

## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

Randall Nadeau, Trinity University

### Chinese Dynastic History

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#### **Mythic and Prehistorical Period**

Xia	c. 2200–c. 1600 BCE
Shang	c. 1600–c. 1100 BCE

#### **Classical Period**

Zhou	c. 1100–249 BCE
Western Zhou	
Eastern Zhou	
Spring and Autumn period	
Warring States period	

#### **Imperial Period**

Qin	221–207 BCE
Han	206 BCE–220 CE
Three Kingdoms	220–589
Period of North–South Division	
Six Dynasties	
Sui	581–618
Tang	618–907
Song	960–1279
Yuan	1271–1368
Ming	1368–1643
Qing	1644–1911

#### **Modern Period**

Republic of China	1911–
People's Republic of China	1949–

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## The Study of Chinese Religion

The Western encounter with Chinese religion began with the Jesuit “conquest” of China in the sixteenth century. Prior to this, it is difficult to find any references to Chinese religion as a distinct entity, even within China itself. This is because religion—arguably all religion, but we will limit our discussion to religion in China—is indistinguishable from wider cultural elements, and its conceptual isolation is a relatively recent (and peculiarly Western) phenomenon.

The first Western missionaries saw “Chinese religion” in reference to Christianity, and identified particular cultural forms that were already familiar to them: worship practices (offerings and sacrifice), institutional organizations (housed in monasteries and temples), a spirit world (gods, ghosts, and ancestors), ethical values and philosophies (usually identified with Confucianism, Daoism, or Buddhism), and a textual tradition (of scriptures or holy books parallel to the scriptures of all the “great religions”). But in the late imperial and modern periods, when Western missionaries and scholars had very little access to religion as actually practiced in China, Chinese religion was identified more and more with its elite forms, and in particular with the textual traditions of the “three religions.” Consequently, one of the most significant achievements of the modern study of Chinese religion was the translation of the religious classics into English, as part of Max Müller’s “Sacred Books of the East” project (fifty volumes published between 1879 and 1910). Four of these volumes were dedicated to “the texts of Confucianism,” all translated by the Victorian missionary scholar James Legge (1815–1897):

- Vol. 3. *The Shû King [Shujing: Book of History]. The religious portions of the Shih King [Shijing: Book of Odes]. The Hsiào King [Xiaojing: Classic of Filial Piety].*
- Vol. 16. *The Yi King [Yijing: Book of Changes].*
- Vol. 27. *The Lí Kí [Liji: Book of History], part 1 of 2.*
- Vol. 28. *The Lí Kí, part 2 of 2.*

Some ten years earlier (1865), Legge had already translated *The Chinese Classics in Five Volumes*, including *Lunyu (The Analects)*, *Daxue (The Great Learning)*, and *Zhongyong (The Doctrine of the Mean)*, all attributed to Confucius; *Mengzi (The Book of Mencius)*; and *Shijing (the Book of Poetry)* and *Shujing (the Book of History)*, said to have been “edited” by Confucius.

Legge was also the translator of two volumes of “the sacred books of the East” dedicated to “the texts of Taoism”:

- Vol. 39. *The Tào the king [Daode jing]. The writings of Kwang-tze [Zhuangzi], books I–XVII.*
- Vol. 40. *The Writings of Kwang Tse, books XVII–XXXIII, The Thài-Shang Tractate of Actions and their Retributions [Taishang ganying pian], other Taoist texts, and the index to vols. 39 and 40.*

In addition, one volume included translations by Samuel Beal (1825–1889) of Chinese Buddhist texts:

- Vol. 19. *The Fo-sho-hing-tsan-king* [*Foshuo xingcan jing: Sutra on the Footsteps of the Buddha*], a *Life of Buddha*, by Ashvaghosha, *Bodhisattva*; Translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by Dharmaraksha, A. D. 420.

It is difficult to underestimate the impact of these translations on the Western understanding of Chinese culture and religion, and the scholarly legacy of James Legge in particular has been far-reaching. For one thing, it identified Chinese religion with its texts or scriptures, placing them on a par with the Holy Bible of the Western Abrahamic traditions. In addition, it canonized certain of those texts as foundational for each of the Chinese traditions. For the Confucian tradition, these were the “four books and five classics” that had been identified by the Song Dynasty neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi as the basis for the imperial examinations. For the Daoist tradition, Legge chose the *Daode jing* and the *Zhuangzi*, but also included several other scattered works from the Daoist canon, some alchemical and some hagiographic. A whole generation of scholars after Legge saw the *Analects*, the *Daode jing*, and the *Zhuangzi*, in particular, as the holy books of Confucianism and Daoism, and the basis for understanding Confucianism and Daoism as religions. Even a hundred years later, the Western popular imagination equates Daoism with the mystical philosophy of the *Daode jing*.

The second generation of sinologists (from the 1930s to the Second World War) were also textual scholars. Based on translations of Chinese scriptures, classics, dynastic histories, and other canonical works, these scholars composed the first comprehensive histories of China’s “three religions”:

- Herbert Giles (1845–1935)
- Henri Doré (1859–1931)
- Lionel Giles (1875–1958)
- Paul Pelliot (1878–1945)
- Henri Maspero (1883–1945)
- Marcel Granet (1884–1940)
- Arthur Waley (1889–1966)
- Homer Dubs (1892–1969)
- Paul Demiéville (1894–1979)
- Wolfram Eberhard (1909–1989)
- Holmes Welch (1924–1981)

Representing a more anthropological approach to the study of Chinese religion in China’s late Imperial period was J. J. M. de Groot (1854–1921), professor of sinology at the University of Leiden. Though certainly well-versed in China’s classical literature, which he used to contextualize what he observed on the ground, de Groot was primarily an ethnographer, and his six-volume *Religious System of China*

(1892–1910) was based upon fieldwork conducted in Amoy (present-day Xiamen) and the Fujian countryside. In a series of lectures he delivered at Hartford Theological Seminary (around 1907), he began with the religion of the people. His first lectures were on “universalistic animism,” “specters,” and “ancestral worship,” only later turning to Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Even then, his lecture on Confucianism departs significantly from a text-based approach to the tradition, with discussion of the state (or imperial) religion (albeit based partly on the Han Dynasty *Book of Rites*), of popular temple-based religion, of burial practices and ancestor worship, and of popular religious deities, their images, and their histories.

Among the anthropologists working in China in the pre-Second World War period and immediately thereafter, mention must be made of Francis Hsü (*Under the Ancestors' Shadow*, 1948) and C. K. Yang (*Religion in Chinese Society*, 1961). Hsü, a student of Bronislaw Malinowski, taught at Yunnan University, Cornell University, and Northwestern University, and conducted fieldwork in southwest China from 1940 to 1944. Yang, a professor of sociology at Lingnan University (Guangzhou), Harvard University, and the University of Pittsburgh, based his study on fieldwork conducted in the People's Republic of China from 1948 to 1951. Their two works, on the ancestral cult and on “diffused religion versus institutional religion,” were landmarks in the social and anthropological study of Chinese religion in the contemporary period.

The third generation of Western-trained anthropologists were severely curtailed in their work by social and political upheaval in China, and were largely forced to conduct their ethnographic research in Taiwan (especially in the 1960s and 1970s), which was heralded as a repository of traditional Chinese culture. Nonetheless, they set the standard for ethnography of Chinese religion, with detailed studies that have now been replicated on the mainland. In addition, a number of scholars, primarily British, conducted fieldwork in Hong Kong and the New Territories during the period between the Second World War and the repatriation of Hong Kong to the mainland.

Today, scholars are trained in both sinology (textual studies) and ethnography, and combine elements of both. Leading lights of this integrated approach are Daniel Overmyer, a scholar of folk religious movements, and Kristopher Schipper, a Daoist scholar who was himself ordained as a *Zhengyi* Daoist priest. The study of Chinese religion today, especially Daoism, is multidisciplinary and tightly focused, favoring “micro-histories” of particular communities, religious movements, and contemporary religious trends.

## The Traditions in the Western Imagination

The paradigm of religious identity that Western scholars have followed for generations is one of *distinct* beliefs and practices associated with *discrete* religious institutions. We tend to view “religions” in contrast with one another, such that even

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, for example, despite their common origins, are seen as three distinct, often conflicting, religious traditions. This model has been extended to the “world religions,” often at the peril of failing to recognize multiple religious identities, syncretistic beliefs and practices, and religious borrowing and interpenetration that is in fact more characteristic of religious life as actually practiced throughout the course of human history.

This paradigm dominates the history of Western scholarship on Chinese religion, with its conventional demarcation of “three religions” (Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism) and, more recently, “popular religion.” Certainly, Chinese themselves—especially at the most elite institutional levels—have sometimes seen these traditions as separate entities and we can view them as such as a point of departure, but this has not been the norm for the vast majority of religious practitioners across the centuries, who have not identified themselves as “believers” of one in opposition to the other two. Indeed, if the question were posed to most Chinese, they would respond that their religious beliefs and ritual practices are informed significantly by all three traditions, and would be hard-pressed to distinguish between them. In this introduction, we will first examine how Western scholars have understood the three traditions and provide brief overviews of each; then, we will turn to the more integrative approach of this volume.

## “Confucianism”

In the West, we tend to identify religious traditions with their founders. We think of Christianity as having been founded by Jesus of Nazareth, or of Islam as having been founded by the Prophet Mohammed. The word “Confucianism” suggests a tradition that was “founded” by Confucius, who lived 2500 years ago. Westerners think of “Daoism” as having been founded by Laozi, and of “authentic Buddhism” as having been founded by the Buddha. This emphasis on founders is especially problematic in the study of Chinese religion. “Confucianism,” for example, does not refer simply to one man or one collection of scriptures. We now know that the ideals, values, and behaviors that we call “Confucianism” actually predated Confucius by at least a thousand years.

The English word “Confucianism” is a relatively late invention (there was no use of the term before 1687), and Confucius himself was not known in Europe until Jesuit missionaries visited China in the 1600s. The Christian missionaries saw a strong link between the cultural values that they observed among Chinese officials and the classical texts attributed to Confucius and his followers, so they named this tradition “Confucianism.”

Interestingly, the word “Confucianism” does not exist in the Chinese language. This is largely because “Confucian” values and behaviors pre-date Confucius himself; Confucius’ contribution was to collect, organize, and highlight the beliefs and practices that were definitive of his culture. Confucius is recorded as saying, “I transmit

but do not create. I place my trust in the teachings of antiquity.” As a “transmitter” or “systematizer” of values, Confucius was certainly important, but the values and behaviors of “Confucianism” were central to Chinese culture even before the beginning of recorded history, some one thousand years before Confucius. Neither Confucius nor his followers considered the “Grand Master” to be a religious “founder.”

The terms that are equivalent to “Confucianism” in Chinese are *Ru jia*, *Ru jiao*, and *Ru xue*—the *Ru* school, the *Ru* tradition, and *Ru* studies. In Confucius’ time, the *Ru* were “scholars,” but at a much earlier time (1000 BCE or before), the Chinese character *Ru* referred to religious priests or shamans who were ritual experts—masters of religious music and dance—especially skilled in summoning good spirits, exorcising evil spirits, and bringing rain and other blessings. By the time of Confucius, the *Ru* were also historians, because the shamanic rituals of the past had fallen into disuse and were known only in the historical records. Confucius was an exemplary *Ru* scholar as he was especially interested in cultural history (the history of music, dance, and other arts) and in ritual. One of his major contributions was to codify and advance the ritual traditions of the early Zhou. Consequently, “Confucianism” refers to all of the values and practices of the “*Ru* tradition,” and does not refer simply to the “religion of Confucius.”

Since the Rites Controversy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Western missionaries and scholars have debated the “religious” status of the Confucian tradition, a debate that reverberated among Chinese officials and intellectuals within China. For reasons far removed from religious practice itself, these constituencies concluded that Confucianism was “not a religion” and was, therefore, depending on one’s point of view, (1) compatible with Christianity or (2) “modern” or “scientific.”

The Rites Controversy revolved around the efforts of Italian Jesuit missionaries, led by Europe’s first sinologist, Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), to Christianize China by permitting the practice of “indigenous customs” among the common people, including the veneration of ancestors and the erection of temples to Confucius. Effectively, this meant that Confucianism was “not religious” and therefore not in conflict with Catholic rites and teachings. While the Church ultimately rejected this argument (Pope Clement XI decreed in 1715 that veneration of ancestors, and of Confucius, was incompatible with the teachings of the Catholic Church, a decree that was overturned only in 1939), the precedent was set for a view of Confucianism that was “cultural” rather than “religious.”

For Chinese intellectuals in the late imperial and modern period, it was especially important to cast off the “feudal past” and its “superstitions,” which were blamed on Confucianism. As in the West, considerable intellectual effort was expended to divorce Confucianism from its “supernatural” elements; in particular, the efforts of Chinese intellectuals in the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) to restore Confucianism to its pre-Buddhist and pre-Daoist roots (through “evidentiary scholarship” and “Han learning”) were based partly on a desire to prove Confucianism’s “non-religious” character.

At the popular level, the religious status of the Confucian tradition has never been in doubt, and, since the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) in particular, Confucian practice has been fully integrated in a wide-ranging religious system affirming the “unity of the three-in-one”: a syncretic religion incorporating Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian elements. The religion of China includes temples (or halls within temples) dedicated to Confucian masters or culture heroes who manifested Confucian virtues; a value system grounded in the Confucian ethical code (encompassing filial piety, ritual propriety, honesty, integrity, loyalty, and social harmony); and a sense of cultural identity that is explicitly Confucian, with Confucius himself heralded as the “founder” of China’s cultural core.

Nevertheless, among Western sinologists, the religious status of Confucianism was the first and most frequent topic of discussion, and remains an ongoing debate. On the one hand, Confucianism has a strong humanistic and naturalistic emphasis. Tu Wei-ming, a professor at Harvard and at Beijing University who is recognized as a leader of the New Confucian movement, describes the tradition as “anthropocosmic”—that is, human-centered rather than God-centered. Traditionally, Confucian intellectuals often expressed skepticism about “supernatural” events or causes, and saw in worship and sacrifice only a social benefit, in bringing communities together and reinforcing ethical norms. According to this line of argument, Confucianism represents a system of values, not a cosmology or (religious) system of beliefs. It is a philosophy, not a religion, and should be studied as such.

On the other hand, Confucianism has a rich store of ritual norms and practices, set forth first in the ritual classics of the Han Dynasty (221 BCE—220 CE), and scholars today are engaged in focused research on this ritual tradition, based upon ritual codes and manuals as well as local histories, temple steles (engraved tablets), and archeological findings (Confucian ritual as actually practiced in particular times and places). Based on this growing body of evidence, there is little doubt that “Confucianism” does represent a “religious” tradition, with a variety of cosmological views and a complex set of ritual norms and practices.

What, then, is the “*Ru* tradition,” and how should “Confucianism” be defined? For Chinese, it is the general term for the *religious and ethical ideals, values, and behaviors* that have shaped Chinese culture for the past three to four thousand years. These include

- The veneration of ancestors;
- Education in history and culture (poetry, music, painting, and calligraphy);
- The cultivation, through ritual principles and rites-based behaviors, of harmonious, hierarchical relations in one’s family and social life; and
- The grounding of moral teachings and ethical principles in a religious or cosmic reality.

These are “Confucian” behaviors and values in the sense that Confucians value them, not because Confucius “invented” them. They have become so much part and

parcel of Chinese thought and practice that it is not an exaggeration to say that China, from antiquity to the present, is a thoroughly Confucian culture.

## “Daoism”

“Daoism” is an even more complicated term. In English, the word was coined two to three centuries after “Confucianism,” appearing in book titles as “Taouism” in 1839, “Tauism” in 1855, and finally “Taoism” in 1879. The term was used to translate the Chinese *Daojia* and *Daojiao*, which mean “school of the *Dao*” and “religion of the *Dao*.” (“*Dao*” is the modern accepted Romanization of the Chinese character that was once Romanized as “*Tao*.”)

Until recently, Western historians of China limited “Daoism” to a school of philosophy—set out abstrusely in the *Daode jing* and elaborated by the sages Zhuangzi (dates uncertain, but he lived between 370 and 301 BCE) and Liezi (a historical figure only known by a book appearing in his name, dating anywhere from 300 BCE to 300 CE). These three thinkers were said to be the authors of a philosophy that was distinctly “anti-Confucian”: rebelling against education, against government service, against the moral and ethical codes of social interaction, and against the norms and rules that govern everyday life. These Daoists advocated instead a life of “free and easy wandering” (a chapter title from *The Book of Zhuangzi*), unbounded by the norms of society, or even by the constraints of language and logic. This is one reason that these books are often so confusing—because they are meant to be! The teachings of Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Liezi are the heart of this philosophical tradition, but little is known of a Daoist religious community in this early period, if it existed at all.

Daoists themselves trace their origins to the mythical Laozi, a name meaning “Master Old” or “Old Infant,” the supposed author of the *Daode jing* (*Classic of the Way and its Power*). Legends tell of personal encounters between Confucius and Laozi, so this “religious founder” is purported to have lived, like Confucius, in the Spring and Autumn period of the Zhou Dynasty (770–476 BCE). These hagiographic myths relate that, while in human form, Laozi was a recluse or hermit, disgusted with the ways of the world, only deigning to share his wisdom when departing China for the mystical mountains of the West. Beseched by a gate-keeper at the pass that separated China from the barbarian wilderness “beyond the sands,” Laozi agreed to recite his lessons in “five thousand words”—this explains why the *Daode jing* is often called in Chinese the *Five Thousand Character Classic*. According to some schools of Daoism, Laozi was a seer and magician, capable of physical self-transformation, and is now a transcendent deity or “pure spirit.”

Like Confucianism, however, “Daoism” is not limited to the teachings of one sage or one book. Daoists believe that the *Dao* itself “originated” in a far more distant past: it is a cosmic “Way” (the literal meaning of “*Dao*”) that formed, or began to form, before the existence of all individual “things.” As the *Daode jing* relates, “Before there was a ‘two’ and a ‘three,’ there was the ‘One.’” This “Cosmic One” describes the original unity of the universe, an undifferentiated energy that “gave birth” to the



“ten thousand things.” The *Dao* continues to exist. In fact, it is eternally evolving or “coming into existence” and is “never complete.” It is an energy that permeates the universe and can be “tapped into” as a source of health, vitality, long life, and supernatural power. The Daoist religion is a historical transmission of texts and rituals that attempt to explain, harness, create, and recreate this cosmic energy.

After the Zhou Dynasty, Daoism emerged as a vibrant religious tradition, not limited to a few abstruse philosophical texts but featuring church-like institutions, rites, and ceremonies (with hundreds if not thousands of ritual instruction manuals), a rich tradition of physical and hygienic practices with the goal of long life or immortality, a pantheon of terrestrial and celestial deities, and mythologies of those deities’ lives and heavenly existence.

Of course, historians have been aware of these religious elements for a long time—and all of these beliefs and practices continue to exist—but in the past we tended to denigrate them as superstition or folk religion, not realizing that they are highly elaborate, intellectually sophisticated, and ritually complex, and not recognizing them as part of a continuous whole. “Daoism,” therefore, includes much more than the teachings of Laozi and his immediate followers. It is rather a religious tradition with all the elements of a complete religious system, including a priesthood, composed primarily of ritual specialists; rituals that benefit individuals or social communities by tapping into the power of the *Dao*; and a canon of religious texts (one of the most voluminous canons in the world’s religions, including hundreds of scriptures, commentaries, treatises, and manuals).

Though it is meaningful to speak about a “school of the *Dao*” (*Daojia*) before the Han Dynasty, it had no identifiable social base or institutional organization. “Religious Daoism” as an *institutional* entity did not come into existence until the Latter Han, and enjoyed its fullest development as a religious tradition in the medieval period and after. Today, for most Chinese, “Daoism” refers not simply to a “naturalistic philosophy”—though this is certainly part of it—but more comprehensively to a religious tradition of immense color and complexity, replete with a complex institutional history, ritual traditions, architectural and artistic genres, a priesthood and a monastic tradition, and both home-based and communal worship.

Daoism is covered extensively throughout this book, but its basic contours can be summarized as follows:

- The sense that reality extends beyond the observable realm, and includes spiritual power that has physical effects and manifestations but is not limited to the physical world;
- The belief in *harmony*, not only among persons but between persons, the natural world, and the cosmos;
- The practice of meditation and physical exercises that emphasize the unity of an individual’s psychological, emotional, physical, and spiritual identity; and
- The belief that internal and external harmony has practical benefits, from social welfare to individual health and longevity.

## “Buddhism”

Western scholarship on Buddhism was dominated for centuries, arguably since the Jesuit “conquest” of China in the seventeenth century, by a paradigm of historical decline and theological inauthenticity. Matteo Ricci first made his appearance in China in the guise of a Buddhist monk, but, seeing that it was gentrified scholar-officials (“Confucians”) who had greater social prestige, he soon adopted the “costume” of a Confucian intellectual. From that point on, Western scholars bought into the official Chinese view of Buddhism in the late imperial period: a religion of “foreign” provenance that contributed little of any value to the cultural history of the great empire.

Buddhism first appeared in China in the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). The Han saw the establishment of a political meritocracy—the assignment of positions in government bureaucracy by virtue of merit, not birth—based upon classical learning. China during the Han was the most technologically advanced, economically complex, and politically stable nation in the world. Its renown was so great that, even today, the Chinese are known as “Han people” and the Chinese language is made up of “Han characters” (pronounced *kanji* in Japanese). The Han was the first of China’s great empires: its political boundaries extended as far north as modern Korea and as far south as modern Vietnam.

One effect of the Han’s great power was increased contact with the outside world. It was at this time that China first encountered Buddhism. Central Asian Buddhist monks traveled to the Chinese capital, bringing their scriptures and monastic regulations. They established translation centers and strived to explain Indian cosmologies in Chinese terms. Their influence in the Han was small, but these foreign monks were the seeds of a rich intellectual and monastic tradition that grew rapidly in periods of political disunity and was significantly sinicized (made Chinese) within three hundred years of its arrival.

The close connection between Confucianism and the imperial house meant that Confucian fortunes rose or fell with the imperial state. Consequently, Confucianism flourished during periods of political unity and was eclipsed during periods of political disunity. During the Period of North–South Division (220–581 CE), Buddhism and Daoism enjoyed a meteoric rise in influence and power, and gained widespread followings among the people. For Buddhism, this was a rich period of doctrinal development (including the emergence of rival philosophical schools and sectarian movements within Chinese Buddhism), monastic expansion (from 1800 monasteries housing twenty-four thousand monks and nuns in the fourth century to 40,000 monasteries housing three million monks and nuns by the seventh century), and popular devotional movements (such as “calling upon the name” of the Buddha Amitabha for rebirth in his Pure Land, with associated funerary rites) that appealed to almost all Chinese across the economic and social spectrum.

One of the schools to emerge in the late medieval period was the Chan (Japanese Zen) school. Establishing small mountain cloisters far from the great monasteries of the cities, with their rapidly growing wealth and social prestige, the first Chan communities saw themselves as “traditionalists,” reaffirming the “original intent” of the Buddha by laying claim to an innate “Buddha-mind” and repudiating the “trappings” of institutional Buddhism as it had come to prominence in Chinese culture. Their self-seclusion proved fortuitous, when, in the Tang Dynasty (618–906 CE), a Confucian minister named Han Yu (768–824) composed a memorial to the throne condemning Buddhists and Daoists in a statement of religious exclusivism rarely seen in Chinese history. This memorial expressed the key values of imperial Confucianism: social responsibility, loyalty to the state, veneration of ancestors and of the great teachers of antiquity, and a hierarchical ordering of society based upon intellectual achievement (reading, writing, and knowledge of history and the arts). Han Yu accused Buddhist monks in particular of being parasites upon the productive “four classes” of farmers, workers, artisans, and merchants; of neglecting the core Chinese (that is, Confucian) values of ritual propriety, social harmony, and moral responsibility; and of importing “foreign” or “aberrant” cultural norms. Han Yu’s memorial is representative of the close links between Confucianism and the state, an association that can be traced back to the Han Dynasty and that has typified “imperial Confucianism” for the past two thousand years of Chinese history.

While it is possible to overstate his influence, Han Yu’s memorial led ultimately to a great persecution of Buddhism from 842 to 845, recorded first-hand by a Japanese monk named Ennin who happened to be traveling in pilgrimage to China at the time. Many monks were forcibly returned to lay life, monastic treasures were taken by the state, and Buddhism never again enjoyed the institutional presence that it did in the later medieval period. This, in combination with the “syncretistic” orientation of Chinese thought in late imperial and modern times, led to the refrain of “Buddhist decline” in Western scholarship. It is only in recent years that scholars have recognized Buddhism—even in the late imperial and modern periods—as a rich, vital tradition with a significant, even ubiquitous, presence in Chinese religious life.

In its long history in China, spanning some two thousand years to the present day, Buddhism offers

- A ritual tradition related especially to death and to destinies after death, most notably featuring the participation of clerics in public funerals;
- Cosmological conceptions of karmic reward and punishment, heavens and hells, and ideas of past and future lives—conceptions that are held almost universally among most Chinese as an underlying assumption about the moral law of the universe;

- The practice of meditation and worship—the former enjoying a significant revival, especially among young urban professionals, in contemporary China; and
- The choice of monastic ordination, open to both men and women, which—while chosen by few—is still admired and supported by society as a whole.

## “Popular Religion” and Religious Syncretism

The last millennium of Chinese religious evolution has witnessed a series of creative elaborations on the major concepts and practices of the three traditions (Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism). In this period, *syncretism* was the overwhelming strategy of choice in dealing with religious diversity, and the Buddhist and Daoist traditions outdid one another in developing integrative schemes, seeing the “three religions as one” though always recognizing their own tradition as the highest organizing principle and the most perfect manifestation of the Way. Self-consciously syncretic movements arose especially in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and continue to exist in various forms in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Chinese diaspora. There is now a significant volume of Western scholarship on these movements and their social impact.

Western scholars until the mid twentieth century tended to classify Chinese religions in terms of these three “great traditions,” but since the 1950s some of the most exciting ethnographic research has been at the level of the family, temple, and village or neighborhood community, with the study of Chinese “popular religion.” As Philip Clart discusses in this book, “popular religion” is not easily classified but can be seen to include all elements of religious practice—especially in the family and community—determined by “inclusion” rather than by “membership”; that is, as a function of being part of a group as opposed to individually electing to “follow” a certain institutional religion. This is the “religion of the people” (not limited to the peasantry or the uneducated, but in fact including all classes of society) and includes such practices as the veneration of ancestors in the home, the worship of gods and expiation of ghosts in local temples, cyclical rites (such as annual festivals and rites of passage), and various forms of religious self-cultivation inspired by insights and practices that originated in one or more of the three religions.

The practice of religion in China in the modern era has been weakened by a series of cataclysmic events that have shaken the very foundations of Chinese culture. China’s tumultuous modern history began with a crisis of cultural identity, a crisis that in some respects is still ongoing. Following a military uprising bordering on civil war (the Taiping Rebellion: 1851–1864) and the forcible opening of trade to the West (a drug trade in opium supported by the British and American governments), many Chinese intellectuals in the late Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) blamed Confucian traditionalism, “bookishness,” and self-restraint for China’s failure to compete economically and militarily with the West. This “blame game” led to a wholesale

rejection of China's Confucian past by late nineteenth and early twentieth century students and intellectuals and, most notably, by the Communist revolutionaries who eventually succeeded in gaining power and establishing the People's Republic of China of today: "Down with Confucianism!" and the backwardness for which Confucianism was to blame. "Smash the Confucian Shop!" "Eliminate the Four Olds [old habits, old ideas, old culture, and old customs]!" "Root out unscientific superstition [veneration of gods and ancestors, shamanism, temple construction, and divination]!" These were the rallying cries from the May Fourth Movement of 1919 to the Cultural Revolution of the 1970s.

Chinese intellectuals of the New Culture and May Fourth movements (in the late Qing and early Republican period) criticized Confucianism as the product of a feudal age. The late Qing reformers dedicated to the creation of a "new China" were skeptical of China's religious traditions, believing that religious "superstition" had contributed to China's "backwardness," to the nation's lack of resistance to the imperial aspirations of Japan and the West, and to the political despotism and stagnation of the central government. Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism—as well as the local folk traditions of the people—were associated with China's imperial past. Consequently, the nationalist government of the Republic of China (which was founded in Nanjing in the 1920s and moved its capital to Taipei, Taiwan in 1949) and the central government of the People's Republic of China (which established its capital in Beijing as a Communist state in 1949) placed restrictions on religious observance, especially at the local level, though these have eased significantly, both in Taiwan and on the mainland.

After the victory of Communist forces and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and for at least the next thirty years, the Chinese government continued its attacks on Confucianism and all things "old." Confucius himself was reviled as a feudal "slave holder," and Confucian values were condemned as oppressive and class-based. The Mencian ordering of "people who labor with their minds" above "people who labor with their strength" was reversed, as intellectuals were "sent down to the countryside" to learn from the peasants the values of hard work and physical self-sacrifice. For most of the past century, the nation's intellectual and political leaders have blamed Confucianism for everything that was wrong with "feudal" China.

Against this tide of cultural self-loathing is a modern tradition of Confucian resurgence. In the past fifteen to twenty years the central government has begun an aggressive "resuscitation" of Confucius and traditional Chinese culture, sponsoring academic conferences, establishing institutes of "classical studies" (*guoxue*), and even, at least rhetorically, taking public pride in Confucianism as the basis of Chinese civilization. But this follows a much more protracted effort by a small number of Chinese intellectuals—at home and abroad—to preserve the tradition, and to adapt Confucianism to changing conditions within China and the world. Today, a number of intellectuals argue that Confucianism represents what is best of China's cultural past and the hope of China's cultural identity in the future.

Today, Daoism, Buddhism, and “popular religion” are all resurgent in China, but the influence of Westernization (including Communism) has been great, and China’s religious culture faces a number of challenges. At an institutional level, Buddhist monasteries and Daoist abbeys are administered by quasi-governmental “religious associations” answerable to political authorities. Religious institutions simply are not permitted complete freedom and autonomy, and voluntary religious associations (“cults” or “sects”) are subject to severe restrictions. Nevertheless, the Chinese people today enjoy more religious freedom than they have had in half a century, and religious observance, writing, and research are enjoying a modest recovery.

Clearly, despite major setbacks since the end of the dynastic period, religion in China still survives, and many Chinese—from the relatively uneducated populace of the countryside to the upward-looking consumers of the booming cities—are looking to the traditions of the past for guidance and inspiration. For Western scholars, the cultural revival of religion in China, in both its communal and individual aspects, is an area crying out for new research.

### **Moving Beyond the “Three Traditions”: The Structure and Organization of *The Wiley–Blackwell Companion to Chinese Religions***

Most books on Chinese religion (or “Chinese religions”) are limited to “one” of the so-called “three religions” (Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism) or to an analysis of the three religions in contrast to one another. While accepting this convention to a certain extent (certainly chapters on Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism can be found, and these religious designations are used throughout the book), the traditional view that Chinese religions were defined by and limited to the three traditions is both simplistic and erroneous, if our interest is in knowing how religion has actually been lived and practiced both in history and in contemporary China. This book goes beyond the conventional designations, and the traditional approach to Chinese religion as outlined above, in several ways:

Part I (HISTORICAL SURVEY) traces the history of Chinese religion through the formative periods of Chinese history: the Shang and Zhou Dynasties (c. 1600–249 BCE), the Han through the Six Dynasties (206 BCE—589 CE), the Sui and Tang Dynasties (581–907), the Song Dynasty (960–1279), and the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368–1911). In these opening five chapters the paths of development of the three traditions are outlined both independently and in relation to the others. The authors of these chapters see many of the most significant developments of Chinese religious history as the reflections of encounters between and among the traditions, and employ an integrative approach.

This book does not limit Chinese religious history to the three religions alone, but includes in Part II (THE TRADITIONS) popular religion, Islam, and Christianity in

addition to Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. This gives a much fuller and more complete picture of the Chinese religious landscape in all its forms.

Finally, Part III (CRITICAL TERMS FOR THE STUDY OF CHINESE RELIGIONS) eschews the separation of the three religions altogether, with a wholly integrative approach. Though the names (Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism) are still employed, it is clear that all three contributed, in various degrees, to the actual beliefs and behaviors of religious practitioners. The focus here is on religion as lived, not doctrinal separation or institutional identities.

The nine chapters making up Part III can further be divided into three groups of three: (1) the chapters on SACRED TEXT, RELIGIOUS RITUAL, and MATERIAL CULTURE provide the reader with the basic “building blocks” of religion as such, often in comparative perspective; (2) the chapters on NATURE, DIVINITY, and GENDER examine the Chinese conceptualization of the cosmos and personal identity in both theoretical and practical terms, again crossing the lines of “Confucian,” “Daoist,” and “Buddhist” theories and practices; and (3) finally, the chapters on DIVINATION, ASCETICISM, and SELF-INFLICTED VIOLENCE delve into Chinese religious practice on an individual level by examining religious behaviors in terms of personal histories, albeit in relation to social and political forces.

The authors of these twenty essays are some of the foremost sinological scholars in the world, and all build upon the history of Chinese religious scholarship while extending our knowledge—and our orientations—in new directions. Therefore, this book is not simply an overview of Chinese beliefs and practices (though it is this as well) but also a critical examination of the study of Chinese religion as an academic discipline. Each of the authors proposes new modes of classification and categorization, new standards of evidence, new ways of thinking (often informed by comparative analysis with, for example, Western religious traditions), and “brand new” documentary, archeological, and ethnographic findings about the history and living reality of Chinese religious life, from early antiquity to the present day. Certainly the focus is historical, as no understanding of any culture—and this is especially true of China—can ignore its origins and development through time.

Let us turn now to a brief overview of each chapter, highlighting the particular contribution of each author to the academic study of Chinese religion. Each is creative, inventive, and path-finding in their approach to religious beliefs and practices that have been “known,” but little understood, for hundreds of years.

Part I of the volume is a religious history of China, in five parts. The editor, Randall Nadeau, begins, in Chapter 2, with an overview of Chinese religion in antiquity, introducing the indigenous traditions (Confucianism and Daoism) but also the competing religious practices and worldviews of the earliest historical periods, the Shang and Zhou Dynasties (c. 1600–249 BCE). The chapter begins with Chinese mythic accounts of the origins of Chinese civilization, including legends of a primordial flood and the invention of writing. Summarizing the basic contours of Shang and Zhou cosmology (which are remarkably consistent with Chinese religious conceptions today), Nadeau turns to textual and archeological evidence for religious

practices of the common people, in particular their veneration for the family dead (ancestors) and their propitiation of vengeful spirits (ghosts). He then introduces the basic religious and ethical teachings of the pre-Han Confucian and Daoist schools.

In Chapter 3, Gil Raz traces both the intellectual and religious histories of the Han through the Six Dynasties periods (206 BCE—589 CE), beginning with the encyclopedic compilations of the Han Dynasty and their elaborate theories of *yin* and *yang*, the Five Phases (*wuxing*), and other aspects of early Chinese correlative cosmology. From this cosmological theory, as well as proto-Daoist writings of the pre-Han period (such as the *Zhuangzi* and the *Daode jing*), emerged methods of “immortality cultivation” that enjoyed imperial favor and inspired a full-fledged Daoist religion in the early Common Era. It was during this period that institutional forms of Daoism and Buddhism first emerged. What is especially notable about Raz’s treatment of this history is his emphasis on social, political, and cultic dimensions of early Daoism and Buddhism, and not simply their “teachings” or “ideas.”

Paul Copp, in Chapter 4, describes what was perhaps the “high point” of Daoist and Buddhist history in the Sui and Tang Dynasties (581–907), in both political and cultural terms. Copp’s task is monumental, as the two traditions, under the protection of imperial sponsorship, produced a voluminous corpus of texts and a complex internal division into numerous sects and branches. Copp shows how the doctrinal divisions of the Chinese Buddhist tradition in particular were not purely “intellectual” but political as well, reflecting power struggles both in the monasteries and at court. Copp’s chapter is based on new scholarship that has challenged fundamental assumptions about religious development in this axial period, and gives special emphasis to cultic dimensions of religious practice, in addition to the rich intellectual history of Daoism and Buddhism as reflected in the canonical texts.

Chapter 5 surveys significant developments, especially in Buddhism and Daoism, in the Song Dynasty (960–1279). Shin-yi Chao argues that the Song, often denigrated as a period of “decline” in Chinese religious history, was in fact just the opposite: a period of intense activity spurred by social and economic developments tied to technological innovation in transport and commercial activity. Chinese religion in the Song was thus characterized by laicization and commercialization. Institutionally, the Buddhist and Daoist monastic traditions took the form that they have today, through a retroactive process of lineage-making that gave authority and legitimacy to doctrinal innovations that were in fact new to the Song. In other words, Buddhist and Daoist doctrinal innovations claimed a much older provenance; it is only recent scholarship that has shown that the basic teachings and ritual practices of the Chan, *Tiantai*, and *Quanzhen* schools, which it was claimed originated centuries before, were in fact invented in the Song. Moreover, these teachings and practices spread widely among the people, aided by printing technologies and intensive proselytization on the part of Buddhist and Daoist clerics. Chao argues persuasively that the Song and Alien Dynasties were a watershed in the history of Chinese religions.

The historical chapters of the volume close with a survey of religion in the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368–1911), the last imperial dynasties prior to the establish-



ment of the Republic of China (1911–present) and the People’s Republic of China (1949–present). Here, Mark Meulenbeld (Chapter 6) focuses on “popular religion” (which he terms more accurately as “local” or “territorial” religious practices) and its gods, temples, and forms of worship. One of the primary resources for the study of popular religion in late imperial China are popular novels, and Meulenbeld explores the close relationship between “fiction” and religious hagiography. Millions of Chinese even today are familiar with these sacred narratives and see them represented in temple architecture and re-enacted in theatrical performances. Demonstrating that the distinction between “popular religion” and “institutional religion” is not definite, Meulenbeld points out that another primary source for our knowledge of local cults is the *Daoist Canon*, which was edited in its final, or present, form in the Ming. Meulenbeld also discusses the three traditions (Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism) at a time when they were said to be “unified as one” (*sanjiao he yi*)—the author discusses the prevailing scholarly view that Chinese religion in late imperial and modern times is “syncretistic” in its approach to institutional diversity. The chapter closes with a discussion of state (imperial) religion, in its ritual aspect and in relation to religious institutions.

Part II of the volume is dedicated to “the traditions.” While the three traditions certainly deserve pride of place in Chinese religious history, it is a particular emphasis of this book not to limit the Chinese religious landscape to Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. At the same time, the book demonstrates just how far sinological research has advanced in recent years, including research into those major traditions that have already enjoyed several decades, if not centuries, of scholarly attention.

Keith Knapp’s treatment of the Confucian tradition (Chapter 7) is a case in point. Not limiting himself to a survey of the life or writings (*Lunyu*, or the *Analects*) of Confucius, or the “philosophies” of the sages (Song “Neo-Confucianism” and Ming “Neo-Confucianism”), Knapp settles once and for all the question of the “religious” status of Confucianism by surveying the rich hagiographic narrative tradition of Confucian saints and their extreme acts of filial piety (*xiao*). From these findings, it is clear that Confucianism is a rich religious tradition, with fully developed cosmologies, rituals, and faith commitments, centered around the veneration of ancestors, gods, and saints.

Chapter 8, on the Chinese Daoist tradition, is based on new research, which has, in the past twenty years, outpaced the study of any other aspect of Chinese religion. Louis Komjathy begins with the “classical Daoism” of the pre-Han era as the basis for his survey of a fully articulated ritual and cosmological system that had its origins with the Celestial Masters’ movement of the Latter Han Dynasty (25–220 CE). Komjathy’s chapter consists primarily of a detailed history of the tradition, concluding in the present day, with an additional section on Daoist religious culture: a catalogue of people, movements, places, scriptures, gods, and material objects central to the tradition. One of Komjathy’s scholarly principles is to treat Daoism as a “lived and living” tradition, still vital in China and Chinese communities worldwide.

Mario Poceski surveys the Chinese Buddhist tradition (Chapter 9), again providing the reader with a helpful and detailed chronological overview, from the tradition's earliest introduction in the Han Dynasty to the present. Poceski then analyzes five aspects of Chinese Buddhism: ethical observance, contemplative practice, doctrinal systematization, popular devotion, and interaction with other religious traditions. In the same way as the other traditions-based chapters, Poceski eschews the conventional presentation of Chinese Buddhism as a "history of ideas" and focuses instead on its social, ritual, and material aspects. With Buddhism enjoying a significant revival both in China and in Chinese-speaking communities worldwide, this emphasis on lived practice is especially important.

Basing his chapter on both historical studies and ethnographies, Philip Clart describes the most pervasive form of religious life in China, conventionally labeled "Chinese popular religion" (Chapter 10). As other authors note throughout the volume, this label is problematic, and Clart begins the chapter with a helpful overview of conceptual issues surrounding the term. Then, he describes the principal elements of popular religion: cosmology (gods, ghosts, and ancestors), religious specialists (shamans or mediums, as well as the ordained priests of the Daoist and Buddhist traditions), means of transmission (including both oral traditions and the non-canonized texts of popular religion, whether literary and vernacular), and the layered social contexts of popular beliefs and practices (the family, the community, voluntary religious associations, and the imperial state).

The primary focus of James Frankel's chapter on Islam in China (Chapter 11) is diversity, in particular the division of China's Muslim community into the ethnic minority populations of Xinjiang and the far west, bordering on Central Asia (Uyghur Muslims), and the thoroughly sinicized Han ethnic Muslims of central and southern China (Hui Muslims). The existence of these two groups, with their vastly different social and cultural histories, makes it difficult to make sweeping generalizations about Chinese Islam. Frankel surveys how these communities came into existence and examines their status today, especially in relation to the national government of the People's Republic. In the cases of Islam and Christianity in particular, "identity politics" comes to the fore, in a way that is much more pronounced than it ever was in respect to the traditional three religions of China. Frankel does not catalogue the full range of "beliefs and practices" of Chinese Islam—which are no different from the beliefs and practices of Muslims the world over—but rather how particular practices have been shaped and determined by ethnicity, acculturation, immigration, conquest, and political power.

Clearly, the problem of "Chinese identity" also plays a role in Ryan Dunch's treatment of Chinese Christianity (Chapter 12)—truly, in the modern period, a "Christianity with Chinese characteristics" (to paraphrase Deng Xiaoping's famous characterization of Chinese socialism). Dunch summarizes the history of Christianity in China briefly, but his principal contribution is a detailed overview of the state of Christianity in China as it enters the twenty-first century. The relationship between "state" and "religion" has always been intimate, and always contested, in Chinese

history, but never more so than in the present day with respect to Catholic and Protestant Christianity. Dunch brings us up to date on the contemporary situation. In the final section of his essay, he examines Chinese Christianity in relation to Chinese popular religion as well as the Chinese state, and draws fascinating comparisons between Christianity in China and in the West. For both Islam and Christianity (not to mention Buddhism a millennium before), “foreignness and the problem of authenticity” (to use Dunch’s phrase) is an abiding Chinese preoccupation.

The first of the chapters on “critical terms” making up Part III of this volume unpacks the heavily freighted notion of the sacred text in Chinese religion (Chapter 13). Thomas Jansen points out that, whereas few texts in Chinese history have achieved the status of “infallibility” that we may associate with sacred texts in other religious traditions, the very idea of “text” itself has a cultural weight and importance that is uniquely Chinese. Jansen begins with a discussion of how the Chinese term *jing* (lit. the “warp” of cloth) may best be translated into English: “scripture,” “classic,” or “sacred text.” This terminological flexibility is an indication of the wide variety of ways in which not only scripture but also other forms of “sacred writing” have been viewed in China, from “holy books” to talismans written on air. The latter half of Jansen’s essay discusses three approaches to the academic understanding of sacred text in China, which he classifies as the “textual,” the “functional,” and the “epistemological”: in Chinese religious traditions, texts do not simply “contain meanings” but also inspire elaboration (the rich commentarial tradition of Confucianism, for example) and material engagement (as objects of devotion, often with healing or apotropaic power).

Joshua Capitanio’s discussion of religious ritual (Chapter 14), like Jansen’s of sacred text, begins with Chinese terms and indigenous interpretations; arguably, no Chinese term is more important for understanding Chinese religion than *li* (ritual, rites, rites-based behavior, propriety). In this respect, Capitanio provides an extended discussion of one of China’s foremost “ritual theorists,” the Zhou Dynasty Confucian philosopher Xunzi. Concerning ritual itself, one of the first things we discover is that *li* was closely related to music and dance in the earliest records. In fact, *li* was “performative” in every respect (in J. L. Austin’s sense of bringing about a new state of being for the ritual participants and their environs); Capitanio illustrates this point with Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist examples. But this “performative” aspect does not exhaust the meaning and significance of ritual in the Chinese religious context: religious rituals do not simply “appease the gods”; they also transform the people who perform them, and ritual behavior is seen in China to be a “civilizing” activity. Capitanio explores the performative function of Chinese ritual as an expression of effective power over self, society, and cosmos.

Julius Tsai addresses material culture (Chapter 15) as the third of the three foundations or building blocks of lived religion in China. In a religious context, a material object is not “just a thing”—it is a metaphor or representation pointing beyond itself, and thereby participating in the creation of culture. Tsai begins with an extended discussion of metaphors. For example, the same object (such as a mirror) can have

very different “symbolic meanings” in cultures, depending on the metaphors that are used to describe it (not just “reflecting,” in the Chinese case, but also “shining” and “illuminating”). The use of these and other material objects in religious contexts affects the ways that participants understand their actions and their world. As an example of the ritual use of material objects, as well as their symbolic meanings, Tsai takes us through a fascinating account of a contemporary religious ritual performed in Taiwan, the Daoist rite of “Pacifying the Dragon” (*anlong*).

What is the Chinese religious understanding of the cosmos and personal identity? The first of three chapters on this theme concerns the natural world (Chapter 16). As we have seen in the case of every author in this volume, James Miller starts with indigenous conceptions: the Chinese religious understanding of “nature” in contradistinction to Western views and to modern scientific understandings in particular. Ideas of “nature,” “heaven,” and “earth” all have particular resonances within Chinese religion and philosophical thought. One of the key questions over the course of Chinese intellectual history was the relationship between natural occurrences and the “human” realm, whether individual, social, or political. For the most part, Chinese thinking on this matter has been “correlative,” asserting a fundamental harmony—if not a reciprocity and mutual causation—between the natural and the human. Miller explores these themes through a close study of Confucian and Daoist texts, focusing on the concepts of “naturalness” and “spontaneity” (*ziran*), “heavenly command” (*Tianming*), and “innate vitality” (*xing*). The close relationship between the human and the natural allows China’s religious traditions to see their actions (especially ritual actions) as potent and effective—theory quickly moves to “practice.” Miller contrasts traditional religious views of natural balance and harmony with the “conquering” spirit of “Mao Zedong Thought” and China’s drive to modernization.

Randall Nadeau explores Chinese conceptions of divinity in Chapter 17, providing a typology of spiritual beings as well as an analysis of Chinese philosophical views on the “existence” or “non-existence” of the spirit world. He writes that the concept of atheism is a “topological impossibility” in Chinese culture, as the spirit world is conceived immanently—as part of the natural world and an essential aspect of human nature: gods and spirits are neither supernatural (in the sense of being *outside* nature) nor transcendent (in the sense of being *beyond* nature). In fact, “spirits” or “spirituality” (*shen*: in Chinese the same word is used for both) are inseparable from life itself. While a skeptical tradition has existed in China since the beginnings of recorded history, this skepticism differs significantly from Western atheism and its “denial” of God or other “supernatural” forces.

Turning from the cosmos to the person, Beata Grant explores Chinese religious views and practices surrounding gender identity (Chapter 18) in a helpful overview of gender concepts as well as women’s roles in Chinese religious traditions. Beginning with a survey of philosophical and religious conceptions of gender differentiation in elite forms of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, Grant turns to religion from the ground up, and the centrality of female shamanism and goddess

cults from antiquity to the present. She concludes the chapter with examples of female models of religious attainment, drawing on the Chan (Zen) Buddhist and Daoist traditions particularly. Clearly, “women’s roles” are not peripheral to the history of Chinese religions.

Having surveyed the foundational and conceptual dimensions of Chinese religions, the volume concludes with three chapters on individual practice. In these chapters, which should be considered illustrative rather than exhaustive, the authors discuss practices from the “early,” “middle,” and “late” periods of Chinese dynastic history. What is especially noteworthy about these chapters is the authors’ appreciation of the fact that Chinese religion on the ground is not singly Confucian, Daoist, or Buddhist, but more typically includes elements of all three—indeed, the authors do not organize their essays around these designations.

The first of these chapters on individual religious practice takes us back again to the earliest period of Chinese history, the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, in a theoretically masterful essay on divination (Chapter 19) by Jue Guo. Drawing upon the most recent textual and archeological discoveries—some having been catalogued and accessed only since 2000—Guo discusses what might be considered the earliest form of individual religious practice: the role of the diviner. Following a discussion of new approaches to the study of Chinese divination, Guo outlines four aspects of divination practice, focusing primarily on the Shang and Zhou periods: occasions and purposes, techniques and mechanisms, practitioners, and functions. What we learn from Guo’s research is that divination is one of China’s most ancient and abiding religious practices; the newest archeological discoveries have unearthed its variety and complexity, as well as its central place in the religious lives of ancient Chinese.

Stephen Eskildsen discusses religious self-cultivation in the form of asceticism (Chapter 20), a practice that, as he notes, “was either prerequisite to or constituted a significant dimension of individual self-cultivation in all of the major Chinese religious traditions,” especially in the period from the Han to the Song Dynasties (roughly the first millennium of the Common Era). Beginning with a review of the ascetic impulse in the pre-Qin philosophers—Confucius, Mozi, and the various authors of the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* books—Eskildsen focuses on ascetic practices of medieval Daoism and Buddhism, with interesting notes on disagreements between Daoist and Buddhist theorists on the appropriate meaning and use of ascetic behaviors.

Jimmy Yu continues the same theme, focusing more on the last millennium of Chinese history (the late imperial period in particular) in his chapter on self-inflicted violence (Chapter 21). Here, the “ascetic impulse” within Chinese religion is pushed to the limit. Having certainly been hinted at in the early dynasties and having Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist precedents, the self-infliction of real bodily harm (burning, slicing, and other forms of self-injury, often resulting in death of the physical body) reached a high point in the early modern era, especially at the popular level. This does not mean, however, that it became purely a “popular” religious practice, as acts of supreme self-sacrifice were often rewarded by the imperial state,

and enjoyed its sanction and encouragement. In the late imperial period, this form of individual religious practice was particularly notable among women, and Yu discusses the implications of the mania for self-inflicted wounds by women as a means of female self-expression, social legitimation, and religious liberation. Some of these women ended up as fearsome ghosts, others as revered goddesses.

Altogether, the *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Chinese Religions* is based on the newest discoveries and research in the field, and often covers whole topics that earlier generations of scholars could not have examined, if they were known of at all. Sinological scholarship today is multidisciplinary, requiring familiarity with archeological, ethnographic, and textual resources. Access to these materials, whether resulting from new discoveries or better cataloguing and more in-depth research, has expanded exponentially in the last decade. And there is much more to be done: China is open to ethnographic research into local religions, and has developed research institutes and doctoral programs in religious studies; young scholars around the world enjoy better language training in both modern and classical Chinese, at an earlier age, than their predecessors; catalogues of the Daoist canon and other sacred texts have recently been completed, with more to come; and interest in religion among ordinary Chinese has not waned, in spite of the dire projections of Marxist-Leninist thought and the globalizing influence of Western consumerism. All of this invites more research, and greater personal engagement, with China's rich religious history.

## A Note on the Chinese Language and Chinese Names

Chinese characters (which are pictographic) are represented in English (which is phonetic) through "romanization." In this book, Chinese characters are romanized using a system called "*pin yin romanization*," developed in the People's Republic of China by Russian linguists in the 1950s. It has become the standard convention in China and around the world. All romanizations in this book reflect the pronunciation of the Mandarin dialect.

Books written originally in Chinese will appear with their titles in English translation followed by their Chinese titles employing the *pin yin* romanization. Given the ease with which online searches can be conducted, interested readers can find the Chinese characters for these titles (and often the texts themselves) using any scholarly search engine. The translations from Chinese texts were done by the individual authors unless otherwise indicated.

Some Chinese Daoist and Buddhist terms were originally adopted from Sanskrit; in such cases, the romanized Sanskrit terms are used.

Two other conventions that have been adopted for this book should be mentioned here: first, all Chinese names will appear in their proper order: surname followed by given name (with the exception of Chinese scholars who have adopted the Western order); second, all dates will appear in the forms BCE (before the Common

Era, corresponding to the Euro-American BC) and CE (Common Era, corresponding to the Euro-American AD).

## Further Reading

A full bibliography of scholarship on Chinese religion, even in English, would be voluminous. Following is a list of one principal or representative work for each of the scholars cited in the first part of this essay, as well as a few studies that have been especially significant for the development of the field. Together, they constitute a handy overview of the history of the field, conceived not simply as an “intellectual history” but as a lived tradition. Additional suggested reading can be found at the conclusion of each chapter.

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