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Themenschwerpunkt

DEFINING RELIGION, DEFINING HERESY IN MODERN EAST ASIA

DEFINING RELIGION, DEFINING HERESY IN MODERN EAST ASIA

Introduction

"Religion" and "Heresy" in East Asia Between Continuity and Discontinuity

Hans Martin Krämer

Throughout the nineteenth century, colonialist and imperialist expansion of the European and North American powers went along with the potential to shatter worldviews and radically alter existing epistemic frameworks, taxonomies, and semantic networks.[1] Conceptions of the religious were no exception: The encounter with Christianity frequently led to altered understandings both of the place of religion in society and of the substance of the religious itself.

Although the various polities and societies of East Asia had had contact with Europeans before the nineteenth century, the most prominent among them being Christian missionaries, consequences for the grasp of religious phenomena had been minimal.[2] Reference to religious phenomena in the narrow sense was made within the framework of 教 (Chin.: *jiao*, Jap.: *kyō*, Kor.: *kyo*), i.e., religions were considered as a kind of "teaching", as part of a category also comprising phenomena which would clearly not be considered "religious" in the contemporary academic usage of that term. Yet, in the middle of the nineteenth century, this longstanding taxonomical epistemology gave way to one heavily influenced by Western traditions of thought – if not entirely identical to them – within a matter of decades. On the surface, this change is best visible in the formation and subsequent deployment of a new term for "religion": 宗教 (Chin.: *zongjiao*, Jap.: *shūkyō*, Kor.: *chonggyo*). Recognizing a category so far unperceived and creating a word for it was no idle intellectual exercise: Rather, the reconfiguration of perceptions had tremendous repercussions for religious groups themselves, for politics, and for society at large.

Yet, recent scholarship has come to different conclusions as to the novelty of approaches to the phenomenon of religion(s) in East Asia in the modern era. Below, the two schools of continuity and discontinuity between the premodern and the

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[1] The author wishes to thank the participants of the workshop on "Defining Religion, Defining Heresy in Meiji-Period Japan" held in Bochum in April 2009 and Christian Meyer, from whose comments he has benefitted when writing this introduction.

[2] For an alternative view arguing that – different from the Chinese case – Japanese terminology for "the religious" did indeed change under the impact of the encounter with Christianity around 1600, see Krämer (2010).

modern eras will be identified. Furthermore, one of the most important concomitants of the formation of a sphere defined by the modern concept of religion was a boundary-drawing exercise which excluded certain phenomena and entities. This is true both for the negatively labeled heresies, superstitions, or heterodoxies and for the more neutrally delineated philosophies or schools of thought. The essays collected here will focus on this excluding side of the process of concept formation and shed light on the question of continuity vs. discontinuity by transcending national boundaries and looking at case studies from China, Japan, and Korea, in the process highlighting commonalities and differences.

Continuity vs. Discontinuity

The fact that the word *zongjiao*, and its Japanese and Korean equivalents, has a long history was pointed out as early as 1912. In that year's edition of the philosophical dictionary *Tetsugaku jii* (first published in 1881), the Japanese historian of philosophy Inoue Tetsujirō draws upon *Zongjing lu*, a Chan Buddhist text compiled in tenth-century China, for an early reference to the word *zongjiao* (Nakamura 1992: 59). A number of Chinese, Japanese, and European authors have recently discussed further findings of the term in premodern Buddhist literature (Nakamura 1992: 59–146; Chen 2002: 47f.; Peng 2007: 5f.; Barrett/Tarocco 2010). The Japanese Buddhologist Nakamura Hajime, in particular, has pointed out that the distinction made in Mahāyāna texts such as the Lankāvatāra Sutra between a "principle of ultimate cause" (Skt. *siddhānta-naya*) and a "principle of explanation [of this cause] through verbal expression" (Skt. *deśanā-naya*) was rendered in Chinese at least since the Tang period by translating the terms by *zong* and *jiao* respectively. Only a combination of both aspects, however, could be said to form the "principle of the *dharma*" (Skt. *dharma-naya*). That is to say, according to Nakamura, as an early Chan term *zongjiao* referred to the notion that the *dharma* is incomplete unless it encompasses both the preverbal enlightenment and its linguistic transmission within institutions such as schools or lineages (1992: 64–68). A comparison with discussions about the formation of the translation term in Japan in the 1870s and its export to China (HSK 1975: 16–28; Suzuki 1979: 13–17; Masini 1993: 222; Howland 2001: 176–181; Chen 2002: 51–54), however, clearly indicates that this premodern history of the term was either unknown to those debating religion in the second half of the nineteenth century or that it was simply irrelevant to that process.

Thus *zongjiao*, as it came to be used in East Asia in the nineteenth century, was by any reasonable definition a *de facto* neologism, expressing a concept that, in its precise contours, had not been expressible in Chinese, Japanese, or Korean hitherto. Several elements contained in this new concept of *zongjiao* are frequently mentioned as new to the East Asian religious tradition, such as the central role of belief,

an individual religiosity, or the exclusiveness of one faith.[3] Yet the actual implications of this terminological invention are still controversial, especially when it comes to its impact on religious policy. Many modern historians of the region have not seen reason to doubt the tremendous consequences of the epistemic shift towards *zongjiao*; they have stressed forcefully that, as historian of religion Vincent Goossaert stated for the case of China, "by adopting the concept of religion based on the model of Christianity […] Chinese intellectuals brought about a radical, unprecedented break in the religious field" (2005: 15). Up to the turn of the twentieth century, "Chinese religion" (*nota bene* in the singular) had been all-encompassing, non-exclusive, and marked by "allegiance not to a single religion but to various worshipping communities within a pluralist religious system," while the Western concept of religion, deeply influenced by Christianity, was understood in China to mean a "structured system of beliefs and practices, separate from society, which organizes believers in a church-like organization." In early twentieth-century China the alien concept became "a powerful ideological tool that shaped and motivated a brutal policy of destruction and repression" (2005: 14).

This latter point is reiterated by Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, who stresses how arbitrary this understanding of "religion" was, deriving "from the nationalist elites' unthinking adoption of Christianity as the model for what a legitimate religion should look like" (2008: 17):

> "[In] China the introduction of this term facilitated an active and purposive suppression of religious life. This suppression was undertaken without benefit of detailed examinations of just how Chinese religious practices might work differently from Christian ones, or how they operated and played beneficial roles in a Chinese social order" (2008: 13).

Borrowing the terminology of Lydia Liu, Yang also describes the "translingual practices" in which the asymmetrical power relations between the West and China in the nineteenth century manifest themselves in the way a "guest language may simultaneously serve as a vehicle through which a foreign discursive power becomes embodied within a host culture." The adoption in the host language Chinese of a concept of "religion" was thus not an innocent act of cultural translation, but rather appears as one site at "which cultural and political power relations are negotiated and implemented" (Yang 2008: 12).

For Japan, historian James Ketelaar has situated the formation of the neologism *shūkyō* within the wider "rapidly shifting intellectual terrain of nineteenth-century Japan," which has been crucial in "the attempt to determine the boundaries of religious action and institutions in modern Japan" (Ketelaar 1990: 42). Similar to

[3] For the Chinese case, Shuk-wah Poon mentions "a coherent belief system, a standard set of scriptures, and a strong institution" (2009: 454), while for Japan, Ian Reader notes that the new term *shūkyō* "implies a separation of that which is religious from other aspects of society and culture, and contains implications of belief and commitment to one order or movement – something that has not been traditionally a common factor in Japanese religious behaviour" (1991: 13f.).

Goossaert for China, scholar of religious studies Isomae Jun'ichi has qualified Ketelaar's general statement by pointing out that it was specifically a Christian concept of "religion" which set these boundaries for religious policy in modern Japan:

> "Following the principles of Western-style enlightenment, 'religion' (*shûkyô*) was entrusted to the sphere of the individual's interior freedom, while the 'secular' sphere of morality (*dôtoku*) was determined to be a national, and thus public, issue. With a clear differentiation between the religious and moral categories being made along the private–public dichotomy, Western modernity came to be comprehended in terms of a dual structure. From the beginning, the very notion of an individual with an interiority was for the first time made possible as a form of self-understanding only through the transplantation of Christianity and the related concept of religion" (2007: 93).

Furthermore, Isomae directly links this conceptual change to new possibilities in policymaking. The private–public dichotomy was crucial in determining the precise wording of article 28 of the 1889 Meiji Constitution, promising religious freedom provided that the public order was not disturbed (a connection that was also to be influential in Late Qing and Republican China, see Nedostup 2009: 38), and, concerning the actual religious policy of the modern Japanese state, Isomae even claims that "this Western concept of religion […] was a presupposition for the construction of the State Shinto system" (Isomae 2007: 98), a system whose destructiveness for a great number of religious groups in modern Japan has been described many times (for English-language studies see, for instance, Garon 1986, Hardacre 1989, or Ketelaar 1990).

In the case of Korea, direct political consequences of the new epistemic order seem to have been limited to the imposition of State Shintō through the Japanese colonizers from 1910 onwards. Yet, while attempts at erecting a quasi state religion had remained unsuccessful in Korea before 1910, the introduction of the new translation term for "religion" had grave repercussions there, too. As historian Kim Yunseong argues, the category of religion was part of the "modern episteme", which in turn was a part of the cultural imperialism brought to Korea by Protestant missionaries in the late nineteenth century and which led to fundamental changes in Korean society eliciting responses such as resistance or hybridity (1999).

Yet, not all scholars of East Asian religious history agree on the magnitude of the disruption effected by the introduction of modern notions of the religious and subsequent attempts to police religious groups. It has been mostly scholars of premodern (or early modern) religions who have rather tended to stress continuities in elite handling of religion(s). While not all of them explicitly write about *conceptual* continuity, their arguments still call into question some of the fundamental suppositions of the discontinuity faction. The most important counterargument in this respect has perhaps been that the public–private dichotomy was anything but new in the nineteenth century. On this subject, sinologist Joachim Gentz wrote:

> "Traditionally, the Chinese state confronts religions with a policy that only prescribes formal structures, not the substance, and that controls the symbolic level of

> religious representation, not the beliefs of religious people, and that does not intervene, as long as the necessary ritual forms are adhered to" (2007: 384).

A similar argument has been advanced by Japan historian Peter Nosco. A specialist on the Tokugawa period, Nosco has described the "religious policy" of the era, i.e., acts of authority by the *bakufu* and the *han*, as distinguishing clearly between what he termed "style and substance" (1995: 144), i.e., outward forms of behavior and private beliefs. Concerning the latter, Nosco claims, Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the dynasty, had in fact an "inclination towards religious tolerance" (1995: 142) and restricted policy intrusions by the *bakufu* to the area of outward forms of worship. He concludes that "[in] the same manner that the would-be and actual unifiers retreated on other fronts ultimately unnecessary for the maintenance of public order, they likewise retreated in the enforcement of religious policy as it concerned individual belief" (1995: 155).

A somewhat broader and slightly different kind of argument holds that religion has always been a political tool for the elites, and that their attitude towards religions has not changed in this regard as the modern nation-states of East Asia came into existence. Thus Joachim Gentz, now writing about Japan, remarked that "the history of Japanese religions is marked by a permanent intervention of the state in religious affairs" and that "the instrumentalization of religions for political means by the state has dominated religious policy in Japan long before the modern age began with the Meiji Period and has remained an essential component of it since then as well" (2007: 410). Gentz sees old patterns at work even in the modern invention of State Shintō. Its establishment merely meant that "in a supposedly modern nationalistic-secular mode, traditional religious policy was continued" (2007: 412).[4]

A third counterargument is aimed less at the political consequences but rather at the novelty of the conceptual framework itself, or rather the lack of novelty. Perhaps the most radical enunciation of this line of reasoning is to be found in the work of religious studies scholar Michael Pye, who in a 1990 article insisted that "an abstracted and general notion of religion […] developed in East Asia as it did in Europe." According to Pye, the "isolationist" position, i.e., the conviction that an abstract concept of religion developed only in Europe, is false: "The reality is that abstract, critical reflection about that which in western languages we call 'religion' emerged both in Europe and in East Asia" (1990: 115). According to Pye, the long-standing plurality and diversity of religions and the inner heterogeneity of religious traditions, in particular of Buddhism, gave rise to critical reflection on religion in East Asia. Both the program for a religious policy articulated by the fourteenth-century Ming Hongwu Emperor in his *Sanjiao lun* and the critical reflection of the three religious traditions of Japan authored by the eighteenth-

[4] In a similar way, historian of ideas Kiri Paramore has recently argued for a strong continuity of anti-Christian discourse from the Tokugawa to the Meiji Period, when it became a key component of the ideology of the new modern Japanese nation state (Paramore 2009: 162–164).

century Japanese scholar Tominaga Nakamoto treat religions as objects and presuppose "a significant degree of reflection on the nature and function both of specific religions and of religions in general" (1990: 118).

In a similar vein, albeit more circumspectly, the scholars of East Asian religion Timothy Barrett and Francesca Tarocco in their nuanced investigation into the prehistory of *zongjiao* detected continuities which lead them to the conclusion that a "close look at the evidence does not suggest a neologism especially coined to meet the needs of contact with the West" and that

> "the assertion by some in Japan that the modern term and earlier Buddhist usages are 'completely different', implying a radical linguistic discontinuity between the discourse of Buddhist tradition and secular modernity, is in the light of the evidence we have brought forward very difficult to maintain" (2010).

As Tarocco has argued in a different essay, the fact that "*zongjiao* was not invented *ex novo* in a short time," but instead "its roots are to be found in Chinese Buddhist terminology dating back to medieval times"[5] also leads to a different evaluation of the religious policy of the modern Chinese state: "Indeed, the Chinese state's anxiety toward all forms of religious affiliation that exists outside its ritual and ideological boundaries, and its fear of religiously inspired political uprisings is not simply a twentieth century invention," but rather "one of the enduring legacies of the late imperial rulers to modern Chinese nation makers" (2008: 44f.).

There is thus a fundamental contradiction between the assumption of a clear break in the epistemic framework on the one hand, creating new possibilities and restrictions which lead to new, specifically modern, modes of action (including policies towards religious groups) from the nineteenth century onwards, and on the other hand, the claim that the core thinking behind elite attitudes and actions towards religion(s) hardly changed at all, assuming a kind of traditional East Asian notion of religious policy. One key point of dissent concerns the impact of conceptual change: How alien was the modern concept of religion to East Asian societies? To what extent did it set the boundaries for a radically new religious policy? It is therefore hoped that the approach of conceptual history, as taken by the essays in this theme issue of *Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung*, will provide new insights into these questions.

[5] A similar point is made by historian of religion Robert Ford Campany, who claims that there were "analogous usages" in medieval China to the modern Western concept of "religion" (2003: 319). More specifically, he refers to *dao*, *fa*, and *jiao* (2003: 300–307), but fails to acknowledge that *dao* and *jiao* are much broader in meaning than the Western discourse on "religions" that he seeks analogies for, while the usage of *fa* is restricted to Buddhism (and in a limited number of instances, Daoism).

The Heuristics of Heresies

In resolving the problem posed above, special heuristic significance may be accorded the historical position of heresies and heterodoxies. In fact, several of the authors mentioned above, such as Vincent Goossaert or Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, have stressed that what rendered the Chinese situation after 1900 completely new was not just the introduction of the new term *zongjiao*, but the establishment of a new pair of opposites, namely “religion” vs. “superstition” (Chin.: *mixin*, Jap.: *meishin*, Kor.: *misin*).

According to Goossaert, a “Confucian fundamentalism” was widespread before 1898, that is, an “aggressive discourse on religious practice” with anticlerical elements. Yet while there was already a “low-intensity religious conflict”, official prohibitions were mostly ignored, and the criticism voiced by the Confucian fundamentalists came from within the framework of “Chinese religion” (2006: 317–319). In contrast, after the turn of the century, Confucian fundamentalism was gradually replaced by “antisuperstition”, which had become possible only after the terms *zongjiao* and *mixin* had been introduced from Japanese and popularized in 1901 by Liang Qichao: “These notions brought with them distinctions, fissures that did not exist before: The great divide was now between *zongjiao*, ‘the acceptable,’ and *mixin*, ‘the unacceptable’” (Goossaert 2006: 320f.).

The crucial difference between the old differentiation between orthodox (Chin.: *zheng*, Jap.: *sei*, Kor.: *chŏng*) and heterodox (Chin.: *xie*, Jap.: *ja*, Kor.: *sa*) and the new one between *zongjiao* and *mixin* is maintained by several authors although accounted for in different ways.[6] Goossaert resorts to empirical findings when he states that the difference can be seen in the fact that local cults that had been regarded as orthodox up to the end of the nineteenth century were viewed as superstitious after 1900 (2006: 314f., 321). Historian Rebecca Nedostup argues that orthodoxy and heterodoxy are differentiated within a closed system; heterodoxy is defined as such against the yardstick of orthodoxy. Superstitions, however, were usually defined by the standards of modern science and excluded from the system as a whole: “By contrast, although they made handy foils, *mixin* and *zongjiao* did not exist in the same kind of eternal combat as *zheng* and *xie* – perhaps because secularism stood by to undermine them both, but more inherently because the perfectibility of the modern self-conscious subject demanded that he be able to overcome superstition once and for all” (2009: 9). The role of science – “the new sun” around which “all religions of the world, including the old universal

[6] Poon, however, points out that as late as 1928 the Chinese Ministry of the Interior in its “Standards for Preserving and Abandoning Gods and Shrines” combined “traditional and modern approaches to religious practices […], with the imperial concept of orthodoxy still influencing the policy makers of Republican China” (2009: 454). Poon also demonstrates that up to the 1930s the government’s religious policy remained ambivalent in that it failed to draw a clear line between religion and superstition (2009: 470f.), although he does not claim that this is due to the persistence of “traditional” modes of policing religious groups.

imperial Confucian cosmology, were made to revolve" (Yang 2008: 15) – cannot be underestimated. Especially since the 1920s, states Nedostup, an almost blind devotion to science colored attitudes toward religion. Elites now believed that the new disciplines sociology and ethnography were the best tools to approach religions and that scientific methods would indeed help in extinguishing harmful superstitions (Nedostup 2001: 69).

Historian of religion Jason Josephson in his study of the Buddhist philosopher Inoue Enryō highlights the role played by established religions, exemplified by Buddhism, in singling out superstitious elements in Japanese society. Not in the least sense, this was part of a self-cleansing, of getting rid of superstitious elements in their own teachings: Inoue "since at least 1887 […] had been advocating the elimination of superstitions as an important aspect of his attempt to modernize Buddhism" (2006: 152), an effort which was picked up by the mainstream of Buddhism around the turn of the century when " newer Buddhist movements […] made the destruction of superstitions central to their agenda" and "the most influential Buddhist intellectuals in Japan discussed the value of eliminating superstitions" (2006: 163). Buddhists thereby, concludes Josephson, contributed to the more general "process of constructing the category religion" by a "parallel process under which previously contiguous phenomena were excluded from 'religion' through their definition as 'superstition'" (2006: 148).

Surveying the literature on the construction of the religion–superstition paradigm, it seems that the position taken by Francesca Tarocco, who sees in "the battle conducted against such loosely defined *xiejiao*" "one of the enduring legacies of the late imperial rulers to modern Chinese nation makers" (2008: 44), is the exception rather than the rule. More widespread is the conviction that we see in the newly formed opposite terms to "religion" a good indicator of what was new, especially as the term "superstition" was even more intimately connected to actual policy-making directed against creeds stamped as superstitious than was "religion".

The relatively minor role of faith or belief in premodern East Asian religious traditions may help to explain why heterodoxies were often not subjected to radical policies of elimination. It may also be useful in this regard to carefully consider the often ignored difference between heterodoxy, usually a deviation in theoretical terms and of less serious consequences, and heresy, a label for something that is considered to be so clearly outside the bounds of toleration that it deserves to be obliterated. For our present purposes, focusing on the conceptual grasp, and social utilization, of heterodoxies, heresies, and superstitions can be of great relevance to the study of the formation of the new category religion.

Religion and Superstition, Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in China, Japan, and Korea

The essays brought together in this volume will follow this suggestion and attempt to illuminate the construction of the new category religion and its consequences by focusing on how that which was excluded from it was conceptualized. The early modern legacy is addressed by Hans Kühner, who in his “Sorcerers, Bandits, and Rebels: Anti-Heretical Discourse and Practice in Late Qing China” analyzes how conventionalized ascriptions of heresy and heterodoxy were employed in the suppression of the “Huangya Sect” (or Taigu School) in 1866. Kühner argues that while the substance of the discourse on religion may have changed since the turn of the twentieth century, the old dichotomic logic is still at work in the modern era – at least this is what one will find in twentieth-century texts on the Taigu School.

Jason Josephson begins his “Evil Cults, Monstrous Gods, and the Labyrinth of Delusion: Rhetorical Enemies and Symbolic Boundaries in the Construction of ‘Religion’ in Japan” with an extended discussion of the premodern legacy of heterodoxies and heresies in East Asia. He points out that Japanese discourses on heresy were relatively stable until the modern period, when, paradoxically, most of what we today would subsume under “religion” first came to be regarded as “evil cults”. While this changed when the new term “religion” gradually became established during the 1870s, the formation of this term itself was inextricably linked to a process of demarcation and exclusion. For the sake of modernity and civilization, religion was cleansed of science, on the one side, and “superstitions”, on the other.

The desire for civilization is central to explaining processes of exclusion in the Korean case as well, as You Jae Lee argues in “The Concept of Religion and the Reception of Christianity in Korea around 1900.” Practices such as faith healing, irrational miracles, etc. were suppressed as “cults” in 1930s Korea because they seemed to run counter to the ideals of modernity and civilization then prevailing. The concomitant desire for national sovereignty, however, occupied a different discursive position in Korea because of the context of colonization through Japan. In marked contrast to China, in particular, (Christian) religion was not regarded as anti-modern because it was identified with the Western civilization brought by the missionaries, who were not the colonizers. Religion came to be closely connected with the nation through a discursive move that could be read as resistance to Japanese colonialism, a move that was impossible in China and Japan.

In an in-depth study of how the broad epistemic changes affected a particular religious tradition, John LoBreglio analyzes the process of reform within Sōtō Zen Buddhism in Japan between 1870 and 1890. In “Orthodox, Heterodox, Heretical: Defining Doctrinal Boundaries in Meiji-period Sōtō Zen,” he shows how the sect underwent a “Copernican revolution” in the relationship between lay and clerics. This reform, which constituted a radical departure from traditional self-understandings,

was a product of how sect leaders in the Meiji period understood what constituted a modern "religion," an understanding clearly influenced by their image of Protestant Christianity.

Moving on to a period in which the new terminology was already widely accepted, Christian Meyer takes a look at "'Religion' and 'Superstition' in Introductory Works to Religious Studies in Early Republican China." Meyer argues that the 1920s discourse on religion in China was decisively enriched by the nuanced contributions of Christian authors on the subject of religion. Indeed, the identity of Chinese Christians themselves was shaped through this discourse on religion. What is especially relevant in this process is how, in their attempts to incorporate the religious traditions of China into a larger framework of world religions, these authors went beyond a simplistic dichotomy between religion and superstition. In a departure from earlier Christian missionary attitudes, the works investigated by Meyer contributed to the inclusion of Buddhism and Daoism into the fold of "religion", just as the institutionalization of Buddhism and Daoism led to a greater acceptance of organized religions after the 1930s.

The essays collected in this volume make clear that there is no all-inclusive answer to the question of continuity vs. discontinuity that would hold true throughout East Asia. Rather, one has to distinguish both between the different countries as well as between fields of impact such as politics, indigenous religious groups, academia, etc. Still, putting together cases from China, Japan, and Korea will hopefully enable meaningful comparisons just as employing the heuristics of heresy and heterodoxy should add substantially to our understanding of changes in the religious field by forcing us to take note not just of those entities making up the new category "religion", but also those excluded from it. The latter, after all, contributed just as much to delineating the new concept of "religion".

Glossary

bakufu 幕府
chŏng 正
dao 道
fa 法
han 藩
Hongwu 洪武
Inoue Enryō 了円上井
Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎
ja 邪
meishin 迷信
misin 迷信
mixin 迷信
sa 邪
Sanjiao lun 三教論
sei 正
Tetsugaku jii 哲学字彙
Tominaga Nakamoto 富永仲基
xie 邪
zheng 正
Zongjing lu 宗鏡録

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