

2 The Making of ‘Religion’ in Modern China¹

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The Chinese are emphatically not a religious people, though they are very superstitious.

—H. A. Giles, *The Civilisation of China*, 1911

I have found that the Buddhists considered the Taoists superstitious; the Confucians considered the Buddhists superstitious; the Christians considered them all superstitious and were considered superstitious themselves by the Confucians and the Communists.

—H. Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China*, 1968

The historical myth that diversity in social relations and religious belief undermines the strength of the regime continues to inform Communist Party policy.

—P. B. Potter, *Belief in Control: Regulation of Religion in China*, 2003

INTRODUCTION

Research on religion in modern China has been constantly growing during the last decade. Scholars have been particularly concerned with assessing the impact of legislation upon religious practice and, to a lesser extent, with looking at how practitioners have accommodated themselves to the changing cultural and political environment.² While such studies have done much to illuminate several aspects of the Chinese religious world in the twentieth century, this essay takes one step back and begins to look at the emergence of a novel conception of ‘religion’ between the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, a notion that was at considerable variance with the ideas and practices of earlier periods. In particular, I look at how notions surrounding *zongjiao*—the term used to translate the English term ‘religion’ in modern Chinese—emerged out of several processes of cross-cultural translation and linguistic accommodation that involved primarily, but not exclusively, China and Europe, the beginnings of which can be dated back to the seventeenth century. In fact,

premodern China lacked both a lexical equivalent of the English term religion and the current notion of 'religion' as a discrete feature of culture and matter of individual belief.³ The following comments will hopefully reveal something of the processes that took place both with respect to some of the attempts at representing the Chinese indigenous worldview along lines similar to those of Christianity and to the slow but progressive assimilation of a modern version of Chinese Buddhism into the new religious order.⁴

BEFORE ZONGJIAO

In his seminal work *Genealogies of Religion*, Talal Asad convincingly demonstrated that any definition of religion is itself the 'historical product of discursive processes'. Thus, in the context of nineteenth-century Western evolutionary discourse, 'religion' came to be regarded as an earlier stage of the human condition from which modern law, modern science, and modern politics had emerged, and from which they should be detached.⁵ No longer a set of practical rules attached to specific processes, 'religion' became something with an increasingly abstract nature. The sheer scale of the Christian missionary enterprise that followed in the wake of European high imperialism contributed to the widespread diffusion of this notion beyond Europe and North America.⁶

The idea of 'religion' as operating in a realm separate from that of the state, the family, and the community, and as a matter of individual belief, must have been alien to the experience of any lettered or indeed illiterate person born in late imperial China. Law was promulgated by the emperor, who was also the supreme judge and guarantor of harmony under heaven (*tian*), and was administered by a bureaucracy of scholars-officials. Moreover, it was the sincere (*cheng*) performance and participation in rituals (*li*) that mattered the most to late-imperial Chinese.⁷ As Stephen Feuchtwang and others pointed out, the terminology determining Chinese questions of authority and of identification with that authority revolved around the terms 'orthodox' (*zheng*) and 'heretical' (*xie*), 'order' (*anping*) and 'chaos' (*luan*), which were crucial to any activity, and to ritual activity in particular.⁸ Beside the officially sanctioned rituals for the ordering of the universe and for death rituals, the state traditionally patronised and controlled, members of the Buddhist and Daoist orders (for instance, by issuing ordination certificates) while local cults continued to thrive in local societies, generally resisting most attempts at official control.

This fluid situation was reflected by the lack of an umbrella term subsuming all religious beliefs and practices. Yet regardless of its manifestly complex genealogy, the introduction of *zongjiao* to the modern Chinese intellectual vocabulary to 'translate' the term 'religion' has up till now been regarded as a relatively transparent process. *Zongjiao* is generally regarded as a borrowing from Japan, where it was supposedly used in the context

of the rapid modernisation and Westernisation of the country in the second half of the nineteenth century. For instance, in his important study of the expansion of the Chinese lexicon in the nineteenth century, Federico Masini described it merely as a ‘graphic loan’ from Japanese and dated its first occurrence in Chinese to around 1890.⁹ This view, still current among China scholars, is only just beginning to be challenged.¹⁰

The two terms forming the disyllabic compound *zongjiao* have a long history as separate elements. They both figure in some of the earliest Chinese written sources, including the *Shijing* (*The Book of Songs*) and *Shujing* (*The Book of Documents*), datable to the Eastern Zhou period (c. 1000 BCE and c. 600 BCE), and in the equally early *Shuowen jiezi*, the first comprehensive dictionary of Chinese characters ever to be compiled. But crucially they are also found in premodern Buddhist texts in some form of relation to each other. *Jiao* can be glossed as to ‘teach’, ‘instruct’, and ‘set an example’. The second element, *zong* is slightly more complex. Its original meaning refers to the main ancestral line, and in more abstract terms, it is often translated as ‘principle’. It is not used exclusively in Confucian contexts but was also appropriated by Buddhists.¹¹ As noted by T. H. Barrett, even before the arrival of Christianity definitions surrounding *jiao* were highly ideological.¹² In the sixth century, ‘teaching’ featured as a key term in imposing Buddhist norms. Centuries later, in nineteenth-century Yunnan, the term took on a broad cultural meaning in which Islam was the norm.¹³ Interestingly, in the first *Dictionary of the Chinese Language* in English, compiled in the early nineteenth century by the British missionary Robert Morrison, who based his work on existing Chinese dictionaries, contains the following entry:

Superiors giving inferiors something to imitate, viz. a precept; a rule; a law; to teach; to instruct; that which is taught; a system of opinion or a religion; to command; to order; *keaou men* [i.e. *jiaomen*] commonly denotes the Mohammedans, but it also means Religion or Sect generally.¹⁴

In fact, *Jiao* has been used to designate Buddhism, as in *fojiao* or ‘the teaching of the Buddha’, and Christianity, as in *tianzhujiao* or ‘the teaching of the lord of heaven’ in seventeenth-century Jesuit Chinese parlance. But there was also *xiejiao* or ‘heretical teachings’, a rather elusive category inclusive of everything the regime regarded as threatening to social security and state authority, regardless of its specific religious identity, and so ranging from millenarian Buddhist groups to local sorcerers and Chinese Christians. Indeed, one of the enduring legacies of the late imperial rulers to modern Chinese nation makers was that of the battle conducted against such loosely defined *xiejiao*. Indeed, the Chinese state’s anxiety toward all forms of religious affiliation that exist outside its ritual and ideological boundaries, and its fear of religiously inspired political uprisings is certainly not simply a twentieth century invention.¹⁵ Similarly, *zongjiao*

was not invented *ex novo* in a short time either. On the contrary, its roots are to be found in Chinese Buddhist terminology dating back to medieval times. Its modern incarnation emerged first in nineteenth century China rather than Japan over the course of a couple of generations of linguistic instability. In 1838, for instance, the missionary and prolific Chinese-language writer Karl Freidrich August Gützlaff (1803–1851), eager to interest his audiences in various aspects of the life and thought of Western countries, described the unusual status of the Papal State in the Italy of his day as constituting a *jiao-zong* state.¹⁶ As Barrett and Tarocco pointed out, the meaning of *zongjiao* for Chinese language speakers was from its inception fatally skewed in the direction of the beliefs and practices of the relatively few religious professionals, clerical groups representing such religions as Buddhism and Christianity, and so failed to 'translate' many realities of the Chinese religious world.¹⁷

Echoes of these earlier semantic and semiotic negotiations still resound in today's Chinese language. While the semantic range of the majority of compounds with *zong* is linked with indigenous religious practices, *zongjiao* on the other hand is the only word with a wide range of cross-cultural and modern meanings. There are, for example, terms like 'religious psychology' and 'the policy on religion'. Moreover, *zongjiao* is often associated with Buddhism and Christianity, and conveys a sense of an organised institution of beliefs and textual authority. In a sense, this reflects the fact that 'religion' was established in China through the concurrent effort of Buddhists and Christians and to the exclusion of the daily practices of the many.

WHAT IS 'CHINESE RELIGION'?

As the first two quotations at the beginning of this chapter show (there are scores of similar statements), descriptions of China's religious world by outsiders have been largely negative. To a large extent, observers' representations, including scholarly ones, failed to account for its utter dynamism, its shifting patterns of development, and its underlying principles. In order to understand how some of these misrepresentations came about, one has to turn to the work of Jesuit missionaries in seventeenth-century China.¹⁸

In the view of European Jesuits, the Chinese had had an early belief in a transcendent, presumably male, deity, which over the course of time degenerated into the then, widespread 'idolatry' of the populace. The Jesuits described the existence of 'three teachings' (*san jiao*), understood as discrete entities and separable from the body of religious practice in general. Yet the historical record shows that in Daoism, for instance, self-perceptions and self-representations were shaped through rituals whose cosmological meanings and boundaries were negotiated with, and against, Buddhist and popular religious practices. Clear-cut divisions between Buddhism and Daoism were mostly true only in the case of religious professionals and their

scriptural materials, whereas ‘community rituals . . . were themselves not exclusive; indeed they readily accommodated the different private understandings of the participants’.¹⁹

The talented Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) was for years engaged in multiple, cross-cultural translations. In China, he translated ‘Western books’ (*xishu*)—this was also the name by which Chinese scholars traditionally referred to Buddhist books—and told the Chinese court and literati about the culture of another ‘West’ (*Daxiguo*, literally the ‘great western country’), which lay to the west of China’s traditional ‘West’, India (*Shendu*).²⁰ In Europe, his description of China’s religion for centuries proved the most influential. Ricci wrote his *Della entrata della compagnia di Giesù e Christianità nella Cina* (‘On the Entry of the Company of Jesus and Christianity to China’) while living in Beijing. From its idiosyncratic central Italian vernacular with Spanish and Portuguese influences, in 1615 the text was eventually revised and translated into Latin by Nicolas Trigaut. It was this later version, thanks also to the incorporation of large extracts in the *China Illustrata* (1667) of the Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher, and its subsequent translations into French (1616), German (1617), Spanish (1621), and eventually English, that became an important source of first-hand knowledge about China until well into the nineteenth century. A section of the book is devoted to the ‘various sects that surround religion in China’ (*varie sette che nella Cina sono intorno alla religione*). Of ‘all the tribes known to Europe’, wrote Ricci, no people made ‘fewer mistakes’ than the ancient Chinese who worshiped one ‘ultimate deity’ (*supremo nume*) called the ‘lord of heaven’ (*re del cielo*). However, over the course of time they came to believe in the existence of not one but three teachings—‘three laws’ (*tre leggi*) in Ricci’s parlance—and to worship idols everywhere and not just in temples. Of the three laws, he chose to describe two as idolatrous, but made a favourable portrait of the teaching of the literati, which was represented as mostly devoid of religious elements.²¹

Ricci described what we now call Buddhism as having a huge following, if only among ‘women, eunuchs and rude people’ (*donne, eunuchi e gente rude*). What he or his interlocutors perceived as similarities between his teachings and those of the Buddhists he tried to explain away as intellectual theft. The Chinese must have somehow ‘heard about the fame of the holy Gospel and sought it in the West’. However, by ‘mistake or malice’, instead of Christianity their emissaries brought back the ‘fake doctrine’ of Buddhism. Buddhism’s creators (*autori di questa dottrina*), he wrote, must have known about ‘our philosophers’ (*nostri filosofi*) and about ‘Christian things’ (*cose della christianità*). How is it otherwise possible to explain the fact that they believe in the trinity (*trinità*), promise alternatively rebirth in paradise (*paradiso*) or eternal damnation in hell (*inferno*), teach about repentance (*penitentia*), and lead a celibate life (*la vita del celibato*)? Yet Jesuit missionaries showed comparatively little interest towards many aspects of China’s ‘idolatry’, and focused their attention instead on

specific issues that were in line with the preoccupations of their interlocutors of choice, the elite literati. If initially the Jesuits donned the robes of Buddhist monks, they soon decided it was more politically expedient to align themselves to the mores of the Confucian literati, rather than those of the people with whom they shared some more or less profound similarities. In time, Ricci came to see a sort of preparation for Christ in the classical texts of the Confucian tradition which he carefully studied.²²

In his writings in Chinese, Ricci was polemical towards Buddhism. This attitude, as Jacques Gernet pointed out, may well have been one of the reasons behind the initial success of Christianity among some members of the Chinese ruling classes, since their anti-Buddhist feelings were growing vis-à-vis the widespread diffusion of Buddhist-inspired practices among all strata of the population. In the treatise *Tianzhu shiyi* ('True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven'), printed in Beijing in 1603, after condemning the 'mistake' made by those who brought back to China the teachings of Buddha instead of the 'true teachings' of Christianity, Ricci offered arguments against transmigration and criticisms of abstention from meat. The latter was clearly not a distinctively Christian preoccupation, but a crucial marker of Buddhist-inspired religious identities in the Chinese context. While offering a rationale for Christian celibate life, he made no mention of similar Buddhist monastic attitudes.²³ For their part, Buddhist clerics did not remain silent at Ricci's criticisms and launched several campaigns aimed at confuting and ridiculing Christian doctrines. The love-hate relationship between Christianity and Buddhism in China, and their battle over a comparatively small number of otherwise politically influential souls, had started in earnest.²⁴

In some important ways, the representations of China's religion by Victorian Protestant missionaries echoed those of Matteo Ricci.²⁵ Yet much had also changed, for Europe had been rife with religious controversies. As Susan Rosa pointed out, the formalized credos issued by the competing Christian denominations in the wake of the Reformation had encouraged the development of the notion of religion as 'adherence to a set of propositions'. The creation of such 'propositional religion' in turn enabled the emergence of a 'discussion of the merits of other "religions" conceived to similarly exist as sets of beliefs. In this way, 'true religion' became 'a body of certain knowledge'.²⁶ To a certain extent, as C. John Sommerville argued in *The Secularization of Early Modern England*, it became 'something one thinks about rather than something one does'.²⁷

The writings on China of Protestant missionaries, who often doubled as scholars and journalists, reflected a variety of intellectual, political, and religious agendas. But there were some underlying presuppositions. One of their primary quests was that of forming a new Chinese language of religion.²⁸ In the eyes of Griffith John (1831–1912), the Chinese were 'irreligious', so much so that they did not even have a word for religion. In his *China Her Claim and Call*, he observed that

religion . . . as realised by the Chinese in their inward experience, is not worthy of the name, and it is a remarkable fact that they have not in their language a generic term for it. The Chinese are as immoral as they are irreligious'.²⁹

Yet earlier he had proclaimed in a missionary journal 'our indebtedness to Buddhism for the use of many of our religious terms, as well as for the existence of many religious ideas at the present time among the Chinese. Without it they would have been materialists and unbelievers in a future state'.³⁰ Others presented Buddhism as a *preparatio evangelica* of sorts. It has 'not been without its use', we read elsewhere, for it has 'enlarged the vocabulary of mercy in the Chinese language'.³¹ In *The Celestial and His Religions, or the Religious Aspect in China*, originally a series of lectures delivered at the Young Men's Christian Association of Hong Kong, Dyer Ball (1847–1919) stated that Buddhism

has prepared the way to Christianity in China; for the Indian Buddhists introduced different terms into the Chinese language, and [to] some of these terms Christianity is indebted in conveying its truths . . . So we are indebted to Buddhism for the terms for heaven, hell and devil, as well as saviour'.³²

However, this was far from being a discussion of technical terms. New battles were fought with tools both old and new. Walter Medhurst (1796–1857), founder of the first Christian printing press in Shanghai, commented in his *China, Its State and Prospects*, that Buddhism was 'despised by the learned' and that its practices were highly reminiscent of those of the 'Pop-ists'. Buddhism is '*in decadence* and can only be regarded as a spent force'. Buddhist temples are 'manifestly the centres of a worship which is both polytheistic and idolatrous'. Similarly, Buddhist 'priests' may well wear their 'priestly robe', sport 'clean-shaven heads' and carry the rosary, but 'their lives are lazy' and the 'prayers that they daily repeat before their images are a jumble of now meaningless sounds, which even they themselves do not understand'.³³ In the *North China Herald*, the English-language periodical published in Shanghai, Joseph Edkins (1823–1905) of the London Missionary Society wrote that 'after so many centuries of successful domination over the Oriental mind' Buddhism had 'lost its proselytising power'.³⁴ In fact, for all their calculated anti-Buddhist rhetoric, the missionaries' representations once again echoed certain strands of Chinese elite opinion of the time. As Vincent Goossaert pointed out, 'unreconstructed Confucian scholars', now finding work in the emerging modern periodicals, were more 'anti-clerical' than 'anti-religious'. Thus, one of the important forces in the making of China's modernity, the periodical press, was initially marked by a certain anticlericalism, which both Christian and Buddhists addressed forcefully.³⁵

THE MODERN CHINESE LANGUAGE OF 'RELIGION'

From the time of the publication of Morrison's dictionary in the early nineteenth century onwards, the Chinese language underwent a significant lexical expansion for within less than a hundred years it absorbed the nomenclatures of the most diverse branches of Western knowledge and thought. Highly-ideological labelling in the religious field on the part of observers, and ad hoc strategies of self-representation of (mainly Christian and Buddhist) Chinese practitioners, became especially relevant during the last decades of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century, a time of great social and political unrest and of heightened intercultural exchange. By the late 1890s, the discourse about 'religion' was of increasing interest as any search of the Chinese-language press, or of other non-Chinese-language periodicals produced in China, would reveal.³⁶ The missionary and amateur linguist Ada Even Mateer (1847–1936) culled Chinese-language periodicals for years in her search for new lexical items, especially with reference to religion. One of her studies contained the translation of a compelling article taken from such a Chinese-language periodical. The anonymous author (maybe Liang Qichao, to be discussed below) advocated the unification of China's now infamous 'three religions' into a single 'new religion'.

The Buddhist religion came from India, the Protestant, Catholic, Christian and Mahomedan from Eastern and Western Europe. Our nation has originally no 'state teaching' (*guo jiao*). . . . Is it only in matters of religion (*zongjiao*) that we are not to have reform (*gaige*) and progress? China has from of old the Confucian religion; but since men only recognize that as a religion which holds some theology, Confucianism, which makes no mention of theology, cannot claim to be a perfect religion. But setting aside the question as to whether or not Confucianism is a religion, as well as the question of the origins of each religion, and speaking only of adaptation to changing conditions, there is advance in civilization, there is enlargement in physical science, there is revolution in government, and religion also cannot but adapt itself to circumstances and change with the rest. Then again, speaking only of the three religions (*san jiao*) held by the majority of the nation, from the ordinances and codes of these three religions, by combination and adaptation, a new religion (*zongjiao*) should be formed, called the Great Union New Buddhist religion.³⁷

The possible connection between 'national progress' and 'religion' was not lost on a number of late nineteenth-century Chinese cultural and political activists in search of an overarching meta-narrative of national salvation. The secretary of the Christian Literature Society of China, Timothy Richard (1845–1919), worked for years to provide books and pamphlets in Chinese that showed 'the bearing of educational and religious development

in industries and trade and in every department of national progress'.³⁸ He told 'all the followers of the non-Christian religions' that they should not 'take alarm, because we bring them new religious ideas', because 'the new is so much better than the old'. Those resisting change in religion, he added, 'are to-day in danger of retarding progress, as Roman Catholicism and Islam do in all countries under their sway. They bring on inevitable national death . . . hence the prosperity of all Protestant countries. . . . In religion, we must not be behind'.³⁹

The highly influential journalist Liang Qichao (1873–1929), who had for a time been in close contact with Timothy Richard, was one of the first propagators of the modern Chinese discourse of religion.⁴⁰ In his essays from the early 1900s, Liang described religion (*zongjiao*) as 'the root of Western civilization' and actively sought for a Chinese alternative to Christianity. In the essay 'On Religious Reform in China' (*Zhina zongjiao gaige huanshuo*), he argued that the West succeeded in 'reforming its ancient schools thereby giving the people what they needed in terms of consciousness and spine to renew itself'.⁴¹ He advocated a similar kind of restoration of the Chinese 'ancient teachings' of Buddhism and Confucianism. In his 'On the Relationship Between Buddhism and Social Order' (*Lun Fojiao yu qunzhi zhi guanxi*), he lamented the fact that China, differently from Europe or America, did not have a 'national religion', and asked, 'Will progress in governing China be attained using faith or not? . . . The root of faith is religion. . . . Some say that education can take the place of religion, but I dare not accept this statement'. He then listed several reasons for which Buddhism should be the ideal choice as the 'Chinese national religion', as it is a 'rational belief' (*zhe xin*) and not a 'superstition' (*mixin*). Buddhism trusts in one's strength and not in the strength of others, has faith in universal goodness and not in individual goodness, and teaches equality rather than discrimination because all sentient beings possess 'Buddha nature'.⁴² Similarly, Yang Wenhui (1837–1911), one of the most influential Buddhists of modern times, was convinced that Buddhism could certainly stand up to each and every 'teaching of the West' (*xi yang ge jiao*) and become the first religion (*zongjiao*) of the world.⁴³

Such an ambitious project is yet to be realised, but in an attempt to recontextualise their cultural heritage vis-à-vis the prevalent secularism of both Nationalist and Communist nation makers, a new generation of Chinese religious activists, many of whom were close to Buddhism, became acquainted with the language of religious modernity. Many sought to negotiate a legitimate place for Buddhist practice in the context of the modernist and secularising debates about which aspects of the existing Chinese religious landscape could, and indeed should, be placed in the novel category of 'religion' as opposed to the concurrently emerging Christian-inspired category of 'superstition' (*mixin*).⁴⁴

In 1918 the Chung Hwa Book Company printed the *Modern Dictionary of English Language* (with Anglo-Chinese explanations), based on

Webster's New International Dictionary. This dictionary, whose compilers were all Chinese, registered the definitive move towards standardising the modern Chinese lexicon and, as the preface states, 'technical and scientific terms relating to the most modern developments'. The gloss for religion reads thus:

1. The outward act or form by which man indicate recognition of a god or gods to whom obedience and honour are due; the feeling or expression of human love, fear or awe of some superhuman or overruling power; a system of faith and worship; a manifestation of piety
2. Specif. Christian faith and practice. ⁴⁵

Since the late Qing and the Republic, the Chinese state has conducted several attempts to frame the indigenous worldview along lines similar to those of the post-Reformation conception of religion, which in many important ways equates 'religion' with 'church'. The modern Chinese language situation underwent a significant shift in order to take into account and accommodate novel ideas about 'religion' and 'superstition'. But while those in power in China have until now largely failed to create uncontroversial and universally acceptable taxonomies of the religious field, the state has succeeded to an extent in imposing novel rules on the public practice of religion.

CONCLUSION

As Kenneth Dean pointed out, 'local Chinese religion resists definition'. As, indeed, any definition derived from Western critical traditions that revolve around doctrine, institutionalisation, and priesthood, is not very useful for describing local communal religion.⁴⁶ In today's Hong Kong, Taiwan, and various sites of the Chinese diaspora, people frequently organise temple festivals to celebrate the birthdays of their patron deities. They regularly visit shrines and temples seeking the blessings of a large pantheon of deities, both local and translocal, when facing difficulties, financial or sentimental concerns, or health problems. In order to come into contact with the gods and solicit their positive response, believers perform their own private rituals in temples, at countless ritual sites, or in front of domestic altars. In China however, the lack of a positive definition for many local and community-based practices is still problematic. Whatever is not 'religion' (*zongjiao*), in fact, may be 'superstition' (*mixin*) and must, according to China's law, be suppressed. Today's Chinese constitution officially grants the freedom of religious 'belief' (*xinjiao ziyou*), but many aspects of religious practice, including proselytising, are not contemplated. Generally speaking, the authorities seem to be most concerned with all things outside the realm of the officially registered sites and the five institutional 'religions'

that is Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism.⁴⁷ Indeed, *zongjiao*, a by-product of several different things, including the Chinese imperial state's anxieties towards religiously inspired political uprisings, Christian missionaries' evangelising strategies, elite Buddhist modernisers' struggles for legitimacy, and Nationalist and Communist nation-makers' secularising attitudes, remains a problematic category. Beside being used in a positive sense to grant 'freedom of religion', for a number of citizens of the People's Republic of China, including members of the officially sanctioned Protestant and Buddhist communities, its adoption has ended up relegating several ordinary and traditionally widespread religious activities to the realm of superstitions.

Among cosmopolitan Chinese especially, a process of convergence with a conception of religion that had initially emerged outside China was clearly part of the shift to accommodate the new generic term for 'religion'. In order to fully understand these processes, one should take into account emerging notions of 'superstition', and consider more extensively the language used to represent the identities of the various religious traditions present in nineteenth- and twentieth-century China. However, even the present cursory examination of the sources reveals some of what took place. Remarkably, along with the great difficulties inherent to the many attempts at reconfiguring the Chinese indigenous worldview along lines similar to those of Christianity, some parts of 'Chinese religion', namely what we now call Buddhism, came to be regarded as commensurate to Christianity and so, ultimately, as 'religion'.

NOTES

1. I gratefully acknowledge the Leverhulme Trust for awarding me a fellowship (ECF/2005/0186) that allowed me to carry out the background research for this chapter. I am indebted to T. H. Barrett, Jeremy Gregory, John Zavos, Nile Green, and an anonymous reader for their insightful comments on previous drafts of this essay.
2. For a recent volume of studies on Chinese religion see D. Overmyer (ed.), 'Religion in China Today' (Special Issue), *The China Quarterly* 174 (2003); see also A. Anagnost, "The Politics of Ritual Displacement", in C. F. Keyes, L. Kendall, & H. Hardacre (eds.), *Asian Visions of Authority: Religions and the Modern States of East and Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), pp. 221–254; K. Dean, "Ritual and Space: Civil Society or Popular Religion?", in T. Brook & B. M. Frolic (eds.), *Civil Society in China* (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1997), pp. 172–192.
3. cf. U. Bianchi (ed.), *The Notion of 'Religion' in Comparative Research: Selected Proceedings of the XVIth Congress of the International Association of the History of Religions* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1994); J. Paper, *The Spirits Are Drunk: Comparative Approaches to Chinese Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).
4. For some further comments on Buddhists' view of their own tradition, see F. Tarocco, *The Cultural Practices of Modern Chinese Buddhists* (London: Routledge, 2007).

5. See T. Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 27 & 29.
6. See the primary sources and studies underlying T. D. Dubois, "Hegemony, Imperialism, and the Construction of Religion in East and South East Asia", *History and Theory* 44 (December 2005), pp. 126–131.
7. For a thorough examination of ritual, orthopraxy, belief, and state standardisation among other issues in late imperial China, see the essays in the special issue of *Modern China* 33, 1 (2007).
8. S. Feuchtwang, *Popular Religion in China, The Imperial Metaphor* (London: Curzon, 2001), p. 10.
9. See F. Masini, *The Formation of Modern Chinese Lexicon and Its Evolution Toward a National Language: The Period From 1848 to 1898* (Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley, Project on Linguistic Analysis, 1993), p. 223.
10. For the moment, see T. H. Barrett & F. Tarocco, "East Asian Religion Unmasked: A New Genealogy", *Dangdai zongjiao yanjiu* 4 (2006), pp. 37–43.
11. For the shift of other terms of kinship to indicate more abstract religious or intellectual phenomena, see M. Csikszentmihályi & M. Nylan, "Constructing Lineages and Inventing Traditions Through Exemplary Figures in Early China", *T'oung-pao* 89 (2003), pp. 59–99 and T. H. Barrett, "Kill the Patriarchs!", in T. Skorupski (ed.), *The Buddhist Forum*, I (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1990), pp. 87–97.
12. T. H. Barrett, personal communication (30 January, 2006).
13. For Buddhism: see M. Levering, "Scripture and Its Reception: A Buddhist Case" in M. Levering (ed.), *Rethinking Scripture: Essays From a Comparative Perspective* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 64; for Islam: see D. G. Atwill, *The Chinese Sultanate: Islam, Ethnicity and the Panthay Rebellion in Southwest China, 1856–1873* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 158–159. I am grateful to T. H. Barrett for bringing these works to my attention.
14. R. Morrison, *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language in Three Parts* (Macao: East India Company Press, 1815–1823), p. 533.
15. For a study of state-sponsored actions against Christians, see L. Laaman, "Anti-Christian Agitation As an Example of Late Imperial Anticlericalism", *Extreme-Orient Extreme Occident* 24 (2002), pp. 47–63. For the late imperial state relationship with popular religious networks, see B. ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1992).
16. Aihanzhe for example, 'Philosinensis', K. Gützlaff, (ed.), *Dong-Xiyang kao meiyue tongjizhuan* 3 (1984), p. 48 (as reprinted in Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997, p. 342). For a brief introduction to this figure and his publishing ventures in China, see J. Lutz, "Karl F. A. Gützlaff, Missionary Entrepreneur", in J. K. Fairbank & S. Wilson Barnett (eds.), *Christianity in China: Early Protestant Writings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 61–87.
17. See T. H. Barrett & F. Tarocco, "East Asian Religion Unmasked: A New Genealogy", *Dangdai zongjiao yanjiu* 4 (2006), pp. 37–43.
18. For a critique of the academic representation of the Chinese religious world see Paper (1995). For the genealogy of 'religion' in the West, see Asad (1993).
19. S. Naquin & C. Yü (eds.), *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 10. On the formation of Daoist rituals and cosmologies see for instance the studies in L. Kohn & D. Roth

- (eds.), *Daoist Identity: Cosmology, Lineage and Ritual* (Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 2001).
20. Note that in the mid-nineteenth century, Chinese scholars were still using the term 'Western books' (*xishu*) to indicate Buddhist books thus clear differentiation with Christian texts is quite slow (T. H. Barrett, personal communication).
 21. On Matteo Ricci, see J. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (London: Faber & Faber, 1984). For an examination of the relationship between Jesuit writings and the origins of Sinology, see D. E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989). The text of the *Storia* is reprinted in P. M. D'Elia, *Storia dell'introduzione del cristianesimo in Cina*, in *Fonti Ricciane: documenti originali concernenti Matteo Ricci e la storia delle prime relazioni fra l'Europa e la Cina* (Roma: La Libreria dello Stato, 1942–1949), vol. 1, pp. 108–126; see also J. Gernet, "Della entrata della Compagnia di Gesù e Christianità nella Cina de Matteo Ricci (1609) et les remaniements de sa traduction latine (1615)", *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres: Comptes rendus des séances de l'année 2003, janvier-mars* (Paris: Diffusion de Boccard, 2003), pp. 61–84; L. Fezzi, "Osservazioni sul De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta ab Societate Iesu di Nicolas Trigault", *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* 2 (2000), pp. 541–566.
 22. See J. Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact: A Conflict of Cultures*, trans. J. Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). For a fuller account of Ricci's views on Chinese religion see D. Porter, *Ideographia: The Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), especially pp. 90–108.
 23. The original text is found in the database of the Ricci Institute for Chinese–Western Cultural History http://www.usfca.edu/ricci/resources/library/tianxue_chuhan_vol1/tianxue_chuhan359.htm (accessed October 2005). For a study of missionary attitudes with regard to vegetarianism, see E. Reinders, "Blessed Are the Meat Eaters: Christian Antivegetarianism and the Missionary Encounter With Buddhism", *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 12, 2 (2004), pp. 509–537. For Buddhism and religious life in late imperial Beijing, see S. Naquin, *Peking: Temples and City Life, 1400–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
 24. See Jiang Wu, "The Revival of Yogâcâra Studies in Seventeenth-Century China and the Use of Buddhist Syllogism in Anti-Christian Polemics", *Studies in Yogâcâra Buddhism, A Seminar of the American Academy of Religion, Yogâcâra in East Asia, 2001*: <http://www.uncwil.edu/p&r/yogacara/eastasia/> (accessed February 2003).
 25. See T. H. Barrett's insightful comments about the enduring legacy among British sinologists of Ricci's views as represented by Trigault's version of Ricci's text in T. H. Barrett, "Chinese Religion in English Guise: The History of an Illusion", *Modern Asian Studies* 39, 3 (2005), pp. 509–533.
 26. Susan Rosa's study of the text *Dialogues Among a Lutheran Theologian, a Jesuit, and a Chinese Philosopher* contains an engaging history of the rise of new attitudes toward religion in post-Reformation Europe; see S. Rosa, "Seventeenth-Century Catholic Polemic and the Rise of Cultural Rationalism: An Example From the Empire", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57, 1 (1996), pp. 87–107; (the quotation is on p. 88). For a revealing study of Christianity in Europe before the eighteenth century, see J. Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). I am grateful to Jeremy Gregory for pointing me to the latter study.

27. See C. J. Sommerville, *The Secularization of Early Modern England: From Religious Culture to Religious Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 9.
28. For a study of the famous 'terms question' that consisted in finding a suitable Chinese translation for the words god, holy spirit, baptism, and so forth; see I. Eber, "The Interminable Term Question", in I. Eber, Wan Sze-kar, & W. Knut (eds.), *The Bible in Modern China: The Literary and Intellectual Impact* (Sankt Agustin, Germany: Institut Monumenta Serica, 1999), pp. 135–161.
29. G. John, *China: Her Claims and Call* (London: London Missionary Society, c.1882), p. 20.
30. G. John (1877), p. 106.
31. *Christianity and the Religions of China: A Brief Essay in Comparative Religions* published and distributed by the London Missionary Society, n.d. (School of Oriental and African Studies, CWM Library, School of Oriental and African Studies, Q 222).
32. D. J. Ball, *The Celestial and His Religions or the Religious Aspect in China* (Hong Kong: Kelly & Walsh, 1906), p. 115. For a discussion of the Victorian world's encounter with Buddhism, see P. C. Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) and the review article by J. A. Silk who critiques and integrates some of Almond's views in *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 22 (1994), pp. 171–196.
33. See W. Medhursts, *China: Its State and Prospects: With Special Reference to the Spread of the Gospel Containing Allusions to the Antiquity, Extent, Population, Civilization, Literature, and Religion of the Chinese* (London: John Snow, 1840), p. 217. Medhurst referred specifically to 'the celibacy, tonsure, professed poverty, secluded abodes, peculiar dress of the priests: the use of the rosary, candles, incense, holy water, bells, images, and relics, in their worship; their belief in purgatory, with the possibility of praying souls out of its fires; the offering up of prayers in a strange language, with their incessant repetition; the pretension to miracles; the similarity of their altar pieces'.
34. *North China Herald*, 29 April 1854. Apart from his contributions to the popular knowledge of Buddhism, Edkins also authored scholarly works, including *Chinese Buddhism* (1880). Another member of the London Missionary Society who was active as a scholar was Ernest Eitel, author of the *Hand-Book for the Student of Chinese Buddhism* (1870).
35. See V. Goossaert, "Anatomie d'un discours anticlérical: le *Shenbao*, 1872–1878", *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* 24 (2002), p. 127. For Buddhist reformist views, see G. Müller, *Buddhism und Moderne* (Stuttgart, Germany: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1993); R. Birnbaum, "Buddhist China at the Century's Turn", in Overmyer (2003), pp. 122–144.
36. A search of the very influential *Shenbao* for the years 1872 to 1895 reveals that some two hundred items were published in the newspaper that dealt with religious issues, ranging from spirit mediums to the morals of Buddhist monks and Chinese converts to Christianity. See the *Electronic Index to the Early Shenbao (1872–1889)* at <http://www.sino.uni-heidelberg.de/database/shenbao/manual.htm>.
37. Adapted from A. H. Mateer, *New Terms for New Ideas: A Study of the Chinese Newspaper* (Shanghai, China: Presbyterian Mission Press, 1917), pp. 49–50.
38. T. Richard, *Forty-Five Years in China* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1916). See especially pp. 159, 218–219, 222, 231.

39. W. E. Soothill, *Timothy Richard of China: Seer, Statesman, Missionary and the Most Disinterested Adviser the Chinese Ever Had* (London: Seeley, Service & Co., 1924), p. 210.
40. For a study of Liang Qichao and other modern Chinese intellectuals' involvement with Buddhism see, C. Sin-wai, *Buddhism in Late Ch'ing Political Thought* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1985).
41. L. Qichao, "Zhina zongjiao gaige huanshuo", in *Yinbingshi wenji* (Shanghai, China: Guangzhi shuju, n.d.), vol. 5, pp. 33–36.
42. L. Qichao, "Lun Fojiao yu qunzhi zhi guanxi" (On the Relationship Between Buddhism and Social Order) in S. Jun, L. Yulie, F. Litian, X. Kangsheng & Y. Shouming (eds.), *Zhongguo fojiao sixiang ziliao xuanbian* (Selected Materials on Chinese Buddhist Thought) (Beijing, China: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), pp. 49–56.
43. Y. Wenhui, "Zhina Fojiao zhanxing ce yi, er", reprinted in S. Jun et al. (1990), pp. 12–13.
44. On the problematic use of the term 'superstition' in Republican-period and communist China, see P. Duara, *Rescuing History From the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995). On religious persecution in 1920s China, see M. Bastide-Bruguière, "La campagne antireligieuse de 1922", *Extreme-Orient Extreme Occident* 24 (2002), pp. 77–93.
45. See the *Modern Dictionary of English Language* (n.p.: Chung Hwa Book Company, 1918), p. 813. Every sentence in English is followed by a sentence in Chinese, which is omitted here.
46. See K. Dean, "Local Communal Religion in Contemporary Southeast Asia", in Overmyer (2003), pp. 32–52.
47. For state control over religious practice in contemporary China, see P. B. Potter, "Belief in Control: Regulation of Religion in China", in Overmyer (2003), pp. 11–31.