrong doctrines or beliefs but in formal terms: clothing, music, rituals and names. These criteria do not allow a reconstruction of a correct counter-model. Obviously these criteria have not been developed on any systematic doctrinal understanding of right versus wrong religion but rather on the basis of an established aesthetic canon (Gentz, forthcoming a). The general term throughout all these laws was 'deviant teaching' (*xiejiao*), a term still used today by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to criminalise non-registered and thus illegal religious movements.

Classifications

Starting with the book catalogue in the Sui dynasty (*c.*630 CE), Daoist and Buddhist texts were appended to the greater category of 'Masters'-texts (*zi*) in two categories called *shi* and *dao.* Westerners would classify *zi* as 'Chinese

philosophy'. As in the inter-religious debates, institutions and laws, Daoism and Buddhism were grouped together but without being classed under a term common to both.

The Tang and Song ritual compendia did not contain an independent category of religious rituals and practices. Thus there was no generic category for 'religious affairs' in these classificatory works.

Terminology

In the pre-modern Chinese discourses on religion, in documents of religious policy and inter-religious debates, there were references to some of the six religious fields.

As has been observed *sanjiao* (Three Teachings) is the most general comparative term that existed to describe religions in pre-modern China. Clearly restricted to officially supported religious institutions it was an enumerative and not a systematic term.

If the notions found in the Chinese sources are compared with those in the Western categories we find no equivalent for Ancient religion since this category reflects a modern historical view. We do however find distinct designations for state religion (*wang li*), Confucianism (*ru*), Daoism (*dao*, *xian*) and Buddhism (*shi*, *fo*). Foreign religions were classified as *jiao,* but normally not included in the official enrolment regulations, which mentioned only Buddhist and Daoist monks (*seng* and *dao*). Popular religions were referred to as *jiao* only in the negative mode as 'deviant teachings' (*xiejiao*) and subsumed under heresy. In Buddhist texts, however, the Sanskrit term for 'heretical teachers' (*tirthya* or *tīrthika*) was translated as 'outer ways' (*waidao*), with the opposite being the correct/orthodox way (*zheng dao*). This was also taken over in Daoist texts. One such Daoist text, a Tang dynasty *Huahu jing* found in Dunhuang, lists among the 96 'outer ways' (most of which are Indian and probably copied from a Buddhist list of heretics) also Mazdaism, Manichaeism and Nestorian Christianity (miɛ-ɕiɛ-hɑ, Myie-shye-ha, referring to Messiah, the same term is also used on the famous Nestorian Stele from 781). The first and most prominent feature mentioned of each of these 'outer ways' is their number of numinous beings (*guishen*) which are given in each case with numbers ranging between 300 and 908,000. This sheds some light on an inner-religious understanding of heretical teachings all of which were attached to numinous beings (*guishen*). Heterodox practices were in Daoist texts also called demonic ways (*guidao*) (Mollier 2009, p. 66, fn 30). Another way of distinguishing Buddhist from other, especially Daoist, teachings was the designation of Daoism as 'wordly teaching' (*shijian*, *shijiao*) versus the Buddhist teaching that reached beyond the

world (*chushi jian*, translating Sanskrit *lokottara*, ultra- or supra-mundane) (Barrett, 2009). It is tempting to apply the categories of immanent and transcendent teachings here in the Buddhist discourse with the true teaching focusing on transcendent issues.

The three most important terms for religious issues were '*li*', '*jiao*' and '*dao*'. *Li* was the official ceremonial order, while *jiao* was a field of expertise taught in a non-state organisation, often used in compounds to specify a particular class of religions. The term 'dao' could refer to religions, too. As we have seen (p. 5 above), *jiao* and *dao* both were used in the same document as generic terms – *jiao* as a classificatory compound, *dao* as a general term that was often used not as a strict systematic term but as a very open concept. The more classificatory term *jiao* never referred to state religion. All of these terms were also applied to non-religious phenomena. Apart from the compound *sanjiao* the positive categories were thus not religion specific.

The reason there is no matching generic term for religion in Chinese might also partly be because there is a basic difference in Western and Chinese language about religion. In Western secondary literature Chinese religions are often metaphorically described as entities. They survive, grow and blossom like living organisms; they conquer like armies; they are compared to closed systems, act like personified agents or are attractive and appealing like marketable commodities. In Chinese literature Chinese religions are represented by their founders; religions are designated as a way or path (*dao*), a law, method or doctrine (*fa/dharma*), a teaching of somebody, and much less as entities. Chinese religions are not seen as agents but as humans that act; they are never depicted as closed systems or organisms but as constructs that are commensurable and mappable one to another (Campany, 2003).

To sum up, there were groupings of what Westerners call religions or religious affairs in pre-modern China in linguistic, institutional and classificatory systems, but there was no terminology that was religion specific. Systematic distinctions were not made between sacred and secular, but the state did differentiate between official and non-official, legal and illegal, normal and deviating, peaceful and dangerous. In the pre-modern era, as with Roman imperial religion, the main concerns were with correct ritual, correct gods and correct naming. Instead of questions about truth there were concerns about canonicity, orthodoxy and heresy. In the inter-religious discourses issues of legitimacy, hierarchy and superiority played a major role, yet the status of a religion as jiao or dao was never questioned. Even an 'outer way' (*waidao*) was still a *dao* and a mundane teaching (*shijiao*) still a *jiao*. Similarly the state did not show any interest in defining true

religiosity.It rather regulated features, mostly formal features, that might have impacted on the public order, as the following section will demonstrate.

Ritual

In European travel accounts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Chinese religion was merely regarded as superstitious and idolatrous; ritualism was never mentioned. Following the Jesuit interpretation of China, Chinese religion from the seventeenth century onward was repeatedly criticised by Europeans as empty ritualism. The earliest public controversy about the character of Chinese religion was the rites controversy that evolved between Jesuit and the Dominican missionaries in the seventeenth century. The Jesuits took the view that the veneration of Confucius at full moon and new moon in the form of animal sacrifices and incense in the temples of Confucius were not religious but merely a ritual without religious implications. They argued that Confucius was neither regarded as divine nor was he asked for anything (blessing, good fortune, etc.) (Rule, 1986, pp. 27–8). The Jesuits allowed converts to continue offering sacrifices to Confucius, as well as their own ancestors, and this led to the great rites controversy that ended with a general papal prohibition for any Catholic to participate at ancestral sacrifices (Minamiki, 1985; Mungello, 1994). This dispute has considerably shaped the European notion of, and discourse about, ritual. It has probably led to a transformation of the meaning of the European term 'ritual' from a Roman-Catholic to a comparative notion.

With the strengthening of the economic power of Europe, growing eurocentrism and the demystification of Asia in the nineteenth century, the European view of China started to become more negative (Osterhammel, 1998). With an increasing number of reports of corrupt officials and backward conditions, the earlier European admiration of the refined Chinese civilisation, with its polite manners and morality, vanished and Chinese culture appeared as degenerate and motionless. The admired Chinese control of emotions now appeared as a numb mask forced on the people by a despotic state; they were a sign of stagnation, sterility and unsocial distance, opposed to the modern open dynamics of a vigorous European culture. Chinese bureaucratic scribal culture – with its strict formulaic rhetorical rules, seen earlier as a sophisticated way to secure social order – was now regarded as schematic and lacking in imagination, and opposed to the free and elegant intellectual debates of European salons. In the light of the new evolutionist and racist discourses and idealistic philosophies of the West, China appeared as weak, backward, repressed, ossified, boring and dull (Lühmann, 2003, pp. 128, 139).

Ritualism, in its negative sense of a dead and empty formalism, became one of the major features associated with China. Since then, it seems, Asia has been judged mainly in terms of ritual refinement or ritualistic torpidity. This nineteenth-century view of Chinese culture and religion as essentially ritualistic (Williams, 1883, p. 424; Smith, 1899, p. 193) has been superseded by the views of modern scholars of Chinese religion, many of whom have emphasised the contrast of ritual and belief (Fehl, 1971; Fingarette, 1972; Watson, 1988, p. 4; Paper, 1995, provides further examples on pp. 26–31, see also his historical sketch of Chinese ritual, pp. 31–40).

The focus on ritual in the study of Chinese religion was reinforced by the development of religious studies theory. After the critique of the Christian notion of religion as an analytical tool in the anthropology of religion (Geertz, 1966; Asad, 1993) and the 'performative turn' in cultural studies, ritual has returned to the focus of anthropologists working on Chinese religion and culture (Sangren, 1987; Weller, 1999, Chun, 2000; Feuchtwang *et al*., 2006; Feuchtwang, 2010, Chapter 4; Dean and Zheng, 2010; Dean, 2011). Chinese religion in these works was analysed in regard to:

- processes of place-making and representational practices;
- processes of localisation, globalisation and modernity;
- the interaction of multiple liturgical frameworks within rituals and their syncretic fields;
- their ritual alliances;
- their imitation or subversion of, and their adaptation to, political institutions;
- their negotiation of social order and the defining of new kinds of communities.

Further recent research on Chinese ritual has clearly demonstrated (Chow, 1994; Zito, 1997; Lam, 1998; Meyer, 2008; Gentz, 2010) how rituals are instrumentalised as vessels for the interests of different groups and that these vessels were never empty (Rawski, 1988 against Watson, 1988, p. 4).

Since the notion of Chinese 'ritual' has become one of the major foci in the research of Chinese religions we should look at this notion from its emic perspective, as in the discussion above on Chinese 'religion'. First, Chinese indigenous reflections on the central Chinese notion of ritual – *li* – will be described and then further indigenous terms and concepts of Chinese ritual analysed (see also Gentz, 2006b).

*Chinese reflections on ritual (*li)

The idea that Chinese identity is mainly defined through its ritual culture is not a European invention. In his commentary to the *Gongyang zhuan*

(Duke Yin seventh year), He Xiu (129–182 CE) wrote the famous phrase: 'China is the country of ritual and righteousness.' The concept of *li*, which is one of the main Chinese equivalent terms for the Western notion of 'ritual' (see below), was already being used by the Chinese in the second century CE to define their cultural identity. It is from then on continuously repeated by later Chinese scholars.

This early association of ritual and Chinese identity presupposes a high degree of reflexivity about the meaning and function of ritual in Chinese religious, social and political practice. The earliest reasoning about ritual can be found in historiographical narratives and commentaries from the fifth through the second centuries BCE, in the so-called philosophical texts of the Pre-Qin (before 221 BCE) masters, and the ritual books *Yili*, *Zhouli*, *Liji* (*Record of Rites*) and *DaDai Liji*. Among the ritual books, the *Liji*, a collection of forty-nine essays on rites written between the fourth and first centuries BCE, contains the most elaborate and complex arguments about the origin, nature, function and meaning of ritual (trans. Legge, 1885).

Four basic realms of reflexivity on ritual can be distinguished in the *Liji* collection, in which its nature and significance were explained in different terms (Gentz, 2001, pp. 297–307; Gentz, 2004, pp. 307–10; Meyer, 2008, pp. 65–70). The first realm was what might be called the religious one. Until the Western Zhou (1040–771 BCE), *li* mostly denoted sacrificial rites and ritual decorum. This meaning was still present in some of the *Liji* discourses, in which *li* was associated with the respect for ghosts and ancestors, and the blessings resulting from this.

The second realm – of sociopolitical order – became important in Western Zhou times. This notion of *li* was present throughout the *Liji* and formed one of the most common explanations for ritual as a means of creating a well-ordered community.

The third realm was of cosmology. In these arguments, ritual was grounded in, reflected and expressed the cosmological patterns of Heaven and Earth, the Four Seasons, Yin and Yang, and the Five Phases (*wuxing*, also called Five Elements, Five Agents, Five Movements: wood, fire, earth, metal and water, which in a circular movement generate or overcome each other). In the *Liji*, analogies of particular rites with natural phenomena, animal behaviour and cosmological forces were drawn to explain the principles of ritual.

The final realm was of human emotions (*qing*). Similar to the cosmological reasoning, and probably developed at the same time (third century BCE), mainly by the Confucian thinker Xunzi, the function of ritual was explained as regulating human emotions, balancing and harmonising

them. This affective reading wass especially strong in the chapters on mourning rites.

These four reflexive models of rites were not necessarily separated in the *Liji*. They often appeared side by side in the same chapters, as different modes of argumentation, making use of different terminologies that were inconsistent with each other, yet were presented as equally valid. Sometimes they were combined, and sometimes one approach was rejected in the light of another. Throughout the *Liji*, the sociopolitical and the affective reading of ritual were clearly dominant (Gentz, 2001, pp. 304–7; Puett, 2009, pp. 697–700).

The formulation of a ritual theory, however, was nowhere an ultimate ambition in early Chinese ritual literature. We therefore do not find any theoretical discussion about ritual theory. Theory served rather as a means of arguing for the right practice, with the ultimate aim of achieving the desired effect – the right emotional, sociopolitical, and religious-cosmological order.

Chinese terms for 'ritual'

Theories on Chinese ritual mainly discussed the concept of *li*. Yet in Classical Chinese and in the different Chinese local dialects there were hundreds of terms denoting specific rituals or rites. In the following section, the most basic generic terms for 'ritual' will be discussed.

As has been seen, the best-known Chinese generic term for the religious performances called 'rituals' in the West was the term *li*, which was mainly used in the Confucian tradition. It was not used in the Daoist tradition, perhaps because of its negative connotation in the books *Laozi* (*Daode jing,* Chapter 38) and *Zhuangzi*. Buddhists used the term *li* only in connection with worship.

The most important Chinese term for rites used in all traditions was *yi*, which denoted the formal model aspect of individual rites. The Confucian tradition has reflected on the concept of ritual *li* in the most theoretical and abstract way in ritual chapters and books, such as *Xunzi* 'Li lun', *Liji*, *DaDai Liji* (Gentz, 2004). The Daoist term for ritual was a binomial composed of the words *ke* and *yi*. Other Daoist terms referring to religious performances were *zhaijiao* and *baibai*. In the Buddhist tradition the main term used was *yi* (*shi*) and also *libai*, *gong*, and *fashi* or *foshi*.

Li might be defined as performing a Confucian ideal system of rules (on a religious, sociopolitical, moral and cosmic level); *ke*, *bai*, *gong* and *shi* can be defined as Daoist/Buddhist performative acts; and *yi* was the notion of the outer appearance of rites – the model ceremonial form.

Confucian *li* was a generic term denoting all sorts of human activities that establish an order that was conceived to accord with the proper order of an ideal system of rules. It comprehended official etiquette as well as sacrificial, birth, capping, wedding and mourning rites, religious services, clothing, correctness, rules of behaviour, officials' equipment and also inner attitudes. Its meaning was thus much broader than the meaning of 'ritual'. Traditional Chinese encyclopaedias described highly differentiated subdivisions of ritual, which followed a basic fivefold separation into rites concerning: auspicious affairs (religious rites) (*ji li*); imperial affairs (*jia li*); guest affairs (*bin li*); military affairs (*jun li*); and unlucky affairs (*xiong li*). Ritual was distinctly opposed to codified positive legal statutes.

According to Pines (2000), in the Western Zhou *li* referred to sacrificial rites. The broad concept of ceremonial propriety appeared in these texts under the name of 'ceremonial decorum' (*yi*) or 'awe-inspiring ceremonies' (*weiyi*), which referred to the precise, orderly performance of the complicated ceremonies in which each participant behaved according to his rank and seniority in his lineage. In the early Chunqiu (770–476 BCE) speeches, *li* primarily referred to the inter-state etiquette, and more broadly to the proper handling of international relations. From the mid-Chunqiu period, statesmen began applying the term *li* to a broad range of political activities, such as personnel policy, proper handling of rewards and punishments, and ensuring smooth functioning of the administration in general.

Li thus evolved into an overall pattern of governing, and this meaning overshadowed its ceremonial origins. In late Chunqiu discourse *li* was for the first time connected to Heaven and Earth and its value was further elevated thereby. At the end of the Chunqiu period Confucius concentrated on ethical aspects of *li* at the expense of its political functions. In the Zhanguo period (475–221 BCE) *li* comprised two distinct meanings as a signifier of the social order: it referred to hierarchic order in general; and was intrinsically linked to the aforementioned Western Zhou set of ritual regulations, with their overt hereditary connotations. Later it was developed as a moral principle, a norm of interpersonal intercourse; it became an internal virtue, part of the innate good nature of human beings. Finally, by the end of the Zhanguo period, *li* became a multifaceted term referring to political, social, economic, military, ethical, religious and educational spheres, to mention only a few. Yet this richness of functions should not obscure the nature of *li* as primarily a sociopolitical term, a regulator of society and the state.

Li further achieved a cosmic dimension, becoming the terminological counterpart of the True Way – *Dao* as a supreme truth; the unique force

applicable at the cosmic, social and individual level, the One that Pervades All. At its highest level *li* was treated as an unchanging, unifying force of the universe. In later times *li* always comprised these different layers of meaning: Zhou religious ritual, sociopolitical order, moral principle and cosmic law (Pines, 2000).

The Daoist terms *ke* and *yi* referred to religious performative acts, such as commands, dances, prayers, purifications, invocations, consecration and offering formulas, hymns and perambulations. The terms *ke* and *yi* were taken as class categories for the scriptures of the Daoist canon (approximately 600), which contained rules for religious performances, such as fasting, prayers and offerings. They stood in between the classes '("magical") methods' (*fa*) and 'monastic regulations' (*jie*, *lu*). Schipper (1993, pp. 74–6) gave the following subordination of the terms. He translated *ke* as a great (for example, two-day) service for a local community, which may consist of some fifteen rituals (*yi*), which included a succession of rites (*fa*): purification, invocation, etc. In contrast to *yi*, which was a standard Chinese term for rite, the term *ke* had a more Daoist implication in that it referred less to a moral and more to a cosmological order in the sense of a hierarchical classification of beings. According to Lagerwey (1987, p. 286), 'the binomial *k'o-yi* (*keyi* jg) then may be defined as "regular patterns of behaviour that give concentrated expression to the order of things".' They recreated the universe through returning to the Origin. The synecdochical term *zhai-jiao* denoted the sphere of fasting and offering and thus the whole sphere of Daoist ritual. Of all the rituals, the offering (*jiao*) was the basic liturgical service conducted for the living, and it was composed of rituals of communion and covenant. Fasts (*zhai*) included rituals for the living and for the dead and comprised rituals to obtain merits.

Baibai was a general term for worship. It also meant a religious festival or any kind of ritual or festive event. It was frequently used in colloquial popular language too. In opposition to Confucian ritual, only a small part of these religious acts, which were performed by ritual specialists, themselves realised the cosmic order. Great rituals and small rites have to be distinguished: small rites were part of the daily practice of healing, exorcising and purifying individuals. By contrast, the great rituals, which contained many rites, concerned groups of people and may have been divided in funerary services for the ancestors (kin rituals, called 'sombre', *you*, referring to the world of the dead) and in services for the gods (Heaven rituals, called 'pure', *qing*, referring to Heaven) (Schipper, 1993, pp. 72–6).

The Buddhist terms *li* and *bai* (also *libai*) denoted many different sorts of inner and outer reverence, worship and adoration acts (*vándana*). *Yi(-shi)*

described only the outer formal aspect of the performative ceremonial act, the visible part as expression of worship. *Yigui* was an expression for a genre of Buddhist esoteric literature continuing the vedic *kalpa sūtras*, which contained prescriptions for secret ceremonies and rituals, secret ritual methods such as mudras and mantras, and rules of behaviour. *Gong* were devotional offerings, and *foshi* or *fashi* were expressions for all kinds of services that were carried out to honour the Buddha or the Dharma.

All Chinese generic terms denoting ritual included the semantic realm of rules, precepts and discipline. On the generic level the concepts of ritual and rule were never differentiated terminologically. In the Confucian and Daoist traditions the different rituals served to re-enact the cosmic order that had been disturbed or endangered either by human non-ritual behaviour (Confucianism) or by powers of darkness (Daoism). Since the cosmic order was envisaged as a moral order and the rites embodied cosmic order, the rites were taken to carry moral meaning as they were liturgical matrices on which conduct must be modelled. That is why they were so closely related to moral precepts and rules. This was also the reason why wrong rituals were so strictly prohibited throughout Chinese history.

Since the cosmic order was identified with state order in Chinese political philosophy, rituals, by re-enacting cosmic order, simultaneously re-enacted state order. In addition to the state rituals (including sacrifices to deities, the imperial ancestors and Confucius) carried out by the emperor himself, Daoist and Buddhist rituals were also performed on a regular basis at the imperial court for the sake of the state and the imperial family.

For further reading: Feuchtwang (2010); Paper (1995); Yang and Lang (2011).

2

The Landscape of Religions in China

The situation of religions in China differred fundamentally from that of the three monotheistic religions from which most Western models of religion were drawn. In contrast to the Western religious cultures the religious worship carried out by the Chinese ruler could not be performed by any other mortal. Only the emperor was allowed to offer sacrifice to Heaven/*Shangdi*, Earth and the highest (imperial) ancestors. State religion in China consisted mainly in sacrifices and ceremonies that were performed by the emperor, who was responsible for securing the well-being and harmony of cosmic and the numinous and sociopolitical forces. Heaven, which since Han times (206 BCE–220 CE) was identified with the God on High (*Shangdi*) and to which the emperor offered the great sacrifices, was quiet, deliberate, impassive and addressable only by the emperor. Although the emperor was the only human being offering sacrifice to *Shangdi*, the relationship was not one of personal intimacy. No temple existed for the God on High, worship was never personal and no one ever caught a glimpse of *Shangdi*. As the son of Heaven the emperor was responsible for the order of the empire called 'All under Heaven' (*tianxia*). Political and religious tasks were thus inseparable. Religious ritual was part of the ruler's administrative duty regulated by the Ministry of Rites (*libu*). Similar tasks were carried out at the lower administrative levels as well. Officers responsible for the order of prefectures, districts or cities also addressed gods positioned at the corresponding levels of the celestial hierarchy. This order of duties continued into the clan and the family, with different levels of ancestors being addressed in clan and family rituals by the heads of these social units in their respective ancestral halls.

We thus find in Chinese state religion a religious order in which officials as representatives worship particular gods that, in a supernatural hierarchy, corresponded to their own position in the political hierarchy. The structures of the political administration thus mirrored the structures of the celestial

bureaucracy (see, for an excellent discussion of this parallel structure, Wolf, 1974). At the lower levels state religion merged with popular religion, city gods were worshipped by officials as well as common people.

The only cult that was carried out on different levels throughout the empire was the cult for Confucius. After a Confucius temple had been erected in the capital in the year 480, the cult spread by imperial order, so that in 555 every district capital had to erect a Confucius temple and by 687 all cities had to erect Confucius temples. Although the official structures of state ritual were thus established and followed strict rules, people who were not officials were neither forced nor expected to believe in or to attend these ceremonies. Rather, in the case of the imperial sacrifice, no ordinary Chinese person was allowed to view the main procession and the following ceremonies or to assemble nearby. The same distinctions applied to the family – no Buddhist family was forced to worship their ancestors. However they were expected to support the state through their charity works and administrative offices and also through religious rituals held regularly for the sake of the emperor in Buddhist temples and at court.

Terms such as 'inclusivism' or 'exclusivism' thus do not apply to these Chinese religious cultures in a strict sense. For the greatest part of the imperial history of the united Chinese state we do find a state religion supported by a bureaucratic structure based on a Confucian ideology taught in schools and academies. Besides this state religion, non-centralised religions existed with strong regional and local tinges and controlled by the imperial administration – the two most powerful being Buddhism and Daoism. From late imperial times these non-Confucian religions were also administered on prefectural, sub-prefectural and district levels and thus incorporated into the hierarchy of the official bureaucracy.

The power of Buddhist or Daoist temples depended on the level of official support. Temples patronised by the emperor were wealthy and untouchable. As officially sanctioned temples they counted as 'legal' religious institutions. Temples built and supported by the local gentry had a lower status and were tolerated only as long as the power of the gentry was sufficient to protect them. Temples erected by local commoners rarely survived for very long. They were regularly destroyed on the order of government officials and then mostly rebuilt as soon as state control was eased. The Chinese religious landscape was thus pluralistic but regulated. This specific form of regulated pluralism resembled the religious landscapes of other ancient empires such as the Roman or Persian and, probably, pre-Muslim Indian empires. It contrasted with the religious landscapes dominated by Christian churches or Muslim rules.

Religious pluralism and tolerance

The Chinese traditional discourse on the harmony of the Three Teachings (*sanjiao heyi*) began in the fourth century CE with claims such as the one of Sun Chuo (314–371) in his *Yudao lun*:

> [The Confucian sages] Duke of Zhou and Confucius are like the Buddha and the Buddha is like the Duke of Zhou and Confucius. These are probably just designations of outer and inner aspects. Therefore it works as imperial in front of an emperor and as kingly in front of a king. The term '*fo*' is Sanskrit and in [the language] of the Jin it has the meaning of 'awakened'. 'Awakened' means 'to get the meaning' and denotes an insight into the things. It is like Mencius taking the sages to be those who are the first to awaken, both point to one and the same. To appropriately respond to the social affairs of the times and follow the course of the things you probably also have to meet the timely moment. The Duke of Zhou and Confucius rescued the world in times of utmost distress, the Buddha illuminated its roots. Together they can be taken as head and tail, what they lead to is not different (*Yudao lun* in *Hongming ji*, beginning of Chapter 3).

This, and similar statements, have led Europeans to believe that Chinese religions were in general more tolerant and more peaceful than Western ones (Parker, 1905, pp. 7–9, 15–16; Soothill, 1923, p. 13; Devaranne, 1924, pp. 12–16; Yang, 1943, pp. 37–40; Chan, 1953, pp. 115–30).

The sinologist and missionary De Groot (1854–1921), incensed by the attacks of the Boxer movement against Christians in China in 1899, published a book in 1901 in which he tried empirically to disprove this European belief in Chinese religious tolerance. He provided and discussed source material from the history of Chinese religious policy, citing lengthy passages from anti-heresy laws against deviant religious practices in the civil and penal codes of the Ming and Qing dynasties (De Groot, 1963).

With the claim of a harmony of the Three Teachings, pluralism was defined as a secondary feature behind the assumed identity of the Three Teachings. In practice, competition between the Three Teachings was not weakened by this claim but transformed into a struggle of pre-eminence. Thus this competition did not aim at the monopoly for a single religious tradition but rather to a dominant position within a regulated arrangement of diverse religions; neither the concept monopoly nor the concept pluralism applies here. We should rather think of it as a case of a *regulated*

pluralism that claimed to eschew competition to form a threefold oligopoly independent of coercive measures by the state.

During most of China's history after the Sui dynasty, the Three Teachings have been state supported. In China the ruler did not have to make a choice in regard to his own position but could, and would, employ representatives of all Three Teachings at the court to conduct specific rituals for the court. He had institutions dealing with other (foreign) religions as well. Chinese religions have always been as exclusive as Western religions. That they rarely conducted war against each other was mainly due to their weak positions of power *vis à vis* the Chinese state. They were not allowed to do so. As a consequence religious institutions made use of imperial power when they tried to eliminate or suppress each other. Examples of this can be found in times when the state favoured one over the other and allowed one institution to control the other. The Quanzhen-Daoists under their leader Qiu Chuji (1148–1227 CE) were given special privileges by Genghis Khan through imperial edicts in 1223 and 1227. This led to the destruction of hundreds of Buddhist monasteries and temples, and the devastating reverse of the Buddhists after 1258 (Eichhorn, 1973, pp. 305–7; Liu, 1984, pp. 65–7). In these cases while the state-supported faiths were claiming identity with each other they were also competing with each other. The state-regulated religions were competing for the favour of the emperor as much as for believers. This dual alignment was different from other modern situations in Europe, the USA and west Asia.

When examining the harmonisation of the Three Teachings we have to ask, first, how different these traditions actually were so that we can rule out the possibility that the *sanjiao* model could, in fact, be regarded as a variant of a religious monopoly. There has been much discussion on unity and diversity in Chinese religions. Freedman and Wolf have defined the two polar positions in this debate in 1974 (Freedman, 1974, Wolf, 1974; see also a discussion of this debate in Feuchtwang, 2010, Chapter 3). Robert Weller, in his long-term analysis of unities and diversities, has shown that Chinese religion was neither simply unified nor simply diverse but that unity and diversity could both be constructed through interpretation and reinterpretation of religious symbols (Weller, 1987, p. 144). China however 'clearly had a kind of unified religion in the sense that even the wildest variations drew on a set of general themes, shared ambiguities, and common tensions' (Shahar and Weller, 1996, p. 22). This can certainly also be stated for such diverse religions as Judaism, Christianity and Islam or for Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. Although there was considerable overlap and family resemblance in these cultural sets of religious traditions Weller also asserted that

the Three Teachings and popular religions began increasingly to take form as discernible traditions the more they narrowed into a professional literate élite (Ebrey and Gregory, 1993, p. 12 with reference to Zürcher, 1980, p. 146, hold a similar view). Throughout Chinese history we see a strong awareness of continuous and clearly distinct identities in each of these traditions, even if many elements have been borrowed, adapted, included from other traditions, in my view, in a more eclectic than syncretistic way.

Given this strong awareness of their distinct identities how do we understand the idea of the unity of Three Religions (*sanjiao heyi*) that seems to point in the opposite direction? Mary Garrett has argued that:

> within a competitive debate framework the conclusion that the clash of arguments has demonstrated the truth of both or all doctrines seems odd, if not outright illogical. From a philosophical standpoint, the notion that each religion expressed the same truth in its own way was a respectable intellectual tenet in China as in the West. However it was not one that the structure of the competitive debate format of the 'Three Doctrines Discussions' would seem to encourage, or even be consistent with (Garrett, 1994).

Empirical research in historical and contemporary fields seems to support this argument. The idea of a harmony of the Three Teachings belonged purely to the discourse about Chinese religions and was not a feature of Chinese religions themselves.

In the history of Chinese religions there was no successful attempt at creating a harmonious system of Chinese religions in which all Three Religions had equal positions. Reading the *sanjiao* essays carefully we find that the metaphors often implied subtle hierarchies and seldom expressed equality or unity. The exclusive statements appeared mostly at the end of these texts. When Daoan, in his 'Essay on the Two Teachings' (*Erjiao lun*, 570 CE), described Confucianism and Buddhism as complementary, as inner and outer realm, we find at the end of the essay that the inner realm (i.e. Buddhism) was by far superior (Kohn, 1995, pp. 179–80). Liu Mi (Song or Yuan dynasty), who started with metaphors of equality in his 'Essay on viewing the Three Teachings with a balanced mind' (*Sanjiao pingxin lun*), also ended with a harsh critique on Han Yu (768–824) and the whole essay then turned into a defence of Buddhism. This competitiveness did not change in Ming times as often proposed. In no case of the most famous and praised examples of Chinese *sanjiao* thinkers do we find a basis for a unity of religions.

This does not mean that there was no 'mutual influence' as Zürcher (1980) termed it, or 'appropriation' as Bokenkamp (2004, p. 323) preferred to put it. Using the example of official and popular religion, Romeyn Taylor has demonstrated how integration between different religious traditions worked. His cases -— of the emperor's official worship of Mount Tai on which a number of Daoist temples were built and of city god temples connected to popular worship – resulted either in the creation of dualism (in the 'persistence of differences in the official and popular forms of the same cults' involving 'the differentiation of official cults into two forms': for example, an altar form and a temple form) or in a cult that could continue to be a Daoist cult in both the official and the popular forms (Taylor, 1990, pp. 148–56).

In a different context, that of Daoist adaptations of Buddhist concepts of rebirth and afterlife, Bokenkamp has demonstrated that they were gradually adapted into pre-existing Chinese conceptions of how to deal with the dead because they helped to solve particular problems among the living. He emphasised the point that this was not about belief systems but about other sorts of concern, some religious, some not (Bokenkamp, 2007, p. 10). Christine Mollier in a most detailed study of Dunhuang manuscripts revealing the relationship and interchange between Buddhist and Daoist traditions has further asserted that 'what we find in these examples is not mere hybridisation or passive borrowing, but a unique type of scriptural production, whereby the two traditions mirrored one another' (Mollier, 2008, p. 10). This showed a whole range of cases of 'plagiarism', 'textual exchanges', 'appropriations', 'cut-and-paste copies', 'literary transpositions' etc., which do not aim at unifying the two traditions but to appropriate the other teaching's ' "bestseller" for their own ends' (Mollier, 2008, pp. 25, 57, 100, 112, 130–1, 207–8).

Thus, in what is normally called the syncretistic aspect of Chinese religions there are many different forms of identification (for a detailed analysis of the logical figures of these identifications, see Gentz 2008b; Gentz forthcoming b). There is no evidence of an amalgamation that would allow us to conclude that a non-exclusivist unification of traditions in a monopolistic way existed and rendered superfluous the need to mark distinct identities and make a choice between the three traditions.

There is no evidence either in historical sources or from empirical fieldwork that a harmonious unity of the three traditions as envisioned by the *sanjiao heyi* discourse ever existed in practice. *Sanjiao heyi* was merely a concept that had no institutionalised reality as counterpart. This is not to deny the existence of a broad range of syncretist and eclectic religious

practices that addressed numinous personnel from all Three Religions in various forms. However no institutionalised form of such religious practice existed that was accepted by an authoritative institution (exerting impact beyond the local level) of any one of the Three Teachings at any time in Chinese history.

In Ming times the *sanjiao* discourse changed. This might have been due to the fact that Zhu Yuanzhang (1328–1398, reigned 1368–1398), the first emperor of the Ming dynasty, had written an *Essay on the Three Teachings* (*Sanjiao lun*), which was frequently quoted in other texts on the Three Teachings and which served as a political discursive guideline with normative character (Taylor, 1983; Langlois and Sun, 1983). What followed from this was that the Three Teachings were no longer regarded as three distinct legs of a tripod – they were intermingled in order to elucidate each other (Ch'ien, 1986, p. 14).

New *sanjiao* models were developed mainly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries following the teachings of Wang Yangming (1472–1529). Wang Ji (1498–1583), Lin Zhaoen (1517–1598), Li Zhi (1527–1602), Jiao Hong (1540–1620) and other 'wild' Chan-Confucianists of the left wing of the Wang Yangming school began to read the different teachings in an interrelated way (De Bary, 1970, pp. 171–8). The imperial model text allowed these scholar officials to do so. Even in these more radical approaches there was no new, more pluralistic attempt at unifying the teachings. The other teachings were used as commentarial readings of their own canonical works (Ch'ien, 1986, p. 88). Buddhist scholars such as Ouyi Zhixu (1599–1655) did much the same with Confucian texts. The new, typical Ming dynasty relationship between the Three Teachings was a commentarial one. This was most evident in the development of a text genre of 'three-teaching-commentaries', which interpreted the texts of other teachings in the light of their own doctrine.

The relation to other teachings was always an instrumental one and often served as defence of their own doctrinal position – not against other teachings but, as in the case of Jiao Hong and other leftist Ming Confucians, against other tenets within their own tradition. These commentarial references in Ming times revealed a new field of doctrinal tension in which interpretations within their own tradition posed a greater threat to doctrinal group identities than canonical texts from the other traditions. The widespread easy commitment to a 'unity of the Three Religions' provided evidence for this new drawing of identifications. Teachings from other canons could easily be used to interpret their own canon in a way that strengthened their own position within their own tradition.

Regarded in this light, the *sanjiao* discourse seems to have followed an entirely different dynamic than what it appeared to represent. Instead of working towards a unity of the Three Teachings it was a tool or strategy to strengthen the arguments of its advocate as a *distinct* position. Thus, although the *sanjiao* discourse seemed to give up pluralism and to form a unity, it aimed at dominance of one particular religion over the other religions: either on the side of the state or on the side of the religions; either against the state or against each other; and even against opposition within a particular religious tradition. The strategy was confusing. It seemed as if different religions were offered as sharing one and the same goal, yet we see the same religion used to achieve different goals. Goals that were identical in the sense that ascendancy for one religious tradition over the others was however the objective.

Chinese religions as imperial religions

We might infer from these inter-religious and state-religion relationships that there was a particular type of religion in China that was determined by its being part of, and playing a role in, the Chinese empire. Since the unification of China in the second century BCE, and their enforcement from the seventh century CE, Chinese religions were mostly a facet of a centralised empire. This shaped their self-awareness and identity. Chinese religions might therefore be classified as imperial religions, among which state religion occupied a similar status and had a similar character as in Roman or Persian imperial religions.

Features that Chinese imperial religion shared with Roman imperial religion were, for example, the dichotomy of a central state cult attempting to ensure cohesion and social and moral control on the one hand with local religions, with their potential to criticise central rule through local institutions of divination, on the other. This function of religion as mediator providing a space for negotiation between general (central) politics and individual (local) circumstances seems to be a typical feature of imperial religions. As in the Roman empire, religions in China became distinct formations only as a result of the appearance of social groups that were not identical with politically or culturally defined groups. The codification of textual canons and histories of affiliations and transmission lines was part of this process. The more accessible religion became to the people the more it was subject to legal regulations – laws that disciplined and restricted religious practice by drawing a clear line between orthodox and heretic religious practice and by identifying strange and foreign cults (*wai*, *superstitio*) (Rüpke, 2011, pp. 301–9, 312).

In contrast to many others, the Chinese empire was not built up on a number of conquered territories culturally (and religiously) as diverse as those of the Roman empire. It has never vanished as an entity; it has kept its political unity and its core, central power until today. The historical beginning of religious history looks quite similar. With the establishment of the unified empire a state religion became defined in China, as in other empires, mainly on the basis of a routine of ritual practices. Later independent religious institutions emerged that formed something akin to church structures and were tolerated and controlled by the state. Yet, from the seventh century onwards, China developed a unique form of religious policy. This kept the state cult strictly separated from religious practice outside the imperial court, and it also clearly defined a set of state-tolerated religions by propagating the idea of the identity and harmony of these religions.

In China there was a unique combination of an imperial state religion, local religions and the three main teachings. One provided the official ideology and administrative structure of the empire. The others developed in ways analogous to churches in the West: partly being officially involved in their own administration; partly serving the state by offering religious (rituals); and partly through non-religious services (such as charity work). This strictly regulated pluralism was restricted to a specific number of religious institutions, and a clear distinction of state cult and religions for the people appears to be the unique form that Chinese imperial religion took in pre-modern times. The main change in modern times was the abolition of the state cult. Even if we regard the Communist orthodoxy with its canon and canon exegesis and its religious policy of a regulated pluralism (with five tolerated religions instead of three) as a continuation of pre-modern forms of state orthodoxy, the modern state cult is not distinct from the people. Portraits of Mao Zedong can be found as religious objects of worship on altars of peasants in southern China as well as protective amulets dangling from rear-view mirrors in taxis in Beijing with Bodhisattva Guanyin on the reverse side (Jensen, 2008, pp. 49–74).

Historical landscape

In the following section Chinese religions are presented according to the common classifications: Ancient religion; Confucianism; Daoism; Buddhism; popular religion; and modernity. This presentation enforces a historical scheme on overlapping religious traditions.

After an early phase of ancient religions that included the Shang (sixteenth century to 1045 BCE) and Zhou (1045–256 BCE) dynasties Confucianism started as an interpretation of the vanishing ritual traditions from the sixth

and fifth century BCE onwards. Confucianism became the dominant state ideology in the unified empire of the Early Han in the second century BCE. Daoism, initially an oppositional train of thought in the fourth century BCE, emerged as a powerful religious movement at the end of the Late Han in the second century CE. Buddhism then arrived as the leading state doctrine in some of the dynasties during the Wei-Jin period (220–420 CE) and achieved what is called its 'golden time' in early Tang times in the seventh and eighth century CE. From the Song period syncretic ideas appeared within all three main traditions as well as in the newly emerging sectarian lay movements. These ideas increasingly dominated the religious landscape of late imperial China until modern Western concepts reframed the whole understanding of religions in general and changed religious culture in China.

There is very little evidence of the religious diversity that we assume must have existed in China's early history as it occurred later. Changes of central religious concepts and practices, together with early archaeological artefacts and textual sources, indicate such a diversity. It was only with the Late Eastern Zhou (also called Warring States times, 475–221 BCE) that we have broad textual evidence of a great diversity of religious concepts in all their syncretic forms (Harper, 1999).

Early Han emperors rendered service to *Shangdi* and the Ancestral Shrines as well as to the Five Shrines of the Five Gods (*wu di*, each corresponding in colour, cardinal direction etc. to one of the Five Phases, *wuxing*). The *jiao* sacrifice offered to Heaven at Yong became the most important ritual after 33 BCE. Besides this there were hundreds of shrines for sun, moon, winds and other gods to which the emperor was supposed to sacrifice much more often than he actually did. In many cases their main function was an appropriation of local cults and deities into the ritual framework of the imperial cult, so as to gain control over the localities.

Rather than merely following the traditional routines, new cults were also introduced at the personal suggestion of the emperor or on recommendations by high officials. A number of ritual reforms were carried out. The first Dynastic Histories reflect the conflicts and discussions that resulted from these changes. The rightfulness of such decisions was negotiated by different interpretation of the Confucian classics, or of natural disasters and omina. Within a highly sophisticated framework of Confucian erudition, and of correlative cosmology in which all rituals were placed, the emperor acted as mediator between Heaven and Earth.

These discussions between politicians and scholars demonstrate that the main religious position taken by the Han state was the new synthesis of Han Confucianism. This combined the Confucian canonical works with *yinyang*

and Five Phases (*wuxing*) cosmology. They also reflect the diversity within this newly formed synthesis as well as the various readings of the multifaceted Confucian canon that finally resulted in different exegetical traditions based on different variants of the canonical texts.

In Early Han times masters of recipes and methods (*fangshi*) were trained as specialists in occult and divinatory techniques. Shamanistic priests performed powerful rituals – despite much criticism of their practices by Confucian scholars – and were still influential inside and outside the imperial court; they were often personally patronised by emperors. At the same time the institutional authority of the Confucian orthodoxy in political and legal matters became so dominant in Han times that there was a first peak of highly sophisticated exegesis of Confucian texts. This exegesis borrowed interpretative techniques from divinatory ways of reading signs. Han Confucianism, with its combination of Confucian text interpretation and those of correlative cosmology and *fangshi* techniques of omen interpretation, mingled these two types of approaches. The resulting wild speculative commentaries, which together claimed to possess newly revealed or secret apocryphal texts (*chenwei*), weakened the institution of Confucian texts considerably (Dull, 1966) as they were heavily criticised from within the Confucian school. Critics such as Wang Chong (27–*c*.97 CE) and Wang Fu (*c*.78–163 CE) in the first and second centuries CE argued very explicitly and on a very high systematic level against certain religious concepts and practices (Forke, 1962). Yet some of these exegetical techniques and above all the idea of revealed texts inspired new religious movements that based themselves not on Confucian but on Daoist texts (Seidel, 1983).

This weakening of Confucian state orthodoxy allowed space for the formation of the first great organised religious millenarian movements, such as the Celestial Masters or the Yellow Turbans in the second century CE. These were independent of the state and sought to establishing a religious state. However they were fought and ultimately controlled by the state. It was exactly in this time also that Buddhism began to spread in China. Thus, during the second century CE, the basic structure of the religious landscape started to form which was to remain for the greatest part of China's history: a Confucian orthodox state with independent religious traditions that were controlled by the state.

After the breakdown of the Han state in 220 CE, partly caused by these religious uprisings, China was not unified for nearly 400 years. In this time the two great religious cultures, Daoism and Buddhism, established themselves as independent and powerful traditions. They consolidated their identity with core ideas, terminology and canonical works. Also, at

this time, they started to compete in polemical discourses (Zürcher, 1959, Chapters 5 and 6). Many of the early Buddhist polemical tracts can be found in a collection called *Hongming ji* compiled by Sengyou (445–518) (Schmidt-Glintzer, 1976; Kohn, 1995). The first great persecutions were carried out by the state authorities, which at times supported Buddhism, at others Daoism (Mather, 1979), or neither of them as in the great Northern Zhou persecution in 574–578 CE. This proscribed both religions, destroyed temples, images and books and secularised the clergy as they didn't accord to the Confucian ritual canon.

Discourses on the relation of the Three Teachings (*sanjiao*: Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism) emerged, ranging from the most pejorative polemics to the propagation of an identity and harmony of the teachings (Liu, 1984; Garrett, 1994). These served to demarcate lines of religious identities for purposes of doctrinal differentiation. Perhaps even more importantly they distinguished different local and social groups and proved their political legitimacy by affirming that their religious practice was in line with the values of the political order.

During the Six Dynasties period (220–589) a major struggle evolved between traditional cults led by shaman priests and the political and clerical élites who attacked the shamanist cults as superstitious, harmful and immoral (Johnson, 1985, p. 425). The discourses on the Three Religions and their relationship also legitimised their respective religious practices within this field of growing tensions.

Another important feature of these 400 years was the formation of strong local profiles for Daoism and Buddhism within the different political cultures in which they had to position themselves. The absence of a strong political centre during this formative stage of Chinese religions might even be one of the reasons for the decentralised structure of Chinese religions. The fact that China, at this time, was split into several states with different regional cultures may have inhibited any centralisation of Daoism and Buddhism and any formation of unified churchlike structures. On the contrary, both Buddhism and Daoism developed local traditions, not incompatible with each other, but possessing clearly distinct features and identities. Diverging local emphasis on particular texts, rituals and meditation practices did not stop them being regarded as complementary.

Thus one of the features of Chinese religious history was the great number of schools that existed in Buddhism and Daoism. These were associated with certain personalities and lineages or with specific localities, often mountains (Maoshan Daoism or Tiantai Buddhism) or regions. All major schools of Daoism are linked with a sacred mountain (Hahn, 2000, p. 684).

Scholars speak of Northern and Southern Buddhism and Daoism and of the Buddhist centres at Xiangyang, Jiangling and Lushan (Zürcher, 1959, Chapter 4). Many of the main schools of Confucianism are still associated with, and named after, particular regions in the famous *Record of Ming Scholars* written by Huang Zongxi (1610–1695). Much attention to these regional aspects of religion has been paid in research on Roman imperial religion (Cancik and Rüpke, 1997; Rüpke, 2011, pp. 299–300), yet this approach to a geographical history of religions has been neglected in works on Chinese religions even though the regional difference of Chinese religions was noted early (Parker, 1910, pp. 5–6, 8–9, 11 etc.).

Instead of centralised and unified churches, religious centres formed the organisational basis of Chinese religions. The relationship of these religious centres should be understood as one of teaching centres, similar to the relationship of universities today. Adepts would travel between these centres to find a personal master, an appropriate place to study or to research different things. In later times they would also move between Confucian academies and Daoist and Buddhist monasteries and temples to study teachings from different traditions. Even many of the inter-religious debates have to be understood not in terms of doctrinal disputes between centralised church-organisations but rather as attempts to secure economic means and status for the support and survival of religious centres at a local level. Understanding the landscape of Chinese religions requires an understanding of the local and regional character of Chinese religions.

With the support of the centralised state after the unification of the empire through the Sui and Tang dynasties the different religious traditions became better integrated in themselves, and their organisations were more streamlined. The various Daoist schools – for example, northern and southern, communal and semi-monastic – integrated themselves into a more systematic organisation called the Three Caverns (*sandong*) and established monasteries with strict rules, precepts and organisational principles that reflected local culture while reflecting models derived from canonical texts and Buddhist examples (Kohn, 2004). In Buddhism, hierarchical classifications of Buddhist schools and strategies of identification were developed as part of the sinification process of Buddhism. Local culture however still continued to have a strong influence on religious institutions at the local level.

The first Sui emperor, Wen (541–604, reigned 581–604), was a devout Buddhist and great admirer of the Indian Buddhist ruler Asoka (third century BCE) whom he emulated in many respects. He used Buddhism as a means to pacify the south and to overcome the great cultural diversity in his

empire. Thus he revived both Buddhism and Daoism considerably after the great persecution of 574. To justify his rule however he made use of the symbolic power of Confucian rituals (Wright, 1957, 1978). By reordering the rituals according to the classical Confucian codes a number of 'un-Chinese' religious elements from the 'foreign' dynasties were expurgated and antique elements from the Zhou such as *wu*-shamans and a number of old deities were reintroduced.

While the Tang imperial family promoted Daoism, Mazdean, Manichaeist, Nestorian, Muslim and Jewish communities settled in China, and Buddhism had its golden age under their rule. China replaced India as the centre of the sacred geography of the Buddhist world with a whole network of pilgrimage sites that were established (Ebrey and Gregory, 1993, p. 20). Within the strong Tang state Confucianism asserted the position of the ruling doctrine, despite this context of imperial patronage of Buddhism and Daoism. The Confucian revival was further consolidated with intellectuals such as Han Yu, who defined a new 'pure' Confucian culture. This formulated strong anti-Buddhist views (even more after the harsh persecution of Buddhism in 845).

Restoration of the centralised bureaucracy of the unified Tang state was predominantly built on Confucian institutions such as the state ritual, the cult of Confucius, the Confucian education and examination system. These institutions generated a self-confident Confucian intellectual élite representing a self-perpetuating community, which controlled the civil government and reinforced the position of Confucianism for the rest of the imperial era (McMullen, 1988). With the establishment of Confucianism as state orthodoxy, religion became more tightly controlled and heresy more strictly regulated. The indigenous rural cults, of which we know so little, were now dominated by the new forms of popular religion that emerged in controlled urban areas. David Johnson has shown in a brilliant study how, in Tang and Song times, city gods with anthropomorphic character were emerging in the cities; how they were used by powerful merchants and officials to subvert popular cults and infuse them with their own values; and how these gods were secularised and 'metaphorised' by concretising them through depictions and by constructing them as colleagues and allies of human magistrates. This settled the old conflict between gods and officials by leading to an equation of both, thus weakening the position of the gods (Johnson, 1985, pp. 425–40). In this way the basic structure of the late imperial religious landscape, as a relationship between the Confucian centralised state and a controlled plurality of competing religions (with Buddhism and Daoism predominant), was established in Tang times.

Confucianism further developed its dominant position as state orthodoxy in Song times and adapted many Daoist and Buddhist elements. Daoism and Buddhism also included central elements of the other teachings into their own doctrines – Chan Buddhism and Quanzhen Daoism. New kinds of religious organisations started to develop over the following centuries. They became one of the most dynamic and innovative forces that shaped the new Chinese religious landscape outside of the officially controlled institutions. These were sectarian lay movements. Such movements were short-lived, based on individual charismatic leaders, highly flexible and in permanent transition (Seiwert and Ma, 2003). The Chinese state had great difficulty in controlling them. Simultaneously local gentry began to use local temple cults to promote local and regional identities.

From Song times new labels such as *bailian* (White Lotus) or *yaojiao* (demonic teachings) were therefore introduced in imperial religious policy to denounce such lay religions as deviant or rebellious movements (Ter Haar, 1992). Religious control became tighter. Only government employees, for example, were authorised to make Buddhist translations (Bowring, 1992, p. 80). With a strong popularisation of religions there was a sudden increase of titles granted to gods in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, an elaboration of the bureaucratic metaphor with a much more concretised conception of celestial hierarchies, of the blessings of Heaven and the punishments of Hell, spread especially via visual means, a vernacularisation of ritual, the feminisation of compassion in rising devotional cults to feminine deities and a worldly devotion for Buddhist temples by many literati.

The polemic inter-religious *sanjiao* debates, after a last peak between 1259 and 1281, came to an end in Yuan times because of the openness of the Mongol rulers of the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) to foreign religions. Significant Muslim, Christian-Nestorian and Jewish communities settled in China, and Neo-Confucianism was established as state ideology in 1313. To assist their rule, the Mongol rulers gave preference to different religions in different regions: the Daoist Quanzhen school in the north; to Chan Buddhism in the east; to Tibetan Buddhism; and to Zhengyi-Daoism in the south. This led to violent struggles between Daoism and Buddhism, because of this confusion in the state regulation of religions.

In Ming and Qing times lay religious movements continued to develop on an increasing scale, many of these creating their own textual canons (Overmyer, 1999a). The state fostered syncretistic tendencies while religious policy and law became much stricter, yet the basic structure of the religious landscape did not change. Regulated pluralism became institutionalised during the Tang with detailed legal regulations such as the first decrees

specifically regulating Daoist and Buddhist monks, the *Daoseng ge.* These controlled priests, monks and nuns by defining numbers of enrolments and requiring state-controlled examinations of their level of knowledge (Kohn, 2004, pp. 12–13). Although these regulations became more detailed in the Song and Ming times, the basic political attitude behind them and their inherent power relation did not change.

Consolidation of Confucian orthodoxy, state control of religions and the growth of non-registered lay religious millenarian movements seemed to provoke each other. It is impossible to decide which came first, but state religious policy became more rigorous over time. The tension between popular religion and state grew until it reached a peak in the nineteenth century.

From the fourth century onwards, when Buddhism started to become more and more self-aware as a distinct tradition, each religion started to borrow from the others (Bokenkamp, 2007; Mollier, 2008). In Song times Buddhism and Confucianism began to historicise their own genealogies, strictly demarcating not only the differences between the (three) teachings but also the different schools of each of the teachings (Wilson 1995; Schmidt-Glintzer, 1982; Jan, 1964). The internal borderlines within the teachings were sometimes emphasised more strongly than the borderlines between the teachings. From Ming times the religious traditions appeared to have become more fluid in their own self-conception, while syncretist and eclectic tendencies were evaluated more positively. In the realm of popular religion movements arose frequently making use of symbols, ideas, terms and practices that were elements of a common cultural memory. These were arranged and rearranged in various ways without belonging to a particular religious tradition or a specific social class (Seiwert and Ma, 2003, pp. 489–94).

This general fluidity of all religious traditions in a landscape of regulated pluralism in late imperial China means that it is necessary to design models of Chinese religions that are more appropriate in order to explain and understand them, instead of using those Western models derived from the highly exclusivist monotheistic Abrahamic religions. Given this fluidity of boundaries attention has to be paid to different symbols, ideas, terms and practices as markers of distinction, rather than of the religious traditions as a whole. Adam Chau identified five *modalities of doing religion* in China (in contrast to conceptualising religion). He distinguished:

- the *scriptural/discursive* modality: involving mainly the composition and usage of texts;
- the *self-cultivational* mode: transforming the individual practitioner;

- the *liturgical* mode: related to elaborate rituals conducted by ritual specialists;
- the *immediate-practical* mode: relating to simple forms of rituals with immediate effect, divination or magical acts (exorcisms, purifications, healings etc.);
- the *relational* mode: focusing on socialising and maintaining good relations with other humans as well as with gods, ghosts and ancestors (Chau, 2001b).

These modalities cut across the three main religious traditions and the manifold variety of so-called popular religions. Competition was not so much between these traditions as a whole but rather within each modality of these traditions at a local level: 'What happens on the ground "religiously" is very much a congruence of local customs, historical accidents, social environment, personal temperaments, and configurations of modalities of doing religion' (Chau, 2011b, p. 82).

Modernity changed the Chinese religious landscape but not its basic structure. New criteria for the definition of 'religion' have been adopted from the Western model of Christianity. Accordingly new centralised institutions were established in the early twentieth century. But in the PRC the central political power, which itself takes a clearly defined orthodox position in regard to what religion is, still practices a policy of a regulated pluralism. This draws decisions from what 'normal religious activities' are and what is deviant or 'heretic' (*xie*) (Yu, 2005, p. 145). 'Normality', as in pre-modern times, is formulated in party documents solely in a descriptive mode of listing all kinds of 'religious activities' and classifying them either as 'normal' or as 'deviant' (Dean, 2011, p. 143).

For further reading: Clart (2009, pp. 17–154); Eichhorn (1973).

3

Ancient Religion

Our knowledge about religion in ancient times is based on reconstructions of religious concepts, institutions, practices and beliefs from the few selected sources that allow glimpses into the religious cultures of ancient China. Some archaeological remains from Neolithic times have been interpreted as reflections of an early religious culture. Among these have been remains of buildings that might have been used as altars or temples; figurines that might have been objects of worship; images that resemble later mythical figures of tigers and dragons; funerary arrangements that show an east–west orientation. They include valuable burial goods or make use of red hematite powder so can all be interpreted in religious terms. Such interpretations remain highly speculative and dependent on current theories of religion, as they are based on archaeological remains that do not 'speak'.

Shang Oracle Texts

The earliest archaeological artefacts that give us insight into early Chinese religious culture are oracle texts inscribed into animal bones and turtle shells recording divination practices of the Shang kings *c.*1250–1046 BCE. Hundreds of thousands of fragments of these texts have been excavated since 1928. They allow us to reconstruct one of the early Chinese divination techniques, its institution and experts, calendrical structures, concepts of space, cosmos and orientation, together with a number of religious concepts such as a highly diversified pantheon, ritual time and its association to the pantheon, a sun cult, numerology, animal worship and sacrifice. David Keightley, a leading expert on oracle texts, imaginatively reconstructed a divination scene in which the diviner tried to find the reason behind King Wu Ding's (reigned 1250–1192 BCE) toothache as follows:

> Five turtle shells lie on the rammed-earth altar. The plastrons have been polished like jade, but are scarred on their inner side with rows of oval hollows, some already blackened by fire. Into

one of the unburned hollows, on the right side of the shell, the diviner Ch'üeh is thrusting a brand of flaming thorn. As he does so, he cries aloud, 'The sick tooth is not due to Father Chia!' Fanned by an assistant to keep the glowing tip intensely hot, the stick flames against the surface of the shell. Smoke rises. The seconds slowly pass. The stench of scorched bone mingles with the aroma of millet wine scattered in libation. And then, with a sharp, clear, *puk*like sound, the turtle, most silent of creatures, speaks. A *pu* ⊦-shaped crack has formed in the hollow where the plastron was scorched. Once again the brand is thrust, now into a matching hollow on the left side of the shell: 'It is due to Father Chia!' More time passes ... another crack forms in response. Moving to the next plastron, Ch'üeh repeats the charges: 'It is not due to Father Chia!' *Puk!* 'It is due to Father Chia!' He rams the brand into the hollows and cracks the second turtle shell, then the third, the fourth, and the fifth.

The diviners consult. The congregation of kinsmen strains to catch their words, for the curse of a dead father may, in the king's eyes, be the work of a living son. Ch'üeh rubs wood ash from the fire into the new set of cracks and scrutinizes them once more. But the shell has given no indication. The charge must be divined again. Two more cracks are made in each of the five plastrons ... and there is again no sign.

Another brand is plucked from the fire and the new charge cried: 'The sick tooth is not due to Father Keng! ... It is due to Father Keng!' Father Keng – the king's senior uncle. This time the indications are clear [...]

Now the king speaks. Assistants drag two victims into the temple. There is the barking and bleating of animals in panic, then silence. Blood stains the earth floor. The king dismembers the victims as Ch'üeh proposes a new charge: 'We sacrifice a dog to Father Keng, and butcher a sheep.' The brand flames ... *puk* ... *puk* ... *puk* ... the plastrons crack in slow and stately sequence. Has the sacrifice mollified the dead uncle? Will the pain in the sick tooth depart? The king, his hands still sticky with blood, scans the cracks [...]

As the ceremony ended, the diviner handed the five plastrons to scribes, who began the task of carving into the shell's smooth front a record of the charges proposed and results observed. (Keightley, 1978, pp. 1–2)

This recreation contains the most important information on divination techniques and procedures. First, divination involved a number of specialists. It was carried out by diviners in the presence of the king. The diviners divined but the king interpreted. The results were then inscribed into the divinatory materials, bones or shells, by scribes. Secondly, divination results were possibly achieved by interpreting the form and the sound of a crack derived by heating the bone or shell. Thirdly, the charges were posed in a binary fashion in a positive and negative mode; they were often carved symmetrically on the right and left side of the plastron. We therefore assume that the answers revealed in the cracks were read as yes/no auspicious/inauspicious responses. Fourthly, the divination procedure was highly formulaic and so are most of the inscriptions. A full inscription consisted of five elements:

- a *preface* specifying date and name of the diviner;
- a *charge*, containing the topic of divination, mostly in positive and negative formulation;
- a *prognostication* that was mostly introduced with the words: 'the king reading the cracks said' and provided a divination results in terms of its auspiciousness;
- a *verification* which proved the correctness of the divination by recording the actual events that followed;
- a *postscript* including the place of divination or the month.

A simple full inscription would therefore be of the form in the table below:

Divination record from King Wu Ding's reign.

	Positive, left side	**Negative, right side**
Preface	Crack-making on *jimao* day, Que divined:	Crack-making on jimao day, Que divined:
Charge	It will rain	It will not perhaps rain
Prognostication	The king, reading the cracks, said: 'It will rain, it will be a *ren* day'	
Verification	On *renwu* day it really did rain	
Postscript	Fourth month	

Topics of the charges included a broad range of questions about sacrifices, military campaigns, hunting expeditions, weather, agriculture, sickness, childbirth, dreams, building work, tribute and divine approval. Divination was probably carried out on a daily basis. The provision of turtle plastrons and sacrificial animals must therefore have required a highly efficient and

extremely costly apparatus of breeding farms and workshops for the preparation of the animals. The daily ritual involved king, diviners and scribes, which showed the great importance of this institution.

The recordings of days probably did not serve a historical or archival function but had religious implications. Days were noted according to a sexagenary cycle that consisted of the combination of a decadal and a duodecimal cycle of what later came to be called the ten 'Heavenly stems' (*gan*): *jia*, *yi*, *bing*, *ding*, *wu*, *ji*, *geng*, *xin*, *ren*, *gui*, and the twelve 'Earthly branches' (*zhi*): *zi*, *chou*, *yin*, *mao*, *chen*, *si*, *wu*, *wei*, *shen*, *you*, *xu*, *hai*. The combination of these two cycles (that probably had their origin in earlier ritual cycles of religious cults) resulted in a sexagenary cycle of sixty *ganzhi*: *jiazi*, *yichou*, *bingyin*, *dingmao*, *wuchen*, *jisi*, *gengwu*, *xinwei*, *renshen*, *guiyou*, *jiaxu*, *yihai*, *bingzi* etc.

The sexagenary *ganzhi*-cycle for date recording table.

1. 甲子	2. 乙丑	3. 丙寅	4. 丁卯	5. 戊辰	6. 己巳	7. 庚午	8. 辛未	9. 壬申	
10. 癸酉	11. 甲戌	12. 乙亥	13. 丙子	14. 丁丑	15. 戊寅	16. 己卯	17. 庚辰	18. 辛巳	
19. 壬午	20. 癸未	21. 甲申	22. 乙酉	23. 丙戌	24. 丁亥	25. 戊子	26. 己丑	27. 庚寅	
28. 辛卯	29. 壬辰	30. 癸巳	31. 甲午	32. 乙未	33. 丙申	34. 丁酉	35. 戊戌	36. 己亥	
37. 庚子	38. 辛丑	39. 壬寅	40. 癸卯	41. 甲辰	42. 乙巳	43. 丙午	44. 丁未	45. 戊申	
46. 己酉	47. 庚戌	48. 辛亥	49. 壬子	50. 癸丑	51. 甲寅	52. 乙卯	53. 丙辰	54. 丁巳	
55. 戊午	56. 己未	57. 庚申	58. 辛酉	59. 壬戌	60. 癸亥				

The temple cult was organised according to the ten Heavenly stems (*gan*). Ancestors to whom regular sacrifices were made in the ten-day Shang week were assigned one of the ten stems as a temple title and were worshipped on the respective days. The recording of days in the oracle texts therefore indicated which of the numinous powers was in charge on the day of the divination. They also documented that the daily sacrifice had been executed orderly and the divination was thus well prepared. We find a continuation of the sexagenary *ganzhi*-cycle for date recording at the beginning of texts in later Bronze inscriptions as well as in the earliest annalistic works.

The *ganzhi* has been used as calendrical cycle throughout Chinese history and is still used in the traditional Chinese lunar calendars today. (It is to be found in the widespread popular almanacs and in the dating of letters, calligraphies and other texts.) Some scholars believe that this cycle has continued without disruption since Shang times. As each of the days was associated with some ancestor during the Shang, so were the days in later Zhou times associated with more abstract, specific, auspicious or inauspicious qualities

in complex correlative systems and hemerological calculations of auspicious and inauspicious days for specific actions. The sexagenary cycle is also used to count other units of time such as years or hours. It continues to play a fundamental role in diverse religious rituals and in divination in China as expression of the powers which rule specific units of time.

In Shang times these powers were part of a highly diversified hierarchical pantheon. On the top of this hierarchy were the Shang lineal ancestors, pre-dynastic and dynastic kings and their heir-producing ancestral consorts, whose spirit tablets were worshipped in temples in the ritual centre of the Shang. Further powers included: historical and mythical culture heroes who were not members of the Shang lineage; nature powers such as the sun, the winds, the cardinal directions, the soil, with rivers and mountains playing the most important role. The supreme ruler on high, *Shangdi*, probably stood at the top of the pantheon and received no cult, perhaps because he was regarded as so powerful that humans could not sacrifice to him directly. They had to sacrifice to ancestors and other deities and thus addressed *Shangdi* indirectly via these lower intermediary powers.

One of the features of Shang divination was its bureaucratic character. Not only were oracle texts meticulously recorded, including date and place of the divination and name of the diviner, but they were probably also filed and stored in archives. Ancestors and deities were regarded more as posts than as persons. The pantheon was organised in a strictly hierarchical manner according to criteria of seniority. There were functional distinctions and clearly regulated command structures. Increasing depersonalisation, rationalisation of the pantheon and routinisation of divination procedures also reflected the bureaucratic character of early Shang religion. A feature that we find later, as part of the Chinese imperial cult, is that sacrifices were performed not only at different levels (king, princes etc.) but also that divination objects and topics varied according to status. Shang princes' sacrifices were restricted to Shang ancestors and they wouldn't divine on matters of state concern. In divinations on a more popular level preparation of bones and shells was less skilled. As they didn't record these divinations with inscriptions nothing is known about their topics. Keightley (1988) has argued that these structures prefigure the highly bureaucratic structures of later religions and their pantheons in China. Alternatively they may be reflections of political structures, which prefigured the highly bureaucratic structures also of later Chinese states.

For further reading: Allan (1991); Eno (2009); Keightley (1978, 1984, 1988, 2000); Tung (1964).

Zhou Religion

With the Zhou a new concept appeared at the centre of religious concerns. Heaven (*tian*) was increasingly referred to as the highest power that legitimised the new rule of the Zhou by imparting the Heavenly mandate (*tian ming*) to rule on the Central States. In contrast to the numinous powers of the Shang, which had to be appeased through regular rituals and sacrifices, Heaven was now propagated as a protector of those rulers who ruled and behaved according to moral standards. This development, probably dating from the Late Western Zhou period, rendered the Zhou rulers, and all subsequent Chinese rulers, as sons of Heaven (*tianzi*) and bound them to moral rules. It had decisive consequences for the development of a moral cosmology that shaped both philosophical and religious landscapes, and the relationships of philosophy and religions with the Chinese state, until the twentieth century.

Reconstructions of Western Zhou religion are mainly based on two sources: the ornamentation of and inscriptions on sacrificial bronze vessels or chime-bells; and the earliest transmitted texts – the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing*), the *Book of Documents* (*Shangshu*) and the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*). While Shang oracle texts have allowed an insight into the religious aspect of élite divination and provided information on the ancestral cult and the pantheon, Zhou bronze ornamentation and inscriptions revealed that part of religiosity which was connected to sacrifice and ritual.

There is very little evidence for the religious practices of the Early Western Zhou (1046–950 BCE). For the first hundred years they seem to have mainly continued the traditions of the Shang. Only from the beginning of the Middle Western Zhou (950–850 BCE) do the sources start to give more detailed information about the temple system as it started to be reorganised. At the same time the Shang animal décor on bronze vessels was transformed into abstract symmetrical figures of ornamentation. With the beginning of Late Western Zhou (850–771 BCE) animal décor on bronze vessels had nearly disappeared and been replaced by pure ornament. This change from animal décor to ornamentation probably indicates a change in ritual, from something similar to shamanistic practices (with vine offerings to the ancestors) into more formalised ceremonies with standard sets of vessels that had a more symbolic and representative character. These showed a rigid uniformity of a less complex design that made use of archaisms.

Religious ritual in Late Western Zhou times seems to have developed from small intimate ceremonies into formalised performances for a public that watched them from some distance. These fundamental innovations happened in such a short period of time that scholars refer to them as 'ritual

revolution' (Rawson, 1999; Falkenhausen, 2006). Similarly the mentioning of ritual music in the bronze inscriptions changed from direct onomatopoetic evocations to descriptive representations of the sounds (Kern, 2009, p. 167). Religious sacrifice in Late Western Zhou was mainly a combination of banquets and ancestral sacrifice. Communal meals were held in temples to which ancestors were invited to descend, so that both the superior ancestors and the subordinate officials were fed by the ruler, who acted as host.

One of the most detailed descriptions of such sacrificial practice finds its reflection in the hymn 'Thorny caltrop' ('Chu ci', *Shijing*, Mao No. 209, see translation in Kern, 2009, pp. 174–6). Its strict linguistic structure reflects the strict formal order of the ritual, as shown in the formalised ornamentation of the vessels used in such rituals. This regular formulaic and repetitious type of ritual is an indication of its commemorative mode. It focuses on the continuation of a rigid and static formal pattern and sticks to it strictly.

The new temple system seems to have followed a similar formalisation process in setting up a clear spatial order of ancestors within the temple. It gained its full dominance during this period through ritual and administrative reforms that fused administrative and religious practices. Political action appeared as an extension of religious practice as kings started to act like Heaven, granting mandates to their subordinates. As the religious and the political realm were united in the banquets as well as in the political actions of the kings the Zhou constructed an all-encompassing bureaucracy that continued that of Shang religion (Kern, 2009).

Bronze inscriptions followed a typical formulaic pattern that consisted of four parts: date and place notation (as in the oracle texts); event notation; gift list; and dedication. Date and place notation can be considered religiously motivated in the same way as the date (and place) notations of the oracle inscriptions. The dedication was in most cases directed to one or more ancestors together with a wishful prayer for the future and for the blessing of the ancestral spirits (Shaughnessy, 1991, pp. 76–85). Some of these inscriptions also contained religious contents, such as this rhyming inscription from a bell dating from the mid-ninth century BCE:

> Ning from Xing says: [My] illustrious and gentle cultured ancestors and august late fathers were able to give substance to their virtuous power. They obtained purity and used generosity, forever ending in auspiciousness. Ning does not dare to disobey them. Using his cultured ancestors and august late father [as his model], he respectfully holds on to their virtuous power. Ning is elated, elated about their sagely brightness, approaches their

> place in the ancestral hall. This, Ning has made for father He a grand *linzhong* [-bell]; use it to sacrifice in commemoration, to delight the former cultured men. The former cultured men may solemnly reside above! *Pang-bo*, *pang-bo* – they bestow on me rich rewards, manifold blessings without limit! May Ning have a myriad years! May sons of sons and grandsons of grandsons forever treasure and use [this bell] to make offerings! (Kern, 2009, pp. 195–6)

These texts had a dual function. They communicated with the ancestral spirits to secure Heavenly blessings. At the same time they presented the status of the vessel owner to a broader public in legitimation and foundation of their worldly power. There were similar venerations of virtuous ancestors and former kings in the transmitted texts, early *Songs* (*Shi*) and *Documents* of propaganda speeches (*Shu*), which formed part of the core canonical works of Confucianism and had a mainly commemorative function. They appeared from the beginning of the Late Western Zhou as a fiction of an idealised past rather than the embodiment of the past, which their contents presented. Detailed information on a pantheon is lacking in all these sources. The sources have to be interpreted rather from a perspective of representation than of actual engagement with religious practice. Yet many of these commemorative texts begin to make an implicit argument for the relationship of virtuous rule to the support of Heaven or the God on High, *Shangdi*. The song on King Wen in the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing*, Mao, No. 235) goes as follows:

> King Wen is on high; Oh! bright is he in heaven. Although Zhou was an old country, The [favouring] appointment lighted on it recently. Illustrious was the House of Zhou, And the appointment of God came at the proper season. King Wen ascends and descends, On the left and the right of God.
>
> [...]
>
> Profound was king Wen; Oh! continuous and bright was his feeling of reverence. Great is the appointment of Heaven! There were the descendants of [the sovereigns] of Shang; – The descendants of the sovereigns of Shang, Were in number more than hundreds of thousands; But when God gave the command, They became subject to Zhou.
>
> They became subject to Zhou. The appointment of Heaven is not constant. The officers of Yin, admirable and alert, Assist at the libations in [our] capital; – They assist at those

libations, Always wearing the hatchets on their lower garment and their peculiar cap. O ye loyal ministers of the king, Ever think of your ancestor!

Ever think of your ancestor, Cultivating your virtue, Always striving to accord with the will [of Heaven]. So shall you be seeking for much happiness. Before Yin lost the multitudes, [Its kings] were the assessors of God. Look to Yin as a beacon; The great appointment is not easily [preserved].

The appointment is not easily [preserved], Do not cause your own extinction. Display and make bright your righteousness and name, And look at [the fate of] Yin in the light of Heaven. The doings of High Heaven, Have neither sound nor smell. Take your pattern from king Wen, And the myriad regions will repose confidence in you (trans. Legge, 1871).

Similar texts from the same period can be found in the Book of Documents (*Shangshu*) such as the beginning of one of the old *Shangshu*-chapters, 'Da gao' ('The Great Announcement' by the Duke of Zhou), which belongs to the royal speeches:

The king speaks to the following effect: – 'Ho! I make a great announcement to you, [the princes of] the many states, and to you, the managers of my affairs. – Unpitied am I, and Heaven sends down calamities on my House, without exercising the least delay. It greatly occupies my thoughts that I, so very young, have inherited this illimitable patrimony, with its destinies and domains. I have not displaced wisdom, and led the people to tranquillity, and how much less should I be able to reach the knowledge of the decree of Heaven! Yes, I who am but a little child am in the position of one who has to cross a deep water; – it must be mine to go and seek how to cross over. [I must] diffuse the elegant institutions of my predecessor and augment the appointment which he received [from Heaven]; – so shall I be not forgetful of his great work. Nor shall I dare to restrain the majesty of Heaven seen in the inflictions it sends down. The Tranquillizing King (Wu) left to me the great precious tortoise, to bring into connection with me the intelligence of Heaven. I consulted it, and it told me that there would be great trouble in the region of the west, and that the Western people would not be still. Accordingly we have the present senseless movements. Little as the [present] prosperity of Yin is, [its prince] greatly

> dares to take in hand its [broken] line. Though Heaven sent down its terrors [on his House, yet] knowing of the evils in our kingdom, and that the people are not tranquil, he says, – "I will recover [my patrimony]"; and so [he wishes to] make our State of Zhou a border territory again' (trans. Legge, 1865).

Like the bronzes from the Late Western Zhou these texts expressed a new religious attitude that tried to emulate fixed patterns of a tradition that it invented retrospectively. Individual variety was restricted to ideal patterns that were centrally controlled. Heaven now appeared as the utmost and ideal model of such a pattern. As all these texts confirmed, Heaven acted as guarantor of both this pattern and the harmony that resulted when men followed this pattern, obedient like little children.

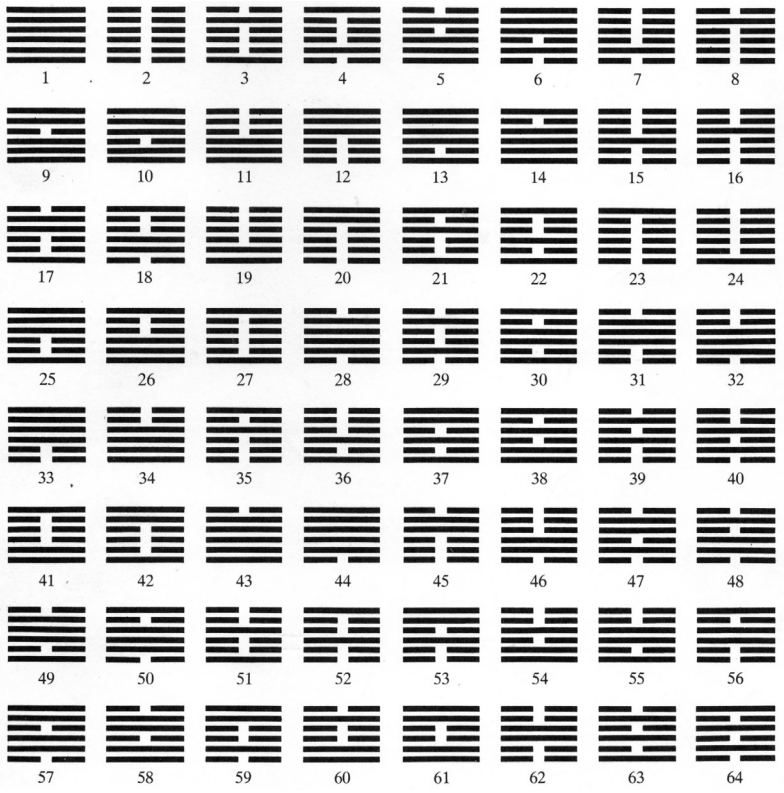
The mention in these texts of the tortoise oracle as a means to connect with Heaven showed the continuing importance of this Shang divinatory institution. However divination practice reflected the same kind of transformation into a rigid formalisation that left no space for improvisation. In the last Shang oracle texts (1170–1046 BCE) ritual mechanisation and bureaucratisation of oracle-bone divination developed into a constant ritual act of affirmation. This replaced the anxious questioning of earlier phases and exchanged the institution of open prognostication with a ritualised act of proclamation (Keightley, 1984, pp. 17–20, 1988; pp. 378–83; Allan, 1991, p. 120; Tung, 1964, pp. 98–108).

Although divination with tortoise shells continued in the Zhou, as numerous texts assert, a new form of divination with yarrow stalks was introduced by the Zhou. This was based on an entirely different concept of divination and became increasingly dominant until it replaced the tortoise entirely. This new divination had its origin in numerograms that existed during Shang rule. It did not relate to the personal powers of the ancestral spirits but attempted to explore the hidden patterns of change in the cosmos in order to predict the future. The text that has transmitted this divination technique and philosophy is therefore called the *Changes of the Zhou* (*Zhouyi*) better known under its later canonical title *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*).

The basic assumption of this new philosophy was that changes in the world were caused by the two abstract forces *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* and *yang* originally designated the sunny (*yang*) and the shadowy (*yin*) side of a hill and were generalised into abstract principles of binary oppositions such as bright–dark, high–low, hot–cold, dry–wet, fire–water, sun–moon, male–female, mountain–valley, fast–slow, hard–soft, loud–quiet and

active–passive. The first elements were of a *yang* and the second of a *yin* character. The constant changes of the world were conceived as being driven by different tensions caused by the various constellations of these two forces that were systematised in sixty-four hexagrams each composed of six horizontal parallel lines that could either be straight (*yang*) or broken (*yin*). These sixty-four hexagrams represented all possible states of changes in the world. They were not conceived as static but as momentary tendencies that were about to change into the next state. In *Yi*-divination the open decision that has to be divined lies not in the response of the ancestors but in the specific moment of change indicated by one of these sixty-four hexagrams.

The abstract forces *yin* and *yang* introduced by the Zhou and systematised in sixty-four hexagrams.



Once the hexagram (the moment in the constant process of change) is known the commentarial texts (which were appended to each hexagram and interpreted the image as well as the single lines and their mutual relationships) give advice on whether a certain action would be successful or not.

Here, divination does not seek knowledge about the will of ancestors but asks for definition of the concrete moment within the process of change and, more importantly, the next moment to arrive in that process. As to the open spaces of divination, all anthropomorphic elements (such as the unpredictable and unreliable will, anger or favour of the ancestors) were replaced by abstract rules and a clearly defined exegetical method. The diviner was not a descendant who stood in a personal relationship to the supreme ancestral power but any expert who knew the rules of the divination technique.

The whole realm of divination thus moved into a framework of formalised rules. This does not mean that the practice of ancestral sacrifice ceased, but it became weaker in the realm of divination. In the centuries of the Eastern Zhou (770–256 BCE) commencing with the loss of the Zhou homeland (771 BCE) and breaks in authoritative lineages, the role of the ancestors started to diminish as the vital link between Heaven and political power was superseded by a principle of resonance between Heaven and human action. This was not bound to lineage identities but explained on the basis of correlative rule systems of impersonal cosmological forces such as *yin* and *yang* and the Five Phases (*wuxing*), which were now regarded as the new central operation modes of Heaven. The ancestors in Heaven lost their power as decisive forces and became subordinates to new stronger celestial powers such as the abstract astral power *Taiyi* (the Great One), a deity associated with the pole star and other deities no longer associated with particular aristocratic lineages.

The decentralisation of power of the Zhou ruling house and the accompanying growth of military and economic strength in the feudal states had a number of consequences for the Chinese religious landscape. With the loss of their homeland the Zhou also no longer had their ancestral burial grounds and their sacred sacrificial vessels.

> These vessels were clear and powerful symbols: they were symbols of wealth because they *were* wealth and possessed the aura of wealth; they were symbols of the all-important ritual that gave their owners access to the ancestors; and they were symbols of the control of metal, which meant control of exclusive access to the ancestors and to political authority' (Chang, 1983, p. 97).

The vessels probably carried images and emblems from all the Zhou regions and were cast from metal obtained from all the regions of Zhou rule. With the loss of these symbolic vessels the centre of Zhou ritual was gone. Their ancestral cult and claim for political leadership were slowly appropriated by

more and more of the former tribute states. This resulted in different local claims of religious authority and a greater number and variety of élite religious practices, which, in turn, led to competition, comparison and critique of religious concepts and practices. One of the great changes in the Eastern Zhou period was the privatisation and individualisation of religious practices coupled with the critique and differentiation of religious discourse. This was perceived as a religious crisis. In the *Guoyu*, 'Chuyu xia' division (fifth to fourth century BCE), this process was remembered as 'pervasion between Heaven and Earth':

> Anciently, the people did not intermingle with the spirits. Among the people there were some who were of such a refined brightness and single mindedness that they were reverent and truly decent. Their wisdom enabled them to collate that what lies above and below; their sageliness enabled them to illumine what is distant and pervade what is bright; their perspicaciousness enabled them to illuminate it and their savvy enabled them to understand it thoroughly. Bright spirits would descend upon such people of which males were called xi-shamans and females wu-shamanesses. They arranged the positions and sequential orders of the spirits at the ceremonies, made the sacrificial vessels serve them in timely response and thereupon brought about a situation in which the posterity of the sage kings had brilliance and were able to know all the ritual rules of how to conduct proper religious services. [...] Thereupon institutions relating to Heaven and Earth, spirits and people and all classifiable categories, called the Five Offices came into being, each taking charge of their distinctive duties so that no disorder occurred among them. [...] People and spirits had different tasks, they respected each other and did not interfere. Therefore the spirits sent down their blessings and the people comforted them with the right kind of offerings, natural calamities did not occur and there was a balance in what was needed and what was supplied.
>
> When it came to the demise of Shaohao the nine Li tribes fell into disorder, the people and spirits became intermingled and matters could not be distinguished. Everyone did their own rituals and every family had their own shaman priests, obligation ceased to exist. The people failed to attend the regular ceremonies and didn't know about their bliss, instead their

> sacrificial offerings were beyond measure and people and spirits took the same positions. People approached them on an equal level without awe and reverence. Spirits were laxly adopted to the people's standards and their actions were not extolled. They didn't send down their blessings and they were not comforted with the right kind of offerings. Natural calamities occurred and neither side exhausted its full potential. Hence Zhuanxu who followed Shaohao, ordered Chong, Governor of the South, to take charge of the Heavenly realm as purely belonging to the spirits, and he ordered Li, Governor of Fire, to take charge of the Earthly realm as purely belonging to the people. They brought the two sides back to the old regular norms so that they did no longer interfere. And this is meant by cutting the pervasion between Heaven and Earth.

A consequence of this new form of religious discourse and practice was the depersonalisation of religious concepts. This allowed non-established lineages and social strata access to the religious sphere and thereby provided religiously based legitimation of political power. In Western Zhou times Zhou ancestors were called on to serve Heaven so as to maintain Heaven's support for their human descendants. During the Eastern Zhou all numinous powers were subordinated to, and subsumed under, cosmological forces or matters such as *qi*, *yinyang* and *wuxing,* or celestial deities with multiple identities. These changes resulted in two fundamental innovations in religious thought and practice during Late Eastern Zhou times.

One of these major innovations was the development of a highly complex cosmology that operated mainly with the logic of correlative relations. Any aspect of the world, including time and space, was classified in one of the various correlative schemes that were further correlated with each other. Many of these schemes were incompatible and contradictory, but they provided a basic order of the world that was applied not only to all the protosciences but also to politics and to religious practices. The basic idea of these correlative schemes was that all classifiable things could be ordered in a scheme of five cyclical phases and thus related as in the table below.

This selective table could be further expanded with musical notes, rulers, instruments, parts of the body, sacrifices, domestic animals, weather, states, fruits, grains, fingers and so on. As the totality of all things was classified in such all-encompassing correlation systems, harmony, health and peace were achieved through correlating (in political, liturgical, medical or meditative practices) the corresponding elements of the scheme with each other. The

Correlative correspondences according to the Five Phases cosmology covering the basic order of the world as applied during Late Eastern Zhou times.

Phase	**Wood**	**Fire**	**Earth**	**Metal**	**Water**
Colour	Green	Red	Yellow	White	Black
Direction	East	South	Centre	West	North
Season	Spring	Summer	High summer	Autumn	Winter
Yin yang	Lesser Yang	Yang	Equal balance	Lesser Yin	Yin
Creature	Dragon	Bird	Dragon	Tiger	Tortoise
Senses	Eye	Tongue	Mouth	Nose	Ears
Smells	Goatish	Burning	Fragrant	Rank	Rotten
Tastes	Sour	Bitter	Sweet	Acrid	Salt
Planets	Jupiter	Mars	Saturn	Venus	Mercury
Emotions	Anger	Joy	Desire	Sorrow	Fear
Numbers	8	7	5	9	6
Government	Relaxed	Enlightened	Careful	Energetic	Quiet
Ministries	Agriculture	War	The capital	Justice	Works

assumption was that things of the same kind (*tonglei*) corresponded and created a harmonic resonance. Any calamity and deviation could thus be explained as a disorder within such a balanced organism (in which each of the five cyclical phases ruled in specific times at specific places). A flood or too much rain for example was explained by an inappropriate dominance of the water element (caused possibly by the emperor spending too much time with his concubines – the analogical reasoning following the equivalences: female–yin–water). The problem therefore had to originate in the water-column of the correlative scheme and be balanced by adding more from the fire or yang column in the respective row (Needham, 1956, pp. 232–65; Harper, 1999, pp. 860–6).

These correlative schemes were fully developed under the unified Han state in the second and first centuries BCE. They offered an option to found ritual, politics, divination and any success of human action on these correlative schemes and not on worship or prayer. Heaven in this context was merely seen as the instance of these forces, which strictly followed cyclical laws of proper timing and not any will or moral sanction. A text excavated from a tomb in Guodian and dated around 300 BCE shows that at that time even the success of moral action was subordinated to the right moment of Heavenly time rather than on Heavenly rewards:

> There is Heaven and there is Man, and there is a distinction between Heaven and Man.

> When investigating the distinction between Heaven and Man, one knows that which is brought into action.
>
> If there was a man, but not his time, then, even if he was accomplished, he could not bring this into action.
>
> However if only there were the right times, what difficulties could there then be? (*Qiong da yi shi*, modified trans. of Meyer, 2012, p. 57)

The Confucian philosopher Xunzi (mid-third century BCE) even went one step further in his 'Essay on Heaven' and disconnected the laws of Heaven entirely from man's morality. According to him morality lay neither in Heaven nor in man's moral nature. It could only be achieved through observing the laws of Heaven and Earth and by studying the ritual and music that had been invented by earlier sages. According to him 'Heaven has its seasons, Earth its resources, and Man his government.' Order and disorder, good and bad depended entirely on whether or not man accepted his own responsibility. Such a radical position was refuted by contemporary philosophers, such as the Mohists who continued to insist that Heaven had a will and that ghosts and spirits existed. These, like Heaven, punished humans who acted against Heaven's will. Later Confucianism incorporated much of the correlative cosmology as well as the Mohist concept of Heaven. It was combined in the second and first century BCE with Confucian morality in what is known as the Confucian synthesis of Han times.

The other major innovation in the religion of Late Eastern Zhou, in the fourth and third centuries BCE, was connected to the idea that the cosmos was driven by cosmic forces rather than the will of Heaven, gods, ghosts, or ancestors and was the humanisation of moral and spiritual power. The concept of self-cultivation was developed in several religio-philosophical traditions. This claimed that the main elements needed to gain insight into the workings of the cosmos and realise morality all existed within the person. This idea rested on the assumption that the cosmos was composed of a subtle matter – *qi* – and all changes could be explained by alterations of this *qi*. Humans were also composed of *qi*, and since their spirit was nothing else than a refined form of *qi* (of which spirits were also composed) they were able to comprehend the movements of the cosmos without having to refer to spirits. They could gain the same insight and power once this spiritual force was properly cultivated within them.

Also based on the concept of *qi*, the Confucian philosopher Mengzi claimed that all moral qualities were inborn in human nature and only had to be cultivated to be fully realised. This idea of self-cultivation shifted

authority from Heaven to man. It was strongly developed in the early Daoist tradition in the books *Guanzi*, *Laozi* (*Daode jing*) and *Zhuangzi*, where it is associated not with Heaven but with the *dao*. The term *dao* (which originally meant 'way' or 'path', but also 'walking on a way' or 'doing something in a certain way') gained a new philosophical meaning in the fourth century BCE as an invisible creative force that existed out of itself (*ziran*). By not aiming to fulfil their own desires forcefully, humans were able to act and live in accordance with this *dao.* They thus achieved harmony in the manner that *dao* did in the cosmos and thereby avoided any harm.

These innovations of Late Eastern Zhou religiosity – correlative cosmology and self-cultivation – mark two starting points for the religious concepts that became part of all later Chinese religious traditions. Unlike Judaism, Christianity and Islam Chinese religions thus do not have their origin in visions of prophets and seers but in the idea of cosmic laws which could be realised by humans. Yet, as recent archaeological finds from Late Eastern Zhou tombs have revealed, most of the earlier religious practices did not cease to exist. Sacrifices to ancestors and natural deities, appeasement rituals and exorcisms continued to be practised side by side, and often together with, the calculations of the correlative schemes and self-cultivation exercises. The whole complex demonology of Western Zhou, ancestral sacrifices, dealings with the underworld bureaucracy and divinations exploring Heaven's will were also further discussed and developed in Eastern Zhou (Harper, 1999). Hemerological almanacs defining auspicious and inauspicious days for specific actions (of which a considerable number have been excavated from third and second century BCE tombs) contained combinations of astronomical, agricultural and demonological schemes in complex correlations that were used to calculate the outcome of daily actions. And, although officially denounced, many of these concepts were incorporated in the new form of Confucianism that was established as state ideology in the middle of the second century BCE, sixty years after the unification of China.

For further reading: Chang (1983); Harper (1999); Kern (2009); Needham (1956); Puett (2002); Rawson (1999); Lagerwey and Kalinowski (2009).

4

Confucianism

Is Confucianism a religion? Is it a philosophy or a teaching of ethics? This European question has been discussed since the Jesuits in the seventeenth century claimed Confucius to be a moral philosopher. They viewed his teaching as similar to, and in many respects even superior to, European enlightenment thought and they believed it was not religious at all. Popes Clemens XI and Benedict XIV decided differently. In 1704 and 1742 they prohibited the Christian attendance at any performance of Chinese rites because Rome regarded sacrifices offered to Confucius as religious acts. The debate as to whether Confucianism is a religion or not continues until today. The only resolution of this eurocentric question is to differentiate aspects or dimensions of Confucianism, some of which accord with our mainstream understanding of religion and some not. This chapter attempts to distinguish four main historical dimensions of Confucianism. Each of these possesses a kind of religiosity.

Not only is the question of Confucian religiosity a European one, but the term 'Confucianism' is also a European invention. In contrast to the terms 'Boudhism' (1801) and 'Tauism' (1839), which anglo-romanise the indigenous terms *fojiao* ('Teaching of Buddha') and *daojiao* ('Teaching of the Dao'), the term 'Confucianism' is a Jesuit invention. It is based on the latinisation of the Chinese name *Kongfuzi* (= Confucius) and designates what, in Chinese, has never been called the 'Teaching of Confucius' but always the 'Teaching of the Ru' (*rujiao*) (Jensen, 1997). Ru refers to a class of ritual specialists to which Confucius belonged and with whom his teachings are associated. Although the Chinese designation for Confucius' teaching refers to this professional group, Confucius is regarded as the founder of the 'Teaching of the Ru' and as the editor of their canonical works. For the sake of convenience we will follow convention and use the term 'Confucianism' for both the indigenous traditions that developed from Confucius' teaching and for the Jesuit invention.

Two sources, compiled from earlier materials and written down more than 300 years after Confucius' death, provide the most reliable early information about Confucius. The *Analects* (*Lunyu*) is a collection of short sayings of, and dialogues with, Confucius. These short pieces have in part been transmitted orally, in part recorded and in part have been invented by his disciples. They were probably edited *c.*150–140 BCE into a collection similar to what we know (Makeham, 1996). There is hardly any thematic order, no unified teaching system and no coherent definition of the same terms. Depending on how these short units are interpreted they can be seen as banal statements, humorous anecdotes or insightful wisdom. The second early source is the biography of Confucius in the first Chinese dynastic history, the *Shiji*, written *c.*100 BCE by Sima Qian. It is the first continuous narrative of Confucius' life.

Due to the many incoherencies and contradictions in these two early sources commentators have for centuries attempted to give coherent interpretations of Confucius' teaching. However no consensus has been achieved between scholars as to how a unified system of thought or a philosophical guideline can be reconstructed from these multilayered collections of unrelated statements. There are some consistent characteristics and recurring themes that can be identified. Firstly, there is Confucius' definite assuredness in all matters of ritual regulations, in his moral judgements based on these and in his own moral comportment. Secondly, there is the great admiration for the sage kings of antiquity – Yao, Shun, Yu, King Wen and the Duke of Zhou – as well as a preoccupation with a number of central moral values, including the most important ones of humanity or benevolence (*ren*) and righteousness (*yi*). Finally, there are the references to a set of classical books, most importantly the following two:

- *Book of Documents* (*Shu*) which contains (propaganda) speeches allegedly written by the early sage kings and reflects their normative government ideologies. These texts might be dated between 800 and 300 BCE;
- *Book of Songs* (*Shi*), a collection of 305 (folk) songs, hymns and odes reflecting a broad spectrum of love songs, laments, depictions of nature and daily life and hymns praising the ancient sage kings; it also goes back to between 800 and 300 BCE.

The other three canonical works of early Confucianism are:

- *Book of Changes* (*Yi*), originally a divination book, which combines cosmological speculations with moral instructions (see pp. 45–7).
- *Ritual Books* (*Li*) that contain ritual rules of court etiquette,

diplomatic and interpersonal behaviour for ceremonial occasions such as sacrifices, weddings, capping and funerals together with discussions of ritual principles.

- *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*), an annalistic chronicle of the state of Lu containing records covering the years 722–481 BCE, which was interpreted as a collection of moral exempla.

This fivefold Confucian canon grew until the eleventh century. Further ritual books – the glossary *Erya*, three *Chunqiu* commentaries, a *Book of Filial Piety* and the philosophical book *Mengzi* – were added until the canon was officially closed with a standardised version including thirteen classics with canonical commentaries (and sub-commentaries). These works are regarded in the Confucian exegetical tradition as embodying different aspects of a unified Confucian doctrine, which aims at transmitting and teaching the wisdom reflected in the art (*dao*) of government of the sage kings of antiquity (Nylan, 2001; Lewis, 1999).

Zhou Scepticism and Han Cosmology

The impulse to preserve the old Zhou traditions emerges in the late sixth century BCE at a time of radical changes of the old Zhou ritual, of the social and political system, and the breakdown of its values. Confucius responded to this crisis by defining new moral criteria such as humanity/benevolence (*ren*), righteousness (*yi*), ritual (*li*), knowledge (*zhi*), trustworthiness (*xin*), filial piety (*xiao*), loyalty (*zhong*), yielding (*rang*), which he interpreted as the fundamental values underlying sagely action. Humanity/benevolence took a leading regulative role within the precisely defined hierarchies of social and family relationships. Confucianism was founded on a perceived need to create a new order by reviving these old values, with their correct understanding and teaching of the ancient rituals and texts. At the centre of this new order Confucius envisioned an ethics that should be acquired through continuous learning.

Regarding Confucius' religiosity the *Analects* conveys a master who, while assuming that Heaven has anthropomorphic features (such as a will and a plan) that one can know one's own fate, and that ancestors and spirits exist, was reluctant to teach these things. Some quotations from the *Analects* illustrate this:

> 6.22: Fan Chi inquired about wisdom. The Master replied: 'To devote yourself to what is appropriate for the people, and to show respect to the ghosts and spirits while keeping them at a distance can be called wisdom' (Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 108).

> 7.21: The Master had nothing to say about strange happenings, the use of force, disorder or the spirits (Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 115).
>
> 11.12: Zilu asked how to serve the spirits [*gui*] and the gods [*shen*]. The Master replied, 'Not yet being able to serve other people, how would you be able to serve the spirits?' Zilu said, 'May I ask about death?' The Master replied, 'Not yet understanding life, how could you understand death?' (Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 144)

In this regard we find a rather specific construction of Confucius in the *Analects*, a Confucius who not only refused to speculate on religious topics but also had a strictly sceptical attitude towards linguistic concepts and historical transmission. In the context of the other early accounts of Confucius this sceptic depiction of Confucius in the *Analects* appears rather singular. Yet it created a strong tradition of scepticism, which had an important impact on the later development of the Confucian tradition. This is found in its general distanced attitude towards religious matters and, as a consequence, also in the attitude towards religion of the educated élite and state officials (and thus also in Chinese religious policy).

In opposition to all the other texts that alluded to Confucius in one or another way, the *Analects* was the only text in which Confucius was *not* depicted as the ultimate sage authority who had an answer to all questions. Instead the Confucius of the *Analects* left questions open and opened new questions. Indeed just by being a sage he clearly embodied and showed the ultimate limits of possible knowledge, including religious knowledge (Gentz, 2012a). *Analects* 9.4 noted: 'The Master entirely abstained from four things: he did not speculate, he did not claim or demand certainty, he was not inflexible, and he was not self-absorbed' (Ames and Rosemont, 1998, p. 127).

Throughout the *Analects* we find many statements that show in more detail that Confucius was full of doubts, uncertainties and not-knowing. We find many sayings in which Confucius was full of sorrow or despair, in which he admitted that he didn't know an answer or had no solution for certain fundamental questions. Furthermore there are many statements about what Confucius didn't talk about and didn't teach. In contrast to other founding figures of religious traditions this basic attitude of doubt and uncertainty was not resolved in a happy ending in which Confucius finally emerged victorious. Rather it was promoted as an intrinsic part of his unfathomable wisdom.

This sceptical attitude seemed in the first place to be an attitude of professional methodology, not of personal belief. Many passages of the *Analects* give a clear expression of Confucius' personal belief in an active power of Heaven, in destiny and in the supernatural sphere. This personal belief however was not part of his teaching. This separation of personal religious belief and official moral teaching may explain why the cultic veneration of Confucius as a sage ancestor became part of the Confucian tradition but did not contradict the basic professional sceptical attitude of the Confucian teaching.

Two successors have significantly moulded the further development of Confucianism: Meng Ke (*c*.370–*c*.290 BCE), whose teaching was transmitted in the book *Mengzi* (*Mencius*); and Xun Kuang (*c*.300–*c*.230 BCE), the author of the *Xunzi*. In the *Mengzi* Confucius was elevated to an omniscient sage. He did wonders and was represented as a historical founder of civilisation and a world changing event. Confucian ethics was systematised and grounded in the concept of a human nature that was inherently good. The *Xunzi*, by contrast, assumed a human nature that, due to its insatiable desires, tended towards the evil. This evil nature had to be rectified by constant exercises of ritual and music, which, as invented by the old sage kings, were regarded as the only means to return a chaotic world back to order. Human nature, the human heart and Heaven were, in the *Xunzi,* no longer regarded as reliable institutions on which such an endeavour could be grounded.

With the unified Han empire Confucianism became an institutionalised state ideology. It incorporated Legalist, Mohist and Daoist teachings, the cosmological concepts of *yinyang* and *wuxing,* as well as astrological and divinatory practices of omen interpretation. With the establishment of the Doctoral Chairs of the Five Classics at the Imperial Academy in 136 BCE Confucianism developed mainly as an exegetical tradition of the five canonical works in the form of a highly sophisticated literary culture of commentaries, sub- and sub-sub-commentaries.

At the same time a shift towards a new religiosity seems to have evolved in the Confucian tradition through the introduction of religious concepts such as Heaven, original *qi* and systems of cosmological correlation. However we do not find a reversion to those religious concepts on which sceptical Confucianism had earlier turned its back. The new concept of Heaven and the new interpretations of anomalies and calamities did not reflect the same religious beliefs and practices as those to which the *Analects* referred and against which scepticism or agnosticism was expressed. These new concepts were, rather, reinventions of the old religious concepts within the frame of

a systematic thinking that developed through the third and second centuries BCE in China (Gentz, 2009b). Accordingly, we find in the early Confucian tradition a move away from a religiously conceptualised, personified interpretation of the Confucian texts towards an interpretation based on abstract exegetical rules. This was still bound to the transmitted wisdom of a sage but later abandoned the bondage to the authoritative (religious) institution of a sage to focus entirely on clearly defined depersonalised systems of rules. In this sense the new religious concepts can be understood as a further reaction to the older religious concepts of institutions of personal authority and may be taken as expressions of an even more radical scepticism against non-transparent institutions of religious authority.

Returning to the question of whether Confucianism is a religion we have to consider the possibility that the category religion, in its application to the early Confucian context, might jeopardise our analysis, because it identifies features that are often thought of as opposites. The concept of religion as belief in such diverse ideas as superhuman beings, powerful ancestors and cosmological correlation may obscure the difference and the possibly fundamental contradiction between these three types of belief. What appears to Western eyes as a return from scepticism to religion may be in fact a further move away from a specific anthropomorphic concept of religion. This may be done by the further development of other more non-personal and systematic, religious premises, which even in the sceptical phase had never ceased to exist.

Around the turn of the eras, apocryphal texts appeared as mystical revelations of the true meaning of the Confucian classics. These were full of numerological calculations and portent prognostications and claimed to reveal the hidden messages of Confucius. These apocrypha further divided the religious and the human realm. With the introduction, and differentiation, of non-personal rule-based systematic religious concepts any superhuman power was further subverted. The exegesis, and with it the exegetes themselves, turned into the main and dominant institution of authority, which could not be matched by other human beings. As a result the religious institution of Heaven became stronger. The power however did not lie in its personal incalculable and unpredictable will, which had now been transformed, intellectually, into a system of almost inscrutable rules. It lay in the hands of the newly established scholars of Confucian texts with their interpretative expertise who had now replaced the ruler, the priests and diviners in the role as intermediary between Heaven and Earth.

These highly complicated and mysterious apocryphal texts got out of intellectual control and began to include political claims based on esoteric

numerological and portent interpretations. For these reasons they were prohibited repeatedly from the first century CE by imperial decrees. Apocryphal interpretations were suppressed and the texts were destroyed. Today only scarcely comprehensible fragments are left of these texts. In reaction to these highly speculative interpretations, sceptical approaches, which tried to define a new basis of common argument and understanding, were further strengthened. A dictionary such as the *Shuowen jiezi* in 100 CE, which attempted to define classical terms in an unambiguous way by drawing on etymology, was produced to provide a firm linguistic basis for text exegesis. New commentaries were written and defined as normative readings of the classical texts so that they could serve as sound tools of government.

A new mode of sceptical philosophy emerged with the great sceptic Wang Chong – probably the most well-known representative (see trans. Forke, 1962). This does not mean that Wang Chong did not believe in what Westerners would call religious premises. Despite his sharp criticism on certain assumptions regarding divination, for example, he was firmly convinced of the truth of divination – but only if carried out in the right way (Gentz, 2005). The same is true for other sceptic Confucians from the first century CE on. The way in which the career of the Confucius cult developed in that time is a clear indication for something we would call religious practice.

Confucius Cult

Simultaneously with the development of professional sceptical practice as part of the sagacity of Confucius (in the second century BCE) the sacrifice to Confucius was also established as a central ritual of the imperial court. While scepticism, as a reaction to an exceedingly speculative philosophy, regained weight in the first century CE the Confucius cult also expanded. Thomas Wilson divided the history of the cult into three periods: a local cult from 479 BCE until the fall of the Han in 220 CE; official court celebrations of the cult between the mid-third and the mid-eighth century; and the integration of the cult into the imperial cults from the mid-eighth century onwards (Nylan and Wilson, 2010, pp. 149–50).

After Confucius' death his disciples had erected an altar at Confucius' house to offer him sacrifice. His house thus became the first Confucius temple. Gaozu, the first emperor of the Han dynasty, offered the Great Sacrifice to Confucius at his tomb in Qufu in 195 BCE (an ox, a sheep and a pig) – offerings that he otherwise gave only to his own ancestors. From then Chinese emperors have offered sacrifices to Confucius, and the cult developed steadily over the centuries. In 555 every district capital had to erect a Confucius temple, and teachers and students had to offer sacrifice

to Confucius. In 687 all cities had to erect Confucius temples. In 739 the posthumous title of a king was conferred on Confucius for the first time – 'Exalted King of Culture'. From then Confucius was regularly promoted until, in 1645, he was given the posthumous title 'Great Completer, Ultimate Sage, Exalted First Teacher of Culture'. Meanwhile in 1477 the number of sacrificial vessels had been increased from ten to twelve and the rows of dancers from six to eight, thus promoting Kongzi, in ritual, to the status of an emperor.

The cult of Confucius had two different aspects. On one hand Confucius was venerated in a ritual as an ancestral spirit. On the other hand the cult provided constant opportunities to negotiate Confucian doctrine by discussing details of the cult ritual, titles and enshrinements of disciples, commentators and eminent Confucians (Biallas, 1928, pp. 68–70; Nylan and Wilson, 2010, pp. 149–61).

Returning to the question of the religiousness of the Confucius cult we should bear the following points in mind:

- Confucius was venerated as ancestor, not as a god.
- In contrast to Daoist or Buddhist rituals, the Confucius cult did not promise personal salvation for those who offered sacrifice. Rather, blessings were conferred more broadly on the communities of those who offered.
- Such sacrifice did not include worshipping of, or prayers to, Confucius begging for something. There were expectations of a general positive effect but no focus on particular matters.
- The celebrant's inner purity was believed to be more important for the efficacy of the sacrifices than the punctilious performance of the cult's ritual procedures (Nylan and Wilson, 2010, p. 256).

The Confucius cult started an entirely independent tradition of Confucius worship, which was neatly connected to the great state sacrifices offered to the imperial ancestors, Heaven and Earth. This tradition of state religion seems more like the state religion of the Roman empire and has to be regarded as separate from either popular religious practice or any other moral, philosophical or religious teachings. Although sceptical Confucianism and the Confucius cult never contradicted each other, they related to different practices in different contexts and fulfilled different functions.

Neo-Confucianism

After a period of several hundreds of years of torpidity during the Six Dynasties period Confucianism regained its strength as a state-supporting ideology. The unification of the empire provided texts and expertise for a

renovated centralised administrative system. The cult of Confucius was revived, the official education system was re-established and the Confucian canon was standardised in the early seventh century (McMullen, 1988, pp. 32–7, Chapter 3).

The great revival of Confucianism in the ninth century CE came with Han Yu and his critique of Buddhism. Han Yu prepared the ground for Neo-Confucianism through his focus on those parts of the Confucian tradition, especially the two Confucian texts *Mengzi* and *Daxue,* which responded to the new religious challenges of Buddhism and Daoism. The religious dimension of Confucianism increased with the development of Neo-Confucianism in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The incorporation of Daoist and Buddhist religious elements into this renewed Confucianism brought about an entirely new mixture. There was a highly critical stance against other religious traditions and a new matrix of sceptical arguments within a philosophy which appeared highly rational yet based on religious assumptions and practices. The new basic philosophical assumption of Neo-Confucianism was that there was an overall Heavenly pattern (*li*) in the cosmos as well as in human nature (*xing*). This not only constituted the perfect order but also possessed ultimate moral quality. It thus also constituted perfect moral order and was philosophical and religious at the same time and could be taken in both ways. This assumption was also reflected in spiritual practices of quiet sitting and meditation, within the process of text study, and showed that there was more to it than mere philosophical reasoning.

The invention of Neo-Confucianism in the eleventh century can be explained as a response to the increasing dominance of Daoism and Buddhism and their constructions of school traditions. Accordingly Confucianism was reconstructed by repudiating Han Confucianism and identifying Confucian tradition with the book *Mengzi* as its true root. Han Yu was the first Confucian thinker after Mengzi to propose the theory of the 'lineage of the Way' (*daotong*) in 805, which according to him had been broken after Mengzi so that the true learning of Confucianism was no longer transmitted. This notion was taken up by Cheng Yi (1033–1109), who regarded his brother Cheng Hao (1032–1085) as the true successor of the Way after Mengzi.

Both attempts at redefining a true Confucian tradition must be understood as moves against an intellectual atmosphere in which Buddhism had, for a long time, formulated the main questions and gained predominance by providing the most sophisticated discussions. Confucians such as Zhou Dunyi (1017–1073), Zhang Zai (1020–1077), and his nephews, the

brothers Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi, re-entered the intellectual discussions by adding cosmological, philosophical and religious layers to Confucian ethics. Through Confucian readings of Daoist and Buddhist concepts and reinterpretations of ancient Confucian texts, such as the *Yijing* and the *Mengzi*, the *Daxue* and the *Zhong Yong* Confucian ethics were grounded in the new basic idea that cosmological patterns, Heaven and human's nature were basically one. Humans were able to get insight into these patterns, which were also believed to be the basis of human's own morality. Zhang Zai's famous Western inscription was one of the earliest texts that gave expression to this idea of a unified cosmos of which humans were an integral part:

> *Yang* is the father; *yin* is the mother. And I, this tiny thing, dwell enfolded in Them. Hence, what fills Heaven and Earth is my body, and what rules Heaven and Earth is my nature. The people are my siblings, and all living things are my companions. My Ruler is the eldest son of my parents, and his ministers are his retainers. To respect those great in years is the way to 'treat the elderly as elderly should be treated.' To be kind to the orphaned and the weak is the way to 'treat the young as young should be treated.' The sage harmonizes with Their Virtue; the worthy receive what is most excellent from Them. All under Heaven who are tired, crippled, exhausted, sick, brotherless, childless, widows or widowers – all are my siblings who are helpless and have no one else to appeal to. To care for them at such times is the practice of a good son. To be delighted and without care, because trusting Them, is the purest filial piety ... Riches, honour, good fortune, and abundance shall enrich my life. Poverty, humble station, care, and sorrow shall discipline me to fulfilment. Living, I compliantly serve Them; dead, I shall be at peace (trans. Van Norden, 2006).

The Cheng brothers introduced the concept *li*, 'cosmic pattern', which became the fundamental philosophical concept of all Neo-Confucian doctrine.

Zhu Xi (1130–1200) formulated a synthesis of these new approaches, which made him the leading figure of the Confucian revival. His historical significance as commentator, innovator and systematiser of the Confucian tradition is comparable to that of his contemporaries in other traditions: Maimonides for Judaism; and Thomas of Aquin for Christianity. Zhu Xi's commentaries were canonised in 1313 and from then on formed the basis of Confucian state orthodoxy. They were the normative guideline for all civil

service examinations until 1906. He edited the Four Books (*Daxue*, *Zhong Yong*, *Lunyu* and *Mengzi*) as a canon within the canon and developed a pedagogical programme of learning that also included reflections on reading methodologies and practical exercises. These resembled religious practices of meditation and rituals. A good example of the sentences in the *Mengzi* that he chose, and how he used the new philosophical concepts of 'cosmic patterns' and 'human nature' to interpret them, was his *Explanation of Fully Realising One's Heart* written in 1171. This essay interpreted the first sentence of the 'Jinxin' chapter (7A1) of the *Mengzi*:

> Mencius said: 'For a man to give full realisation to his heart is to him to understand his own nature, and a man who knows his own nature will know Heaven' (Lau, 1970, p. 182).

Zhu Xi explained it as follows:

> Heaven is the inner dynamic of the cosmic pattern and that from which humans are born. Human nature is the full embodiment of the cosmic pattern and that which humans obtain to be born. The human heart-mind is thus that which rules the person and comprises this cosmic pattern. Heaven is great without limits and human nature is endowed with its entirety. Therefore human's basic heart embodies vastly and is also boundless. Only if it is fettered by instrumental partialities and obstructed by the pettiness of the sensual, then it will for this reason have something that conceals it and will not be fully realised. Humans are able to approach affairs and things, fully explore their pattern until one day they can coherently connect and pervasively penetrate it all without neglecting anything. Then they have something to round off their basic heart-mind and vast stature. And that in me which makes me having my human nature and that in Heaven that makes it being Heaven, this is all not beyond this but one and the same that connects all this.

The other Confucian thinker who had a great impact (in China and in Japan but not in Korea which strictly followed Zhu Xi) was Wang Yangming. He founded the most powerful alternative to Zhu Xi's orthodox line with a Confucian school that is called the School of Heart-Mind (*xinxue*). For him all relevant knowledge was enclosed in people's heart-mind and was not solely acquired through diligent study. Wang emphasised the possibility of a direct and intuitive access to an innate pure knowledge and moral sense.

He had a sense of mission to save people from distress and difficulty. He promised that real knowledge would bring virtue, power and bliss. Wang's teaching however was criticised by the Zhu Xi school as too Buddhist.

By identifying human heart-mind with cosmic pattern and moral truth Wang is regarded as a Confucian mystic and as founder of what is probably the most religious branch of Confucianism. Mystic knowledge cannot be separated from practical action since, for Wang, there existed a unity of knowledge and action:

> There have never been people who know but do not act. Those who are supposed to know but do not act simply do not yet know. (Nivinson and Van Norden, 1997, p. 227; Chan, 1963, p. 10 §5)

This had tremendous consequences for the judgement of mental activity:

> I want people to understand that when a thought is aroused it is already action. If there is anything evil when the thought is aroused, one must overcome the evil thought. One must go to the root and go to the bottom and not allow that evil thought to lie latent in one's mind. This is the basic purpose of my doctrine. (Nivinson and Van Norden, 1997, p. 228; Chan, 1963, pp. 201, 226)

Between these two schools of Zhu and Wang a landscape of Confucian positions evolved. Some, like the leftist wing of Wang Yangming's school, were hardly discernible from Buddhist positions. The amalgam of a cult of Confucius, meditative exercises, a complex set of ritual rules and strict morality connected to the heart-mind – plus the claim of an enlightened pure insight into cosmic principles coupled to a mystic spirituality – has led many scholars to regard Confucianism as a religious tradition.

Firstly, in summary, a sceptical tradition of Confucianism may be discerned. This probably evolved as a professional methodology from the office of the court astrologer and scribe to the early Confucian historiographical tradition and the early accounts of Confucius in the *Analects*. The highly critical *Shiji* biography of Confucius may be taken as an expression of that early Confucian historiographical tradition and can thus be regarded as a further early and central classical text which nourished this sceptical tradition. The sceptical tradition expressed reservations about religious ideas and had an impact on the view of the educated élite and state officials on religion. Yet it also included cosmological concepts that Westerners would call religious (Heaven as a moral institution, *yinyang*, *wuxing*, *qi*, etc.). However

these were perceived as part of an abstract cosmological system of rules, clearly opposed to earlier personalised religious concepts.

Secondly, the cult of Confucius was established as a central ritual of the imperial court.

Thirdly, as a reaction to the powerful religious cultures of Daoism and Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism created a religious dimension, which can be taken as the third aspect of a complex and multilayered practice of Confucianism. Since the main debates within Neo-Confucianism do not perceive any contradiction between them we have to assume that the three aspects (scepticism, cultic sacrifice and religious philosophy) were perceived as aspects of one coherent tradition of Confucianism.

Jesuit Interpretations

Despite the many factional fights within Neo-Confucianism this is the form in which Confucianism was declared state orthodoxy by the Mongol emperors in the fourteenth century (1313 CE) and which continued until the last emperor resigned in 1911. However, for what happened with Confucianism in China after 1911 an entirely different interpretation of Confucianism was crucial, which started in the late sixteenth century and developed in the circles of European missionaries and philosophers. In 1579 'a detachment of seamen in service to Philip II of Spain and a few missionaries of a new order of the Catholic Church, the society of Jesus, sailed by Portuguese carrack to the south coast of China. Europe and China, and Confucianism have lived the consequences of this passage ever since' (Jensen, 1997, p. 3).

The Jesuit study of Confucian texts was mainly guided by their specific missionary interest and therefore became part of their discourse on mission theology. Their study reflected European concerns. Confucianism became part of the European discourse. It gained its particular symbolic power as it was identified with China as a whole and thus became the representative of the Chinese other. Confucianism was especially attractive because it appeared as a highly developed and sophisticated system of thought which, in many respects, did not merely seem to equal European standards but even seemed to surpass them.

Although its moral teaching and ethics of state politics were not grounded in a theology, Confucianism nevertheless led to a high standard of ethical behaviour and refined emotional control. Confucian rule was supported through a highly complex bureaucracy based solely on a meritocratic class of Confucian scholar officials. The highly admired Chinese meritocratic system seemed to allow much higher social mobility for the individual and greater individual freedom, than that found in Europe. These were

some of the enthusiastic perceptions that became part of the interrelated European political, philosophical and theological discourses.

The Confucian model posed new systematic problems to the Christian mission abroad. There was the question of the source of highly valuable Confucian ethics. Three different answers to that question ensued from three different theological premises and led to three diverse interpretations of Confucianism. An early event of divine revelation, of which the religious element had been forgotten and the ethical element had been transmitted in the canonical Confucian texts, could have affected the high moral standards of Confucianism. Perhaps natural religion, the basis for the religions of all cultures in the world, was also for Confucianism a foundation, not based on divine grace and revelation but on natural law and human insight. Finally, human reason, which lies in all human minds and does not need any religious impulse to form an ethical system could have been the foundation for Confucian ethics.

The Jesuit missionaries assumed that an early divine revelation lay at the foundation of Confucianism. This was the reason for its being so close to Christian ethical values. This premise was attacked by later missionaries from the Franciscan and Dominican orders, by Jansenists and those from the Missions Étrangères de Paris. These missionaries were convinced that Confucianism and its cult were atheistic, idolatrous and superstitious. It offered no possible links or points of contact with Christianity. They disclaimed any comparison between the two traditions and strictly prohibited Christian attendance at any Confucian rituals. They attacked the Jesuit mission strategy of accommodation and instead spread Christianity as something decidedly different, as a tradition with its own concepts and terms. This contradiction culminated in the rites controversy and the papal decrees prohibiting any Christian attendance at ancestral and other Chinese rites.

The other two concepts (natural religion and human reason) were hotly debated in Europe between enlightenment philosophers and theologians. Thomas Hobbes, for example, supported the concept of natural religion against the dominance of the institution of the church. Thus any resemblance of Confucian with Christian ethics was regarded as being caused by the fact that both originated in natural religion. Furthermore Christianity had been corrupted by an abhorrent priesthood. Confucianism therefore served as an example of pure and uncorrupted natural religion, superior to contemporary Christianity. Confucianism was held up as the true and pure example of how Christianity ought to be, as the model for Christian religion.

The notion, following the Franciscan and Dominican reports, that Confucianism was a non-religious and atheistic humanism attracted

philosophers in Europe. Human reason, of which Chinese philosophy and politics were a very clear and strong expression, was taken by European enlightenment philosophers such as Voltaire, Leibniz and Wolff as being identical to the reason that they found in Europe. In China however they observed more progress in practical philosophy. An invitation to Chinese missionaries to teach Confucian ethics to a morally decayed Europe was considered. Confucianism was intellectually challenging and worth debating. It was regarded as part of a common ground on which universal comparisons of political and social orders, as well as ethical values and ways of life, could be discussed. Confucianism could be used to confirm, to criticise or to relativise European standards and norms.

At the turn of the twentieth century there were two prevailing attitudes towards Confucianism in Europe: that it was part of a backward ritualised Chinese culture; and that it was a culture enlightened by the reason of natural religion, a member of the mystical traditions of the East, from which a religiously alienated Europe could learn basic wisdom. As China moved into modernity the same attitudes were mirrored in Chinese intellectual debates.

Confucianism in the Twentieth Century

At the turn to the twentieth century Confucianism was held in high esteem in China and considered the essence of Chinese culture, even by hardline modernist reformers such as Kang Youwei (1858–1927). It should be retained as the basis of all innovations. In 1898 Kang Youwei even suggested making Confucianism the state religion. Many others followed him in defining a Chinese nationalist religion to stand against Western Christianity. Social programmes were to be developed to compete with the social welfare measures of Christianity in China, which were becoming influential. Kang Youwei therefore positioned Confucius as a radical reformer who envisioned an egalitarian world without political or cultural borders. The eras of 'great peace' and eventually 'great unity' would be China's contribution to a world that emerged from the era of imperialist expansion. In 1906 the Manchu rulers tried to rescue their collapsing dynasty with an edict in which they ordered that Confucius had to be sacrificed to in the same way as Heaven. The second sacrifice was changed thus into the great sacrifice. Confucius was elevated to the same position as Heaven in divine status.

Scholars such as Liang Qichao (1873–1929) and Zhang Taiyan (1868–1936) opposed this religious interpretation of Confucianism. For them Confucianism was a secular philosophy and did not accord to any Western definition of religion, which required churchlike institutions,

an independent priesthood and public religious practices. None of these markers was to be found in Confucianism. Confucianism thus fell between the new modernist categories, and in the 1910s and 1920s it became associated with the pre-modern backward feudal society, with the corrupt and decayed state institutions of the Manchu empire and with repressive government. According to Hu Shi (1891–1962), one of the advocates of Western learning and modernisation, Confucianism (with its strict hierarchical order, with its subordination of women and its teaching of filial piety and obedience) was incompatible with republican principles and with modernity in general. The promotion of modernisation in Western style was generally associated with the damnation of Confucianism.

It is surprising therefore that in the 1920s, when the anti-Confucianist movement reached its peak, Confucianism was supported by influential figures such as Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925) and Liang Shuming (1895–1988). They turned to a renovation of Confucianism as a tool for criticising Western culture. Especially after the shocking events of the First World War, Western culture came to be regarded as materialist and amoral without spiritual content. A number of Chinese intellectuals defended Eastern spiritual culture against Western material civilisation and advocated a subjective intuitive view of life. This was contrasted with the Western objective and rational scientific view of the world, which failed in their view to judge good from bad, right from wrong.

Although these pro-Confucian viewpoints carried strong anti-Western connotations, they were entirely built on Western theories. Liang Shuming, while heavily influenced by Buddhist ideas, took his notion of intuition and philosophy of life from Henri Bergson (1859–1941), and Zhang in his critique against Western science was inspired by Rudolf Eucken (1846–1926) with whom he had studied in Jena. Thus the Chinese criticism of Western culture echoed the Western self-critique. It added Chinese traditional terms that became associated with analytical terms of Western critical philosophy. This approach gave Chinese thinkers a new basis to develop Confucianism further in the conceptual frame of the notions of Western philosophy then dominant. From this approach an entirely new form of Confucianism – New Confucianism – developed. For the past one hundred years New Confucianists have tried to define a new place for Confucianism as a global philosophy.

Confucius, the enlightened philosopher, was thus created in the context of eighteenth-century Europe by Jesuits who received different strands of (sceptic, cultic and religious) Confucianisms and incorporated them into their own construction that was heavily grounded in European theological

assumptions. This vision of him as philosopher, good or bad, rather than as a religious figure continues to be the dominant image of Confucius in the West. It is also this image of Confucius that came to be accepted in modern China. Since the 1990s Confucianism in the PRC has received strong support from the Communist state following the failed attempt to build up Falun Gong (FLG) as representative of Chinese spiritual culture. It is also perceived as a counterweight to any growing influence of Christianity. Another great effort to develop Confucian tradition, in the context of ecology, human rights and theology, is being made in the United States with something approaching a centre in what has been called the 'Boston School of Confucianism' (Neville, 2000).

For further reading: Ames (1984); Chan (1963); Chin (2008); Ching (1986); Creel (1949); Eno (1990); Fingarette (1972); Hall and Ames (1987); Jensen (1997); Neville (2000); Nivinson and Van Norden (1997); Nylan and Wilson (2010); Rule (1986); Shryock (1932); Taylor (1990); Wilson (2002, 2003).

5

Daoism

Daoism is the most complex and indefinable of the great religious traditions in China. Its demarcation line against local variants of popular religions, and Buddhism, medicine or gymnastics, is indeterminable. Its historical beginning is a matter of dispute, its development not consensual, its diverse scriptural traditions are separate, and its organisations not unified. The diverse aspects of Daoist culture may, perhaps, best be identified in their common goal of achieving immortality. Rituals, scriptures, cosmological concepts, alchemical techniques, spiritual and bodily practices have grouped around this central goal of the diverse Daoist traditions. These groups might never had come to conceive themselves as belonging to a single 'teaching' (*jiao*) were it not for their common opposition to the 'teaching' of Buddhism that was organised in various schools. It was in imitation of the Buddhist model, the Tripitaka canon of Buddhist scriptures, that highly diverse scriptures of the Daoist traditions were ranged together in a single canon by the middle of the fifth century CE. Daoism drew on a number of sources that have merged in the various Daoist traditions such as the concepts of:

- celestial bureaucracy;
- ancient cosmogonies;
- correlative cosmology;
- shamanistic practices of ecstatic flight, exorcism and purification;
- pharmaceutical recipes, alchemical procedures and magical techniques of the *fangshi* traditions;
- immortality;
- alchemy;
- ritual efficacy;
- astrology;
- early medical body concepts;
- inner self-cultivation concepts and breathing techniques;
- Daoist philosophy, the books *Daode jing* and *Zhuangzi*.

In later developments of Daoism, elements of Buddhist cosmology and philosophy were included as well. Like ingredients they form the constitutional parts of all Daoist traditions.

Ingredients of Daoism

Celestial bureaucracy

The highly bureaucratised realm of spirits and deities in Daoism and the related bureaucratic procedures of communication have their antecedents in the strict hierarchical order of numinous personnel and the formalised communication procedures found in Shang religion. Late Eastern Zhou documents provide evidence of how the underworld was believed to resemble a bureaucratic state by the end of the fourth century BCE and how identical the communication procedures were to those in Late Eastern Zhou bureaucracies (Harper, 1999, p. 869). Early Daoism maintained these visions of an otherworld that operated on the basis of a bureaucratic order. It reflected the bureaucratic order of the ruling system in imperial times also; petitions to the celestial authorities employed similar forms and followed similar procedures to those to worldly authorities. Formal documents such as contracts and mandates were used as means of communication with the otherworld. Celestial posts and offices, law and judgement mirrored worldly institutions.

Cosmogonies

Cosmogonies are important in Daoist mythology. The idea that the cosmos evolved out of an undifferentiated chaos (*hundun*), associated with the Dao, can be found in many Daoist texts (Girardot, 1983). It was an important idea in the founding text of Daoism, the *Daode jing* (Puett, 2002, pp. 165–7). In a text called *The Great One Gave Birth to Water* (*Taiyi sheng shui*) dated around 300 BCE the origin of the universe was envisioned to be the Great One generating water, and from water everything else is born:

> The Great One gives birth to Water.
> Water goes back and supplements [i.e., joins with] the Great One.
> They thereby complete Heaven.
> Heaven goes back and supplements the Great One.
> They thereby complete Earth.
> Heaven and Earth [return and supplement each other].
> They thereby complete the spirits and the illuminated (*shen ming*).
> The spirits and the illuminated return and supplement each other.
> They thereby complete the yin and yang.
> Yin and yang return and supplement each other.

They thereby complete the four seasons.
The four seasons return and supplement each other.
They thereby complete the cold and the hot.
Cold and hot return and supplement each other.
They thereby complete the wet and the dry.
The wet and the dry return and supplement each other.
They thereby complete the year and then stop.
(trans. Puett, 2002, pp. 160–1)

The water metaphor, which is so central in this cosmogony, was often employed to explain Daoist principles (Allan, 1997, 2003). In the *Daode jing*, water was compared to the Dao:

The supreme good is like water.
Water is good in benefiting all things without struggling.
It resides at places that all people disdain.
Therefore it is close to the Dao (Chapter 8).

Correlative Cosmology

The assumption of correlative schemes of *yinyang*, *wuxing* and *Yijing* cosmology is constitutive for any Daoist world-view. No Daoist ritual, alchemist or meditation practice operates outside the framework of this correlative order. Rituals are arranged according to the correlative order of the cosmos to be efficacious. Alchemical procedures correspond to the phases of cosmic time schemes and combine ingredients according to their classification in correlation systems in order to work properly. Dietary rules follow the classification schemes of food based on the same correlation schemes. Body exercises are based on medical concepts also conceived in correlation models. Astrology plays a major role as part of this correlative system.

Astrology

The *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*) reported major events for the years 722–481 BCE. They recorded sun eclipses, comets and other strange astronomical events. Stars were regarded as representatives of the Heavenly order, as propitious or dangerous and thereby invested with efficacious power. In Han times the planets became part of the fivefold correlative scheme of the cosmos and embodied the power of the phases. Daoism adopted these powers into its pantheon by turning the major stars into powerful deities that are still revered today (Hou, 1979).

Wu-*shamanism*

The relationship between Daoism and so-called 'shamanism' (*wu*) is complicated. On one hand, Daoist traditions refuted any kind of 'impure' or 'chaotic' trances, spirit possession or psychopomp (guiding of souls) practices associated with shamanistic techniques (Stein, 1979; Loewe, 1982, Chapter 10). On the other hand, ecstatic flights and out-of-body travelling, exorcism, appeasing and invocations of ghosts were important parts of the Daoist arsenal. The earliest mention of people searching for herbs to prolong life referred to them as *wu*. *Wu*-shamans may thus also be associated with techniques of prolonging life.

Fangshi

Masters of recipes and methods (*fangshi*) probably originated in north-east China during the Late Eastern Zhou period. These were specialists trained in a variety of occult and magical arts, secret methods and techniques. Some *fangshi* were held in high esteem by Qin and Han emperors, who sought political advice and personal immortality from them. A number of techniques and skills associated with the *fangshi* such as alchemy, exorcism, medicine, divination, weather forecasting and astrology found their way into emerging Daoist practices, whereupon the *fangshi* declined (Dewoskin, 1983).

Cult of immortality

Archaeological and textual evidence proves that an early cult of immortality existed from the third century BCE onward, at the least. The idea that the human body served as the abode of several souls that would separate after death and disperse to various places was reflected in early texts such as the *Zuo zhuan* and the *Chuci.* This led to efforts to preserve the body for as long as possible to achieve longevity or to transform the body into an immortal body that would hold the souls together and thus ensure the continuity of the persona (Maspero, 1981, pp. 26–8). Three main traditions of immortality techniques were:

- body cultivation in the form of breathing exercises, inner self-cultivation techniques, gymnastics and dietetics to purify and transform the body;
- pharmaceutical ways by searching for a plant of immortality or using alchemical methods to produce a magical elixir;
- mystical methods by identifying with an invisible principle of everlasting life, such as the Dao as creative principle and generative origin of the universe. These mystical methods were always accompanied by specific rituals and moral regulations (Kohn, 1992; Roth, 1999, pp. 125–72).

Early depictions of immortals can be found in second century BCE grave paintings, on coffins and in lacquerware. In Han times the immortality cult developed as further ideas were added. One such was the belief in a Western paradise at the mountain ranges of Kunlun. There the Queen Mother of the West (the old goddess Xi Wangmu, also mentioned as a deity in Shang oracle bones) resided and dispensed prosperity, longevity and eternal bliss and the immortals dwelt. Another idea was about islands of immortality in the east called Penglai, which were also depicted as mountains rising from the sea. The first emperor of China, Qin Shihuangdi, sent several delegations to find Penglai and obtain the medicine of immortality. The cult of immortality was so crucial in later Daoist traditions that it is identified with the beginnings of Daoism by some. Although we find very little concerning immortality in the *Daode jing*, the *Zhuangzi* mentions the Queen Mother of the West as having obtained the Dao. It also contains the first literary descriptions of an immortal in its first and second chapters as 'a being with a purified body, who uses a special diet without grains and has the ability to fly, to roam afar and to heal' (Penny, 2000, p. 110).

Alchemy

The idea of producing gold seems to have originated in Early Han times along with the notion that humans can manipulate substances in order to achieve immortality. The earliest *fangshi* associated with alchemical practice was Li Shaojun. In 133 BCE he suggested an elixir to achieve longevity to the emperor (Pregadio, 2006, p. 29). The sources have not allowed us to trace this development any further, so the history of early alchemy started with the Daoist tradition of Great Clarity (*Taiqing*) with its earliest source in Ge Hong's *Baopuzi* (Pregadio, 2006, pp. 2–3).

Ritual efficacy

Chinese ritual is normally associated with the Confucian tradition. No other tradition possesses equally old and elaborate ritual rules. Confucianism was criticised for its excessive and lavish rituals by the Mohist and the Daoist schools. Yet this preoccupation with ritual was taken up in the Daoist tradition as well, both in terms of manifold daily ritual performances and also in terms of textual production. Ritual texts were pre-eminent in the Daoist canon. These include scriptures to be recited, hymns to be chanted, memorials to be read and instructions for meditation and visualisation to be performed within retreat and offering services. Ritual texts amount to some 800 texts of the approximately 1,500 texts contained in the present Daoist canon (Schipper and Verellen, 2004, p. 2). There are rituals for all the

aspects of Daoists' life: for purification, appeasement, exorcism, sermons, sacrifices, communication with gods, healing, alchemical processes, meditation and sexual practices. The length of these rituals varies between short gestures and long liturgical ceremonies lasting several days. These diverse rituals could be performed in private, public or secret contexts.

Inner Self-Cultivation, Medical Body Concepts, Longevity and Breathing Techniques

Inner self-cultivation is a central theme in all early Daoist texts. It is often connected to the nourishing and cultivation of vital energies that nurture life and thus also longevity. Terms for longevity (*shou*, *changsheng*) already appeared in Zhou bronze inscriptions. They refer to physical practices that allow humans to activate their vital forces and to live their full lifespan. It is not the same as becoming immortal (*cheng xian*), a process whereby the body is transformed into a different transcendent state of being. This concept was restricted to Late Eastern Zhou times (Engelhardt, 2000, p. 75). Works such as the *Guanzi* include early chapters such as the 'Neiye' containing ideas that Harold Roth took to be the precursors of a Daoist mystical tradition of inner self-cultivation. He therefore called these chapters the 'original Tao' (Roth, 1999).

> If you can be aligned and be tranquil,
> Only then can you be stable.
> With a stable mind at your core,
> With the eyes and ears acute and clear,
> And with the four limbs firm and fixed,
> You can thereby make a lodging place for the vital essence.
> The vital essence: it is the essence of the vital energy.
> When the vital energy is guided, it [the vital essence] is generated,
> But when it is generated, there is thought,
> When there is thought, there is knowledge,
> But when there is knowledge, then you must stop.
> Whenever the forms of the mind have excessive knowledge,
> You lose your vitality. ('Neiye', Chapter 8, trans. Roth, 1999)

The third chapter of the *Zhuangzi* is titled 'Nourishing life' (*yangsheng*) and describes this technique in some detail by mentioning a number of breathing and gymnastic techniques. These appear in similar form in later texts:

> To huff and puff, exhale and inhale, blow out the old and draw in the new, do the 'bear-hang' and the 'bird-stretch', interested

> only in long life – such are the tastes of the practitioners of 'guide-and-pull' exercises, the nurturers of the body, Grandfathers P'eng's ripe-old-agers. (*Zhuangzi,* Chapter 15; trans. Graham, 1986, p. 265)

Daoist Philosophy: The Books Daode jing *and* Zhuangzi

The Daode jing

'Neiye' also includes chapters that contain an early philosophy of the Dao very similar to how we find them in the *Daode jing*.

> As for the Way:
> It is what the mouth cannot speak of,
> The eyes cannot see,
> And the ears cannot hear.
> It is that with which we cultivate the mind and align the body.
> When people lose it they die;
> When people gain it they flourish.
> When endeavors lose it they fail;
> When they gain it they succeed.
> The Way never has a root or trunk,
> It never has leaves or flowers.
> The myriad things are generated by it;
> The myriad things are completed by it.
> We designate it 'the Way'. ('Neiye', Chapter 6, trans. Roth, 1999)

Compare the famous first chapter of the *Daode jing*:

> The Dao that can be spoken of is not the enduring Dao;
> The name that can be named is not the enduring name.
> Nameless is the beginning of all things;
> Named is the mother of all things.
> Therefore, constantly without desires one will perceive its marvel;
> Constantly having desires one will perceive its margin.
> These two emerge from the same but are named differently;
> Both are called mysterious.
> It is the mysterious of the mysterious;
> The gateway of all marvels.

The *Daode jing* or *Tao te ching* (also named after its alleged author *Laozi*) is recognised as the central canonical work by all Daoist traditions. It is a short text consisting of 5,000 characters only and is divided into a Dao-part

and a De-part together comprising eighty-one very brief chapters of aphorisms that do not form a line of argument. The origin of this work has been disputed. D. C. Lau (1963) and Lafargue (*Tao and Method* 1994) argued that the book is an anthology, an artful arrangement of earlier sayings that had circulated orally. According to them each chapter consists of a collage of unrelated sayings. Others, such as Graham (1989), assumed single authorship and considered the book to be a written composition.

The earliest form we know of this book are three bundles of a total of seventy-one bamboo slips, on which thirty-one of the eighty-one chapters are written in Chu seal script, each bundle by a different hand. Only sixteen chapters are 'complete'. These bundles were found in a tomb in Guodian, Hubei province in 1993. The tomb is dated *c.*300 BCE. Bundle A consisted of, in this order, chapters 19, 66, 46 (part), 30 (part), 15 (part), 64 (part 2), 37, 63 (part), 2 (part), 32, 25, 5 (part), 16 (part), 64 (part 1), 56, 57, 55, 44, 40 and 9. Bundle B contained chapters 59, 48 (part), 20 (part), 13, 41, 52 (part), 45 and 54, while Bundle C held chapters 17, 18, 35, 31 (part) and 64 (part 2). There is no indication that these three bundles were conceived as belonging together; they might have been viewed as three separate books – the cosmogony of *The Great One Gave Birth to Water* is part of Bundle C. None of chapters 67–81 is included in these bundles. Certain ideas appearing in the, later, full versions of the *Daode jing* are absent in these fragments: polemical attacks against Confucian values; references to 'the one'; or to feminine and soft ways and uses of the water metaphor (for an introduction, translation and discussion of the Guodian 'Laozi' see Henricks, 2000).

Two first complete versions of the *Daode jing* were excavated in 1973 from a tomb in Mawangdui, Hunan province, sealed in 168 BCE. Apart from some minor differences in wording or syntax, their more precise grammar and the reversed arrangement of the Dao and the De-parts the two versions basically conform to the transmitted versions of the *Daode jing* (for an introduction, translation and discussion of the Mawangdui '*Dedao jing*' see Henricks, 1989).

The *Daode jing* introduces a number of concepts such as *dao*, *de* (virtue, power), and *wuwei* (non-action), tranquillity, emptiness, obscurity, softness, femininity, reclusiveness, reverse logic and models of the sage and sagely actions of an ideal ruler. Many chapters address the ruler directly, giving political advice. The book has been read as a manual for mystical practices, military strategy, education, sex and breathing techniques. It has also been interpreted as a work of metaphysics, ontological philosophy, feminism and theology. More than 700 commentaries have been written to this work. It

is, after the Bible, the most translated work in the world with more than 300 different translations, more than eighty of them into English. This great diversity of readings reflects the level of abstraction of the text, which permits its application to these various subjects.

One of the central concepts in the *Daode jing* is the idea of the Dao. The Chinese character *dao*, which gave the first part of the book its title, consists of two components – a head and a street. The head component expresses the sound of the word and the street element indicates the meaning, which originally was 'path'. This was then extended to mean 'leading the way', 'pointing out' or 'saying'. The *Daode jing* was probably the earliest text that systematically elaborated on a philosophical meaning of the term *dao* as an eternal creative force or principle that is the unintentional generative source of all things, including heaven and earth. It is undifferentiated and all-encompassing, without name and form, imperceptible, dim, blurred and indistinct. As Chapter 25 says:

> There was something completed out of chaos,
> Born before Heaven and Earth.
> How quiet, how scarce.
> Standing alone without change, moving around without risk
> It can be taken as the mother of the world.
> I do not know its name;
> Designating it I say: "Dao",
> Forced to give it a name I say: "Great".
> [...]
> Man takes Earth as a model,
> Earth takes Heaven as a model,
> Heaven takes Dao as a model,
> And Dao takes as a model that which is so on its own..

The other central concept that was used as title for the second part of the book is *de*. The meaning of this concept includes aspects of virtue, power, charismatic force and moral efficacy. It is perceived as the expression and effect of a realised Dao in personal, social and political formations. De is acting in accordance with the Dao:

> To give birth to it, to nourish it;
> To give birth and not claim having it,
> To act and not rely on it,
> To let grow and not to rule;
> This is called mysterious power (*de*) (Chapter 10).

Wuwei is yet another way to act in accordance with the Dao. Sometimes translated as 'non-acting' it does not refer to passivity but rather denotes a kind of action that does not force things against their nature and is thus in accordance with the Dao:

> To pursue study means to daily increase;
> To pursue the Dao means to daily decrease.
> Through decreasing and further decreasing one arrives at non-purposeful action (*wuwei*).
> Having arrived at non-purposeful action nothing will be left undone.
> The world will be seized as long as one does not get involved in any matters;
> And just as there are matters it will not suffice to seize the world (Chapter 48).

This chapter demonstrates how following the Dao leads to an accomplishment of everything without (forcefully) acting, how it is relevant to a ruler and how it is the opposite of learning. It sheds some light on the context of the formation of the *Daode jing*: as a counter movement against traditions of learning as cultivated, for example, in the Ruist (Confucian) school.

The Zhuangzi

The second great work of Daoist philosophy, the *Zhuangzi* (also known as *Chuang-tzu*), is a collection of texts written by different authors in the fourth and third centuries BCE compiled into the present book by its most famous commentator Guo Xiang (?–312 CE). The texts reflect the complex ideas of a school of thought that was related to a person named Zhuangzi and his disciples. They discussed and challenged conventional ideas and meanings in a highly original style that has exerted a strong influence on Chinese art, literature and religion.

The *Zhuangzi* is quite different from the *Daode jing*, even though they share a similar attitude against fixing the mind on learning and governmental affairs and offer a philosophy that prefers to flow with the greater Dao. However, while the *Daode jing* consists of short often rhymed aphorisms the *Zhuangzi* is a collection of literary texts that are most playful and witty in their choice of words, styles and themes. The focus of the *Zhuangzi* doesn't lie so much in an exploration of the Dao and its principles but rather in the way these principles work in their practical application. This is not just a presentation of precepts for the ruler but also for common people, in their spontaneous actions and daily work.

As in the *Daode jing,* the Dao is given different and strange names. In the *Zhuangzi* however there are many humorous and unexpected weird embodiments of the Dao. These take the form of strange and deviant characters that demonstrate the transformational nature of all things, thoughts, values and views, and the human body. In its transformational nature the Dao is neither bound to any physical reality nor to the reason of logical argument:

> Once Zhuang Zhou dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know he was Zhuang Zhou. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Zhuang Zhou. But he didn't know if he was Zhuang Zhou who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuang Zhou. Between Zhuang Zhou and a butterfly there must be some distinction! This is called the Transformation of Things (Watson, 1968, p. 49).

There are strict logical arguments in many of the dialogues:

> Zhuangzi and Huizi were strolling along the dam of the Hao River when Zhuangzi said, 'See how the minnows come out and dart around where they please! That's what fish really enjoy!' Huizi said, 'You're not a fish – how do you know what fish enjoy?' Zhuangzi said, 'You're not I, so how do you know I don't know what fish enjoy?' Huizi said, 'I'm not you, so I certainly don't know what you know. On the other hand, you're certainly not a fish – so that still proves you don't know what fish enjoy!' Zhuangzi said, 'Let's go back to your original question, please. You asked me how I know what fish enjoy – so you already knew I knew it when you asked the question. I know it by standing here beside the Hao' (Watson, 1968, pp. 188–9).

Yet, these dialogues end with the assertion that there is a truth beyond the relativism and scepticism of argumentative logic that is accessible to perfected humans, who have freed themselves from all worldly bonds:

> Nie Que asked Wang Ni, 'Do you know what all things agree in calling right?' 'How would I know that?' said Wang Ni. 'Do you know that you don't know it?' 'How would I know that?' 'Then do things know nothing?' 'How would I know that? However suppose I try saying something. What way do I have of knowing that if I say I know something I don't really not know it? Or

> what way do I have of knowing that if I say I don't know something I don't really in fact know it? Now let me ask you some questions. If a man sleeps in a damp place, his back aches and he ends up half paralyzed, but is this true of a loach? If he lives in a tree, he is terrified and shakes with fright, but is this true of a monkey? Of these three creatures, then, which one knows the proper place to live? Men eat the flesh of grass-fed and grain-fed animals, deer eat grass, centipedes find snakes tasty, and hawks and falcons relish mice. Of these four, which knows how food ought to taste? Monkeys pair with monkeys, deer go out with deer, and fish play around with fish. Men claim that Maoqiang and Lady Li were beautiful, but if fish saw them they would dive to the bottom of the stream, if birds saw them they would fly away, and if deer saw them they would break into a run. Of these four, which knows how to fix the standard of beauty for the world? The way I see it, the rules of benevolence and righteousness and the paths of right and wrong are all hopelessly snarled and jumbled. How could I know anything about such discriminations?' Nie Que said, 'If you don't know what is profitable or harmful, then does the Perfect Man likewise know nothing of such things?' Wang Ni replied, 'The Perfect Man is godlike. Though the great swamps blaze, they cannot burn him; though the great rivers freeze, they cannot chill him; though swift lightning splits the hills and howling gales shake the sea, they cannot frighten him. A man like this rides the clouds and mist, straddles the sun and moon, and wanders beyond the four seas. Even life and death have no effect on him, much less the rules of profit and loss!' (Watson, 1968, pp. 45–6)

This idea of 'unboundedness' running through many of the funny anecdotes, provocative dialogues, sophist analyses and imaginary narratives has been interpreted as an expression of a philosophy of utmost spontaneity and freedom, as relativism, scepticism, paradox and mysticism.

The poetic philosophy of *Zhuangzi* resonates with Buddhist philosophy. It has provided a substantial part of the cultural basis by which Indian Buddhism was adapted to its Chinese forms, especially Chan (Zen) Buddhism:

> Do not be an embodier of fame; do not be a storehouse of schemes; do not be an undertaker of projects; do not be a

> proprietor of wisdom. Embody to the fullest what has no end, and wander where there is no trail. Hold on to all that you have received from Heaven but do not think you have gotten anything. Be empty, that is all. The Perfect Man uses his mind like a mirror – going after nothing, welcoming nothing, responding but not storing. Therefore he can win out over things and not hurt himself (Watson, 1968, p. 97).

Lord Lao

Laozi is known as the author of the *Daode jing*, the core text of Daoism. Laozi is not a personal name but an appellation of respect or honorific title. The earliest Chinese dynastic history, the *Shijii,* written *c.*100 BCE by Sima Qian, offers a biography of Laozi. He carried the family name Li, came from the southern state of Chu and was archivist at court. He met Confucius and taught him the rites. When Laozi left the country (riding on the back of an ox) to the west Yin Xi, the toll keeper at the border, asked him to write down his knowledge. So Laozi sat down and wrote the *Daode jing* in 5,000 words. This biography contains contradicting information and has probably mingled information about different people with the same name into one not very coherent biographical narrative.

The name 'Laozi' is first of all associated with the text of the *Daode jing*. There are numerous later texts which, from the second century CE, also started to use the name Laozi in their titles. These claimed to be revelations by Laozi in its divine form. In these texts Laozi was depersonalised as a historical author, divinised and identified with the eternal Dao, of which both the historical Laozi and the Laozi who revealed texts were regarded as emanations.

Daoism developed with the new revelations of Lord Lao(zi). It was influenced by, and dissociated itself from, Buddhism in the third to fifth centuries. Then Laozi, as 'Lord Lao', gained new functions and roles (Seidel, 1969; Kohn, 1998). He was visualised in meditation, was identified with the Buddha, was formed into holy statues and appeared frequently in revelations. After the integration of the different Daoist schools in the sixth century, his life story was developed in a complex myth so he became the third, and most popular, deity of the Daoist trinity. From the seventh century Laozi was declared the ancestor of the imperial family, which bore the same family name, Li. Lord Lao was then advanced to the position of the protector of the whole empire. Later dynasties continued to revere Lord Lao at court, but he lost his central cultic position after the tenth century.

History of Daoism

Early movements

These various roots formed the basic constituents of what developed into the diverse strands of Daoist religion. Each of these strands in turn is made up of rather different mixtures of these constituents. A family resemblance unifies them in such a way that they have been identified as a religion called 'Daoism'. If we were to decide, from a scholarly point of view, when Daoism started as an organised religion we would need to look at early Daoist movements in the second century CE. They were formed in reaction to the turmoil of the end of the Han dynasty. These groups first emerged in smaller numbers in Early Han times. The groups combined a spirit of political resistance with religious ideas of supernatural powers and mostly shamanistic healing techniques.

In ancient times political power had been legitimised through religious concepts and signs, and consolidated by rituals. From the Late Eastern Zhou time onward the interpretation of such signs of legitimation had slipped from the control of experts into the hands of a much broader class of educated men, who claimed authority on their own versions of truth. All early Daoist movements started with the claim of individuals that they had insight into a superior ultimate truth, a claim that became possible only through the development of a broad access to truth outside expert institutions. This empowered and gave authority to the individuals claiming to have gained insight. The two most prominent early Daoist movements occurred at about the same time in the east (Shandong) and west (Sichuan) of China, but they seem not to have been coordinated.

The Yellow Turbans in the east believed in the Yellow Emperor and the rule of a Yellow Heaven. Yellow (earth) was the colour that, according to the sequence of cyclical correlative schemes, followed red (fire, the element of the Han dynasty), which in turn had claimed to follow the black (Qin dynasty) in the cosmological circle. They were also called the Taiping dao (Great Peace Movement), because their holy book was called *Taiping jing* (*Classic of Great Peace*). They believed in an era of great peace that, according to calendar calculations started in 184 CE, the year they rebelled. The most distinctive feature of this uprising was its enormous size and vigour. Their charismatic leader Zhang Jue assembled hundreds of thousand men and could be subdued only by uniting all the governmental forces.

The other prominent movement gained momentum through a revelation to Zhang Daoling by Laozi in 142 CE, who declared Zhang to be a Celestial Master (tianshi) and revealed to him the 'Teaching of the Orthodox Unity based on the Authoritative Alliance'. The divine Laozi explained that the

ruling six Heavens had been replaced by the rule of the Three Pure Ones – personifications of the three Daoist core concepts: original vital breath, *qi*; subtle vital essence, *jing*; and vital spirit, *shen*. In future sacrifices were to be offered only to these deities, and blood sacrifices should cease. Zhang then gathered followers and founded the movement of the Celestial Masters (*Tianshi dao)*. The movement was also called the Way of Orthodox Unity (*Zhengyi dao)* or the Way of Five Pecks of Rice (*Wudoumi dao)*, as Zhang asked his followers to contribute five pecks of rice. As with the Yellow Turbans the holy book of this movement was called *Taiping jing,* but in contrast to the Yellow Turbans Zhang declared it to be of divine provenance.

After Zhang Daoling's death his son Zhang Heng succeeded him as Celestial Master and in turn he was followed by his son Zhang Lu. This trio is known as the trinity of the Three Zhang. Zhang Lu was formally acknowledged as a regional leader and ruled his own highly organised religious state for twenty-five years. The state was highly bureaucratised with its regime envisioned in parallel to the celestial order. Legal, moral and religious regulations were hardly separable. Charity work and collective rituals were carried out, dietary rules were followed and holy texts recited. A regular confession of sins served a 'quasi exorcist' purification, which helped to avoid and to heal disease.

The treating and healing of disease were the economic and social basis of the early Daoist movements. In the community, social peace was seen as a fundamental condition of achieving longevity, and meditation was encouraged as a means of achieving physical health. The Celestial Masters campaigned against popular religious practices, which they labelled 'heretic teachings' and 'excessive cults' because they disrupted the harmonious relationship between the people and the Dao and could cause disease.

Zhang Lu did not strive for a formally independent state, and after some fighting he handed his territory over to the warlord Cao Cao in 215. In turn Cao Cao protected Zhang Lu and ennobled many of his leaders. A large number of Zhang Lu's followers, around a hundred thousand, were relocated. This hastened the spread of this early Daoist movement. The Celestial Masters' subordination to political authority was probably one of the preconditions for their social advancement from peasants and commoners to aristocrats. They provided the basic model of Daoist organisations from which the next major schools – Highest Clarity (Shangqing) and Numinous Treasure (Lingbao) – developed in the second half of the fourth century CE. They have remained one of the most important schools of Daoism, with their sixty-fourth Celestial Master now in office.

Ge Hong

Ge Hong (*c*.283–343 CE), a famous early Daoist master, enriched the Daoist tradition from a fundamentally different angle. The communal morality of the Celestial Masters didn't permit its members to leave their family or community to lead a life of a recluse. Yet the earlier tradition of the *fangshi* specialists had not ceased to exist. Ge Hong was one of the most important representative of this group. He came from a southern aristocratic family, which had transmitted recipes and texts for generations and was probably descended from *fangshi* specialists active at the court of Emperor Wu of the Han (reigned 141–86 BCE). This genealogy, and the fact that Ge was so aware of it in his own writings, shed some interesting light on the transmission of the early specialist knowledge of the Daoist traditions. These, like medical and other specialist knowledge, were secretly transmitted within family lineages. This was achieved partly by oral tradition and partly in the form of enormous family libraries. These libraries were proudly mentioned by Ge, who gave up his position as a high official to become a hermit and seek immortality.

Ge regarded these two sides of his character – aristocratic official and religious recluse – as exterior and interior aspects or the branches and the roots of one and the same truth. They were reflected in his influential work *Baopuzi* written *c*.317. This was revised *c*.330 and was split into an outer, Confucian, and an inner, Daoist, part. In the Daoist part, *Neipian,* there was a combination of many of the elements described above, including parts of the pantheon, correlative cosmology, practices of exorcism and purification, ritual, ideas of immortality, early medical body concepts, inner self-cultivation concepts, breathing techniques and Daoist philosophy.

His most important contribution to Daoism however was the elaboration of alchemical techniques and knowledge. The book describes alchemical substances such as cinnabar, mercury and gold. It contains recipes and magic formulae and provides dietary advice and instruction for meditative, ritual and sexual practices together with the exorcist and protective usage of talismans. Ge Hong was the first to publish and disseminate his family knowledge. He is the earliest known, and also the last, representative of the complex southern Daoist tradition, which had great impact on the further developments of Daoism.

Shangqing

Emerging soon after Ge Hong's death, the new powerful movement of Highest Clarity, Shangqing, combined the southern tradition of Ge Hong with elements of the northern Celestial Masters to form the first clearly

structured coherent Daoist school to base itself on a set of canonical texts and strict instructions. In contrast to the rituals of the Celestial Masters, the Shangqing concentrated on meditative practice.

The movement originated in a succession of revelations of celestial beings, originally humans who lived during Han times. These descended from the Heaven of Highest Clarity to appear to a certain Yang Xi in the years 364–370. They transmitted a number of Daoist scriptures called the *Shangqing scriptures*. These were written in a highly sophisticated literary language that surpassed the more technical or argumentative language of earlier Daoist texts. This elaborate language was a response to a fundamental problem that occurs in many forms of divination, revelation and other types of communication with divine beings: the translation of divine meaning into human language. For Yang this problem was solved in a model of several stages of transcription. Firstly, the revelations were transmitted in a celestial script, a pure form of script that originated through a material condensation of original breath at the time of the creation of the cosmos. This divine scripture consisted merely of light and breath. Since human scripture was unable to represent this subtle form, the original pure scripture was first condensed in the form of clouds, then written in golden letters by divine beings on jade and finally in a ritual process imitated in a particular calligraphy, which resembled these as much as possible. This calligraphy was treated as a relic because it was regarded as a trace of the real truth. Most of these texts were revealed to Yang by a female called Wei Huacun, who had just died thirty years before. She in turn had received the texts from an appearance of her own deceased master, Wang Bo.

Yang acted as medium for the aristocratic Xu clan, which was related to the family of Ge Hong. The movement developed in southern aristocratic circles as a counterweight to the growing power of the northern Celestial Masters. The northern Celestial Masters had moved south with the court of the Jin (defeated in 316) and were beginning to destroy local southern 'heretic' cults as part of a political programme to gain control over the independent powerful southern clans. The Shangqing countered with a variant of Daoism that claimed to be superior to the Celestial Masters in several respects. They promised their members salvation in the higher celestial spheres of Great Clarity; they produced texts of greater profundity and literary value; and they claimed to worship more powerful deities. The Shangqing teachings combined much of the southern tradition with some of the Celestial Master's teachings, some elements of local popular religion and for the first time some Buddhist elements. As the revealed scriptures were regarded as the canonical basis of truth for the Shangqing movement they

were carefully transmitted among selected members with strict rules to avoid forgery, theft and loss.

Tao Hongjing (456–536), member of an aristocratic family that had close contact to both the Ge and Xu families is regarded as the greatest collector, editor and disseminator of the corpus of Shangqing texts. In 492 at the age of thirty-six he retired to Mount Mao (Maoshan) to compile the texts, certify their authenticity and annotate them with scientific precision. At Maoshan he founded a religious organisation. Because of the enormous influence that this organisation had in the subsequent history of the Shangqing the movement is sometimes also called Maoshan Daoism and Tao regarded as its founder. During the Tang between the sixth and tenth century the Shangqing movement was by far the most powerful and influential Daoist school. It is still important today.

With a focus on visionary texts Shangqing Daoism turned its main focus away from both the communal ritualism of the Celestial Masters and the outer alchemical practices of the Ge Hong line. It moved inward, towards meditative practices of visualisation and spiritual cultivation. Performed by individual adepts in a more mystical and ecstatic way these reflected the experiences of flight and travel formulated in the earlier *Zhuangzi* and *Chuci*.

Lingbao

In reaction to the Shangqing scriptures, Ge Chaofu – a second-generation descendant of Ge Hong (who had inherited his library and was an active member of the aristocratic Shangqing community) – produced another scriptural corpus in the years 397–402. These amounted to around forty texts and came to be known as Lingbao (Numinous Treasure) scriptures.

Like the Shangqing texts they claimed a revelatory origin, in this case from the Buddhist-inspired Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Origin (Yuanshi Tianzun). The texts were intended to reform Celestial Master Daoism on the basis of more traditional religious practices. They moved away from an emphasis on the individual exploring the inner world, as found in the Shangqing texts, to return to the ideal of the communal liturgies of the Celestial Masters. The decisive difference was that the impulse for doing so came from the reception of Buddhist Mahāyāna ideas, in this case the Bodhisattva ideal of universal salvation for all beings, in which their idea of the communal rituals clearly differed from that of the Celestial Masters. The Lingbao school is the first Daoist school that extensively borrowed from Buddhist texts and terminology and also from the Celestial Masters and Shangqing traditions. In doing so they reconfigured these earlier Buddhist

and Daoist traditions in new syncretist forms that characterised later Daoist movements.

Lu Xiujing (406–477) played the same role for the Lingbao school that Tao Hongjing had played twenty years later for the Shangqing school. He collected the original Lingbao scriptures and sorted them, edited them and presented them, together with collections of scriptures of the two other schools, to the emperor in 471. Following the tripartite structure of the Buddhist canon he divided his collection of Daoist text into three caverns (*dong*) with the Lingbao scriptures placed first followed by the Shangqing scriptures and the Sanhuang (Three Sovereigns) scriptures. The inclusion of texts of the other schools followed the Buddhist Bodhisattva ideal of universal salvation. This collection of Daoist texts can be regarded as the historical starting point of a unified Daoist religion.

Lu also reorganised and standardised Lingbao ritual in precept ordinations (*jie*), purification ceremonies or meagre feasts (*zhai*), and offerings (*jiao*). In the history of Daoism the Lingbao school owes its importance mainly to its role as the provider of the predominant liturgical frameworks and ritual templates for the Daoist liturgy of all schools until today.

Inner alchemy (neidan)

From the tenth century onward another important development occurred in Daoism – the consolidation of highly esoteric doctrines and practices called inner alchemy (or inner cinnabar, *neidan*). This was in opposition to outer alchemy (*or* outer cinnabar, *waidan*), which attempted to produce an elixir of immortality from drugs and substances such as cinnabar and mercury by emulating cosmic forces of transformation in a laboratory that, for this purpose, was arranged according to cosmological correlations. The basic idea was to speed up the transformation process through precisely regulated phases of heating, so that the purification of substances, which would take a very long time, could be accomplished quickly. Inner alchemy attempted to produce an elixir of immortality (in the form of a purified inner body of subtle energy) by using the human body as a laboratory in which the circulating flow of the vital breath *qi* led to purification and transformation of the body and the growth of an Immortal Embryo within the mortal body.

The basic idea of inner alchemy was that the energies in the human body correlated to the cosmic forces of the universe. When someone was able to manipulate the body through exercises in such a way that it operated according to the same natural order as the cosmos then it was transformed into a pure organism. This transcended the confines and harmful influences of the impurities in the material body and became identical to

the cosmic Dao and thus immortal. In order to achieve such an ambitious goal the body had to be mapped in great detail. The body was described, in metaphoric ways, as a landscape (depicted in the famous diagram *Neijing tu*), as a mountain or as an alchemical laboratory.

Catherine Despeux (1994) has analysed another diagrammatic *neidan* representation of the human body, the *Xiuzhen tu*. This combined different layers of correlative forces, such as the trigrams of the *Yijing,* placed at certain points of the body; the cycle of the moon phases running around the body; mythical animals; body deities; and the system of the flow of the vital breath *qi*. The language of the inner alchemical texts is metaphorical and comprehensible only if decoded by reference to correlations.

The transformation of a coarse mortal body into a subtle immortal spiritual body was achieved in several stages. The body was constituted of three elements of different subtlety: vital essence (*jing*); vital breath (*qi*); and vital spirit (*shen*). These elements were purified and transformed into each other through controlled circulation within the body, starting from the lower abdomen, rising through the spinal column, passing the three barriers and up to the head before it then descended. Each of these cycles was divided into twelve parts, which were correlated with twelve hexagrams. Breathing rhythms in multiples of nine and six accompanied different parts of the cycle. To start with, the sexual essence *jing* – as the coarsest form of vital essence – had to be circulated very carefully to avoid leakages of this valuable vital energy. The essence was refined through regulated circulation and finally transmuted into vital breath. In the next stage vital breath was refined and transmuted into vital spirit. Texts stated that this process began spontaneously as one passed from self-conscious action into non-action. Essence, breath and spirit became unified and produced the Immortal Embryo on successful completion of this stage. During the final stage the Immortal Embryo was nourished and grew until it was free to leave the adept's body through the head. The adept then achieved immortality and unity with the Dao (Pregadio and Skar, 2000, pp. 489–90). These exercises of mind and body went along with specific dietary regulations, meditation, prayers and ritual practices.

Quanzhen

The most recent great Daoist school emerged in the twelfth century CE in the north of China and was called Quanzhen, Complete Perfection, School. Like earlier Daoist movements Quanzhen started with an individual, Wang Zhe (1113–1170), who met immortals, received sacred texts and practised

spiritual methods for cultivating longevity. During his lifetime the movement was not widespread, but under the leadership of his seven main disciples it gained momentum. It also came to the attention of the imperial court, which supported the movement so strongly that it became the most powerful religion in northern China during Yuan times, despite severe setbacks after a number of Buddhist–Daoist debates at court, which it lost.

Since 1281 the Quanzhen school (with the Celestial Masters school) has remained one of the most powerful and influential Daoist schools. It is the only government-sponsored form of monastic Daoism in the PRC today. Whereas the Celestial Masters continue to represent the liturgical traditions in Daoism, the Quanzhen school has taken the lead in continuing the tradition of inner alchemy, mainly by incorporating large elements of Confucianism and Buddhism.

The Quanzhen included the Confucian *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing*) and the Buddhist *Heartsutra* (*Xinjing*) as two of their four central texts. They made full use of Buddhist and Confucian terminology in their texts and organised their monastic rules and meditation practices mainly according to the Chan (Zen) Buddhist tradition. The White Cloud Temple (Baiyun guan) in Beijing, seat of the Chinese Daoist Association, is run by the Quanzhen school today.

Ritual

Ritual is at the core of Daoist practice and supports all other spiritual and alchemical practices. Some 800 of the 1,500 texts in the Daoist canon are liturgical texts giving instruction, and Daoist rituals include a great variety of religious acts such as commands, dances, prayers, purifications, invocations, consecration and offering formulas, hymns and perambulations. Ritual practice serves to invoke or assist positive cosmological and spiritual powers or energies to the benefit of individuals and the community. Preparation for, and performance of, rituals require a profound erudition in the complex and highly detailed rules transmitted often secretly from master to disciple in different stages of initiation.

Scripture

Scripture is highly venerated in Daoism. According to his earliest biography in the *Shiji* Laozi was a keeper of the archives of the Zhou court. When he left China for the West he is said to have written down his entire wisdom in the *Daode jing*. Scripture also played a central role in Daoist revelations as an emanation of the Dao and in the formation of Daoist schools. Collecting, editing, collating and cataloguing Daoist scriptures has been one of

the central concerns of Daoist masters from Ge Hong's catalogue of Daoist books until Zhang Yuchu, who completed the final version of the Daoist canon in 1445 following an imperial order. Supplements were added in 1607. Each historical collection of Daoist texts redefined the contents and borders of Daoism, especially *vis-à-vis* Buddhism. It is to these transmitted texts that we owe most of our historical knowledge about Daoism (Ōfuchi, 1979; Schipper and Verellen, 2004, pp. 1–52). Script is also a powerful means of protection and exorcism in the form of scriptures and *fu*-talismans. These combine astral and magical symbols with the writing of a special form of condensed Chinese characters (Drexler, 1994).

For further reading: Kaltenmark (1969); Kohn (2000); Maspero (1981); Robinet (1997); Schipper (1993); Seidel and Welch (1979).

6

Buddhism

The Introduction of Buddhism to China

In the fifth and fourth centuries BCE Buddhism was mainly confined to the Ganges valley in India, but by the middle of the third century BCE it started to spread: southward to Sri Lanka; north-west to Gandhara (Bactria) and Kashmir. From there Buddhism moved further northward to central Asia to Parthia, Sogdia, Khotan and Kucha. It must have reached China, at the latest by the first century BCE, through the so-called Silk Road. Other routes, through Assam and upper Burma to Yunnan in south-west China, through Nepal and Tibet, and by sea to the south China coast were less frequently travelled by Buddhist monks. On its way north Buddhism passed through central Asian cultures in which it was transformed: for example, the famous early Buddhist statues in Gandhara showed signs of Greek culture stemming from the influence of Alexandrians troops. The word of Buddhism spread further north through the Pamir Highlands, Hunza Mountains and the line of the Karakorum along which are some of the earliest examples of Buddhist art carved into the mountains.

Buddhism entered China at a period of political decentralisation, social disintegration and intellectual disorientation. The Han state had lost central control in 220 CE and was replaced by kingdoms that did not acknowledge any central power.

The gradual dissemination of Buddhism into China started from diverse Buddhist centres all offering rather different forms of Buddhism. As a consequence the early Buddhism with which Chinese were confronted did not constitute a coherent religious doctrine or unified system of thought but rather a confusing multiplicity of different teachings, traditions, rituals and texts, coming from very different south- and central Asian contexts. These could not be reconstructed in China (Tsukamoto, 1985, pp. 11–13).

The early Buddhist communities in China, in the first few hundred years after its arrival, probably consisted mainly of non-Chinese believers and

practitioners. Buddhism seems to have spread only very slowly to Chinese people. The growing variety of Buddhisms led, from the fourth and fifth centuries, to attempts by Chinese Buddhists to reconstruct the whole of Buddhism in accordance with their own systems and practices. From this the Chinese schools of Buddhism developed. Much of the dynamic of the development of Chinese Buddhism was an attempt to reconcile the diverging central Asian forms of Buddhism to the Chinese cultural and institutional landscape.

Archaeological findings have revealed that Buddhism did not enter China in some pure original Indian 'Hīnayāna' form, which was later transformed into more popular forms through amalgamation with Chinese popular religions in China. These findings showed that the early Indian Buddhism already comprised elements that as 'typical Chinese innovations' have been attributed to Chinese Buddhism by earlier scholars. Veneration of stūpas and supernatural Buddhas can be found in early Indian Buddhism, as can the possibility of the transfer of karma between monks and lay people. Moreover appeasement of local spirits, the accumulation of private property, magical rituals, invocation of divine powers etc. were not later elements added to an originally pure Indian Buddhism but elements of early Indian Buddhist practice from its very beginning (Sharf, 2002, p. 13; for the question of private property see Kieschnick, 2003, p. 5, and Gernet, 1995, pp. 66–93, 153ff; for the question of 'magical' devices see Hamlin, 1988 and Gómez, 1977).

The archaeological findings also help explain why these popular forms of Buddhism were not at first recognised as foreign teachings in China. Indeed they shared much with Daoism. Both religions repudiated sacrifices in their public rituals and religious exercises. Both emphasised techniques of concentration and meditation, breathing control and specific diets. Buddhists seemed to teach something like the immortality of the soul and its reincarnation in divine Heavens, similar to Daoist concepts of a paradise of immortality. Therefore Buddhism was identified as another Daoist sect at the beginning, and Daoist religious terminology was used to translate Buddhist terms. The Buddha was taken as another god from the Daoist pantheon and was associated with gods such as Xi Wangmu, the Queen mother of the Western paradise. The earliest Buddhist statues in China were found at places of local Daoist cults bearing no evidence of any Buddhist religious content or functions (Sharf, 2002, p. 22).

Buddhism was conceived as a teaching with which magic powers, immortality and salvation into the Western paradise could be attained. The dogmatic contents of Buddhism were not emphasised and the basic

differences were not comprehended (Wright, 1971, pp. 32–3). All of this aided the acceptance and spread of Buddhism in China (Tsukamoto, 1985, p. 366). Other Buddhist cultural imports such as ritual practices, temple architecture, clothing and monastic institutions were adopted without any knowledge of their original Buddhist context and meaning. The fact that the earliest Buddhist texts were not translated into classical literary Chinese but in language very close to the vernacular idiom of the time shows the social milieu in which Buddhism first settled (Zürcher, 1977; 1991). Thus Chinese Buddhism in its early stages had no problem with its position *vis-à-vis* indigenous Chinese religions because it had not developed any position of its own. It was rather a medley of different strands of Buddhist traditions, which tried to settle in the Chinese territories.

Among the vast Buddhist literature, texts dealing with meditation techniques were translated first because they seemed to deal with similar things as Daoist religion. They could be translated and appropriated more easily than others. Buddhist thoughts and terms were first translated into the terminology of Daoism and Neo-Daoism. This changed many basic meanings of the terms and led to a legacy of Daoist preconceptions within the terminology of Chinese Buddhism, which seriously affected all later developments (Lai, 1995, pp. 277–81; Demiéville, 1956). The Buddhist concept of emptiness was translated as Daoist nothingness (*wu*), dharma was translated as *dao*, nirvana as non-action (*wuwei*). The Confucian concept of filial piety and obedience (*xiaoxun*) was taken as translation for the much more general concept of *śīla* (moral).

This translation technique became known as '*geyi*' (matching the meaning) and comprised not only singular terms but also systematic operations such as the grouping of several words to numeric units: the five Buddhist precepts for example were identified with the five Confucian virtues. In Chinese translations of Buddhist texts words that appeared offensive to Confucian morals such as kiss or embrace (which in the Indian context were gestures of respect and veneration) were concealed. The relatively high status of women in Buddhism was changed; the rule for example that a man should support his wife was changed into the rule that a man should *control* his wife (Wright, 1971, pp. 36–7 with reference to Nakamura, 1957).

Another major problem of translation was the use of terms that where ambiguous and led to misunderstandings, which could not be solved systematically (Lai, 1979). The *Mouzi lihuo lun*, written by Chinese Buddhists for Chinese readers in the second century CE, reflects central topics of these early discussions and shows didactic attempts to explain Buddhism to a Chinese public (Keenan, 1994). In general those elements that appeared

familiar to Chinese tradition were absorbed. The Buddhist teaching to abandon desire as a cause of suffering for example was new to the Chinese. Practices such as meditations on different stages of the decomposition of a dead body were unacceptable to Chinese. However breathing exercises, well known from Daoism, were practised.

The earliest Buddhist texts translated into Chinese were not about the four noble truths, the eightfold path, chain of causation, *nirvāňa* or *anātman*. They were rather about breathing control and concentration exercises – a typical example being the 'Sūtra on the Nine Causes of a Sudden Death' (*Jiuheng jing*), in which instructions for proper diet and moral directives were given, all of which were not specifically Buddhist in the first place.

As Buddhism spread in China more and more problems occurred with this sort of cultural translation, while the basic cultural differences and contradictions became increasingly obvious. This complicated Buddhism's assimilation into the Chinese sphere. Fundamental premises (which formed the consensual basis of the various teachings in India) such as the supposition of a cycle of rebirth, of karmic dynamics and a complex structured cosmology involving various spheres of heavens and hell had to be made plausible in the Chinese context. It was difficult to convince Chinese people devoted to traditional knowledge, long life and their own ancestors to accept the Buddhist view that they lived in ignorance, that the world, their perception of the world, and even their self, were just illusions, which should be abandoned, that one should leave the family to follow the Buddha without caring about parents or ancestors.

Chinese scholars who studied a canon of five basic books (which many of them knew by heart) and believed in the superiority of their ancient language and script were unlikely to be convinced that Buddhism had hundreds of equally important texts written in a non-Chinese language. This was especially problematic as these texts were regarded by Buddhists as not being important in themselves but merely served as a means to an end outside of the texts. To Buddhists books like all other things were considered to have no reality and truth of their own.

The traditional Chinese world-view, in which cultivation of the body played a central role both as a value in itself and as a means for salvation, rejected the Buddhist idea that the body was just an illusion, empty and without significance. For Buddhists the only goal was the insight and realisation of the Buddha nature, which in itself was empty; that their ultimate goal was *nirvāňa,* which could easily appear as the opposite of immortality, as the total extinction of the self. People who were accustomed to venerating

life, who celebrated spring and the forces of fertility, opposed the basic Buddhist concept that life is suffering and something to be overcome.

Chinese people were not used to giving money to people wandering as part of their religious obligation. Even if a young Chinese were convinced by Buddhist teaching it would be a greater step to cut his hair, leave the family, live in celibacy and wander around begging for food. Abandoning the family and living in celibacy were considered unfilial in the Chinese Confucian tradition, so Buddhist monks would be blamed for following an immoral, subversive and parasitic lifestyle with 'barbarian' origins – one that was neither productive for the family nor for the state.

There was also a problem of language. The Chinese language, with its non-inflectional syllables, is best expressed in a dense style using illustrative formulations, comparisons and directness. The Indian language uses abstract concepts and discourses, applies ornaments, has a highly systematised grammar and organises thoughts in a rather mathematical way. Therefore translations of Buddhist text, which had begun by 165 CE, caused problems from the start.

The Formation of an Indigenised Chinese Buddhism

It took Buddhism until *c*.300 CE to form its own identity and become an independent force in China. It was a further hundred years before it emancipated itself conceptually as a religious tradition in its own right with its own language. This then set new standards in the history of Chinese religions.

The indigenisation, which took place in the fourth and fifth centuries, has to be understood against the background of political events, which shaped the further development of Buddhism. With the fall of the capital Chang'an in 316 the north of China was occupied by non-Chinese rulers who, in short-lived dynasties, fought each other and tried to rule according to the Chinese model. The greater part of the Chinese élite fled southward. The defeat provoked general doubts about the cultural superiority and strength of the Confucian doctrine and led to an increased interest in Buddhism. Buddhism was thus disseminated among the élite in the south.

In the north Buddhism was considered by the new foreign rulers to be part of the state, and its function was to build an ideological basis for political unity. Being foreigners themselves a number of Indian Buddhists could identify with, and co-operated well with, the new foreign rulers. Buddhist councillors provided the rulers with magical skills for the control of nature, for military success and for the prediction of the future. The Buddhists in the north between 220 and 618 were therefore very much dependent on the ruling house which employed them as rain invocators, calendar

specialists, doctors and councillors. Buddhist monks therefore replaced the educated Confucian élite. This functionalisation of Buddhism as a sort of state church in northern China shaped the tradition of Northern Buddhism for many centuries to come.

From the fifth century on the Buddhist position was challenged repeatedly not so much by Confucians but by Daoists, who tried to win the ruler's favour. Buddhists often struggled in highly competitive public debates with Daoists (Kohn, 1995; Gentz, 2006a). For these polemical debates Daoists wrote texts, such as the *Huahu jing*, in which they claimed that Buddhism was actually the teaching of Laozi, which had spread to India and now returned in a wrong and misunderstood form (Wang, 1934; Zürcher, 1959, pp. 288–320; Deeg, 2003, pp. 209–34). Buddhists responded to these criticisms and attacks with their own treatises in which all the Daoist arguments were confronted and refuted in detail. Many of these rather polemical works were collected in the *Hongming ji* and *Guang hongming ji* (Schmidt-Glintzer, 1976).

One of the earliest Buddhist responses was the *Zhengwu lun* written by an anonymous writer probably in the early fourth century (Link, 1961). This treatise, written in a quasi-dialogical form, quoted criticism of a non-Buddhist (*yiren*/*tīrthika*) and the Buddhist response, which corrected the maligner (*zheng wu*). The dispute shows a lack of clear doctrinal distinctions, which was typical for the early profile of the different schools: 'The Taoist antagonist cites Buddhist theories in order to disprove Buddhism, and the Buddhist apologist sounds like a Confucian strongly influenced by Taoism' (ibid., p. 138). Thus the Buddhist argument was based more on the Confucian classics and the *Daode jing* than on Buddhist texts – the theory of a fate determined by *yin* and *yang* being accepted by Buddhists, as were basic Confucian assumptions and values. In a counter to the *huahu* theory, Laozi was presented as a disciple of the Buddha.

In serious debates between Daoists and Buddhists, which were fought at court in front of the emperor, similar strategies and arguments were formulated against each other (Garrett, 1994). New scriptures such as the *Laozi kaitian jing* and its Buddhist counterparts, the *Zhoushu yiji* and the *Han faben neizhuan*, were forged in order to prove their greater age and thus their authority over the other tradition (Tang, 1983, p. 387). These polemical debates continued through the Tang dynasty.

Despite these, from the fourth century increasingly confident Buddhism formulated its own position against Chinese tradition, Daoism and the Chinese state. At the same time Buddhism developed its own schools and created a Chinese Buddhist terminology. After the great translator Kumārajīva arrived in the northern capital Chang'an in 401 the translation

of Buddhist texts reached a new level of professionalism. Huge translation teams were formed to discuss and control translations in a more scientific manner. The traditional Daoist terms used for translation were displaced by a new Chinese Buddhist terminology based on Sanskrit linguistic features including the syntax and phonology of the Indian language (Meier, 1972).

The foreign rulers of the Northern Dynasties financed the construction of Buddhist monasteries as well as of great complexes of cave temples such as Yungang in Shanxi (in which several of the huge Buddha statues embody physiognomies of some of the Northern Wei rulers). However they also invented new systems for temple control and for the first time appointed clerical officers to serve the interests of the state. The first great persecutions of Buddhism, in 446–452 and 574–578, occurred under their rule.

In the south the situation was reversed. Many educated Confucian scholars and sons of rich aristocratic families who did not get an official position in the (much smaller) southern territory turned to Buddhism, where the religion was independent of the state. Southern Buddhism therefore developed as an alternative intellectual institution that challenged the official scholarly élite and sometimes the court. Building on the 'pure conversation', *qingtan*, tradition of Neo-Daoism (the so-called 'Study of the Dark', *xuanxue*) central topics of the earlier Neo-Daoist debate on being and non-being, on wisdom, emotions and sagacity were now discussed within an emerging élite Buddhist context. They were connected to Buddhist topics such as emptiness or wisdom. Answers and theories relating to Chinese traditional questions were developed on the basis of Buddhist texts. These, much greater in number than the available Daoist texts, and rich in sophisticated literary and philosophical expressions, were highly attractive for many members of the southern aristocracy (Tsukamoto, 1985, p. 402).

From c.290 Buddhism thus reacted to Chinese concepts, translated Buddhist concepts with Chinese Neo-Daoist terms and began to develop a specific Chinese tinge. With the support of the court and finance from the aristocratic clans, the Southern Buddhists had built some 1,700 monasteries and ordained 80,000 monks by the year 400. The court also tried to exercise religious policy by employing Buddhists as advisers and officials in secular matters and by restricting the growing power of the Buddhist clergy. Therefore in the south, as in the north, an indigenous Chinese Buddhist tradition developed (Zürcher, 1959, p. 75).

From the fifth century the self-confidence of Buddhism as an indigenous Chinese teaching was also reflected in the development of its strong economic power, especially in northern China. This had far-reaching

impact on Chinese material culture (Kieschnick, 2003) but it also developed into a fiscal burden for the Chinese economy from for example great works of Buddhist art (the huge grottoes in Yungang and Longmen were built between the fifth and eighth centuries) (Gernet, 1995, pp. 14–25). The Buddhist monasteries were not only places of education, teaching and religious practice but also economic centres for grain storage and treasuries. They also wielded religious and political power for which they were often severely criticised and as a consequence were attacked by the state (Gernet, 1995, p. 15).

The immunity of Buddhist monasteries against imperial elimination was dependent on their status. In general three different types of Buddhist institutions can be distinguished, which, according to their different sponsors, enjoyed different degrees of protection:

- The imperial sponsored large monasteries received their names through imperial order and were subsidised by regular donations. They were accepted as official places of Buddha worship. Ordained monks and nuns were selected by imperial institutions and controlled by an imperially appointed clergy. These privileged monasteries served the state through their ritual practice (Gernet, 1995, pp. 4, 303–6).
- Monasteries founded and supported by the local élite, who were also responsible for the control of these institutions. These monasteries did not enjoy an official status, but were tolerated by the court. Whether or not they fell victim to the regular imperial anti-religious campaigns depended on the power and influence of the local clans. Since the main aim in founding these monasteries was the gaining of merit and the receiving of blessing, the main interest of the locals lay in the continuous maintenance of the religious service (Kieschnick, 2003, pp. 185–99). Powerful clans or monks therefore exerted pressure on the court to achieve official approval for these monasteries and official ordination for the residing monks and nuns.
- Small Buddhist temples erected in villages by the village community and financed by donations and offerings given in exchange for their religious services. These institutions spread everywhere and were virtually uncontrollable. Innumerable anonymous variants of Buddhism developed in these village temples, which mixed different sorts of Buddhist with local popular religious traditions. Their existence depended mainly on the degree of control that local magistrates were able to exercise. During anti-religious campaigns thousands of these small temples and shrines were destroyed or turned into secular buildings, to be rebuilt and reconverted later on.

Buddhist monks could be found at the imperial court as well as in the countryside, in huge monastic communities and as individuals in villages and woods. This explains the enormous variety and diversity of Buddhist teachings, schools and the different features of Buddhism in China, which strongly depended on local characteristics. It also shows the different ways in which Chinese Buddhism built relationships with other religious traditions.

At a local level Buddhism sought pragmatic solutions so as to integrate best into social and economic structures (Gernet, 1995, p. 250). Big monastic organisations, in contrast, as centres of control and representatives of the Buddhist tradition were more likely to insist on the differences and thereby risk conflict with imperial and other religious institutions.

Large monasteries had up to 300 monks or nuns; average monasteries 20–50 monks or nuns plus 10–20 novices; while small temples retained only two or three monks or were organised by local temple committees (Gernet, 1995, p. 9). Many monks or nuns did not dwell in their monasteries; the affiliation was a purely formal one, which allowed them official registration and, on that basis, exempted them from tax payment, military and labour services. Many monks and nuns were not registered however as the number of ordinands was officially limited.

Most of the monks and nuns ordained in the regular large-scale state ordinations (which took place every few years) were not new monks. Their ordination did not add to the overall number of monks in the empire, rather it gave a large number of unregistered monks and nuns a new official status (Gernet, 1995, p. 10). The percentage of (officially registered) Buddhist monks and nuns in relation to the (officially registered) population is relatively constant throughout at 0.5–1%. In times of financial shortages (for example 534–574 and around 830) the state would sell ordination certificates to rich peasants, who by that means could evade taxation and labour services. The number of ordained monks would rise and the state would acquire money in the short term. Then official persecutions (such as the big persecutions in 574–577 and 845) brought the numbers down again considerably. Gernet has convincingly demonstrated the economic reasons for the rise of ordination numbers as well as for the major persecutions, which also determined the position and relationship of Buddhism towards other religious traditions in China (Gernet, 1995, pp. 11–12).

Integrative Efforts of the Different Chinese Buddhist Schools

The early integration of different Buddhist approaches into a Chinese conceptual framework can be seen as an attempt by various Chinese Buddhist communities to create a consistent Chinese version of the different central

and south Asian Buddhist teachings. These needed to be comprehensible within the frame of Chinese common language and culture. Three interrelated factors – identification, reformulation and further interpretation – may have caused the development of what can be called Southern Chinese Buddhist perspectives, which started with the study of Buddhist wisdom texts (*Prajñāpāramitā*), translated already in the third and fourth centuries. The obvious similarity between the doctrine of the emptiness of all things and certain Neo-Daoist concepts of nothingness suggested an identification of these two quite distinct doctrines (Tsukamoto, 1985, p. 369). The chaotic and often very cryptic transmission of this Buddhist doctrine necessitated its reformulation and systematisation into comprehensible Chinese terminology for the Chinese context; because of its opacity this left sufficient space for different translations. The Neo-Daoist terminology of the early very free translations of Buddhist texts led to associations and understandings that began indigenous Buddhist traditions in China.

In the fourth and fifth centuries these terminological, philosophical and intellectual approaches were criticised by representatives of the new Buddhist centres in the middle provinces at Xiangyang, Jiangling and Lushan. These centres were associated with the ministry of two leading figures: Shi Daoan and his main disciple Shi Huiyuan (Zürcher, 1959, Chapter 4). Daoan was among the first to formulate guidelines for translators, in which he systematically defined five types of text deviations and three difficulties (Meier, 1972, pp. 42–4). This new focus on philological matters led to a rejection of the usage of Daoist concepts for Buddhist terms. It was also influential in the school of the great translator Kumārajīva (Zürcher, 1959, p. 203), who had a constant fear that his interpretations and commentaries might not exactly correspond to the actual intention of the canonical texts (ibid., p. 187).

Daoan began a new tradition of Chinese Buddhism, highly conscious of the differences between the indigenous Chinese and the Indian Buddhist teachings. This becomes explicit in a letter written by his disciple Huiyuan to Huan Xuan in 403: 'Furthermore, the *kasāya* is no court attire, nor is the *pātra* a vessel appropriate for ancestral temples. Just as the civil and the military have different forms, so the foreign and the Chinese should not mix' (Tsukamoto, 1985, p. 841). The new hermeneutic approach of Daoan developed in politically independent areas, with local rulers. The resultant Buddhist traditions were independent from the mainstream discourses of the Southern and Northern courts and were more creative in moulding their own intellectual trends. On the basis of this conscious creation of an 'original Indian' Buddhism in China they combined elements of the Northern

traditions, such as veneration, meditation, breathing and magical-religious practices, and monastery rules, with elements from Southern Buddhism, such as literary traditions, fine arts and philosophical speculation. Because Daoan and Huiyuan and most of the Buddhist converts had a strong background in Daoist or Confucian texts (Demiéville, 1956, pp. 24–7), they used elements from the Confucian and Daoist traditions in a very conscious way by treating them not as identical but as analogous elements. The biography of Huiyuan reports:

> When he was twenty-four (357 CE), he once attended a sermon where a guest who listened to the explanation (of the scripture) raised objection against the concept of transcendent Truth (*shi xiang*) (as explained by Daoan). The debate lasted some time, but the (opponent's) doubt and lack of understanding still increased. Then Huiyuan mentioned a (corresponding) concept taken from *Zhuangzi* by way of analogy whereupon the deluded (opponent) reached a clear understanding (of the truth). Daoan henceforward especially allowed Huiyuan to keep the secular literature (for this purpose) (*Gaoseng zhuan* Chapter 6; trans. Zürcher, 1959, p. 241).

This passage shows the way in which teachings of other religious traditions were used as useful but clearly distinct supports.

The integration of the Northern and Southern traditions of Buddhism led to the most creative and innovative phase of Chinese Buddhism in the Sui and Tang dynasties. With restored unity in the empire, the Chinese regained self-confidence and encouraged the appropriation of the foreign teaching into Chinese culture. The new philological self-assurance facilitated replacement of Indian concepts by Chinese ones, inferred exegetically from the texts, Chinese experience and cultural concerns. Text interpretation began to use metaphors and parables; it therefore did not follow established Indian scholastic traditions, with their syllogistic arguments, that had dominated Chinese interpretations in the fifth and sixth centuries. Great Chinese Buddhists were not seen as mere followers of the early Indian masters but as great masters in their own right – as founders and patriarchs of new Chinese schools of Buddhism. A number of Chinese school traditions (*zong*) were established in this time. Some such as the Sanlun or the Faxiang schools (which were Chinese scholastic versions of the Indian schools of Madhyamaka or Yogācarā) were short-lived. Others such as the Tiantai, the Huayan, the Pure Land (*jingtu*) and the Chan (Japanese Zen) schools survived,

mainly because they accomplished an integration of Chinese traditional elements in the following three main ways.

Tiantai and Huayan schools

In reaction to the diversity of Buddhist scriptures and teachings, theories were developed by the Tiantai and Huayan traditions that explained how the diverse Indian Buddhist scriptures and schools could form one coherent teaching of the Buddha. Traditional Chinese classification methods were used to integrate systematically all the other major schools (and sometimes even the Daoist and Confucian traditions) into an encompassing hierarchical order. In the Buddhist context these systematisations were called *panjiao* (Doctrinal Classifications). Three major criteria for classification were used in these *panjiao* systems to constitute and justify an order in which their own school ranked at the top of the systematic order: chronology; classification according to the Buddha's teaching methods; classification by doctrine (Ōchō, 1981; Liu, 1981; 1988).

Although different criteria were used to achieve different rankings of the Buddhist schools, the basic methodology was taken over from older Chinese traditions of correlative classifications of the world. They were used, in the Confucian way, to advance a school's position within the great variety of philosophies and religions in China and to create political unity. The unifying approach was based on the assumption that all these differences were mere variants of an underlying unity – an ideal that could never be achieved but only be approached and was best represented by the school ranked highest in the system.

This continuation of the old Confucian strategy of unification was expressed clearly by Zongmi (780–841), honoured as the fifth patriarch of the Huayan scholastic tradition and of the Heze-line of Southern Chan, author of the doctrinal classification treatise *Yuanren lun* (*Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity*) (Gregory, 1995, pp. 4–8, 80–104). In order to legitimise his approach Zongmi referred to the best-known Confucian phrase from the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*): 'together they return to the one source' (*tong gui yi yuan*) (Gregory, 1995, p. 189). Another Confucian strategy used by Zongmi can be found in his correlation of the *panjiao* stages with a cosmogonic process through which the order of Buddhist teachings became equivalent to the order of the cosmos (ibid., pp. 21–4). Zongmi was the first to include Confucian and Daoist teachings into his scheme. These were placed at the first, and lowest, stage of his hierarchical *panjiao* order.

This systematic integration of different traditions seems to be one of the main features of Chinese Buddhism, especially the Tiantai school. Aside

from the *panjiao* classification methodology other strategies to unify diversity were emphasised in Chinese Buddhist traditions.

A central concept of explaining doctrinal contradictions in different Buddhist texts, and of conforming different strands of Buddhism in China, was the development of Nāgārjuna's doctrine of two truths (*er di*). In the Chinese theory of the two truths, the highest truth (*paramārtha*, *zhen)* lay beyond language, while the truth that can be expressed (*saṇvṛti*, *su*) referred to and was part of the worldly reality (Swanson, 1989). This binary division into something true, essential, unchanging etc. and into something temporary, functional, changing etc. was developed into a long series of analytical pairs of opposition. These were used in discussion through the ages and often adapted to analogous Daoist philosophical pairs of oppositions: for example, being (*you*) and non-being (*wu*); activity (*wei*) and non-activity (*wuwei*); concrete (*shi*) and emptiness (*xu*); the one (*yi*) and the multiple (*wanwu*). This repositioning within a Daoist discourse made the character of matter more prominent than it was in the Indian traditions, in which the theory of two truths mostly referred to epistemological and discursive questions and not to ontological questions of materiality and existence (Lai, 1978, pp. 341–2). Zongmi used this binary division in his differentiation of temporal/provisional (*quan*) and conclusive/definite (*shi*) teachings (Gregory, 1995, p. 73; Hoffmann and Hu, 1997, pp. 49–50).

Hanshan Deqing (1546–1623) applied this structure in regard to the teachings of Daoism and Confucianism in the well-known pair of the oppositions of '*ti*' (essence) and '*yong*' (function) (Hsu, 1979, p. 151). Lu Longqi (1630–1693) attacked Wang Yangming arguing that he took the actual (*shi*) of Chan Buddhism but followed Confucian namings (*ming*). In the *Treatise on the Two Truths* prince Zhao of the Liang dynasty (502–557) correlated the true (*zhen*) with the truth of the highest meaning (*diyi yidi*) and with the concrete (*shi*) of equality (*pingdeng*) as well as with the unattainable and unborn. On the side of the second truth he placed the common (*su*), the worldly (*shi*), the collected manifold (*ji*) and the differentiated, which moves, changes and has beginning and end. He then quoted the *Mahāparinirvāňa Sūtra* with the correlation of the highest truth with the insight (*zhi*) of those who have left the world and the lower truth with the insight of the worldly people (Lai, 1978, pp. 343–4). Thus the multiplicity of the (Buddhist) doctrines, including even the four noble truths, resulted from a worldly perspective that was unable to grasp the one and equal first truth of the unity of all these teachings. In the Indian context this was, for Nāgārjuna and others, an epistemological problem. In the Chinese context this was often interpreted within the ontological dichotomy of being (*you*)

and non-being (*wu*), assuming that beyond the lower worldly reality (which was not truth) would be another higher and ultimate reality.

The Buddhist concept of 'expedient means' (*upāya*, *fangbian*) is a pedagogical technique central to many Chinese traditions, especially the Tiantai school, with its focus on the Lotus Sutra. The concept fitted the above discussed pluralistic understanding of truth perfectly. According to the theory of 'expedient means', the Buddha had explained one and the same truth in different forms to different people, according to their level of understanding. This helped them in the most efficient way on their path to enlightenment. This technique was discussed in several major Mahāyāna-sutras (above all the Lotus Sutra) as one of the central messages. The multiplicity and contradictions of the Buddhist doctrine could thus, on the basis of the 'two truths' model and the technique of 'expedient means', be related to a unified doctrine.

Accordingly one of the main innovations of these new emerging Chinese schools was the special emphasis on the Indian concept of the one and unified Buddha nature (*tathāgatagarbha/buddhadhātu*, *rulaizang/foxing*) in all sentient beings. This was now understood as something substantial, which lay in every person and thus unified the diversity of beings on a very fundamental level. Two aspects of this innovation are worth analysis.

Firstly, the Buddha nature (*foxing*) related to the early concept of human nature (*xing*). This was at the core of a major debate in Confucian philosophy (from the third century BCE on) and was directly related to the other central debate, on sagacity and wisdom (Graham, 1967, pp. 59–65). It also provided a unifying centre within the diversity of sentient beings, thus continuing earlier Neo-Daoist Xuanxue debates.

Secondly, the process of interpreting abstract Indian concepts increasingly in terms of substance was another central feature of the sinification of Buddhism. In general Indian Buddhist concepts of emptiness and illusion were transformed into Chinese concepts of substance, which were concrete, illustrative and real. Dushun (557–640), the first patriarch of the Chinese Huayan school, translated the Indian notion of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) with the Chinese term *li*, the cosmic pattern of moral order, and thus took away much of its negativity. The term *dharma* expressing a concept that de-substantiates phenomena into abstract parts was translated as *shi* (event), emphasising the active and sensory aspect of the things in the world. Spirit and world were taken as permeating each other. This increased the value of the world as a glorious part of the ultimate reality and as potential means to or even condition of achieving enlightenment. This revaluation of the material world led in turn to the development of a specific Buddhist material culture in

China. Kieschnick has divided this into the three aspects of 'sacred power', 'symbolism' and 'merit'; his fourth category, 'accidentals and incidentals', is not so important in this context (Kieschnick, 2003). In the field of language Gimello has shown how a shift from an apophatic to a cataphatic discourse occurred as part of the sinification of Buddhism, with its tendency towards the positive rather than the negative (Gimello, 1976).

The Pure Land (jingtu) *school*

'The Chinese Pure Land school developed earlier Indian Pure Land traditions based on three main Pure Land Sutras by integrating devotional practices from Chinese popular religions. Its main emphasis lay on Buddha worship and salvation in the Western paradise, a notion that was partly influenced by earlier Chinese religious traditions such as the worship of Xi Wangmu, the Queen Mother of the West (Loewe, 1979, pp. 86–126). The school's basic idea of sudden enlightenment and immediate salvation in the Pure Land was probably inspired by Daoist concepts. It shaped the Southern Buddhist tradition especially, whereas Northern Buddhism kept to the Indian concept of gradual enlightenment (Gregory, 1987).

Around 370 Daon assembled seven disciples in front of a statue of Buddha Maitreya and they vowed to be reborn in Tuşita-Heaven, in which Maitreya resided, so they could obtain his permanent guidance and inspiration (Zürcher, 1959, p. 194). Likewise, in 402 Huiyuan (334–417) assembled more than a hundred disciples before an image of Buddha Amitābha and they vowed in front it to be reborn in Sukhāvatī, the blessed realm in which he resided (ibid., p. 219). These events marked the beginning of the Chinese Pure Land school, which later further developed the idea that immortality in the Pure Land could be achieved.

The Pure Land doctrine became very popular from the seventh century and was on its broad popular basis probably mainly understood in terms of Daoist culture. Its most important philosopher, Tanluan (476–542), who was strongly influenced by Daoism, travelled to meet Tao Hongjing, the great master of Shangqing Daoism and received the *Scripture on Immortals* from him (Ch'en, 1973, pp. 343–5). Later, when he became the most important teacher of the Pure Land school, Tanluan still made use of and quoted Confucian and Daoist texts. In one passage, for example, he explained the efficacy of the invocation of Amitābha's name by referring to a passage in the Daoist text *Baopuzi* written by Ge Hong in which incantations were given for the healing of illness and protection against harm.

In his doctrinal teachings Tanluan emphasised the power of the Buddha vow over the rest of the Buddhist practice to a greater extent than the Pure

Land sutras did. According to Tanluan an invocation of the name Amitābha uttered with serious belief sufficed for rebirth into the Pure Land. He explained Nāgārjuna's 'Path of easy practice' (*yixing*), as laid out in the ninth chapter of the *Discourse on the Ten Stages*, *Daśabhūmika-vibhāṣā sastra*, as follows:

> 'The way of easy practice' means that simply by resolving to be reborn in the Pure Land, through faith in the Buddha, and by availing oneself of the power of the Buddha's vow one attains rebirth in that Pure Land (trans. Tanaka, 1990, p. 18).

Chan (Japanese Zen) school

Daoist elements were also integrated in the Chan tradition. These were often traced back to the Daoist philosophical work *Zhuangzi* as they were full of the wit and unorthodox forms of a particular part of the Chan tradition (Knaul, 1986; Wang, 2003; Wu, 1982, pp. 3–4, fn. 7+8). The figure of Confucius, as represented in the Analects (*Lunyu*), appeared as a precursor of later Chan masters (Wagner, 1991, pp. 455–64). The main features taken into the Chan tradition were use of paradox language in order to undermine the limitations of linguistic expression. This linguistic practice was based on a particular philosophy of language that considered language, and even more so texts, as insufficient tools to express deeper insights and higher truths. Therefore they were used in specific coded, hidden and dark ways by sages who wanted to transmit their insights to later generations. This philosophy found expression in such early texts as the *Daode jing* and the *Yijing* and also had reflections in the Confucian *Analects* and the exegetical tradition of the early Confucian and Daoist classics. Sceptic, relativist, iconoclastic and deconstructionist strategies were related to fixed concepts, definitions, values and rituals. There was an emphasis on spontaneity, as opposed to controlled modes and expressions of behaviour, argument and thought. Finally there was a focus on meditation, mysticism and emptiness.

Chan gained a number of its specific Chinese elements through the fact that it was a social movement of lower and middle class members of the Buddhist community in the south. It was an expression of opposition against northern court Buddhism and clerical pomp in the two capitals. In the inner-school polemics were a number of topics that were later used to classify different traditions within Chinese Buddhism: south versus north, subitism versus gradualism, cultic-practical versis scholastic etc.

Huineng (638–713) was one of the first Chan members to emphasise sudden enlightenment and to concentrate on more worldly aspects of Buddhist practice. His teaching was collected and edited by Shenhui (670–762)

in the *Platform Sutra* (Jorgensen, 2005). With Mazu (709–788), Linji (?–867) and later Chan masters further Chinese elements such as manual labour for monks were introduced. These were in stark contrast to all Indian traditions of Buddhism.

Scholars have shown the importance of the sacred power of material things for the later Chan tradition, which merged with Pure Land traditions (Sharf and Sharf, 2001). However an important impulse to the early Chan tradition was also the iconoclastic momentum that turned against any concretisation of theory, conceptualisation and thought, in the study of texts or in religious practice and institutions in general. This stemmed from a radical understanding of an all-present universal Buddha nature, which was accessible through other means than the study of texts and the practice of rituals – namely introspection and a direct and spontaneous transmission from mind to mind between master and disciple.

Meditation (*chan*) techniques and the line of succession from Chan masters played an important role in Chan Buddhism as a counter tradition to Confucian genealogies (Jorgensen, 1987). Bernard Faure in his work on the Chan tradition has shown how much of the concept of immediate enlightenment in the Chan tradition has to be understood as rhetoric and how important the practice of rituals and text study remained for the Southern Chan traditions (Faure, 1988; 1991; 1993; 2003). However with its emphasis on different paths to enlightenment, which focused strongly on common everyday things and actions, the Chan tradition also continued the Huayan and Pure Land approaches. These concentrated on paradoxical language (Wright, 1982, pp. 335–6) and, with their focus on the material world as a blessed Buddha world, further opened the Buddhist tradition to Daoist concepts of paradox through which insight into truths beyond language and reasoning should be achieved. Like the Daoist tradition, Chan through these means also expressed opposition against the other established religious (including Buddhist), political and moral institutions. The great founding patriarch of the Chan tradition, Bodhidharma, and many of the later Chan patriarchs were represented as deviant and oppositional symbols of resistance against common habits and established worldly institutions through the collection of anecdotes and biographical literature (Faure, 1986). These efforts towards integration generally tended to favour Chinese vitalism against Indian spiritualism, and showed a preference for a reconciliation with worldly matters.

Around the eighth century a further change of perspective occurred in Chinese Buddhism, which is related to the veneration of Chan Buddhist patriarchs. Such veneration had a twofold effect: Buddhist history was

henceforth mainly written in the form of hagiographies; and a new sacred geography was established, which tracked the travels of famous Buddhist monks and replaced the earlier traditional paths of pilgrimages that had followed local traditions or travels to India. China and not India came to be regarded as the centre of the Buddhist world. The Chan concentration on its own patriarchs, rather than on the Indian texts, restructured Chinese Buddhism. Chan Buddhism was also particularly radical in dismissing local traditions. In contrast to Daoism, which incorporated local religious symbol systems as subsystems of their own system, Chan monks converted or suppressed local deities, destroyed places of local religious memory and decoded or re-coded local legends (Faure, 1993, p. 157).

Chinese Buddhism after the Ninth Century

By the tenth century all the major Chinese schools of Buddhism had been established. Buddhism and Daoism were both established orthodoxies and, despite their rivalry in regard to imperial support, they shared a common interest in maintaining the political system. This best preserved the social structures that supported them and of which they had become an intrinsic part. As such Buddhism and Daoism co-operated with the state at the local level and opposed any popular cults and religious movements that were outside state-controlled orthodoxy (Seiwert and Ma, 2003, p. 161).

The great persecution of Buddhism in 845 by Emperor Wuzong (in which 260,000 monks and nuns were ordered to become lay people, while 4,600 temples and 40,000 shrines were destroyed) brought an end to Buddhism prosperity and to many of the Buddhist schools in China. Chinese Buddhism never recovered from this persecution. Only two schools, Chan and Pure Land, remained, because of their independent central institutions and their main focus on religious practice.

The concurrent growth of the Confucian influence on the court, articulated for example in Han Yu's (768–824) anti-Buddhist pamphlets, combined with a veneration of Laozi to whom the Tang imperial family (because of their identical surname Li) had a special relationship, may be the main reasons why the major institutions of élite Buddhism were no longer supported by the Chinese state. Albert Welter has shown how Buddhism, despite efforts of highly respected representatives such as Zanning (910–1001), was no longer able to play a full role in the Chinese élite's discourse because it was denied a place in the new intellectual order from Song times. The intellectual debate switched as the élite began to define its own identity through a return to native values and to sources connected to Confucian civil and literary culture (*wen*) (Welter, 1999).

This did not however lead to a total decline of Buddhist culture (Gregory and Getz, 1999, pp. 1–20; Weidner, 2001). We rather should talk of a transformation of Buddhism in China, which continued to influence Chinese intellectual and aesthetic culture in new forms of popular mass organisations and developed entirely novel syncretistic forms of popular Buddhism (Overmyer, 1976; 1999a; 1999b; Yü, 1981, p. 4). Its relation to the other religious traditions changed because these syncretistic forms incorporated indigenous religious traditions. In combination with messianic and millenarian ideas, some of the new Buddhist movements, especially in Ming and Qing times, became political and were persecuted harshly by the Chinese state. The resultant religious policy is in many aspects still in use today (Seiwert and Ma, 2003; Ter Haar, 1992).

Another change was that Chinese Buddhism started to construct its own school traditions through a new historiography, in order to keep its own identity *vis à vis* the other established religions and within a process of an increasing syncretism (Schmidt-Glintzer, 1982; Jan, 1964). Also, following the revival of Buddhist monasticism in the seventh century (Chen, 2006), new forms of organisation and rules were defined in new codices of monastic rules (Yifa, 2002; Foulk, 1993). Additionally Buddhist forms of popular religion emerged, with their own scriptures, rites and doctrines (Overmyer, 1976).

The reformation of Confucianism, into an inward-looking Song Neo-Confucianism, incorporated a number of Buddhist concepts in its interpretation of the canonical Confucian texts. A similar development in the Daoist alchemical tradition was the creation of the deeply Chan-influenced Quanzhen school of Daoism. Thus the claim of the 'harmonious unity of the Three Teachings' (Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism), 'sanjiao heyi', started to be used increasingly in imperial edicts and religious texts, which suggests equality between the religions. The Buddhist perspective did not show any specific profile in this genre of *sanjiao* texts. As with the other traditions Buddhism argued for the superiority of its own tradition by using the same arguments that had been developed for inter-religious polemical debates for the *panjiao* schemes and for the public *sanjiao* debates at court. In so doing Buddhism sought to secure its own position in the established threefold scheme of religions.

Nevertheless, within this secure framework, a further important shift of Buddhism took place in Ming times. This was through a development of the Confucian tradition towards the self and the mind. It culminated in Wang Yangming Confucianism, which opposed the orthodoxy of established Neo-Confucianism by further turning inward, by further turning toward

practice and by more borrowing from Buddhism. 'Left wing' disciples of Wang Yangming opened Confucianism further to Buddhism in the sixteenth century by mixing elements from both traditions in such a way that both of them became widely accepted among the Confucianist educated gentry (Brook, 1993, pp. 54–88). At the same time Buddhists such as Yunqi Zhuhong (1535–1615) developed new syncretistic modes of Buddhism, which also focused more on practice than on doctrine. These innovative forms addressed laymen and made a conscious effort to combine different Buddhist schools while approaching the Confucian tradition (Yü, 1981).

Around the middle of the nineteenth century Chinese Buddhism was nearly destroyed in its main areas of influence, in the lower Yangzi delta, through the devastating consequences of the Taiping Rebellion (1851–1862), which left more than 20 million people dead and destroyed 600 cities. The 'Christian' Taiping rebels killed Buddhist clerics, destroyed temples and scriptures and thereby weakened Buddhism in China considerably.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Buddhism regained strength through reforms that positioned it as a doctrine which, with its 'atheistic philosophical rationalism' and international context, appeared to be compatible with the expectations that the political reformers in China had in relation to the traditional religions (Goossaert, 2006; Goldfuss, 2001; Müller-Saini, 1993). Since then it has – like most other Chinese religions – developed very much in accordance with the changing political requirements of the ruling parties in mainland China (Feuchtwang, 1989, pp. 43–68). In the Republic of China (ROC) the Buddhist tradition has been revived by the development of a socially engaged humanistic Buddhism (Madsen, 2007).

For further reading: Ch'en (1973); Gernet (1995); Wright (1971); Zürcher (1959).

7

Popular Religion

'Chinese popular religion', a notion coined by Western scholars (Clart, 2007), refers to religious concepts and rituals that were believed and practised by the majority of Chinese lay people of all social classes throughout China in imperial times (and continue to be so until now in Hong Kong, the ROC and overseas Chinese communities). Recent decades have seen its return to mainland China (Chau, 2005; 2006; 2011a; Overmyer, 2003; 2009). While Confucianism aims at the moral cultivation of self and society, Daoism at the immortality of the self and Buddhism at the extinction of the self, Chinese popular religion is directed towards communal and personal welfare (Poo, 1998). This is achieved through expelling harm, misfortune, disease and calamity by means of exorcist rites, oracles and divination carried out by lay specialists. Good fortune, wealth and an access to paradise are the rewards for moral conduct, regular sacrifice to gods, ghosts and ancestors who help people to be saved from a world that is threatened by violent forces (Ter Haar, 2002; 2006). The borders between these religious traditions are not easy identifiable:

> There is something called Taoism, with certain tradition and religious specialists and books associated with it; and it is Chinese. There is also something called Buddhism, with certain traditions, religious specialists and books. It is different from Taoism, but in most ways it is equally Chinese. There is in addition to these two traditions, with their specialists and their books, a corpus of beliefs and practices, the folk religion, which has variously been described as Confucian (which it is not), as animistic, and as popular. All three of these strains, Taoism, Buddhism, and folk religion, have contributed heavily to Chinese religious life, and their interpenetration is so extensive as to prevent a thoroughgoing sorting of the elements one

> might associate with each in its 'primal' state. It is important that we note how closely these three strains are mixed. At the same time however there are certain traits that still carry specifically Taoist or Buddhist tinge, and, most important, there are separate Taoist and Buddhist clergies whom village people call upon to perform certain rituals. Both pantheons and the personnel of Taoist and Buddhist faiths must be clearly distinguished from each other and from folk religion if we are to understand the dynamics of religion in Taiwan today (Jordan, 1972, pp. 25–6).

Chinese popular religion has no canonical scriptures, no unified institutions independent of secular institutions (such as the family, the clan and the guild) and no professional priests. It is mainly transmitted through vernacular fiction and oral storytelling (Shahar, 1998). Its local varieties are so manifold that it can hardly be regarded as an entity. Many Chinese who daily burn incense to various gods and ancestors would deny practising, or believing in, 'religion'.

Until the early twentieth century Westerners denied these practices as being religious, regarding them as 'superstition'. The Chinese readily adopted this classification in the twentieth century (Nedostup, 2009) since popular religious practices had been regarded in pre-modern China as only customs (*fengsu*); they had not been classified as 'teachings' (*jiao*). Accordingly no administrative institutions existed in the imperial bureaucracy unless the popular religions had developed into something classified as 'excessive and improper cults' (*yinci*) or 'heretic teachings' (*xiejiao*), as they did periodically.

Sarah Allan (1979) has argued that a thread runs through the history of Chinese popular religion. It started with the ancestral cult, as reflected in the oracle bones inscriptions, and continued to modern times by following the three fundamental assumptions: people continue to exist after death; the deceased exert power over the living; and the deceased need nourishment from the living. Such assumptions have led to the following characteristics of Chinese popular religious culture:

- politicisation and bureaucratisation of Heaven: since the gods are of human origin they possess a human nature and thus follow a human order of power and hierarchy;
- lack of myth and the emphasis on history: because all gods were humans in the past they are perceived within a historical frame and not within a mythological one;

- lack of systematisation: since worship is an exchange of power and a matter of mutual support, religious practice is primarily pragmatic and individual. There is thus no impetus to create a systematic orthodoxy.

Although these basic structures of belief appear quite invariable the more concrete ritual forms and practices as well as forms of organisation and aesthetics have changed considerably. As indicated in the short historical overview above, the current forms of Chinese popular religion took shape mainly during the Song dynasty. These resulted from countermeasures taken by members of the élite against uncontrollable rural religious practices. The gods were tamed in an ordered celestial bureaucracy mirroring the official institutions of the new urban milieus (Johnson, 1985, pp. 425–40) as anthropomorphised counterparts of their Confucian-official colleagues (Ebrey and Gregory, 1993, p. 29). During Song times lay sectarian movements developed as another form of popular religion, and this had a great impact on the religious landscape of late imperial China and on local and imperial politics (Overmyer, 1976; Seiwert and Ma, 2003; Ter Haar, 1992).

Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism have generated and influenced the development of diverse forms of popular religion. They have incorporated parts of them and have in their turn also been influenced by them in their own local forms. The three greater religious traditions play a stronger or a weaker role in popular religion from region to region.

However a great number of local religious traditions exist entirely independent from the greater traditions. They possess distinctive features and demonstrate a process of constant intermingling and change. One of the central features of popular religion is that it exists in a cultural space outside the control of the élite, of officials and of clerical institutions. It seems that many of the popular religious movements that developed, especially in late imperial times, gained their social dynamics by their alternative constructions of reality in cultural spaces uncontrolled by the government. They drew on symbols and ideas taken from an inexhaustible cultural reservoir and, especially during times of decreasing state power, assumed that the present world was imperfect and corrupted (Seiwert and Ma, 2003, p. 500; Weller, 1996).

The extensive pantheon of gods, ghosts, ancestors and demons, of diverse realms and functions. is organised according to, in tension with or as a historical variant of the existing system of the state bureaucracy. Feuchtwang defined popular religion therefore as an 'imperial metaphor', which is not just 'a parallel and confirming structure of imperial bureaucratic rule' but 'sufficiently different to present a sense of place and of power which is a

supplementary universe to that of ruling orthodoxy' (Feuchtwang, 2001, p. vii). Including a number of former powerful officials, the wide range of numinous agents of this pantheon can be divided into three main classes of gods, ghosts and ancestors. Their differences are clearly reflected in cultic practice (Jordan, 1972, p. xvi; Wolf, 1974). Firstly, as carriers of legitimate power, the supreme official gods (*shen*) represent and serve to support the state order, which they protect by virtue of their office. In addition to the gods and imperial ancestors venerated in the central official cult, officially approved local deities were and are worshipped only at local level and also belong to this category. Secondly, ancestors are spirits of the deceased, which are appeased and kept in order by being offered regular and proper sacrifices by their families. Thirdly, demons and spirits of deceased (*gui*) symbolise chaos and disorder by existing outside the economy of sacrifice and blessing. They may be either ancestors, those without descendants sacrificing to them, or ghosts. Ghosts are not officially recognised spirits and hold illegitimate powers used to disturb or oppose the public or the official state order. Against state classification these can also be venerated as legitimate gods (*shen*) at local level, because in contrast to central state policy popular religious practices at local level take the efficacy of a god or demon in their own community as the main criterion of veneration.

It is difficult to classify the great diversity of agents in Chinese popular religion. There are temples to stones, to plants and animals, to unwed virgins, battlefield victims, inebriated priests, thieves, criminals and murderers (Weller, 1996, pp. 250–1). Many of these spirits possess an ambivalent double nature, like tricksters, by being good and harmful at the same time. They are worshipped and exorcised. This is particularly true of ghosts associated with money. Sometimes they are transformations of material objects, animals or humans (Sterckx, 2002). Weller and Von Glahn have noted an increase of eccentric and inconstant deities and cults in times of economic inflation or instability, such as during China's seventeenth-century monetary crisis (Von Glahn, 1991; 2004) and, more recently, during the rapid economic growth in the ROC in the 1980s (Weller, 1996).

A more general classification allows us to divide Chinese pantheons into: the supreme officials of the complex celestial and underworld bureaucracies; the nature deities; and gods for daily issues such as household gods, gods of professions, trades and guilds, ancestral gods and protection gods. Moreover there are Buddhist and Daoist gods and gods worshipped in the state cult (Maspero, 1932; 1981, pp. 77–196). Although the relative importance of each of the gods is different from one province to the other, the pantheon in its main outline is nearly the same throughout China. Many

of their titles relate these gods to Buddhism (Buddha/*fo*, Bodhisattva/*pusa*, Arhat/*luohan*), to Daoism (Celestial Venerable/*tianzun*, Immortal/*xian*) or to the state religion (emperor/*di*, empress/*hou*, king/*wang*) – fundamentally disparate religious cultures in which the role, status and function of gods diverge to a degree of insurmountable incompatibility. Yet in the pantheon of popular religion they are regarded as identical in nature and are distinguished only by their hierarchical ranks, which they hold according to their efficacious power (*ling*) – a basic function they all share. Furthermore nearly all of these manifold gods can be traced back historically to humans who possessed their own worldly biography and, by means of their apotheosis, are remembered by the religious community. This is an ongoing process (Maspero, 1981, pp. 84–7). In this respect they differ from the main Daoist deities who are conceptualised as hypostases of astral energies and cosmic pneumata. Gods in Chinese popular religions are thus continuously created; they are venerated in local festivals in a complex system of official, semi-official and official temples and shrines in territorial organised rituals and processions. They are linked to the people through canonical, familial and local relations and through social rather than doctrinal belongings. Their status and gender are changeable; their histories can be traced over centuries and resemble the ups and downs of worldly career progressions.

The Heavenly Jade Emperor (Yuhuang shangdi) is recognised as the supreme deity. He is identified with Heaven and in popular language addressed as Father Heaven (Laotian ye). He resides with his family and his court, consisting of innumerable officials, at the summit of the celestial bureaucracy in the Heavenly Palace. A parvenu among the highest deities is Guandi, who made a great career from bean-curd seller Zhang to general Guan Yu in the third century CE. He holds one of the most powerful positions as Heavenly Regent of the Earth and is well known for his power to banish demons and evil spirits. Other important deities include Chenghuang, the god of moats and walls, who has an important function as city god, protector of buildings and guardian against disasters to whom the lower local deities (*tudi shen*) are subordinated.

Both Guandi and Chenghuang are typical representatives of protective deities that are associated with the martial (*wu*) aspect of Chinese masculinity as opposed to the aspect of the cultivated gentleman (*wen*) (Louie, 2002), which is represented by other male deities such as Wenchang, the god of literature. The Holy Mother (Shengmu) is an old and widespread deity with Daoist connotations, who looks after women and children and blesses people with children. The Buddhist equivalent is Guanyin, the Chinese female form of the Indian Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara; she

is venerated widely as goddess of mercy and benevolence for her divine support of fertility and childbirth. The kitchen or stove god (Zhao jun) and his wife are positioned at the lowest rank of the divine hierarchy, yet he is the most important of the Chinese domestic gods. Like a spy he regularly reports the good and bad behaviour of the family to the responsible officials in the celestial bureaucracy, who record it in the celestial registers and either send down reward or punishment directly or change the lifespan of the individuals appropriately. The kitchen god, represented by a paper effigy above the stove, is the main mediator and connection between the family and the celestial sphere of the gods.

Like Daoism, popular religions are aggregates of varying elements. With the main religions they share the basic assumptions of correlative cosmology that reaches back to Late Zhou times as well as basic ethical values and parts of the pantheons. One of the main distinctive features of popular religions *vis-à-vis* Daoism or Buddhism are their social and local criteria of belonging. Belonging to a particular cultic community in popular religion is in many cases dependent on and identical with belonging to a particular kinship group marked by the same surname or belonging to a particular local community such as a village or a (part of a) town (Jordan, 1972).

Lineages share the same ancestral line and temples to worship these ancestors in elaborate ceremonies. They have a corporative character in financial and sometimes professional matters. At the level of the single family, daily rituals are performed in front of the home altar for protective deities and direct family ancestors. Rites are also carried out to appease, expel and exorcise disturbing demons near the house. The family cleans the family tombs too and venerates the ancestors at the Qingming festival on 5 April. There are many occasions, such as festivals or special family events, for families to conduct rituals to the gods related to them.

In the case of territorial communities, belonging to a cultic group depends on living within a particular space, which, as kinship groups, is an external factor determining an individual's religious affiliation and leaves no choice for alternates. Whether religious affiliation is defined in kinship or in territorial terms, the basic concepts of these popular religious groups in China work in similar ways. 'In general, the relation between the village and its protecting gods and threatening ghosts is the same as the relation between the family and its patron gods and threatening ghosts' (Jordan, 1972). Jordan perceived: 'a kind of least-common-denominator formulation of Chinese religious conceptions whereby contingencies in the human world are guarded against by organisations of people forming alliances with gods and exchanging worship for divine protection' (ibid., p. 134). Yet at village

level gods are not only used for protection but also for self-symbolisation in communication with other cultic communities, in the establishing of ritual alliances and in temple networks between villages (Dean and Zheng, 2010).

For further reading: Day (1940); Dean and Zheng (2010); Feuchtwang (2001); Jordan (1972); Maspero (1932; 1981, pp. 77–196); Overmyer (1976, 1999a); Seiwert and Ma (2003); Shahar and Weller (1996); Ter Haar (1992, 2006); Wolf (1974).

8

Understanding Religion and Secularisation in Modern China

Detailed studies have been published concerning the complex process of how the Western concept of religion has changed and shaped the Chinese landscape of religion, including politics, discourse, self-representation and practice at the turn of the twentieth century (Nedostup, 2009; Goossaert, 2006). Together with the term and the concept of 'religion' other related terms and concepts such as 'science' and 'superstition' have been introduced to China and have framed the process of transformation, especially in the forming of new religious institutions, which for the first time in Chinese history have started to take the shape of national organisations. Further theoretical terms such as 'magic', 'fetishism' and 'animism' as well as evolutionary models have been crucial in the forming of intellectual reflections and a strong critique at religion in general.

Because traditional religion mirrored and reproduced dynastic hierarchies of order, the destruction of the old imperial political legacy of feudalism and the destruction of feudal superstition were often mentioned in one breath. Secularisation was deployed as an instrument for the restructuring of religiously based, traditional power relationships. It did not occur as a process of the gradual decline of religious faith (Duara, 1991, pp. 75ff.). In order to comply with the new concept of religion and protect themselves from persecution, religious traditions adopted the new political symbolism and rhetoric (Poon, 2004, p. 222).

From 1912 Buddhism, Daoism, Islam and Christianity developed overarching national religious institutions on the model of Western churches, separate from the institutions of popular religion, which were now viewed as mere superstition. Daoism, because it was traditionally associated with communities of local cults, whose practices were considered superstitious,

was often compelled to defend its status as religion. With its 'atheistic' philosophy extending over much of Asia, it was much easier for Buddhism to portray itself as an international religion compatible with science and modernity, with a global orientation and opposed to superstitious notions and practices. With the modernisation of China, Chinese Buddhism, which had been in decline, received fresh impetus and underwent a revival driven primarily by the laity. Rather than the secularisation of Buddhism, modernisation led to an international revival (Seiwert, 1981). This did not apply to Daoism. On account of its local manifestations and traditions, Daoism was less easily slotted into the programme of modernisation in a standardised form. There was no laity actively pursuing its revival (Goossaert, 2004). Daoist and Buddhist communities that did not fit the modern concept of religion and that were linked with local cults, along with their associated temples, could be more easily destroyed: they were impossible to integrate into the newly formed national umbrella organisations and thus no longer had any basis for legitimacy as religion. Without the new attributes of religion such as churchlike institutions, a hierarchically organised priesthood, and scriptures (and lacking their own military force, see Ownby, 2001) the local religions had no chance to establish themselves in the modern religious sphere. They were largely eliminated through several waves of anti-religious movements (Duara, 1991, pp. 79–80).

These movements peaked in 1922 through the efforts of the 'Great Federation of Anti-Religionists', founded early the same year, when it was announced that the 'World Student Christian Federation' would meet in Beijing in April. The proclamations of the Great Federation cast scorn on the 'poison' of religion and were initially aimed at Christians, from 1922 to 1927. On a theoretical level the movement came to the more general conclusion that religion was a product of primitive peoples, was based on superstition, was dogmatically intolerant and stood in the way of human progress. Religion was thought to hinder individual development and social improvements and was deemed hypocritical. From this viewpoint, the origins of morality lay in human nature and were not dependent on religion. It was through the arts and sciences that the people's lot would be improved (Chan, 1969).

Meanwhile, following the 'European barbarism' of the First World War, representatives of the religions took up arguments found in European cultural criticism. They contrasted the materialistic culture of the West with the superior spiritual culture of Asia. China thus negotiated a European contradiction existing between the often fundamentalist missionary movements, with their critique of a modern society considered to be 'materialistic,

atheistic and inhumane', and the modernisers with their 'scientific' critique of religion. The theological critique of materialistic culture became one of the bases of the spiritual model of Asian culture, while the scientific critique of religion formed one of the foundations of the critique of 'superstitious' tradition (Bellah, 1965, p. 205).

Between 1913 and 1929, a whole series of religious laws were enacted, which formalised certain elements of the religious practice of the Qing dynasty. The laws no longer provided only general guidelines but included precise lists detailing the specific features of correct religions. Such lists formed the basis for determining whether local religions should be destroyed or preserved (Goossaert, 2003, p. 435; Nedostup, 2009). Religious traditions that lacked these features had to redefine themselves in secular terms as tradition, custom, folklore, self-cultivation or Qigong in order to survive (Poon, 2004). Some 50–60% of all temples were secularised and used for worldly purposes. Central deities such as the city god or god of the millet were no longer worshipped; feng shui and divination practices, ancestor sacrifice and the production of alchemical elixirs, which had been part of everyday life, were reduced. No new immortals or gods were generated and incorporated into the pantheon. Daoism was hardly regarded as religion any more (Chan, 1953).

In addition to the new religious laws three factors above all destroyed the social bases of many traditional forms of religion. Firstly, festivals and rites, which were bound up with the agricultural cycle, lost their significance and decreased in number as a consequence of *industrialisation*. Secondly, the *urbanisation* that accompanied industrialisation shattered the social and spatial realities that had been characteristic of the villages. There, social community and religious community had been equivalent, their unity based on the village temple. Social communities had seen themselves as part of the locality, including its resident forces and ancestral graves. New social relations developed in the cities, and these were no longer identical to those of the neighbourhood community. Traditional religious life, which was a part of the community, thus lost its social and spatial basis. Thirdly, *cultural contact with foreign countries* led to Westernisation. From the perspective of modern Western science, traditional Chinese religion was superstitious. Traditional Chinese culture no longer represented the sole aesthetic arsenal of the Chinese lifestyle but was joined by Western ways of life and values. On this basis, people also turned against traditional religion, which was now located within an aesthetic and cultural context no longer relevant to young city dwellers. In these times of rapid change, traditional rituals appeared bereft of meaning to the youth of the cities; ties to the ancestors

no longer seemed binding. Rather, on the Western model, which was based on Western urban values, smaller families developed, as did a more individual world-view in which the social forms of traditional religion no longer had any place.

This resulted in an unprecedented transformation of the Chinese religious landscape in the first half of the twentieth century. Various features emerged as typical for the religious groups of that time. One was that the clergy began to play a subordinate role. Parts of Buddhist and Islamic religious practice moved from the official religious institutions to charitable organisations led by lay people. Another was the syncretism of religious traditions as they tried to become compatible with other religions and with the requirements of Western modernity and therefore included new religious and modernist concepts. Religious engagement also turned away from scholastic erudition towards inwardness and pietism. Finally, testimony of religious belief became more important than religious ritual.

The ROC after 1949

The year 1949 marks an important turning point in the history of Chinese religions. From then until the 1980s research on Chinese religious traditions was mainly conducted in the ROC because religious practice and research, including by foreigners, were not restricted in the same repressive way as in the PRC. As in the PRC only a limited number of religions were tolerated in the ROC. These were in the form of national associations controlled by the Kuomintang (KMT).

In addition to the five religions that were officially accepted in the PRC (Daoism, Buddhism, Christian Catholicism, Christian Protestantism and Islam) the ROC government also tolerated some new religious movements. Missionary activity by foreign religious institutions was permitted and, although Christian missionaries who had been expelled from the PRC became active in the ROC, Christians comprise only 4% of the ROC population. Illegal religious movements such as the Yiguandao were not persecuted and were able to survive and even to grow. Popular religion was criticised as superstitious by the KMT, as it was in the PRC, and its activities obstructed. Ethnic conflicts between indigenous Taiwanese and Han Chinese were sometimes symbolically expressed in the religious activities of the local Taiwanese traditions (Clart, 2009, pp. 151–4). Buddhist organisations flourished, and the concept of an engaged or humanistic Buddhism, which had started with the modern reform movement in China by Taixu (1890–1947) and Yin Shun (1906–2005), became very popular in the ROC. Cheng Yen and Hsing Yun founded the enormously successful

charity institutions Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan (Queen and King, 1996; Madsen, 2007).

After the death in 1975 of Chiang Kai-shek, who was the president of the ROC and director-general of the KMT, a liberalisation and democratisation started with the rule of his son Chiang Ching-kuo. This led to the end of martial law in 1987 and the increasing pluralism of religions, which had begun in the early 1980s, finally was endorsed by the state. Religious movements such as the Yiguandao became legal, and new religious movements were formed. With a number of powerful engaged religious charity institutions such as Tzu Chi (Ciji), Buddha's Light Mountain (Foguangshan), Dharma Drum Mountain (Fagushan) and the Daoist Enacting Heaven Temple (Xingtiangong) claiming millions of members, the religious revival seems to be developing in a balanced and rather positive way (Kuo, 2008, p. 12; Madsen, 2007).

Religious Policy and Discourse in the PRC after 1949

In mainland China the general disagreement about the role and status of religions was replaced, after 1949, by a clear concept of the function and value of religion and its place within the socialist state of the PRC. According to the ruling Marxist ideology religion had two roots: cognitive and social. The social root was the reality of class struggle. Once the social fundamentals were resolved, through the realisation of a classless society in communism, this root would be eradicated. The cognitive root – superstition – caused by wrong education and scientific ignorance was to be destroyed by a progressive Marxist-scientific education that was implemented massively throughout the country. Religion was regarded as a useless outgrowth of a primitive or bourgeois society. In the worst case it was an instrument of feudal suppression, foreign imperialism and counter-revolution for the exploitation of the Chinese people. According to Marxist theory, religion would vanish, by itself, with the victory of socialism. Therefore there was no point in banning religion; instead its roots had to be eradicated.

Religious freedom, first conceded in the constitution of 1912, was therefore also included in the constitution after 1949. However the classification of actions as either 'religious' or 'superstitious' was a matter of interpretation. Whether religious action was interpreted as counter-revolutionary, revisionist, imperialist, rightist, leftist or bourgeois depended mainly on the party line, which was constantly redefined in new political movements. The constitutional guarantee of religious freedom did not therefore protect those who were identified as revisionists, counter-revolutionaries or intellectual élitists. As any other citizen, religious believers

had to avow themselves as patriotic members of the socialist state, who would contribute to the construction of a New China. This implied the transformation of monasteries into religious agricultural or industrial co-operatives, social or educational institutions. It also demanded a thorough 'purification' of malign vestiges of the old feudal system and of harmful influences from abroad. Monks and nuns had to take part in national movements such as the War to Resist America and Aid Korea (1950–1953) and the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961). All religious groups, especially Christian and Muslim ones, had to cease relations with foreign religious institutions and came under the control of the Bureau of Religious Affairs and its regional offices. New national associations were formed: the Chinese Buddhist Association in 1953; and the Chinese Daoist Association in 1957. These associations had subordinate local organisations, which disseminated central politics down to the lowest administrative level. Patriotic propaganda and adherence to the political line were central tasks of these associations at all administrative levels.

Several basic guidelines were formulated such as the prohibition of speaking ill of the world and of praise of paradise. Instead religions had to work towards realising joy, happiness and bliss in the worldly paradise of socialism. The task of religions was seen in social activities, working against poverty and misery in the socialist society and towards the Communist utopia. In the Christian context ideas such as 'love your enemies', 'you shall not kill', 'Kingdom of Heaven' and 'you shall forgive injustice' were criticised. Christians were compelled to decide between right and wrong and to position themselves to help destroy all obstacles to socialism and to advance the realisation of a New China. Similarly Buddhist doctrines of emptiness and vanity of the world were criticised. A worldly Buddhism was propagated by modifying the principles of compassion, benevolence and non-killing of living beings. In the Communist interpretation, not to kill cruel enemies out of benevolence meant that you were not kind to the people who were tortured and killed by the enemy. The invasion of American imperialist forces for example had to contradict the basic aims of Buddhism.

Analysis of religion after 1949 was implemented in a new institutionalisation of the discourses on religion in the philosophical departments of Marxism–Leninism. New evaluative teaching and examination methodology ascribed values of right and wrong, progressive and backwards, feudal and revolutionary to all aspects of Chinese historical religions. Three topological fields constituted the main areas of the new discourse on religion. These were clearly structured as oppositional pairs:

- *Theism versus atheism*. A whole research field was created around the task of identifying and highlighting atheistic traditions in Chinese history. Academic research projects including positions and publication organs were funded by the state to produce the historical evidence for an atheistic tradition in China.
- *Materialism versus idealism.* This was applied to any religious thinker or doctrine as a first step of analysis. Research on certain materialist thinkers received so much official support that it impacted on Western research as well.
- *Religion* as a means of élite suppression versus Religion as a means of popular resistance and class struggle. The scholarly debate in the 1960s on the rebellion of the Yellow Turbans is a good example of this discourse.

Although these topics seem to follow directly from Marxist theory (Yang, 2011) they appear at the same time as a continuation of the pre-modern Confucian arguments against Daoism and Buddhism. Sometimes the same formulations were used to discredit the religious traditions for wasting economic resources, confusing the people, spreading pessimistic world-views and encouraging a passive attitude towards the world and society.

Interpretation of religious freedom changed fundamentally in the twenty years between 1949 and 1969 as more and more restrictions were imposed on religious believers. Finally public religious practice was suppressed entirely by the Red Guards in 1966 (Goossaert and Palmer 2011, pp. 139–166).

An early statement made by Mao Zedong shows that he considered Chinese Marxism the religion of the people (MacInnis, 1989, p. 26), and visual propaganda produced by the CCP shows, with particular clarity, that the party drew very heavily on the traditional popular pictorial arsenal of Chinese religion to promote communism. This developed into nothing less than an iconographic orthodoxy during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) (Gittings, 1999, pp. 30–1; Landsberger, 1993, p. 376). This iconography lay bare how traditional religious functions (such as the worship of idols, public rituals, sacrifices and martyrdom, redemption, a cosmic world order, morality, exorcism, final judgement and true knowledge) were transmitted through the medium of visual propaganda (Ter Haar, 1996, pp. 60, 79–84; Kitagawa, 1974; Gentz, forthcoming a).

During the Cultural Revolution religion was annihilated to establish a new revolutionary culture. The Red Guards destroyed temples, churches and mosques, burned religious texts, and tortured, killed or imprisoned religious believers. Religion was defined through five characteristics – it was

class based, counter-revolutionary, backward, deceiving and harmful – and its practice was forbidden; the Bureau of Religious Affairs was closed. Religions therefore went underground and were persecuted.

In 1978 a major change occurred with the official establishment of research on religions in the four institutions of: the Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing (a major think tank of the CCP), the universities, the CCP and the five national religious associations – some 500 people. In 1979 the Bureau of Religious Affairs was re-established and a great conference on religion was held in Beijing. In the same year a book was published by the Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing that contained newly edited material written by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin to provide a broader canonical basis to discuss religion than the 'opium-for-the-people' passage by Marx that had until then been the main canonical reference point. This new material opened the stage for fresh interpretations of Marx and shifted the focus from Mao's writings back to the theories of European thinkers.

As a result in the early 1980s an engaged academic discussion flared up on the meaning of the term 'opium'. In this 'Third Opium War', as it is now known, scholars employed traditional philological (*kaozheng*) skills. They explained the historical German meaning of opium at the time of Marx and interpreted it not as a drug that makes one numb but rather as a painkiller that relieves social pressure so that constructive revolutionary forces could be vitalised. The discussion marked a basic shift from the discourse on religion as a mere dizzy state of consciousness (*yishi xingtai*) to questions on the nature of religion itself and its social function. This assumed that religion had an existence independent of politics (Gentz, 2012b).

In 1982 Hu Qiaomu, the first president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and a prominent politician, declared in a public discussion that religion and socialist society should be in a harmonious relationship. Since Hu was one of the most prominent political hardliners his talk was echoed all over China. In the same year Lü Daji, one of the most prominent scholars on religion, published his now-famous book *A General Essay on Religious Studies* (*Zhongguo zongjiao tonglun*); it was the first book to express a Chinese religious studies theory that went beyond Marxist notions. It provided the first systematic Chinese definition of religion that was based on four factors related to each another in a model of concentric circles: religious consciousness; religious experience; religious institutions; and religious practices.

Also in 1982, document nineteen was published on the initiative of general secretary of the CCP, Hu Yaobang, and published by the Central

Committee of the CCP. This expressed the new religious policy of the CCP and is now the most important and influential party document regarding religious policy. It reinstated the five central characteristics of Chinese religion that had been formulated in 1954 and had been replaced by the five characteristics quoted above during the Cultural Revolution. Document nineteen emphasised religious freedom and recognised religion as a phenomenon that eventually would perish but that had a long endurance, furthermore as a phenomenon that was mass based (instead of class based), ethnic (*minzu*), international (*guoji*) and complex (*fuza*). In the same year the right to propagate atheism was taken out of the constitution, and a prohibition against forcing somebody to follow a certain belief was formulated (Goldman, 1986, p. 150).

Following all these signals from different institutions of power, religion became a topic of discussion at all layers of society. As part of the cultural fever (*wenhuari*) that developed in the 1980s, reflecting a broad popular interest in a non-Marxist Chinese culture, religion became one of the most relevant historical factors for culture and individual psychology seen as having the potential to shape a new Chinese identity. The Academy of Social Sciences organised an international conference on religious culture, and some participants claimed that religion was the centre and driving force and the inner spirit of cultural values. However religious studies scholars were critical of the notion that religion should be seen only in its influence on contemporary issues and that the focus of the new approach was not religion but culture.

In the late 1980s religious studies departments were opened as independent units in the philosophical departments of the great Chinese universities. These departments follow a programme that focuses on a new history of religion and concentrate less on evaluative criteria and more on chronological facts. Scholars started to discuss new topics on the nature of religion, its utility for society, its relation to science and culture and its dynamics of change.

After the suppression of the Tiananmen student protests in 1989 a document on religious policy was published in 1991 – document six. In reaction to demands for more freedom and democracy (and following the breakdown of the socialist systems in Eastern Europe on which the Catholic Church was seen to have had great influence) the document was written in a strict tone and was directed mainly against foreign forces that, under the pretext of religions, try to harm and subvert the Chinese government. The document marks another discursive shift from the opposition of theism versus atheism to new keywords 'patriotic' and 'unpatriotic' —notions that are familiar from imperial religious policy. The slogan 'to use orthodoxy to

suppress heterodoxy' (*yi zheng ya xie*) was propagated. This again is reminiscent of imperial times, when the 2,000-year-old slogan 'to use barbarians to control barbarians' had, time and again, been referred to as a political strategy. The state's religious policy now reflected an overall concern to secure inner social and political stability against hostile foreign forces. The governmental support of the Falun Gong movement as a great new national religious movement falls also in this time.

At the same time an official document in 1990 stated for the first time that religion and society should suit each other (Luo, 1991). The ethics of religion was recognised as something that is beneficial for the socialist society. The CCP with this document stepped away from the Marxist theoretical framework and returned to practices of imperial religious policy. It claimed his move to be an enrichment and further development of Marxism. The strategic concept behind that idea, explicitly enunciated, was for a united front. This strategy had been followed successfully twice in recent Chinese political history – with the Kuomintang in 1924, against a system of warlords, and in 1937 during the second Sino–Japanese war. The philosophical concept behind it was still Maoist: smaller non-antagonist contradictions should unite and provide mutual support against greater antagonist contradictions that can only be settled through fight.

After the end of the Cultural Revolution religion was defined as non-antagonist to the socialist state. Religion became antagonist only if it was used by external enemies for counter-revolutionary activities. This new discourse of a harmony between religion and society was taken up verbatim by the general secretary of the CCP and president of the PRC, Jiang Zemin, in a public speech in 1993. Jiang was the first high-ranking politician to speak positively about religion in a socialist society. In his famous 'Three Represents', he insisted that religion must be practised within the framework of clearly defined laws. As a result the religious laws were tightened in 1994 (Gänßbauer, 2004, pp. 257–66; Lambert, 2001, pp. 124–5). From then on this new positive discourse became programmatic. It represented a political reflection of what had been going on since the late 1980s among Chinese intellectuals.

In the 1990s, under this new guideline, the academic discussion of religious studies scholars in the PRC focused on the questions: *is* there any trace in the Chinese religious heritage that is relevant and valuable to contemporary society that should be revived? If religion forms part of the socialist society, what elements can help in building a socialist state and how? These questions led religious studies scholars away from historical texts and towards contemporary religious practice and institutions. All this

was guided by the new political line that attention should be paid to religious practices in contemporary society and that it should be supported. Academics have shifted their research focus from the canonical texts to marginal practices such as divination, rituals and sacrifices. All of these had been labelled and ignored as 'superstition' before. The whole change of perspective reflects at the same time the political shift from central to local institutions and even non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This shift started in the 1990s and has led to a strengthening of local cultures in a turn away from Maoist centralism to a quasi-Qing dynastic policy – one that bases much of its political organisation on local agents.

Shortly after the 'Three Represents' had been reformulated, in an even more diluted form in 1999 a major demonstration was held by the Falun Gong movement, in which around 10,000 devotees gathered in front of the seat of government in Beijing. This event shocked the Chinese government. Religious politics changed instantly revealing that the changes that occurred in religious policies and legislation in the 1980s have to be understood as a form of state tolerance of religion rather than religious freedom in the modern sense. New religious movements have been dealt with far more harshly since then.

New Religious Movements in the PRC

A complex and confusing landscape of new religious movements developed in the PRC in the 1980s and 1990s. Scholars are unable to provide a neat empirical account of these core groups, let alone all their offshoots, because most of them remain underground to survive.

These groupings can in principle be differentiated into those that pick up the thread of indigenous Buddhist, Daoist or Qigong traditions and those based chiefly on Christian elements. Christian and Chinese elements are however almost always combined in varying proportions, and it is possible to discern numerous elements of Western esotericism in many of these groups, from psychological elements to European notions of Eastern spirituality (Kupfer, 2001; Lambert, 1998; Deng, 1998). One of the key motives for joining such groups is the belief in their healing powers. This applies to the Qigong movement and local cults, to the Christian congregations, most of which are Pentecostalist in character, and to Falun Gong (Währisch-Oblau, 1999; Fan, 2003, pp. 365ff.).

The Chinese government became aware of these groups and their huge following at an early stage. The problem however was that the government was more likely to inspire social unrest than social peace by taking harsh measures against so many millions of practitioners. However, if the Bureau

of Religious Affairs had officially included these many groups in a new expanded definition of religion the number of believers would have grown to such an extent that the Bureau would no longer have been able to deal with them administratively. The Bureau would have required significant expansion, at considerable cost. Apart from groups that have been officially designated 'heretical teachings' (*xiejiao*) and prohibited, there are so-called 'harmful groups', all of whose origins lie in the field of Qigong.

The years between 1983 and 1993 were the golden age of the foundation of new religious movements. The tensions of religious politics, along with the typical structure of new religious movements, with their loose institutional organisation and fixation on a charismatic leader, caused these groupings to splinter and be renamed on a regular basis. This makes it difficult to determine the origins and development of the individual movements. The ambit of these groups ranges from individual provinces to national and international levels. It is extremely difficult to determine their numbers of adherents, because most of them are unregistered and make no official profession of their faith. According to official estimates, the total number of adherents of new religious movements in the PRC is 1.5 million, while other estimates assume a figure of up to 80 million. This number, estimated over ten years ago, would be around 5.3% of the total population (Kupfer, 2001). The number of members probably lies between a few thousand and a few hundred thousand per group, with a small number of larger groups extending into the millions. Falun Gong, which had some 70 million followers in the late 1990s, is an exception here.

Falun Gong

FLG was founded in 1992 as a lay movement by Li Hongzhi (born 7 July 1952 or 13 May 1951) and is representative of a religious dynamic that developed subsequent to the 1980s Qigong fever. Li, the charismatic leader of this movement, sees FLG as a path of perfection leading to the highest possible levels of physical and spiritual cultivation. This includes a whole series of Qigong exercises as well as a doctrine centred on the three concepts of truthfulness (*zhen*), compassion (*shan*) and forbearance (*ren*). These three concepts are considered to be moral principles and at the same time characteristics of the cosmos present in its smallest elements.

The teachings of the FLG state that by refraining from every kind of desire and all forms of individual wilfulness, one's spiritual nature becomes cultivated to such an extent that first of all one attains supernatural powers and one's body is transformed; eventually one's individual cells and molecules consist purely of cosmic energy. The Falun Law Wheel, which according to

FLG doctrine is inserted into the abdomen of the practitioner by Li's transcendental Law Body, is helpful here. According to Li, it is a high-energy, intelligent rotating body consisting of matter, which has the same properties as the cosmos and thus represents a cosmos in miniature. It continuously collects energy from the cosmos and even during sleep brings about a permanent transformation, automatically converting it into cultivating energy (Li, 1998; 2001).

According to Li Hongzhi's teachings, the world is morally corrupt. This is due in part to the influence of harmful beings from other worlds. These have brought modern science to this world in order to make people dependent on them and thus subjugate them. Li sees himself as the only one who knows and embodies the cosmic principles and who has therefore attained such a high level of cultivation that he is capable of saving the world from ruin and of changing it back into a good world.

Li describes his system as part of the Buddhist school, but underlines that FLG has nothing to do with Buddhism as a religion. He is also very keen to ensure that no religious terminology is used in translations of his works. However the FLG doctrine also entails many elements from the religious traditions of Chinese Daoism and Buddhism. It bears all the typical hallmarks of the popular lay religious movements since the Ming era. It has its own scriptures and cultivates a sophisticated body discourse concerned with the healing or rejuvenation of the body through moral or technical practice. Adherents believe in limitless human potential and supernatural abilities and the transformation of the body – above all through morality. They also believe in the notion that human beings have been cast out from a blissful original state; their aim is to return to this state. They believe also in a living Buddha, who embodies the highest truth. They also associate Li Hongzhi, probably, with the Daoist messiah Li Hong (Seidel, 1969–70). Finally they believe that one may take short cuts to redemption through external help such as the Law Wheel – a belief of a kind associated with the tradition of Mahayana Buddhism (Ownby, 2003). At the same time modern concepts are integrated into the doctrinal system to a striking degree.

Alongside Buddhist and Daoist content, the FLG teachings express a world-view which, up to and including specific lines of argument, is strongly imbued with pseudoscientific and ufological elements of new Western religions, in the same vein as Erich von Däniken's ideas. The teachings of FLG thus represent a syncretic blend of indigenous traditional religion, modern science, esoteric doctrine and ufology quite typical of twentieth-century new religious movements around the world.

In response to the FLG mass demonstration held by around 10,000 adherents (of around sixty to seventy million FLG practitioners at the time) on 25 April before the seat of government in Beijing, FLG was prohibited as a 'heretical cult' (*xiejiao*) in China on 22 July 1999. The group is accused of causing unrest and social instability, spreading superstition and heretical ideas and of deceiving the masses – all accusations characteristic of Chinese religious politics for centuries, some of them using an identical form of words. As a consequence a new religious law was enacted in October 1999, featuring more stringent criteria for the prohibition and prosecution of 'heretical cults', whose activities could now be punished as criminal acts for the first time.

Since the mid-1990s Li has been living in the USA in an unknown location. The FLG movement is defending itself against party propaganda with counter-propaganda, it claims CCP's key spheres of legitimacy (such as true knowledge, correct morality and correct leadership) and uses the same tools of propaganda as the party, mirroring its approach in perfect symmetry (Gentz, forthcoming a). While the Chinese state has deployed brutal physical violence against FLG followers, such violence has not yet been used by the FLG.

The stricter laws on religion are directed at all new religious movements, Qigong groups, all of which have been removed from the official register and have lost legitimate status, as well as the underground Christian churches (Gänßbauer, 2004, pp. 257–66). Furthermore the global discourse on terrorism subsequent to 11 September 2001 serves the Chinese regime as a new politically correct justification for the persecution of religious groups in China, particularly the Muslim minorities in the province of Xinjiang (Human Rights Watch, 2005).

Religious policy institutions in the PRC

Since the early 1950s the Chinese government has built up an elaborate bureaucratic supervisory structure intended to ensure that religion serves political objectives. The Bureau of Religious Affairs has divisions at every level of the state bureaucracy and is active politically at the provincial, municipal, district and county level. Each of the five officially recognised religions has a 'patriotic association' that regulates the relationship between religion and state and ensures that state directives are implemented at the local level and that all relevant information from the association arrives at the centre. The structure of these patriotic associations parallels that of the Bureau of Religious Affairs.

Essentially the Bureau's responsibilities consist of registering, monitoring and regulating membership, places of religious gathering and practice,

religious education, selection of clergy, publication of religious material, and the financing of religious activities. It undertakes annual checks on registration and imposes prohibitions and punishments on 'illegal' organisations and activities. Registration-related work is one of the Bureau's key tasks. Registration represents the Chinese state's most important mechanism for controlling and monitoring religious organisations, as registration requires religious groups to give up autonomous power over their clergy, financial affairs, programmes, religious materials and education. These powers now belong to the Bureau, which keeps an eye on these areas and is involved in decision-making (Human Rights Watch, 1997). Religious services may be monitored. In a Christian context, for example, certain topics such as the Second Coming, Judgement Day and the biblical creation story may be censored. All baptisms have to be applied for in triplicate and must be reported. One copy of the application form goes to the Bureau of Religious Affairs, another to the appropriate Patriotic Association and the third to the applying parents' place of work. Legal recognition of a baptism requires the consent of all three entities.

In 1994 the formerly general and flexible regulations were replaced by a large number of more detailed ones governing registration procedures. As the state bases its religious policy far more strongly on the law, it is evident that there is growing secularisation because it no longer has a purely ideological foundation. Since then any condemnation of religious practice has increasingly been justified with reference to specific offences rather than to counter-revolution or ideological principles. The law on religion, which has been tightened since 1999, relates to all religious groups classified as illegal, including the FLG, which has faced outright persecution. It applies in particular to the underground Christian churches.

Organisations such as ChinaAid report encroachment by the state on a weekly basis in the form of persecution, arrests and torture. In this respect, the internet as a medium of information facilitates an entirely new transparency – of a kind unthinkable in the past. Of key importance here is the state's distinction between the practice of religion and criminal activity. On this distinction the state's understanding of religious freedom rests. Consonant with this, the official line is that no one is prosecuted or punished on account of his or her faith but only for engaging in illegal activities in the form of criminal offences. This recalls traditional religious policies. According to the new laws all religious activities that are not officially registered are considered to be criminal offences. The interpretation of religious activities on the part of the CCP generally differs markedly from the self-image projected by the religious communities (Ownby, 2001).

Alongside the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of State Security and other government departments, three organisations have been established specifically to monitor new religious movements:

- The Central Leading Group on Dealing with FLG has overall responsibility for dealing with FLG. Generally known by the abbreviated form '610 Office', the 'Falun Gong Surveillance Team' was established on 10 June 1999 and is the most important response from an administrative point of view to the mass demonstration carried out by the FLG in April 1999. This institution takes its orders directly from the central government. It operates autonomously on all political and administrative levels and across all administrative, local and juridical boundaries (*Diaocha baogao ji* 1, 2004, pp. 18–19, 42–53).
- The Office for Prevention and Handling of Heretical Teachings co-ordinates the day-to-day operation of state religious policy.
- The China Anti-Cult Association is concerned largely with propaganda and research.

The Minister for Public Security, Zhou Yongkang, has described the FLG and other ethnic-religious activities as the two greatest threats to the social stability of the PRC. Since 11 September 2001 the global action on terrorism was taken up in China to suppress opponents of the regime. As the PRC starts discourses on religious terrorism, on fundamentalism, on evil cults, sects and new religions it has started to participate in and politically instrumentalise global discourses on religion, which are adapted to legitimise national religious policy.

Religions at the Local Level in the PRC

The almost daily rituals that are a key characteristic of the popular religion especially in south-east China illustrate very well the complexity of the relationship between state and religion at the local level. It is hard to fathom these ritual events with the criteria typical of European definitions of religion. South-east China is home not only to hierarchically organised religious institutions but also to a complex network of local temples dedicated to a rich pantheon of local divinities. Rather than a hierarchically organised priesthood, there are local leaders who are endowed with responsibility for organising local communal rituals on an alternating basis, through rotation or divination. Daoist, Buddhist or Confucian ritual specialists are employed, mostly from outside the villages, to carry out specific rituals. Local spirit mediums, possessed by the divinities of the village temple, perform religious acts and utter powerful words during the ritual. However all these acts are

too diverse and specific to constitute a particular doctrine or to express specific religious beliefs. They thus fail to tally with the CCP's official concept of religion, which is geared towards definitional criteria such as doctrine, literature, organised institution, hierarchical priesthood and rituals that express religious beliefs. Such criteria, which were developed in the light of European religious ideas, are of little use in describing the Chinese popular religion practised by hundreds of millions of Chinese in south-east China.

The popular religion of southern China is better described as a 'syncretistic field' (Dean, 2003; 2011). Most of the thousands of villages have at least one temple, often more, dedicated to a community divinity. Since the destruction of the Cultural Revolution, many of these temples have been rebuilt in the past twenty years. The life of the temples is highly active and is organised by temple committees. Events are held there several times a week, ranging from processions of gods within the village, processions between villages or to holy sites, and a variety of rituals, to performances of traditional opera, puppet theatre and even films. A procession may involve up to 100 villages and last up to a week. In this way stable local networks are created and continuously strengthened. This extremely dense network of local temples sometimes takes on a large number of local administrative tasks, thus forming an unofficial second level of local government. This restoration of the traditional temple networks in southern China can also be seen as the continuation of a political trend over the past 400–500 years, namely the transferral of tasks and duties of the central government to the localities.

Localities are organised through these temple networks and thus gain some degree of local autonomy. Here local autonomy does *not* mean the separation of religion from the state, but the downwards distribution of responsibility for local affairs to a local managerial élite, whose institutional basis lies in temples, lineage associations and similar local institutions. These constitute a dense and well-organised religious infrastructure used concurrently for administrative purposes. But this does not mean that the religious structures are straightforwardly secular, just that the boundaries of analytical concepts of religion are not drawn so strictly in practice. When evaluating these phenomena it is important that the newly emerging temples and rituals are not seen merely as a rigid revival of a lost past. They are arenas in which the forces and themes of modernity are actively negotiated. It is precisely modern traditions and motifs that are being actively grappled with, integrated and adopted in the context of local culture. What is happening is the absorption and adoption of technological and political innovations within the indigenous cultural symbol system, from the appearance of

portraits of Mao in processions to the exchange of CD-ROMs, featuring the latest ritual innovations, between the temple committees.

The three main actors in this field are the clergy of the local temple, those national religious associations under the aegis of the state, and the Bureau of Religious Affairs. Resources and meanings are constantly negotiated between these three key players. Confrontations between them are controlled within the institutional framework of the religious laws laid down by the state – laws whose specific interpretation is constantly being negotiated through mutual discursive exchange. The national religious associations play a dual role here, in that they supervise and protect the local religious communities and also have a mediating and translating function between state and local interests. It is their task to ensure that the local institutions retain the greatest possible degree of autonomy without infringing the state's religious laws, while asserting their own autonomy as much as possible *vis-à-vis* both parties (Ashiwa and Wank, 2006).

These examples clearly refute the thesis that modernisation brings a reduction in tradition and secularisation in its wake. Despite this revival, religious life in the PRC today is very different from that which pertained before the ravages of the twentieth century. The religious sphere has diminished markedly as a result of the long period of repression and the economic restrictions. However, in those places where the local economy is reviving, the reconstruction of the old traditions is also proceeding much more rapidly: for example, Fujian on the south-east coast of China has close ties with Hong Kong and the ROC, from where it receives a great deal of financial aid. Religious life was most damaged by the decline of lineage as the centre of socioeconomic and ritual life. Because the clan associations no longer have estates or central financial administrations, they are not able to maintain their clan rituals on a large scale. Meanwhile the temples of local divinities and associated rites have been very well preserved and reconstructed since 1979. Some were prohibited; others were frozen in the form of museums; while others managed – for example, by involving old retired party cadres – to grow, thrive and become rich (Chau, 2005, 2006). These emerge as significant cultural centres in which community events take place, in much the same way as sometimes occurs in the parish halls of rural Western Europe.

Apart from waves of the anti-religious campaigns, to which smaller local temples have repeatedly fallen victim, the recent regulations have severely curtailed many temple activities. The *Far Eastern Economic Review* (6 June 1996) reported that, in the province of Zhejiang between February and June 1996, at least 15,000 unregistered temples, churches and graves were

destroyed by the police; the city of Ningbo alone lost 3,000 temples. On 12 December 2000 *Agence France Press* reported the destruction of 1,200 temples in the region of Wenzhou alone, carried out partly with dynamite. A failure to register them properly was given as the reason.

On the whole, simply because of their own limited means, the state institutions in this extremely large and diverse country leave plenty of gaps in their systems of control and administration, something Robert Weller calls 'governing by hypocrisy', or 'governing by turning a blind eye' (Weller, forthcoming). These are filled by local autonomous forms of collective organisation, which create their own order in forms that are often not only tolerated by the state but on which the state depends. This very often entails recourse to pre-modern expressions of a particular way of life, regional traditions and particular cultural values. These flourish anew on the basis of a mutual understanding between representatives of local religion and the state. This though is only possible to the extent that these local forms do not become too powerful and that they continue to observe the official rituals of regular reports and contact with the political centre. The ritual events in south-east China constitute temporary autonomous zones, in which local communities express themselves and are given form. These zones are constantly in motion and of a kind that can only ever exist through such movement.

In the north of China, local cults develop less in the context of a religious infrastructure organised on a large scale and more around powerful religious personalities. Individuals then bring about the development of individual religious structures (Fan, 2003) or places in which in the local public sphere the power of local élites is articulated *vis-à-vis* the local representatives of state power. These sites link various institutions, all of which benefit from the religious activities in various ways and therefore support them (Chau, 2005).

These temple activities have certain traits of civil society associations and clearly contradict the thesis that modern religion involves a withdrawal into the private sphere. According to Goossaert (2005, p. 5) it is possible to identify three basic state measures in China relating to religion in the twentieth century, which also shed light on their secularisation. Firstly, the state replaced the traditional distinction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy (which related to the imperial canonically based ethical-cosmological system) with the Western distinction between religion and superstition, which involved entirely new criteria and led to the identification of five officially recognised religions. Secondly, the state attempted to reform these five religions and to bring their teachings and practices into alignment with state

ideology. Thirdly, it incorporated some elements of the religions into its own secular programme. Thus secularisation appears mainly as a programme of new classifications within a new system of order, within whose categories religious traditions had to reinvent themselves as 'religion', or, if they failed to exhibit the defined characteristics, as 'sciences', 'medicine', 'folklore', 'philosophy', 'ethics' or 'sport'. In this context then secularisation must also be understood as the redefinition of traditional teachings and practices within a new conceptual system. In this the place reserved for 'religion' is so greatly diminished that the continuity of religious traditions could be ensured only under a secular banner.

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