Routledge Handbook of Religions in Asia provides a contemporary and comprehensive overview of religion in contemporary Asia. Compiled and introduced by Bryan S. Turner and Oscar Salemink, the Handbook contains specially written chapters by experts in their respective fields.

The wide-ranging introduction discusses issues surrounding Orientalism and the historical development of the discipline of Religious Studies. It conveys how there has been many centuries of interaction between different religious traditions in Asia and discusses the problem of world religions and the range of concepts, such as high and low traditions, folk and formal religions, and popular and orthodox developments.

Individual chapters are presented in the following five parts:

- Asian origins: religious formations;
- Missions, states and religious competition;
- Reform movements and modernity;
- Popular religions;
- Religion and globalization: social dimensions.

Striking a balance between offering basic information about religious cultures in Asia and addressing the complexity of employing a Western terminology in societies with radically different traditions, this advanced-level reference work will be essential reading for students, researchers and scholars of Asian Religions, Sociology, Anthropology, Asian Studies and Religious Studies.

Bryan S. Turner is the Presidential Professor of Sociology and the Director of the Committee on Religion at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, USA and concurrently Professorial Fellow at the Australian Catholic University, Australia. He was the research leader on globalization and religion in the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore (2005–2009) and the Alona Evans Distinguished Visiting Professor of Sociology at Wellesley College (2009–2010). He is the editor of the Routledge Religion in Contemporary Asia Series and was awarded a doctorate of Letters by the University of Cambridge in 2009.

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As all good handbooks, this one is a mine of information, including a host of references for following up the reading of any one of its chapters. More than that, many of its chapters, but especially its introduction and conclusion, contextualise their topics in theoretical debates in the sociological, anthropological and historical comparison of religions, wisely avoiding any attempts at authoritative definitions. But the best thing about it is the focus, beyond doctrines and philosophies, on religious practices be they internet puja, mother-goddess spirit possession, or the sacralisation of place.

Stephan Feuchtwang, London School of Economics, UK

Religions in Asia presents a truly global combination of overviews and focused studies that traverses an Asian diasporic world stretching from London to Mongolia and deals with topics as diverse as amulets and the internet. This theoretically informed collection will be welcomed by all those seeking authoritative but student-friendly essays that illuminate the multiple ways in which global interactions continue to influence Asia's religious beliefs and praxis.

Barbara Watson Andaya, University of Hawai'i, USA

Routledge Handbook of Religions in Asia boldly challenges, critiques, and expands social scientific theories of religion as it illuminates religious practices and global connections. This handbook's vast scope makes it a necessary reference for anyone interested in contemporary religion, globalization, and social change in Asia.

Rachel Rinaldo, University of Virginia, USA

This brilliant collection is a must-read for anyone interested in the religions of Asia. One of the rare books that offers a truly cosmopolitan dialogue across disciplines and cultures, it pushes the boundaries of contemporary thought on religion. A symphonic account of religions in Asia as they go through profound transformations in our global age, this volume prepares us for a better understanding of the future of religions.

Anna Sun, Kenyon College, USA
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The study of ‘the religions of Asia’ has long fascinated Western scholars. This engagement with Asia can be dated from at least the early Jesuit missions to China and Japan, but the understanding of so-called ‘Asian religions’ became more pressing and urgent with the growth of Western colonial encounters with Asia in the middle of the nineteenth century. Although Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and British traders had been engaged in global trade for centuries, a critical turning point was in 1853 with the arrival of American warships off the coast of Japan as the US demanded not only trade arrangements but also ‘freedom of religion’, which was a notion foreign to Japanese culture (Josephson 2012). Whereas theological studies had long been at the heart of much academic learning in the West and beyond, the comparative study of religion from a scientific and comparative perspective emerged as an important aspect of Western scholarship in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Friedrich Max Müller, a founder of Religious Studies in Oxford, referred to his research as ‘the science of religion’ by which he meant the application of critical inspection to the phenomenon of religion. Müller was influential in Oriental scholarship through his translations of the Upanishads in 1884 and his editorship of the Sacred Books of the East that appeared in 50 volumes from 1879 to 1910 with Oxford University Press (Masuzawa 2005).

Max Müller’s work directly or indirectly inspired a good deal of theorizing on religion, partly based on comparative studies of religious doctrine and practice outside of Europe. Many of the key figures – Émile Durkheim, Mircea Eliade, William James, Bronislaw Malinowski, Marcel Mauss, Joachim Wach, Max Weber and Julius Wellhausen – are still highly respected (albeit critically evaluated) figures in the history of Western scholarship. This legacy is often critiqued by contemporary scholarship as reflecting the values and prejudices of the scholars themselves and their times rather than imparting any objective understanding of religion and religions. Such notions as homo religiosus or ‘the religious mind’ are simply ‘products of their own imagination and desire’ (Lincoln 2012: 122). Furthermore, much of the nineteenth-century study of religion was highly critical, if not judgemental, of other religions or of religion in general. In this critical tradition, which drew much of its inspiration from the rationalist assumptions of the Enlightenment, we can think of Karl Marx, David Strauss, Ludwig Feuerbach and Ernest Renan. The growth of a critical science of religion was to some extent a consequence of the rise of the modern secular university, which was independent and separate from the control of the Church.
As an independent research institution, the university was no longer extensively influenced by the theology faculty or heavily involved in the training of ministers of religion. The teaching of theology gradually gave way to the creation of interdisciplinary departments of Religious Studies and the decline of the faculties of divinity.

Within this Western legacy, there was some general agreement about the nature and importance of the so-called world religions and, while there was ample debate about the generic meaning of ‘religion’, there emerged also some degree of consensus about the five ‘world religions’ – Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Confucianism, that is the three Abrahamic monotheistic religions that found their origins in what is now the Middle East, as well as two religions that emerged in what is now South and East Asia; Africa and the Americas were not seen as breeding grounds for world religions. These major religions were recognized as having shaped the historical development of human civilization. The idea that religion lies behind human culture as such is associated with the debate about the so-called ‘Axial Age Religions’ in the period from 800–200 BCE. In Karl Jaspers’ The Origin and Goal of History (1953) in 1949, these religious and ethical movements included Greek philosophy (Socrates and Plato), Zoroastrianism, Confucianism and Buddhism. We can regard Jaspers as simply one figure in a line of scholarship that recognized the importance of religion in shaping the history of civilizations in the West and in Asia (Momigliano 1994).

Modern scholarship is less inclined to make large-scale generalizations about religion and in addition in the second half of the twentieth century there was an emphasis on modernization, which was seen to involve the secularization of societies. In the work of sociologists of religion such as Bryan Wilson (1966) and Peter Berger (1967), the secularization thesis became the dominant paradigm. With the growth of urbanization, secular education and the dominance of scientific rationalism, it was argued that modern societies were, almost by definition, secular. It was recognized, however, that secularization was never a uniform pattern of social change (Martin 1978). For example the US was always described in terms of its ‘exceptionalism’, because religious institutions and values remained a vibrant aspect of civil society (Berger et al. 2008). While there might be exceptions, organized religion was declining under the impact of science, urban lifestyles, secular education and democratic politics. These secular processes were not confined to the West. In a famous study of Muslim villages in Turkey, Daniel Lerner in The Passing of Traditional Society (1958) argued that the tranquil and static cultures of rural society were changing rapidly and inevitably under the revolution in communication systems as radio and television brought the lifestyle and culture of the city to remote village communities. The future lay with secular not religious cultures.

The paradox is that by the beginning of the twenty-first century, religion appears to be a dominant feature of both domestic and international affairs, and the sociology and anthropology of religion are enjoying a revival. In the light of these developments, which are perhaps misleadingly called examples of ‘religious revivalism’, there has been in the academy a so-called ‘religious turn’. What has changed? In the first place religious developments seem to have acquired more importance in many places. For one of the present authors (Salemink), the interest in religion was a logical consequence of the massive conversion to Christianity among the Vietnamese Highlanders that he studied as an anthropologist. With that increased visibility of religious practice came a much greater sensitivity about the problematic character of Western views of Asian religions in comparison with earlier generations of scholars. It is fairly obvious that much of the research on religion in the nineteenth century was bound up with British colonial administration of African and Asian societies (Asad 1973). For example, Durkheim’s approach to religion in 1912 (cf. Durkheim 1915) was dependent on the fieldwork of British colonial administrators (such as Baldwin Spencer and Francis Gillen) in Australia, which had produced Native Tribes of
Central Australia in 1899. Scholars such as Max Weber and Marcel Granet were often dependent on missionary reports for some of their evidence on China, as missionaries were predisposed to focus on native religion in ethnographies, thereby translating their relationship with natives into the latter’s cultural ‘essence’ (Pels and Salemink 1999).

The growing awareness of the differences between the so-called Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) and the religions of Asia became a critical issue with the publication of Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978), which, employing the epistemology of Michel Foucault, analysed the connections between knowledge and power in the scholarship on the Middle East. In brief, the unequal power relationship in colonial history means that Western scholarship studies ‘them’ and thereby produces practical consequences for the people studied, while ‘they’ do not study ‘us’ with the same authority or powerful effects. The charge of Orientalism threw doubt on the credibility of Western interpretations of religion and encouraged the growth of what we might call indigenous or internal research on the religions of Asia – which might include some of the chapters in the current Handbook. A significant amount of critical research was stimulated by Said’s intervention especially with respect to Islam (Turner and Nasir 2013). More recently there has been a reappraisal of Said’s thesis, which among other things did not sufficiently differentiate between those Western societies that had a significant colonial history (such as France, Britain and the Netherlands) and those that did not (Germany, Austria and Italy) (Varisco 2007). Nevertheless the critique of Orientalism prompted a major shift in the approach of Western scholarship towards the religions of Asia.

One further development associated with the Orientalist debate has been the rise of a feminist critique of traditional religious studies as a distinctively masculine orientation to understanding religion. Edward Said (1978) himself had noted how Western writings about the Orient tended to portray ‘Orientals’ in contrast with the European self-image as rational, strong and masculine – thus essentializing Orientals as irrational, weak and feminized. Going beyond that, feminist scholars have noted that traditional research was not only dominated by Christian or at least Western assumptions, but it was often patriarchal in its presuppositions. Issues about gender and religion have become increasingly prevalent in modern research. In her chapter Fang-Long Shih considers the many ways in which gender plays a major role in the organization of religious practices in Asian societies.

**Globalizing religions**

One important aspect of this intellectual reorientation is the growth of Asian migrant communities in the West (Levitt 2007). Chinese minorities played an important role politically and culturally in large swathes of Asia, from Thailand to the Philippines (Wang 1991), but Chinese migration to the West from the nineteenth century onwards has had a transformative impact on host societies both economically and culturally (McKeown 2010; Ong 1999). There are now substantial Buddhist and Hindu communities throughout the Western world as a consequence of labour migration especially out of South Asia and China. These economic developments, including the growing power of the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), have modified the power relationships between East and West, and as a consequence the religious landscape of the West has become far more diverse and complicated. It is now far more difficult to refer to the religions of Asia – as the Asian religioscape (cf. Turner 2006: 213) has become incredibly diverse and Asians have migrated around the world; it has become even more problematic to talk about ‘Asian religions’, as many such religions have non-Asian adherents, like the Falun Gong (cf. Scott, this volume). These social and cultural changes are consequences of the impact of globalization on all religions. As a consequence many of the chapters in this Handbook
discuss the globalization of religions from Asia. For example, the chapters by Scott Dalby on the Falun Gong movement, Lionel Obadia and Fang-Long Shih on Buddhism, Knut Jacobsen on Hinduism, Surinder Jodhka and Kristina Myrvold on Sikhism and Pnina Werbner on Islam explore how these religions have become global phenomena. Perhaps an additional factor is the growth of the Internet that caused religions to some extent to become online religions. This issue – the impact of new media on religious change – is explored in the chapter by Sam Han. One further aspect of globalization has been the urbanization of the world’s population, the decline of agricultural employment and the decline of folk traditions (but not necessarily of folk religions). This urbanization of religions was associated with Max Weber’s thesis about the compatibility between Protestantism, capitalism and urban society (Weber 2002; Barbalet this volume). The parallel between Islamic piety and the Protestant ethic in Southeast Asia is explored by Daromir Rudnyckyj in his *Spiritual Economies* (2010) and in his chapter ‘Religion and Asia’s middle classes’. The global cultural exchange, with Buddhism and Hinduism growing in the West and charismatic Christianity spreading to Asia (as discussed by Terence Chong and Daniel Goh in their analysis of Pentecostalism and the mega-church), makes it difficult to refer to ‘Asian religions’ as if they were neatly defined in geographical terms.

We need to qualify these observations on globalization. The traditional notion of ‘Asian religions’ typically included Buddhism, Sikhism, Hinduism, Shinto, Daoism and Confucianism. These religions are for instance the topic of such basic textbooks as *Eastern Religions* (Coogan 2005) or *Religions of Asia in Practice* (Lopez 2002). Christianity is almost never defined as an ‘Asian Religion’ and yet the Christian Church had established itself outside the Middle East early on. Miaphysite Christianity (451–622) had established missionary activity in Africa and Asia, and had encountered Buddhist monks in its eastern expansion. The Jesuits were already a global missionary movement when Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) arrived in Macau in 1582 and adopted the attire of a Buddhist monk. Another Jesuit Robert de Nobili (1577–1656) was working in southern India where he also adopted the local attire and practices of a high-caste Hindu. In China, Japan and India the Jesuits did not enjoy the backing of an imperial military presence to consolidate their missionary activity. In this respect, Asia as a missionary field was very different from Latin America where the Church had the backing of either Portugal or Spain. The principal exception was the Philippines, a Spanish colony named after Philip II, where the Augustinian friars could rely on considerable military force to underpin their missionary activities (MacCulloch 2010). In this *Handbook*, given the presence of Christian missions over many centuries, we have included several chapters on Christianity by Terence Chong and Daniel Goh, by Julius Bautista on the Philippines, by Thomas J. Csordas and Amrita Kurian on Roman Catholicism in India, and by Zheng Yangwen on conversions to Christianity in China.

Our second qualification therefore is to note that the globalization of religions is not exactly a modern development. Perhaps we could talk about historical waves of globalization while recognizing that globalization from the late nineteenth century onwards has been particularly intense. Sociologists have often mistakenly identified globalization as an effect of modern means of communication, but there is a strong argument to suggest that the Silk Road, for example, was a major economic factor in the spread of cultures and religions between the Mediterranean, the Middle East and China. The same goes for the so-called Maritime Silk Road (Kauz 2010). Contemporary research on the history of Southeast Asia has concluded that the region has been heavily involved in international trade (and hence with cultural and religious exchanges) since at least the ninth century (Lieberman 2003). Both Christianity and Islam played an important role in this global exchange of both commodities and cultures. In the *Handbook*, Paul Wormser examines the connection between the early spread of Islam and trade routes, and Pnina Werbner looks more generally at globalization and Islam.
The next qualification is that, with globalization and the modernization of religions through the growth of urban piety, it does not follow that folk religions disappear. Of course the idea of ‘folk religion’ along with the distinction between ‘the great and little tradition’ in Buddhist studies is much disputed, because anthropologists tend to argue that ‘folk’ involves an implicit normative judgement that such religious traditions are somehow inauthentic or corrupt versions of the religions of the elite. In this Introduction, by ‘folk’ we simply mean the religious practices of the people in their everyday settings, largely outside the purview of institutionalized religious organizations and clergy. This does not mean that ‘folk religions’ are not subject to social change and adaptation; in a variety of different contexts folk religions were considered superstitious, heretical or heterodox by religious, scientific and/or political authorities, and therefore controlled, curtailed, banned and driven underground. Ironically, at present many such folk religions are recognized as intangible cultural heritage by secular authorities or UNESCO (Salemink 2013). In this Handbook, we consider a range of folk or popular religious manifestations such as Mongolian shamanism (Morten Axel Pedersen), Daoism and folk religions in China (Thomas David Dubois), popular Buddhism in Thailand (James Taylor), spirit possession in Vietnam (Oscar Salemink) and neo-Sufism or urban Sufism (Julia Howell).

Having considered these various qualifications to globalization, we return to the discussion of the changes that have taken place in religious studies to some extent since Edward Said’s (1978) critique of the Orientalist tradition that treated Asian cultures as static and incapable of self-reflection. Perhaps the most significant change has been greater sensitivity to the cultural specificity of the word ‘religion’. Not only is there greater sensitivity, there is also genuine puzzlement as to whether we can use the term ‘religion’ to describe for instance Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism. One solution has been to distinguish between ‘religion’ as a generic term and ‘religions’ to refer to the actual manifestation of religious belief and practices in different contexts. Another common distinction is between faith and religion, where the former refers to powerful, foundational experiences of the sacred and religion refers to the institutions that house and occasionally conflict with faith. This distinction was important for example in Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s influential The Meaning and End of Religion (1963). It has a parallel in Max Weber’s distinction between charisma and institution in his The Sociology of Religion (1965). Other scholars have seen an important difference or antagonism between the otherness of the religious experience and the institutionalization of religion. For example, Rudolf Otto (1929) in The Idea of the Holy defined the religious experience of the sacred or ‘numinous’ as an event outside any mundane or routine world that aroused the individual to a new level of consciousness that he described as the ‘mysterium tremendum et fascinans’. We can translate this expression as referring to experiences that are simultaneously mysterious, fascinating and awe-inspiring. By contrast, the secular is routine, predictable and dull.

Other approaches have sought to treat ‘religion’ in terms of various components or dimensions. In The World Religions, Ninian Smart (1989) proposed to study religions in terms of their practical and ritual, experiential and emotional, the narrative and mythic, doctrinal and philosophical, ethical and legal, social and institutional, and finally material dimensions. This scheme is useful in bringing out the complexity of religion as a socio-cultural system. A similar approach was taken in the famous definition of religion as a cultural system by Clifford Geertz (1973: 90) in The Interpretation of Cultures:

a religion is (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.
These definitions of religion had the merit of indicating that religion is more than a set of beliefs or world views. For example, belief in God or divine persons or spirits does not necessarily explain human action without reference to how those beliefs are embedded in rituals and religious objects. In the contemporary study of religion there is, for example, considerable interest in what is described as ‘material religion’ in which attention is directed at religious clothing, icons, buildings, amulets, relics and so forth. The subtitle of the journal Material Religion is ‘objects, art and belief’. In this Handbook, Carla Bellamy studies the role of shrines in worship and pilgrimage in South Asia. In this focus on material religion, the importance of the body in religious practices has also become a salient feature of current research. In his chapter on the Holy Week in the province of Pampanga, the Philippines, Julius Bautista considers how the way that penitents relate to the body of the suffering Christ indexes a specific type of Christology. In Thailand James Taylor examines the role of amulets in popular Buddhism.

While there is growing sophistication and sensitivity to the issues attending the comparative study of religion, the problem of definition is perennial and deep-rooted. Indeed in Islam Observed, Clifford Geertz (1968: 1) in his comparison of Morocco and Indonesia lamented that ‘The comparative study of religion has always been plagued by this peculiar embarrassment: the elusiveness of its subject matter’. The underlying problem for modern anthropology is that definitions of religion have been either implicitly or explicitly based on a Protestant view of what religion is, namely the beliefs of individuals about the sacred, the importance of conversion to faith, the centrality of an authoritative text, the congregational basis of the collective of the faithful and the role of a church embracing both ministers and lay people. The so-called ‘religions of India’ – Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Jainism – were classified mainly during the second half of the nineteenth century. In this process of construction and classification in early Orientalist scholarship, Protestant missionaries were prominent such as the Bombay Scottish missionary society whose members claimed to study religions from an objective and scientific perspective (Numark 2011). The criticism of this underlying set of assumptions was famously developed by Talal Asad (1993) in his Genealogies of Religion, who argued that the category of religion emerged historically simultaneously with the notion of the secular in early modern Europe. This did more than put in motion a Weberian process of disenchantment that breached the ‘sacred canopy’ that cast a divine gloss over all human relations (cf. Berger 1967). in Formations of the Secular, Asad (2003) argues that ‘secular’ was more than a negation of the ‘religious’ and was constitutive of subjectivities in a Foucaultian sense.

One issue, which this debate has raised, concerns the question of conversion to religion. In the Protestant evangelical tradition, the authenticity of religious commitment is measured in terms of conversion, which is often described as being ‘born again’. This perspective does not apply to all branches of Christianity and it is not relevant to many religions that are not related to the Christian paradigm. Several chapters in this collection also note that the idea that an individual should embrace only one religious tradition is alien to many Asian cultures. Given the pervasive character of Confucianism in parts of Asia, it would be common for an individual or social group to combine Confucian ideas with Buddhist practices and Daoist dietary notions. In popular culture, it would be common in Japan or South Korea for a young couple from a Buddhist tradition to want a Western Christian wedding. In short, while monotheistic religions worship a jealous God who assumes that with conversion an individual abandons previous beliefs and practices, this assumption does not necessarily hold in Asian religious practices that may be less oriented to an exclusive belief in one god and more based on notions of transaction and ritual efficacy.

In this collection various chapters bring our attention to the cultural specificity of many approaches to the definition of religion. For example, Jason Ånanda Josephson looks at the invention of religion in Japan as a consequence of Japan’s entry into the emerging global economy in
the second half of the nineteenth century. Aike Rots examines the complex evolution of Shinto 'from imperial cult to nature worship', and Andrea Pinkney looks at the creation of 'Hinduism' out of the development of the population census carried out by the British colonial administration in South Asia. The idea of 'Hindu' became a convenient administrative category for classifying the population. As an alternative approach, we can consider the various manifestations of religion in South Asia as growing out of an ancient Vedic spirituality (Pinkney, this volume).

As Turner shows in his conclusion to the Handbook, it was Buddhism that posed the greatest difficulties for any comparative study of religion, simply because the classical tradition of the Buddha was philosophically agnostic towards the existence of gods, spirits and other forms of divinity. In The Foundations of Buddhism, Rupert Gethin (1998) complains about the Western tendency to define religion by reference to belief in divine beings and offers a definition of Buddhism that concentrates on those practices that alleviate suffering or dukkha. In this interpretation, Buddhism is 'a practical way of dealing with the reality of suffering' (Gethin 1998: 64).

Similar problems arise in the case of Confucianism. In his chapter Kwang-Kuo Hwang adopts a Chinese perspective when considering many of the problems in understanding Confucianism against the backdrop of the legacy of Max Weber by emphasizing metaphysical notions of 'heaven' rather than explicitly religious notions of 'god/s'.

As scholars have come to accept the complexity of the phrase 'religion and religions', there has been an equally important reanalysis and reconceptualization of various forms of the secular. Whereas in sociology there had been a conventional notion of secularization as a process involving the decline of religious belief and practice (see Bubandt and Van Beek 2012; Hansen 2000), there is now a recognition that secularism and secularity have varied considerably across the West. In Scandinavia, where most of the population is not religious, there is the idea that secularization is incomplete as institutionally the churches and the state have been deeply intertwined with each other (Van den Breemer et al. 2013). The so-called 'wall' between the churches and the state in America produced a dynamic civil society in which denominations could flourish (Warner 1993). These patterns of church and state were very different in Roman Catholic societies both in southern Europe and Latin America. It is also now common to distinguish between the official laïcité of Republican France and the close interconnections between churches and government in federal Germany. Finally there is also recognition that, while churches as institutions have declined in much of northern Europe, there is growing spirituality as a post-institutional and post-orthodox movement especially among youth (Bender et al. 2013).

In Asia there is no recognition of a clear pattern of secularization. Rather Pentecostalism has enjoyed considerable success in societies as different as Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines. Charismatic Catholicism has a considerable following in the Philippines and among Filipino migrants. In China and Vietnam where the communist parties have shown greater willingness to tolerate religious revivals, there is evidence of religious growth of both Christianity and so-called 'cults' (Ashiya and Wank 2009; Chau 2006, 2011; Taylor 2007; Yang 2012). As Julia Howell demonstrates in her chapter, there is an important growth of neo-Sufi practice in Indonesia and throughout Southeast Asia. In South Asia there is a broad growth in reformist Islam as Irfan Ahmad demonstrates in his chapter. Fang-Long Shih describes similar developments in Taiwan where Buddhists attempt to engage in new ways with the secular world. These global developments have often led students of religion to reject the original secularization thesis and instead argue the case for the re-sacralization or de-secularization of society (Berger 1999).

From this brief survey, we can see that the comparative study of religion and religions, facing many conceptual problems, has enjoyed considerable progress over the last decade. The taken for granted assumptions of conventional Orientalism have been identified and criticized, and
to a large extent these assumptions have been overtaken by a more generous and inclusive cosmopolitanism in both the humanities and social sciences. With globalization, there is a greater awareness of cultural and religious interconnections, and there is a deeper appreciation of the conditions under which 'the religions of Asia' were constructed through an encounter with the West (DuBois 2009; Masuzawa 2005; Van der Veer 2001). As Turner demonstrates in his conclusion to the Handbook, globalization has also meant that religions are now involved in a global dialogue about the nature of religious phenomena and about the conditions under which they might co-exist in harmony. In the West, The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) expressed recognition of the validity of other religious traditions and the need for mutual respect of different forms of spirituality (Casanova 2009). Similarly, the growth of Buddhism as a global religion has also resulted in engagement with other cultures, including contact with other religions through Buddhist 'evangelism'. Paradoxically this has also led to processes of purification and demands of exclusive faith, as in monotheistic religions worshipping a 'jealous god'.

There is the argument that, accepting the trend of cultural anthropology to contextualize all discussion of religion, modern globalization does change the framework of this epistemological debate about religion and religions. Religious leaders – priests, monks, ministers, mullahs and others – gather at international conferences and spiritual gatherings, and share ideas about religious phenomena. They often adopt each other's strategies for organizing, commanding loyalty, proselytization and growth. In the context of religious diasporas, there are processes of assimilation that change traditions to meet new situations. In the American context, there has been a 'denominationalization' of non-Christian religions in their adjustment to a competitive Western environment. Mucahit Bilici (2012) in Finding Mecca in America examines the gradual transformation of Islam, for example, by adjusting the direction of prayers to Mecca by shifting the orientation of the qibla to match the curvature of the earth. The subtitle of his book describes the process How Islam is Becoming an American Religion. Despite considerable opposition to the Shari'a by Republican politicians, there is also evidence that Shari'a is being accepted in some circles in the US (Joppke and Torpey 2013). Similar developments are taking place with both Hinduism and Buddhism.

Religion and the state

In the above, we discussed religions in Asia to a major extent in connection with questions of secularization and of a perceived religious revival or upturn. As argued before, in much of the literature on secularization European history was held up as the standard for a long time, and in many ways it still is. A standard narrative of secularization holds that a secular space opened up with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which concluded a series of devastating religious wars between a hegemonic brand of Christianity, Roman Catholicism and 'heterodox' Christianities known as Protestantism. This formed the starting point for the separation between church and state and for a gradual desacralization of sovereign power (Turner 2006). According to Talal Asad (2003), the emergence of a discourse of religion as well as of the emergent categories of the 'religious' and the 'secular' can be located in this early modern period in Western Europe.

In various ways, theories of secularization universalized these specific and localized historical developments. Max Weber (1965) wrote about the process of rationalization and the consequent disenchantment of the world in the sense that the relations of humans with nature and with each other lost their religious gloss. In his footsteps, Peter Berger (1967) wrote about the disappearance of the 'sacred canopy' in terms of the disappearance of religion itself. José Casanova, however, argued that secularization did not mean the disappearance of religion, but rather its cordonning off in a separate social sphere in the context of the differentiation of society in various
spheres, like the economy, the state, civil society, etc. This turned religion into a private affair, thus making the individualization of religious belief and practice possible (Casanova 1994).

However, in his *Formations of the Secular* Talal Asad (2003) went beyond a simplistic notion of ‘the secular’ as meaning the ‘non-religious’, that is, what is left if you strip away the religious. Instead, he proposed to conceive of ‘the secular’ as productive in the Foucaultian sense of enabling new discourses based on different assumptions about personhood and forging new subjectivities. In *Formations*, he gives a number of examples, like the avoidance of pain and the pursuit of pleasure in this life, and the primacy of the ‘human’ bearing inalienable (human) rights. In other words, notions of the secular that proliferate with the process of secularization are simultaneously predicated on, and constitutive of, liberal notions of the free individual: thus, the secular and the individual are mutually constitutive, and inevitably affect religious sensibilities and subjectivities as well. For Casanova, then, there is no contradiction or even tension between religion – like Catholicism – and human rights, since religion is relegated to the private realm of individual belief and hence choice (Casanova 2011).

In early modern Europe, however, the Treaty of Westphalia did not establish freedom of religion for citizens, but attributed the choice of the dominant religion to the sovereign. This element of choice undermined the absolute religious and moral authority of the Catholic Church, thus allowing for different sources of authority to emerge. One such alternative – that is, other than religious – authority that is often seen as competing with religious authority and authorities is science as a secular, human claim to absolute knowledge; one can think of the various evolutionist schemas in which humanity moves via a religious and metaphysical stage to a scientific stage. The various political ideologies that emerged in the nineteenth century constitute another competing source of moral authority, oftentimes in contradistinction with religious authorities (Gray 1998). A more recent claim to global moral authority can be found in the notion of human rights, which in liberal thinking supersedes religious convictions (Ignatieff 2001).

The relevance of this rather Eurocentric sketch lies in the globalization of these religious and secular notions over the past century, as mentioned above and as shown in various chapters. However, this globalization does not mean that such originally Eurocentric notions are uncontested in Asia. One example of such contestation is the conversion to Christianity, Islam or text-based world religions among people that adhere to animistic community religions – often, but not exclusively, upland tribal groups. From a liberal vantage point conversion is regarded as a matter of individual choice, and hence of freedom of religion as one of the fundamental human rights. From the vantage point of the ‘unconverted’, however, the failure to abide by customary prescriptions and proscriptions and to perform necessary rituals endangers the entire community, and therefore is no matter of free choice (Ngô 2011). Jumping from a local to a national scale, many states in Asia regard conversion – especially but not exclusively to Christianity and Islam – as highly problematic and as a threat to national security. In many Muslim-majority countries (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Malaysia) but also non-Muslim countries as diverse as China, Vietnam, India and Sri Lanka Christian missionization is construed as a threat. Similar observations can be made with regards to Islamic proselytization or to the spread of new religions like Falun Gong in and out of China. The point to note here is that many states in Asia seek to control religious affiliations in their populations.

This religious control does not necessarily occur in countries with an official – like Iran or Malaysia – or unofficial state religion – like Sri Lanka or Thailand – but also in constitutionally secular states like India, Indonesia, Vietnam and China, as is brought out explicitly or implicitly in various contributions to this *Handbook*. As countries ruling with reference to Leninist principles of governance, Vietnam and China have Bureaus of Religious Affairs that regulate the degree of
permissibility and acceptance of religions that have to formally register with and seek permission to operate from the state. But more interesting in this regard are the examples of Indonesia and Malaysia. A secular state with a large Muslim majority, Indonesia guarantees freedom of religion, but is simultaneously founded on five philosophical principles, the *pancasila*. The first principle of ‘belief in the one and only god’ arrogates the authority to ascertain what true religions are to the state that recognizes six valid religions in Indonesia (Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism). Malaysia also has a secular constitution but adopts Islam as its state religion, and the state strictly monitors the behaviour of its Muslim population for its conformity to notions of *sharia* law. However, this surveillance is limited to the Malay segment of the population (61 per cent) who are supposed to be Muslim, but not to the rest of the population which is served by a veritable religious market (Ackerman and Lee 1988; Lee 1993; Lee and Ackerman 1997). In other words, in many Asian countries the state assumes the authority to act as arbiter over legitimate religious affiliations, regardless of the secular or religious nature of that state.

Thus, although the Westphalian Treaty is far removed in time and space from the Asian regions discussed here, this would suggest that the main outcomes of that treaty – the establishment of internal state sovereignty and the affirmation of the principle of *eius regio, eius religio* [who rules the land determines the religion] – apply more to contemporary Asia than to Europe, in the sense that most Asian states seek to exercise control over the religious affiliations and practices of their citizens. The connection between religion and politics is often thought of in terms of the secularization of sovereign power – at least by the current authors (cf. Turner 2006; Salemink 2007, 2009) – in past and present. However, in contrast with liberal notions of religion as a private affair, Asian states – including secular states – also seek to control religion as a social sphere apart from the ‘sacred canopy’. China offers an interesting example of both continuities and interruptions, as the emperors were regarded as the ritual mediator between this world and Heaven and hence assumed the authority to classify religious traditions as orthodox or heterodox (hence illegitimate). In contemporary China, the (secularist) Communist Party assumes the same authority as the former emperors to outlaw religious traditions as heterodox, as ‘crooked sects’, as superstitious and unscientific, or as undermining national unity (cf. Feuchtwang 2001, 2007; Feuchtwang and Rowlands 2010; Zito 1997; for Vietnam see Salemink 2007). Following Max Weber’s argument about charismatic authority as the secularization of a gift of grace from God (Weber 1922), it has often been argued that secularization entailed the shift of the attribution of sacredness from divinities to the state. If that implies that in China the Communist Party is sacralized, one could argue that this necessitates closer political surveillance of the sphere of the religious by the party-state. In general one could say that the religious and the political are deeply intertwined in Asia.

**Structure and rationale**

While in this Introduction we have looked at the problematic character of ‘religion’ in recent scholarship, the *Handbook* on the whole does not dwell on the epistemological problems of finding a satisfactory definition of religion. Definitions in general – whether of ‘money’ in economics or ‘power’ in political science – may be inevitably unsatisfactory and hence futile. Furthermore we do not engage in any protracted debate about what counts as ‘Asia’ (Duara 2010). Our approach is somewhat pragmatic; the chapters in this volume cover South Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia and in the chapter on shamanism Northern and Central Asia. This *Handbook* is written mainly from the perspectives of anthropology, history and sociology. These disciplines are characteristically focused on how religions are actually practised in everyday life rather than on how the faithful ought to practice. As a result, these disciplines are not especially
concerned with the written, textual traditions or with the 'orthodoxy' of religions. They differ in this respect both from theology, from philosophy of religion and from religious studies. The social sciences are not concerned with the truth or falsity of religious beliefs, and indeed they are more concerned with rituals and practices in general. The chapter by Carla Bellamy on shrines and pilgrimage is a good illustration of the focus on the sites of religious practices rather than on belief systems. Anthropology and sociology in particular examine how religious institutions shape and are shaped by the social and cultural environment in which they exist. Jack Barbalet’s chapter on the debate about how religious asceticism ('the Protestant ethic') is connected to economic discipline ('the spirit of capitalism') is illustrative of this type of analysis. A corollary of this approach is that the Handbook is primarily concerned with contemporary developments in religions in Asia such as the growth of online religion (Sam Han’s chapter), neo-Sufism (the contribution by Julia Howell), popular Buddhism (the chapters by James Taylor, Lionel Obadiah and Judith Snodgrass) or the reform of Islam in South Asia (in the chapter by Irfan Ahmad). Of course some chapters (by Andrea Pinkey and Paul Wormser) have provided a historical context to this debate about religion and modernity. Both Josephson and Rots in their chapters show how religions were transformed, invented and given new meanings in modern Japanese history.

Our second objective was to recruit scholars from around the world with some balance between scholars living in the West and those in Asia. Our authors come from Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Hong Kong, India, the Netherlands, Norway, Singapore, Sweden, Taiwan and the US. Many of our authors who are living in the West are of Asian origin, and both editors have lived and worked in Asia. We have also achieved a relatively good gender balance among our authors. We believe that this composition gives us a cosmopolitan perspective on religion that goes some way in breaking down rigid distinctions between East and West (cf. Casanova 2011; Pollock et al. 2000).

We have a number of chapters on Islam – in South Asia (Irfan Ahmad), in Southeast Asia (Julia Howell) and globally (Pnina Werbner and Paul Wormser). In writing about Islam, we have tried to avoid focusing on religion as a security issue. In the modern academy, the sociology of Islam is all too frequently slanted towards studies of terrorism, civil conflict and violence. Of course there have been and are tragic episodes of inter-religious violence in Indonesia (specifically in the Moluccas Islands), in Myanmar, in South India and in the southern regions of Thailand. Paradoxically, similar forms of communal violence can be connected to Buddhist (Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand) and Hindu (India, Sri Lanka) religions. For these reasons we have not concentrated on a simplistic 'clash of civilizations' interpretation (cf. Huntington 1996) simply because this aspect of the politics of religion has been in large measure the dominant topic of research following such tragic events as 9/11 and the Bali Bombing. Against this background of contemporary conflict it is worth emphasizing the fact that the sea ports of Southeast Asia have cosmopolitan cultures and a history of compromise and adaptation (Peletz 2011). Our focus is on the routine and everyday character of religious practice rather than on rare traumatic and tragic events.

In a recent article in the Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Christian Smith and colleagues (2013) offered a range of theses that were aimed to redirect and uplift the sociological study of religion. They called on sociology to 'expand its conceptual and theoretical focus to address a wider variety of disciplines, nations, and religions' and the sociology of religion 'needs to focus on big issues, questions and debates, and show how religion must be taken into account to address and answer them well' (Smith et al. 2013: 36). We can immodestly claim that this Handbook contributes to the expansion of the focus of social sciences and examines 'big issues, questions and debates' from a multidisciplinary perspective, but it also seeks to overcome any simple East-West binary.
References


Chinese folk festivals

Thomas David DuBois

It can be very difficult to grasp the big picture of China's religious life. Not only does Chinese belief freely combine elements from the three sacerdotal traditions of Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism, but the ideas expressed in scriptures are quite often only tangentially related to the rituals and practices performed in homes and villages.

For decades, scholars have struggled to come up with theories and typologies that would explain how these different levels coexist and interact, and yet create what is undoubtedly a coherent whole that we may call Chinese religion. Half a century ago, C.K. Yang produced one of the most influential explanations of this difference when he divided Chinese religion into institutional and 'diffused' varieties. The former consists of identifiable sects and teachings; the latter is the mix of practices and beliefs that exist outside of formal institutions (Yang 1961). Others have drawn the line at the presence of written texts, with scriptures being the hallmark of elite, institutional religion, from which the oral, performed religion of the masses derived (Granet 1975). Another division comes at the point of legality. Beginning in the late 1300s, the Chinese imperial state formalized a very specific definition of proper (zheng) religious practices, texts and cults, with everything else categorized either as illicit (yin) or heretical (xie). Legal religion was thus largely a product of the state order, while those practices and texts classified as heretical became a haven and gathering point for anti-state activity, particularly when combined with apocalyptic predictions (de Groot 1903; Zhao 2007). Each of these definitions have merit, but they all share a common trait in that they focus on a knowable quality of religion as being institutional, textual or legal, and then define by default everything else, often the religious experience of the great majority of the people, by the absence of that quality.

It is much more productive to think of Chinese lived religion not as popular or folk, but as local religion; it is the religion of a place. Chinese religion has three levels of geography: national, regional and local. Like the Chinese language, religion is based around an evolving core of beliefs and practices that are shared by Chinese communities everywhere. This core evolved out of a variety of sources: the sacerdotal traditions of Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism (as well as historical teachings such as medieval Manichaeism), state promotion or suppression, and local beliefs and cults that over time took on a national currency. This common culture lives and evolves, giving rise to regional variation. Like dialect, regional religious cultures are a function of communication: they are shaped by geography and the historical flows of population.
Unlike language, however, religion also has a third level of creative variation at the level of local community. In a way, local variation is also a function of communication. Scholars have envisioned Chinese rural society as of spheres, based on how far people travel to buy and sell goods, find a bride, etc. (DuBois 2005: 24–29; Ishida 1979; Lin 1988; Nakamura 1974). By virtue of the intensity of communication inside them, these spheres are like miniature regions, and naturally develop their own slight variations on more general customs and traditions. But local society also has an affective sense of community. Either alone or in conjunction with surrounding communities, villages make prayers, and perform rituals that recreate their unique religious culture. Local ritual also embodies the communities themselves. Ritual that is performed on behalf of a community reflects the boundaries and hierarchies of membership and status within the community. It also reflects local pride, as individual communities vie with their neighbours to organize the largest ritual, along with the best performances, and most lavish banquets. Even as it reflects millennia of national and regional cultural evolution, ritual is always local.  

### Ritual calendar and liturgy

The basic structure of Chinese ritual evolved organically over millennia, taking in influences from ancient agrarian and ancestral traditions, the imperial state and canonical teachings. Chinese and Western scholars have traced this ‘big picture’ of Chinese religious evolution, noting how major intellectual transformations such as the emergence of Daoism and Buddhism as imperial religions, the arrival of Manichean beliefs from Central Asia, and the community rituals promoted by the late imperial state, were all manifested in local religious life. By the fall of the last dynasty in the early twentieth century, this system had already been evolving for centuries, and its basic elements were quite coherent and consistent on a national level.

Religious life throughout China is built on the same basic calendar of ritual occasions. Local communities might vary this calendar by adding their own rituals, or interpreting existing occasions according to local lore and with local customs, but the skeletal calendar of events is remarkably similar across the country, and over time. In its basic form, the calendar of rituals is

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Festival or activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st month</td>
<td><strong>Yuandan</strong>: Spring festival (i.e. Chinese New Year) activities. Send greetings to family and neighbours, worship the multitudes of spirits. Lanterns, entertainment (<em>she huo</em>) and theatre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd month</td>
<td><strong>Qingming</strong>: Families worship at ancestral graves. Magistrate performs ritual for City God, followed by commoners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/8</td>
<td>Merchants organize entertainment and theatre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/5</td>
<td>Decorating homes with willow branches. Families eat millet and drink wine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/6</td>
<td>Summer sacrifice. Families worship at ancestral graves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/15</td>
<td><strong>Zhongyuan</strong>: Autumn sacrifice. Families worship at ancestral graves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th month</td>
<td>Autumn Festival: Families eat moon cakes and carve melons to look like the moon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/1</td>
<td>Families eat date cake and climb to a high place to recite poems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/1</td>
<td>Worship in family temples. Burn ‘winter clothes’ for ancestors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/8</td>
<td>Prepare <em>zhou</em> to entreat the spirits and scatter ice in fields to pray for smooth new year.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Last entry adapted from *Ganzhou fuzhi* (1779), reproduced in (Ding et al. 1991). Dates are given as lunar month/day.
quite easy to uncover: local sources will often discuss their own ritual calendar in detail. This calendar, as described by a late eighteenth-century guide to a county in north-western Shanxi province is typical.

A similar calendar could be found almost anywhere in China. The most important occasions: yuanduan, qingming, zhongyuan and the Autumn Festival, would be part of any calendar. Some of the local festivals were variations on more common themes: the one held on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month was most likely a variation of the rain rituals discussed below. In addition, there was likely more happening than this source mentions. Some of the more peculiar rituals might not have made it to the compiler’s notice, or might have been considered too unseemly for inclusion.

Any of these rituals would have followed a standard three-part format, consisting of welcoming, entertaining and seeing off the spirits. Welcoming the spirits (ying shen) generally consists of a procession, in which the god’s presence, embodied in a tablet or physically manifested in a sedan chair, is brought to the site of the ritual. Entertaining the spirits (song shen) consists of various elements: individually or in a group, people make offerings to the deity, including the offering of spoken prayers or written memorials asking for help or protection. Offerings are followed by the performance of a peak ritual, often one that alludes to the expulsion of evil or a making of passage (such as crossing a bridge). Finally, the deities are entertained with scripture chanting, puppet shows or opera. Seeing off the spirits (song shen) returns the deities (and often their friends, who are brought in separately) in procession to their own temples (Overmyer 2009).

As with the calendar, this basic structure is less a canon than a platform for local ritual to build on. Within this basic structure, there is wide scope for local variation. The entire ritual sequence may be as short as a single event or as long as a series of rituals spread over a few days. Local rituals will also vary slightly in substance, in the type of scriptures that are read, the music that is played, the order of the procession, or the nature of the sacrifices offered. Despite this diversity, almost all local rituals in the end return to some variation on this basic three-part liturgy, and looking at what makes any one area unique suggests the ways that regions develop different traditions.3

Rituals may be performed by invited professionals, local experts or by members of the community. One important reason behind the variation in how rituals are performed is that different types of specialists will bring different levels of expertise. In his study of local ritual in north China, Stephen Jones shows that even within the single province of Hebei, certain regions are unique because of their historical connection to Quanzhen Daoism. Compared to other parts of the same province, rituals in these areas include more identifiable Daoist elements, such as the recitation of Daoist scriptures (Jones 2010: 88–91; Lagerwey 1987: 74–75; Sutton 2003: 127, 168, 173). It need not be formally ordained Daoist priests who perform these rituals, as the locals themselves will have soaked in a great deal more specialized scriptural and ritual knowledge than their neighbours. Something similar happens when other types of ritual specialists become involved: Buddhist monks, the lay ritual masters known as lisheng, diviners known as yinyang masters, and spirit mediums each bring a particular type of expertise to local ritual. Other specialists such as musicians, as well as theatrical or operatic troupes, and professional mourners do not perform ritual per se, but are common features of local ritual life.4

Within this bigger picture of Chinese religion, there are certain trends that distinguish regional variations on common themes. For example, northern Shanxi province is known for a type of extended ritual known as sai. These rituals are performed on the same occasions as most village rituals throughout China, particularly at the Spring Festival. What makes sai unique is its scale. While most rituals are organized by a single village, sai are organized by clusters of villages, who pool resources to fund days of ritual, theatre and feasting. Sai are themselves a relic of a
much older type of temple organization, and their rituals and operas provide a glimpse of a living tradition that is centuries old. The more elaborate scale of organization allows communities to preserve the ritual expertise and traditions that would otherwise have been lost. But the rituals are more than living museums. As generations of lesheng masters passed on texts and practices, they developed a tradition of ritual and theatrical performance that was unique to the area (Huang and Wang 1994; Johnson 1994, 2009).

Jiao are large, communal rituals that feature prominently in local religious life in the south and southeast, and occasionally in pockets elsewhere. Jiao resemble sai in many ways: both are large, elaborate rituals, often organized by networks of villages, and requiring the expertise of specialized professionals who are brought in from the outside. Unlike sai, however, jiao derive from Daoist offerings, along with elements of state religion and local spirit medium cults. Even if they are not performed exclusively by Daoist priests, jiao still contain elements such as possession and ritual travel to the underworld, which reveal strong ties with Daoism and an earlier mediumistic tradition (Davis 2001; Lagerwey 1987).

Family and village rituals

But even taking regional differences into account, the most striking variation happens even closer to the ground, especially at the level of the individual village and even the individual family. Communities will often differ quite substantially in their religious lives, often for practical reasons: for example, neighboring villages might agree to vary the dates of their festivals in order to prevent competition over musicians and ritual specialists, and so that both communities can come and see each other’s activities. Smaller villages might learn to cooperate simply out of necessity. But at least as important, the reason for ritual variation is bound up in identity. Families and villages will perform unique activities because these activities are uniquely meaningful.

Traditionally, the four rituals (si li) of capping, wedding, funeral and ancestor reverence (quan, hun, sang, ji) were the family’s core ritual occasions. Of these, the first three are fundamental rites of passage for individuals, but also moments of importance for the family as a whole. The fourth ritual aims to secure the postmortem welfare of deceased ancestors, but is even more closely associated with the welfare of the living clan. Except for the capping ceremony, each of these rituals retains its importance today.

At the same time, the public ritual life of the family is inseparable from that of the community. Occasions that require a formal ceremony, funerals in particular, provide an opportunity for other villagers to come and seek blessings, make offerings and repay vows. The size and content of celebratory rituals (‘red occasions’, hong shi) such as weddings reflect the wealth of the families involved, and almost by necessity they involve as large a banquet as can be afforded. In these cases, entertainment for local deities is also provided for the earthly guests. In contrast, the two occasions involving death (‘white occasions’, bai shi) have both moral and ritual significance. Whereas wedding ceremonies reflect on a family’s wealth and status, death and postmortem ritual reflect additionally on its commitment to norms of filial piety. The social pressure on such occasions was so intense that families would bankrupt themselves to pay for the most lavish funeral ceremonies.

Funerary ritual continues long after the body is buried. Families will mourn their ancestors at different points in the year: the ‘grave sweeping’ day of Qingming, and the Autumn Sacrifices held on zhongqian. Particularly devoted sons would traditionally go through a three-year period of public mourning during which they would wear coarse clothes, refrain from bathing and publicly lament the loss of their parent. In theory, this type of mourning was legally required of all Chinese subjects during the late imperial period. In reality, since few families could stand to lose the income of their adult males for such an extended period, it was primarily a custom of
the elites. In some cases, however, neighbours might be so moved by the actions of a ‘filial son’ that they would financially support him during his vigil. (DuBois 2008, 2011: 43–45).

Apart from the family, the village forms the most fundamental community. Like families, villages come in all different types, are shaped by their environment and change over time. Even within the same region, villages will vary greatly in size, composition, internal diversity, and rate of inward and outward migration. Two neighbouring villages – one small and intimate, another large, bustling and fluid – would have very different ritual needs and organizational patterns (DuBois 2005: 15–24; Grootaers 1948, 1951; Grootaers et al. 1995).

Village ritual ranges in purpose from the broad to the very specific, and combines the needs of the community as a whole, with those of its individual members. The large, regularly performed rituals, such as the yuanban offerings performed at the beginning of the lunar calendar, are occasions for the community as a whole to express gratitude for the peace and blessings of the previous year, and to ask for continued protection for the year to come. But these rituals also serve a second purpose: while the ritual itself is performed in the name of the community, individuals can also take advantage of the occasion to seek benefits for themselves and their families. This duality is seen in how village ritual deals with death. The zhongyuan ritual, held on fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month, marks the midpoint of the year, and the transition of the calendar from yang to yin. This transition is also the beginning of what is commonly known as the ghost month, a time in which spirits return from the underworld. Ghost month rituals address all aspects of death: they welcome friendly spirits, pray for abandoned souls and establish a defence against harmful ghosts. Zhongyuan is more than a symbolic exercise: since venefiul spirits bring sickness and misfortune, they represent a tangible danger to all. While families privately welcome home their own deceased ancestors, the community gathers to appease and protect against venefiful spirits (Jordan 1999).

Between family and village, a wide variety of voluntary associations also gathered for their own rituals. In cities and towns, guilds revolve around every conceivable occupation: merchants, sailors, carpenters, nightsoil carriers, rickshaw pullers and prostitutes. Each was based around a pseudo-familial hierarchy, capped by a patron deity who took the role of the profession’s ancestor. Ritual made its way into the daily work of criminals (Owning 1996; Wang, E. 1985), as well as that of skilled craftsmen such as carpenters and masons. Such rituals were secrets of the trade, and accompanied moments such as selecting a building site, or calculating auspicious days for construction (Burgess 1928; Rowe 1984; Ruitenbeek 1993).

Other sorts of religious associations were more strictly devotional. Either as individuals or as groups, people expressed special bonds of gratitude by travelling to worship at the festivals, shrines or holy places of a particular deity (Naquin and Yu 1992). Over millennia, China’s five holy mountains became sites of imperial and popular pilgrimage, and in doing so accumulated a thick lore of stories and cultural significance. Mount Tai became closely associated with the goddess Bixia Yuanjun, who was known more commonly as Grandmother Taishan (Taishan niang-niang) (Pomeranz 1997: 182–204). Like all of the matron deities, Grandmother Taishan cares particularly for the problems of women, and is most commonly approached by women who wish to or are preparing to bear children (Dott 2004; Ye 2009).

Among the most important forms of religious associations are the lay teachings known collectively as the ‘White Lotus’. Since the 1300s, dozens of these teachings sprouted up across China, each with its own scriptures, networks and clergy (Ma 2011b; Seiwert 1992). They shared a core of beliefs that integrated Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism into an apocalyptic tradition that lent itself to militarization. Beginning with the first Ming emperor, the late imperial state reacted harshly against these groups, demanding death for teachers and exile for followers (Esherick 1987: 42; Zhao 2007). Nevertheless, these teachings proved impossible to eradicate,
in part because for much of the countryside they represented a far more potent and meaningful representation of organized religion than Buddhism or Daoism (DuBois 2005: 152–185; Li 1990; Pu 1996).

Vows and communal values

The basic dynamic of both individual and communal religious life is to request and repay acts of divine favour. On an individual scale, people ask the spirits to protect their families, for safety for an upcoming journey, or success in business or on examinations. The most common requests are for health and healing: anthropologists who collected 500 prayer slips from a Canton temple in 1924 found that all but 16 contained a prayer to heal the writer or a relative (Day 1940: 13). In return, the supplicant promises to make a donation to a temple or ritual, chant a certain number of prayers or scriptures, or to perform some visible act of piety, such as going on a pilgrimage.

Requests are often presented in a written text. This act may be as simple as writing down the wish on a piece of paper, which is sent to the deity by burning it. More formal still is to use a set text, which is composed in formal language, and printed on yellow paper to resemble an imperial petition. In the style of administrative documents, a space is left in the document for the text of the wish, and the name and address of the petitioner (Schipper 1974).

Although the earthly nature of the requests made to deities, and the contingent nature of repayment, may give the impression that Chinese religion is a simple exchange of services between human and divine realms, the content of vows is also a clear and public expression of morals. One cannot ask ordinary spirits (evil spirits are another matter) to perform an act that is evil or unjust, such as inflicting harm on an innocent party. Like individual vows, collective requests express the orthodox needs and values of the community, for protection, good weather and good harvests. As with the household, the most important vow is the one made implicitly in the first lunar month, when the community meets to thank Heaven and Earth for the blessings of the previous year, and to pray for continued protection in the coming one. Like individuals, communities will also gather to make vows as a community during times of special need. In the countryside, the most important reason for doing so are crises related to agriculture, particularly the Prayer for Rain (qian yu), which is still performed regularly each spring across the drier areas of northern China.

Ritual both represents community and creates it. The task of planning, funding and executing ritual activities draws people and groups together in a common project, and binds them with a sense of collective welfare. The banqueting and drinking that usually follow are an opportunity to renew friendships. Inter-village ritual networks are themselves a way of cementing other sorts of cooperation between communities. During the 1930s, Japanese scholars showed how villages that shared an irrigation system also created a network of shared rituals to the Dragon King (Longwang). The custom of sending the deity on procession through each of the villages reflected and enhanced the ties that bound them (Duara 1988: 31–35). John Brim observed something similar in the New Territories of Hong Kong, where ritual alliances were organized around any question of common concern, such as irrigation networks, crop watching or defence against pirates or bandits. Practical alliances were cemented by the building of a temple in open country, and holding an annual ‘tour of inspection’ in which the image of the god would be carried in a lavish procession to each of the constituent villages. For Brim, the significance of these processions is that they maintained alliances during periods between crises, when there is no immediate need for organization (Brim 1974). By far the most extensive research on this topic has been the massive fieldwork project by Ken Dean and Zheng Zhenman to chart the dense network
of ritual alliances that link villages in the Putian plain of Fujian. Like the Longwang processions, many of these alliances are based on agricultural cooperation, but others are artefacts of more distant realities, such as self-defence networks that had long fallen into disuse. In these cases, the alliances remain simply by virtue of custom and tradition (Dean and Zheng 2010).

The most intimate tie between ritual and social structure is that within individual communities. Anthropologists working in Taiwan during the 1970s demonstrated how neighbourhood shrines were markers of community, an idea that Stephen Sangren later went on to discuss in the case of living rituals (DeGlopper 1974; Sangren 1989; Wang 1995: 33–79). As a point of pride, villages would identify themselves with their own unique ritual performance, and compete to present the best theatre, longest procession, flashiest performance, loudest fireworks and most elaborate banquets. In different ways, Adam Chau and Stephen Jones have each dealt extensively with these aspects of local religious life: the showmanship, spectacle and effervescent euphoria of what Chau calls 'red-hot sociality' (Chau 2006).

Ritual also presents a clear visual embodiment of the community itself. The procession that welcomes and sees off the deities might physically trace the boundaries of the community, marking out its composition in ways such as visiting certain houses and passing by others. The order of the procession is itself a clear representation of status, although not always according to the same criteria. Community leaders might carry the palanquin, walk at the head of the procession, or stand at the front as sacrificers and prayers are offered in the community name (as opposed to performing the ritual itself). But these are not hard and fast rules; nor must ritual necessarily stratify the community in order to represent something essential about it. For example, part of a multi-village procession I witnessed in the Guangdong region of Leizhou included a group of sign bearers with the characters Qi, Chu, Yan, Wei, Han, Zhao, corresponding to six of China's ancient kingdoms. By marching in procession with the signs together, they were metaphorically expressing the message that individual parts together comprise a stronger whole. The place of prominence went to a group of men wearing decorative black robes and straw hats, who walked near the head of the procession, and were the first to bow and offer incense in reverence to the deity. These men were neither the elite of the village, nor representatives of its families or neighbourhoods, but simply the oldest men, some of whom were actually on the poorer edge of the community. In this case, what was being represented was not status as much as a communal expression of respect for old age.

An equally important expression of hierarchy comes not from the performance of the ritual, but in the financial and social considerations that surround it. The most obvious display of stratification within the village is the financing of common welfare projects, of which ritual is one of the most important. Donations for a major construction project, such as repair of a bridge or temple, would often be captured in a stone stele, sometimes listing name and amounts in detail. In the same way, the costs of a ritual will fall to village households, with the different amount contributed by each being a matter of public record. Financial contribution is a vital expression of village solidarity. In close-knit communities (and not all are), contributions to village ritual carry such significance that the record might be altered, such as shadow donations being in the name of the poorest families, to spare them the shame of being left off the list (DuBois 2005: 39–63). The largest donors receive not only prestige, but in some cases also receive the right to a place of prominence either in the ritual itself, or in the drinking and feasting that inevitably follow.

Notes

1 Responding to an earlier debate about what holds Chinese religion and what pulls it apart, the anthropologist Maurice Freedman (Freedman 1974: 34) referred to a 'substrate' that underlies all local expressions of Chinese religion. John Lagerwey (2010) compared variation to jazz riffs on a common melody.

3 The Minshu quyi congshu (Journal of Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore) series, which has been published out of Taiwan since 1991, currently includes over 100 monograph-length ethnographic studies of local ritual life.

4 On lideng (Liu 2005), on Muhian operas (Guo 2005; Johnson and Grant 1989). In addition, there are a number of outstanding studies by ethnomusicologists (Jones 2007, 2009, 2010; and Szczepanski 2012).

5 Johnson (2009: 315) lists many of the major ethnographic studies of sāi and mǔo theatre.

6 By virtue of their access to the forces that affected fengshui in homes, builders easily fell under suspicion of being possessors of evil magic (Kuhn 1990).

7 Barend Ter Haar has forcefully argued that even the name ‘White Lotus’ comes to us primarily as a pejorative used by the state (ter Haar 1993). On the tendency of these teachings to violence see Naquin 1976, 1981; Shao 1997; Shek 1980, 1982; Suzuki 1982.

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