**Chinese Shamanism Theory**

Chinese Shamanism Theory is proposed by Taiwanese-American scholar K. C. Zhang (Kwang-chih Chang, 張光直, 1931–2001), which is a milestone of sinology. It holds that the Chinese culture in essence is based upon shamanism that can be found globally. Being different from the western world that shamanism pervades only in pre-Christian times, Chinese shamanism keeps unchanged from its origin until today. The Chinese Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism (BCD) are nothing mysterious but the forms of shamanism. When characterizing the difference between the Chinese civilization and the western from shamanism view, Zhang calls the Chinese form the "continuity" form, and the Western form the "disruptive" form[[1]](#footnote-1). Zhang’s theory has been supported by more and more evidence from the prehistory archeological materials and the existing historical classic corpus as well as various aspects of the society of today (e.g. Chinese herbs, acupunctures, qigong, psychic divination, etc.)

**Shamanism**

The term shamanism derives from *shaman* (from the Siberian Tungus language, means “one who knows”) a title for those who can enter the ghost realm to interfere human life. Dutch [Nicolaes Witsen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicolaes_Witsen) (1641 –1717) defined *shaman* as ‘priest of the Devil’ in 17th century. The term shamanism became popular after Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) published his work, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1951), where Eliade views the mysterious and fascinating phenomenon in native cultures as absolute true account of a creation in primordial time rather than fake superstitions.

Depending on the purpose and functionality, shaman can be various types, e.g. a medium, necromancer, wizard, magician, magus, sorcerer, witch, wizard, enchanter, medicine man, witchdoctor, sorcerer, exorcist, soothsayer, necromancer, and spirit walker, etc. The female medium(witch) at Endor (1Sam28) who can summon the spirits of the dead by magic is a typical shaman.

Shamanism do not have a certain unified descriptive doctrine (like sacred text, scripture). Many native shamans are illiterate. They use oral storytelling and practices to keep their tradition alive. For example, in China, many mystical practices, like Qigong, a particular acupuncture, a specific herb, etc. are usually passed down generation by generation inside a close family only; they never spill the beans outside. Shamans usually do not make public propaganda; they prefer to operate secretly and sometimes illegally and unwittingly. They only know that their shamanic practices can work but they cannot explain how and why.

**Animism**

The conceptualization of the worldview of shamans contributes to the formation of animism in anthropology. Sir [Edward Tylor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Burnett_Tylor) is a major contributor of animism research. Tylor asserts that although each culture has its own different expression style, mythologies, rituals and society's development stage, the human mind and its capabilities are the same globally. The goal to study animism is to find out the most common, foundational thread of indigenous peoples' "spiritual" or "supernatural" minds.According to Tylor, animism is a study that explores ‘the general doctrine of souls and other spiritual beings in general.’  Animism often includes "an idea of pervading life and will in nature;"[[19]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animism#cite_note-19) a belief that natural objects other than humans have souls.

**Religion**

Animism plays a critical role to assist shamanists to abstract its own ideological theory from folk religious phenomenon. As the constructed shamanism contains identical elements of religion: doctrine, rituals and mass, it can be studied as a type of religion. However, it is over-band to presume that shamanism represents the earliest form of religion. Tylor’s (1929) use of the term ‘animism’ referring to a theory of religion rather than a type of religion is untenable.

In history, the term *religion* initially was used by Tertullian (150--220 AD) to refers to the Christianity and became popular after St. Augustine of Hippo (354--430 AD) wrote his paper, *of the true religion* (*de vera religione*)[[2]](#footnote-2). The English word *religion* came from Latin *religio,* which is derived from *religare*: *re* (again) + *ligare* (bind or connect). Augustine uses the term *religion* as a tool to expound how his Christianity faith is essentially different from all kinds of heresies and syncretism -- the religious Christianity or Christian’s religion is purely built upon Christ the triune of the Son and the Father and the Spirit.

The primitive ineffable concept of spirits in shamanism in primordial times is in essence identical to the Heraclitus’ *logos* or Laozi’s *Dao*, which can be considered as an evolutionary progress for religion. However, human acknowledgement of the Holy Spirit from spirits cannot happened naturally without the reborn process through Christ. From a particular respective, Zhang’s Chinese shamanism continuity theory shows that, without the missionaries in China, the spirit of the good and bad, auspicious and inauspicious, just and unjust in its culture will remain determined by man rather than the trinity God. There is no historical and archeological evidence that can explicitly show a natural evolutionary relationship between animism and Christian’s religion.

1. K.C. Chang, Continuity and Rupture: Ancient China and the Rise of Civilizations, Manuscript being prepared for publication. https://min.news/en/culture/59a6f27153177a16b35cd6a71b0ac432.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE:A Translation for the 21st Century. New City Press. 2005. p17. https://wesleyscholar.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Augustine-On-Christian-Belief.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)