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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Typologies of Secularism in China: Religion, Superstition, and Secularization

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Abstract

This article examines four typologies of secularism in China from the sixteenth century onward, through an analysis of the triadic relationship between the secular, religious, and superstitious. These notions have been considered to be derived from the particular intellectual and political history of the West, but this fails to grasp the complexity of non-Western belief systems. This article proposes to instead examine how Chinese policymakers and intellectuals actively fabricated religion and produced secularization. It goes beyond a simple rebuttal of Eurocentrism, and arguments regarding the mutual incomparability of Western and Chinese experiences of secularization. It distinguishes four typologies of secularism that emerged successively in China: (1) the reduction of Christianity from the sixteenth century to the 1900s; (2) the Confucian secular and (3) atheist secular that were conceptualized, respectively, by royalist reformers and anti-Manchu revolutionaries during the final two decades of the Qing Dynasty; and (4) the interventionist secularism pursued by the Republican and the Communist regimes to strictly supervise and regulate religious beliefs and practices. The paper argues that, if secularization is indeed Christian in nature, secularism and religion were not imposed in China under Western cultural and political hegemony. Instead, the Christian secular model was produced in China mainly via pre-existing cultural norms and the state's ad hoc political needs, making the Christian secularism itself a multipolar phenomenon.

Keywords: secularism; religion; superstition; Christianity; Christian secularism; China; atheism; Confucianism

Some perplexing questions arise from the theoretical framework and historical process of secularization. Until the 1960s, Western scholarship on this subject implied a sort of linear evolution toward the retreat of religion in public life and the decline of individual religious belief and practice.[1] Assumptions that religion

[1]Çağdas Dedeoğlu, "The Modern Is Not Secular: Mapping the Idea of Secularism in the Works of Steve Bruce, Charles Taylor, and Talal Asad," in Seda Ünsar and Özgür Ünal Eriş, eds., *Revisiting Secularism in Theory and Practice: Genealogy and Cases* (Cham: Springer, 2020), 107; Jose Casanova, "Secularization," *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 21, James D. Wright, ed. (Amsterdam:

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would become sublated or extinct came to be contradicted by empirical evidence, a prominent example being Peter L. Berger's 1999 edited volume that rebutted his decades-long support of secularization theory. In response, scholars began to portray secularization as a process that is more dynamic and multifaceted than any linear, evolutionary conception can capture.[2] Charles Taylor, for one, distinguishes three models of secularity: a secularization of public spaces, a decline of religion, and a commitment to privatization of religion wherein the belief in God now becomes one "possibility among others."[3] Taylor argues that, despite the interconnection between modernity and secularization, it is impossible to predict whether or not religion will become completely obsolete: the ultimate question is which religions are weakening, or strengthening.[4] This question requires a reflection beyond Western models and perspectives, which are sometimes theoretically untenable. Indeed, insofar as secularization theories derive largely from the modern transformation of Christianity, some scholars argue that secularism is incompatible with non-Western religions like Hinduism and Islam, since "neither India's indigenous religious tradition nor Islam recognize the sacred-secular dichotomy in the manner Christianity does so."[5] Regarding China, José Casanova makes the case that the Chinese worldly and lay religions of Confucianism and Daoism (whether or not they are religions will be discussed later) need not undergo a process of secularization due to the lack of ecclesiastical organization and tension between this-worldliness and other-worldliness.[6]

Nevertheless, secularization takes place not only as a philosophical movement but also as a sociopolitical arrangement. Certainly, these two aspects are highly intertwined, but an overemphasis on the incommensurability of secularism and non-Western religions ignores the complex empirical contexts wherein secularism was adopted as government policy by non-Western states whose process of secularization might or might not be philosophically inspired by the West. These situations allow us to counterbalance or replenish Western theories of secularization. Jason Ananda Josephson provides an illustrative example in his study on the modern transformation of Japanese religion. He makes the case that, despite the heavy influence of Christianity, secularization in Meiji Japan reveals a science-religion-superstition trinary that Western scholarship on secularism neglects. Concretely, the three traditional Japanese supernatural entities—the emperor, the ox-headed divine god of plagues, and the four divine kings of Buddhism—were discriminately regulated in the Meiji state policy that mandated belief in the emperor's divinity,

Elsevier, 2015), 384; William H. Swatos, Jr. and Kevin J. Christiano, "Secularization Theory: The Course of a Concept," *Sociology of Religion* 60, 3 (1999): 209–28, 219.

[2]Dedeoğlu, "Modern Is Not Secular," 109; Stijn Latré and Guildo Vanheeswijck, "Secularization: History of the Concept," in James D. Wright, ed., *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 21 (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2015), 389.

[3]Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

[4]Tobias Müller, "Secularisation Theory and Its Discontents: Recapturing Decolonial and Gendered Narratives. Debates on Jörg Stolz's article on Secularization Theories in the 21st Century: Ideas, Evidence, and Problems," *Social Compass* 67, 2 (2020): 315–22, 318.

[5]T. N. Madan, *Modern Myths, Locked Minds: Secularism and Fundamentalism in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 6. See also Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 96–97.

[6]Jose Casanova, "Secularization," in James D. Wright, ed., *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 21 (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2015), 383.

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banned belief in the ox-headed god, and acknowledged belief in the four Buddhist kings as religious. However, there was "no scientific reason to believe in the divine descent of the emperor, nor did science provide a reason to eliminate the ox-headed divine king; but this was not the case of the four guardian kings."[7] Instead, the scientific secular and religion joined forces to banish superstition while establishing a non-religious state Shinto identified with the emperor as the national ritual and spirit, and shared by all Japanese independently of their religious beliefs.[8]

The Chinese process of secularization from the late nineteenth century onward also produced this triad. During the Republican period (1912–1949), the state-led spiritual engineering simultaneously entailed a resolute suppression of superstition and the creation of a socially-contributive religious sphere.[9] Like Japan, the Chinese case is distinctive in that, historically, there was neither a state religion nor a religious congregation strong enough to dominate people's spiritual outlooks and everyday lives or command the political order and its institutions. As Vincent Goossaert observes, whereas secularization of twentieth-century societies that had a strong religious authority led to a struggle between the nascent nation-state and institutionally established religion, secularization in China entailed the creation of a religious sphere where religions were organized by emulating the Christian model and under the guidance of the state.[10] I will argue further that "religion" itself was also invented during the course of secularization in China only at the turn of the twentieth century. This specific period in which religion was invented, both as a concept and a social space, needs to be emphasized, since it invites us to ponder how the religiosity of Christianity, which had long been present in China, was perceived by locals and what it might mean for not only the spiritual beliefs in China, but also for the transformation of Christianity in the process of its indigenization.

The invention of religion in non-Western societies has long been debated in postcolonial studies, for which the expansion of the West produced and universalized at the colonial periphery the concept of religion originally particular to the Western historical condition.[11] Yet it bears stressing that a fixed Chinese translation of "religion" appeared only some five decades after the British Empire forced the Qing dynasty in the early 1840s to lift its century-old ban on Christianity. As

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[7]Jason Ananda Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 251.

[8]Ibid., 252–59.

[9]Vincent Goossaert, "Republican Church Engineering: The National Religious Associations in 1912 China," in Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, ed., *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 209–32; Shuk Wah Poon, *Negotiating Religion in Modern China: State and Common People in Guangzhou, 1900–1937* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2011); Rebecca Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes: Religion and the Politics of Chinese Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009).

[10]Goossaert, "Republican Church Engineering," 231.

[11]See, for example, Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 269–84; David Chidester, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Catherine Bell, "Paradigms behind (and before) the Modern Concept of Religion," *History and Theory* 45, 4 (2006): 27–46.

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Romain Bertrand well documents, Europe's advantage over the colonial periphery was neither immediately present nor equally ascertainable to both sides.[12] From this perspective, we must ask why "religion" and, *mutatis mutandis*, the "religiosity" of Christianity became expressible in Chinese only at the turn of the twentieth century, whereas missionaries had been preaching Christianity in China for centuries. Finding an answer demands more than any simple explanatory framework of Westernization that risks overestimating the effective influences of the West on Chinese cultural and political orders. Christianity failed to introduce to imperial China the formulation of religion, and instead it was domesticated into the state-led Confucian language that rested upon practical and worldly affairs. An equitable assessment of Western influence in the transformation of Chinese religion requires that we examine the extent to which Christianity adapted or challenged local cultural norms, social standards, and political needs.

Based on these observations, this article chronologically explores secularization in China from the sixteenth to the late twentieth centuries. Instead of labeling "religion" as a product of European cultural hegemony imposed on a completely different cultural environment, I examine how Chinese policymakers and intellectuals fabricated religion and produced secularization to respond to China's political needs and cultural beliefs. The imperial period witnessed the emergence of three forms of secularism, one of which permeated Chinese history after the country's encounter with Christianity built on the Christian secularism, which I will analyze in the first section. I argue that many key features of Christian secularism, namely the de-Christianization of knowledge, the privatization of Christianity, the prevalence of non-religious values, and the reduction of Christianity to one of many choices, constitute a multipolar phenomenon that, rather than being only a product of Western historical dynamics, also resulted from firmly established cultural norms and political rules in China. During the last two decades of the Qing dynasty, royalist reformers and republican revolutionaries promoted what I call "Confucian secularism" and "atheist secularism," respectively. Both groups were engendered by a "civil religion," but professed faith in different values, symbols, and rituals that characterized the Chinese nation under construction. These three types of secularism informed the state religious policy of the Republican period that was later adopted and extensively applied by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) after its takeover of mainland China. I explain how, despite the strong Western influence on China's political and intellectual trends from the late Qing onwards, Chinese policymakers and intellectuals, far from being passive imitators of the West, produced the scientific secular-religion-superstition trinary—like that Josephson proposed—to create a religious space that suited the nation's cultural norms and sociopolitical needs. Building my analysis upon this trinary, I further highlight the manipulative power the state wielded over science. As far as the power of the Chinese state disproportionately overshadows that of society, science became an ideological justification, rather than an absolute value, at the disposal of the secular state to distinguish between religion and superstition, for its political ends.

This case particularly applies to contemporary China. Methodologically, the article examines the formulation of secularism in China by tracing the

[12]Romain Bertrand, *L'Histoire à parts égals: Récit d'une rencontre, Orient-Occident (XVIe–XVIIe siècle)* (Paris: Seuil, 2011).

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terminological evolution of religion and superstition. The apparition and the translation of a certain religion-related concept, or the lack thereof, are related to the ever-changing intellectual, social, and political landscape. As a whole, this article reflects on how the Chinese case contributes to diversifying and differentiating Western secularization theory by moving beyond simple rebuttals of Eurocentrism as well as arguments that Western and Chinese experiences of secularization are incomparable.

The Christian Secular in Imperial China

Christianity first arrived in China during the seventh century via Syriac monks of the Nestorian Church, and it was known in China as *Jingjiao* (景教, literally "luminous teaching"). In modern Chinese, *jiao* denotes "religion" when used after certain noun adjuncts or adjectives. Catholicism, for instance, is rendered as *Tianzhujiao* (天主教) in the sense of "Heavenly Lord Religion," which was coined by the Italian Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and the elite Chinese Catholic scholar-official Xu Guangqi (徐光启, 1562–1633). In his account of Chinese spiritual life, Ricci depicted China as a land immersed in superstitious practices such as alchemy, fortune-telling, palmistry, and geomancy. Acknowledging Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism as China's three religions, he belittled Buddhism as a doctrine "obscured by clouds of noisome mendacity" and Daoism as simply nonsense whose appeal among otherwise sufficiently wise men went beyond his comprehension. Although Confucianism was not irreproachable by Ricci's Catholic standards, it assumed a noble function of maintaining proper social order, public peace, and economic security while fostering vigorous individual virtues.[13]

Ricci's assertion that Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism formed China's three religions was plausibly informed by the notion of *sanjiao* (三教, three teachings). The concept was originally formulated around the sixth century and categorized Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism under the same aggregate. Ricci was, however, mistaken, since *jiao* did not acquire the modern meaning of religion until the end of the nineteenth century. Contrary to the West, where the spread and adoption of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were historically driven by a virulent clash of civilizations, *sanjiao* implies a unity among Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. In fact, only in the cases of Buddhist and Daoist temples and Confucian academies could those who strictly identified with one of the three teachings be found, while ceremonial and ritualistic events such as funeral and ancestor veneration combine the three, with local variations. The selective employment and observation of the three teachings was context-specific and did not suggest an exclusive allegiance to any of them.[14] Admittedly, the three teachings were different in terms of faith, worship, and perspectives, and competitions or even conflicts among them for imperial favor and doctrinal dominance routinely took

[13]Matteo Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci, 1583–1610,* Nicolas Trigault, trans. (New York: Random House, 1953), 82–86, 93–105.

[14]Vincent Goossaert, "The Concept of Religion in China and the West," *Diogenes* 52, 1 (2005): 13–20, 13–14.

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place. Nonetheless, the concept of "three teachings" itself emphasized harmony and had been philosophically viewed as such over time.[15]

The unity of the three teachings was sustained by the predominance of Confucianism, which became the state ideology of the Chinese empire in the second century BC. The legitimacy of other *jiao* depended on their complementary function of promoting and enforcing Confucian ethics.[16] When Ricci and his fellow Jesuit missionaries arrived in the Portuguese settlement of Macau in the 1580s, they presented themselves as Indian Buddhist monks, leading many locals to believe that Catholicism was a new Buddhist sect, especially given similarities between Catholicism and Buddhism, such as the belief in salvation in the afterlife.[17] Once Ricci realized the relative inferiority of Buddhism to Confucianism, he began to dress like a Confucian scholar and disseminate Catholic doctrines in the framework of Confucian classics, professing that Confucian morality echoed Christianity.[18] The determination to have Catholicism accepted by Chinese literati —men who were educated in Confucianism as the ultimate ideal—was such that Ricci ardently dismissed Buddhism, ignoring the intellectual endeavor of Chinese literati to harmonize the three teachings as well as the profound influence Buddhism had even on those who vehemently denounced it.[19]

The admiration for Confucianism was relative, since the goal of missionaries was to convert natives to Christianity. Ricci, for example, diagnosed Confucianism as lacking considerations for "the salvation of souls."[20] Still, the teaching of Catholicism did not go beyond the purport of Confucian classics for Chinese converts in general. An illustrative example relates to the Chinese translation of God—*Shangdi* (上帝, Supreme Lord)—a notion borrowed from Confucian cosmology: "Our Lord of Heaven is the Supreme Lord (*Shangdi*) mentioned in the ancient Chinese canonical writings."[21] This conversion strategy engendered effects contrary to the purpose, because Catholicism seemingly served to restore the Confucian orthodoxy and consequently became a complement to Confucianism.[22] Since the value of Catholicism for Chinese lay in it serving as this complement, Chinese literati, including converted Catholics like Xu Guangdi, did not find it necessary to invent a term for religion. Instead, Christianity was expected to fit into the available Chinese cultural norms and hierarchy.

As in the case of *jiao*, Confucianism was the yardstick for measuring whether a certain practice or doctrine violated cultural and sociopolitical norms. The idea of banned, dangerous, or heretical beliefs might bring to mind the standard Chinese word for superstition—*mixin* (迷信)—which was a rare word before the late

[15]Daniel J. Paracka Jr., "China's Three Teachings and the Relationship of Heaven, Earth and Humanity," *Worldviews* 16, 1 (2012): 73–98.

[16]Hsi-yuan Chen, "Confucianism Encounters Religion: The Formation of Religious Discourse and the Confucian Movement in Modern China" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1999), 1.

[17]R. Po-Chia Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City: Matteo Ricci 1552–1610* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 92–93.

[18]Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 97.

[19]Yu Liu, "The Dubious Choice of an Enemy: The Unprovoked Animosity of Matteo Ricci against Buddhism," *European Legacy* 20, 3 (2015): 224–38.

[20]Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 96.

[21]Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi* (*The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*), 1603, cited in Carl S. Kilcourse, *Taiping Theology: The Location of Christianity in China, 1843–64* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 31.

[22]Kilcourse, *Taiping Theology*, 32.

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nineteenth century. Catholic missionaries first used *mixin* to describe practices that are now commonly regarded as superstitions, such as fortune-telling and geomancy. Inácio da Costa (1599–1666) also referred to Chinese customs such as concubinage and infanticide as superstitions.[23] These meanings of *mixin* were not widely known outside the Catholic circle. In a study on the semantic evolution of *mixin*, Huang Ko-wu summarizes three connotations the term evoked from the Tang period, when it first appeared in Chinese sources, to the late-Qing period before the advent of science: Confucians used it to criticize certain Buddhist and Daoist invocations and practices, sacrifice to deities other than those in orthodox Buddhism and Daoism and ancestors, and blind obedience or credulous belief in another person's words.[24] Huang further argues that *mixin*, during the imperial period, was synonymous with some much more commonly used notions that expressed "heterodoxy" (邪, *xie*) in opposition to orthodox teachings (正教, *zhengjiao*, literally: proper teaching), such as *yinsi* (淫祀, illicit sacrifice), *yiduan* (異端, heresy), *xieshuo* (邪說, heretical idea), and *zuodao* (左道, deviation).[25] The imperial state legally defended orthodox teachings that consolidated the sociopolitical order, whereas practices and texts promoting anti-state activity were classified as heresies to be eradicated.[26] The dichotomy that separated orthodoxy from heterodoxy conveyed an affirmation of the primacy of Confucian propriety, righteousness, and loyalty toward the established social and political norms. We will see that this politically charged, moral requirement was not the only criterion for distinguishing the modern concept of religion from superstition.

While Christianity as a *jiao* was placed in this Confucian-centered benchmark, missionaries competed with Confucian literati for imperial favor. Science was often

[23]Chu Pingyi, "Piwang xingmi: Ming Qing zhiji de Tianzhujiao yu mixinzhi jiaogou (Enlightening the deluded and awakening the bewildered: Christianity and the term *minxin* in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century China)," *Bulletin of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica* 84, 4 (2013): 695–752, 719.

[24]Huang Ko-wu, "Zhongguo jindai sixiang zhong de mixin (*Mixin* in modern Chinese thoughts)," *Higashiajia niokeru chiteki kōryū: kī konseputo no sai kentō 44* (2013): 185–200, 190.

[25]Ibid. These translations are not literal, since the Chinese words and their translations are embedded in two different cultural, sociopolitical, and even legal contexts that also evolved over time. Although I translate *yiduan* as heresy, the two terms are not absolutely commensurable. For the discussion in this section, it is sufficient to say that *yiduan* was a common condemnation of practices, beliefs, and doctrines strongly at variance with Confucian teachings during the imperial era. Nevertheless, the Ming-Qing Christian communities began to regard *yiduan* as Christian branches with distinct theologies from the one they personally followed. In other words, *yiduan* was believed to originate from within the Christian orthodoxy but had to be denounced to solidify the latter. As such, Catholics and Protestants could discredit each other as followers of *yiduan*, whereas for anti-Christian Confucians of the time, both Catholicism and Protestantism constituted *yiduan*. During the Republican period, the dominant scientific discourse belittled religions and popular folk beliefs as remnants of China's "feudal" past and, consequently, as superstitious. As a result, this rhetorical strategy was adopted by other religious believers who sought to distinguish themselves from followers of superstition by denouncing heterodox rituals and affirming the benefits that religion could bring to society. See Chu Ping-yi, "Zhengjiao yu yiduan: Ming, Qing shiqi 'Da Qin Jingjiao liuxing Zhongguo bei' de zhushu yanjiu' (Orthodoxy and heresy: exegeses of the Nestorian Stele in the Ming and Qing dynasties)," *Bulletin of Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica* 91, 2 (2020): 187–226, 219–20; Chu, "Piwang xingmi," 699.

[26]Thomas David DuBois, "Local Religion and Festivals," in Jan Kiely, Vincent Goossaert, and John Lagerwey, eds., *Modern Chinese Religion II: 1850–2015* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 371.

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used to serve this end.[27] Ferdinand Verbiest (1623–1688), for example, became close with the Kangxi Emperor (康熙, 1654–1772) after successfully predicting the length of a shadow cast by a vertical cord, the exact position of the sun and the planets, and an approaching lunar eclipse, demonstrating that the Chinese imperial astronomers had much to learn from the West.[28] Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1591–1666) was the first Westerner to be appointed the head astronomer at the Qing Court, and was succeeded by Verbiest and other Jesuits.[29] Missionaries also contributed to Qing China's diplomacy and military technology as translators and interpreters. Tomás Pereira (1645–1708) and Jean-François Gerbillon (1654–1707) were appointed by the Kangxi Emperor as interpreters of Latin at the negotiations with the Russian Empire that led to the Treaty of Nerchinsk. Impressed by missionaries' capacities, the Kangxi Emperor authorized Christian missions and prohibited the accusation of Catholicism being an evil teaching (邪教, *xiejiao*).[30]

During Kangxi's reign, the term *xiejiao* legally denoted a teaching strongly opposed to the three orthodox teachings which manipulated "occult powers" (邪術, *xieshu*) for the purpose of conspiracy (陰謀, *yinmou*) that might or might not be political.[31] Ironically, the phenomena caused by scientific technology could effectively be interpreted as manifestations of supernatural power. An example is the great panic caused by a train during an exhibition in Beijing in 1865. The audience was so frightened by its speed that they became convinced it was a demonic creation (妖物, *yaowu*), leading the infantry commander to order the immediate destruction of the railway.[32]Although science did enable missionaries to make Jesus known among the underprivileged, then, the latter's understanding of Christianity often remained unsophisticated, and many approached missionaries as an alternative to performing sacrificial rituals, such as for rainmaking, even in the 1920s.[33] Starting in the late nineteenth century, when the quest for power and wealth through science became a consensus in China, the science introduced by missionaries to spread Christianity became a refutation of the existence of God.[34] Furthermore, while

[27]See, for example, Catherine Jami, "Revisiting the Calendar Case (1664–1669): Science, Religion, and Politics in Early Qing Beijing," *Korean Journal for the History of Science* 27, 2 (2015): 459–77.

[28]Joseph MacDonnell, *Jesuit Geometers* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1989), 66.

[29]Agustin Udia, *Searching the Heavens and the Earth: The History of Jesuit Observatories* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 43–44.

[30]Ferdinand Verbiest, "Shan'e bao lüeshuo" (On the rewards for good deeds and punishment of bad deeds), in Nicolas Standaert and Andrian Dudink, eds., *Yesuhui Luoma dang'anguan Ming Qing Tianzhujiao wenxian* (Sources of Catholicism of the Ming and Ding dynasties from the Archives of the Society of Jesus in Rome) (Taipei: Taibei lishi xueshe, 2002), vol. 5, 509.

[31]This definition of *xiejiao* was provided by the Shunzhi Emperor in a 1656 imperial edict. He enumerated the Luo Teaching (無為教, *Wuweijiao*), the White Lotus (白蓮教, *Bailianjiao*), and the Incense Smelling Teaching (聞香教, *Wenxiangjiao*) as typical *xiejiao*. See Li Wenhai, *Qingshi biannian* (Chronological account of the Qing dynasty) (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1985), 464.

[32]Li Yuerui, *Chunbingshi yecheng* (Li Yuerui's anecdotes), vol. 3, in Song Liankui, ed., *Guanzhong congshu* (Series of the central Shaanxi plain) (Shanxi Tongzhiguan, ed., 1936), vol. 8, 65.

[33]Luo Zhitian, "Xuezhan: Chuanjianshi yu jindai Zhong Xi wenhua jingzheng" (Knowledge warfare: missionaries and the cultural competition between modern China and the West), in Luo Zhitian, ed., *Minzu zhuyi yu jindai Zhongguo sixiang* (Nationalism and modern Chinese thoughts) (Taipei: Dongda, 1998), 131–42; Thomas David DuBois, *Empire and the Meaning of Religion in Northeast Asia: Manchuria 1900–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 60.

[34]Luo, "Xuezhan," 131–42.

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missionaries aimed to persuade Chinese to regard the West as a cultural equal and subsequently convert them to Catholicism through science, Chinese elites clearly distinguished between science and Catholicism. The situation in which Christian missionaries in imperial China found themselves was similar to that of their fellows in Japan before the Meiji Restoration. In both countries, Christianity's legitimacy was evaluated through pre-existing moral frameworks provided by local cultural norms and hierarchies. The expulsion of Catholicism and the persecution of Christians in the mid-seventeenth century did not prevent Western scientific and political texts from entering the archipelago in the centuries that followed. The conceptualization of a techno-modern Japan included purging Christian influence from Western knowledge when the latter was still entrenched in a religious framework in Europe.[35] Josephson contends, "Japan preceded Europe in importing and producing de-Christianized science and politics before anything of the like existed in the West," making Japan a place "where European Christianity could be secularized."[36]

A comparable process of Christian secularization occurred in imperial China. One characteristic of the modern secular age in the West has been the reduction of religion to a personal choice among many denominations, or none at all. Such a privatization of Christianity had been a reality in China since the sixteenth century, when the secularization of Christianity had barely begun in Europe. Missionaries brought Christianity into China but failed to make the concept of the religion understandable to the Chinese, who accepted Christianity on their own cultural terms. Christianity was regarded as a legitimate *jiao* only on the condition that it complemented Confucianism, like any other belief system. This complementing role played by Christianity led to the emergence of a de-Christianized Western civilization in China by the mid-seventeenth century. The Ming-Qing scientist Fang Yizhi (方以智, 1611–1671), for example, ardently advocated Western science, since he found in it the restoration of a "lost" knowledge that contributed to the prosperity of the Three Dynasties—the supreme Confucian golden age in which the upright moral values were believed to have been fully concretized.[37] In the preface of Euclid's *Elements,* which he co-translated with Ricci, Xu Guangqi advances the same argument. While Xu converted to Catholicism, Fang remained highly critical of charging science with theological claims that could be refuted by the very scientific knowledge missionaries introduced to China.[38] Like-minded late-Ming literati elaborated on the "Chinese origin of Western knowledge" as a rhetorical strategy to rationalize the adoption of Western technology to build a more efficient and practical statecraft.[39] The idea of

[35]Josephson, *Invention of Religion*, 254.

[36]Ibid., 163.

[37]Fang Yizhi, "You Ziliu *Tianjing huowen* xu" (Preface of You Ziliu's *Questions about the Principles of Heaven*), in Research Center of Qing History, Institute of History, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, ed., *Qingshi ziliao* (Materials of Qing history) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), vol. 6, 50.

[38]Hou Wailu, *Zhongguo sixiang tongshi* (History of Chinese ideas) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1960), 1143-52.

[39]Wang Yangzong, "'Xixue Zhongyuan' shuo zai Ming Qing zhiji de youlai jiqi yanbian" (The emergence and evolution of the theory of the Chinese origin of Western knowledge during the Ming-Qing transition), *Dalu zazhi* 90, 6 (1995): 39–45; Theodore Huters, *Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai`i Press, 2005), 23–42; Joachim Kurtz, "Framing European Technology in Seventeenth-Century China: Rhetorical Strategies in Jesuit Paratexts," in Dagmar Schäfer, ed., *Cultures of Knowledge: Technology in Chinese History* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 219–32.

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"Chinese learning as substance, Western learning for application" (中體西用, *zhongti xiyong*), condoned by reformers during the Self-Strengthening Movement (1861–1895) and the Hundred Days' Reform (1898), ensured the continuity of early literati's de-Christianization of Western politics and science, which were seen to be separable from a spiritual inclination deemed superfluous and inferior to Confucianism.

Thus did the power asymmetry between the West and imperial China lead to Christian secularism in the Middle Kingdom. To facilitate evangelical outreach, the Jesuits largely reinforced this asymmetry by adapting themselves to local customs and norms, one of which was acknowledging Chinese converts' participation in ancestral and Confucian ceremonies as a practice of civil rites and not idolatry. Contrary to the Jesuits, the Dominicans and Franciscans who arrived in the 1630s refused this policy of accommodation and reported the issue to Rome, which led Clement XI (1649–1721) to prohibit Christians from participating in these rites. In response, the Kangxi Emperor decreed that missionaries who refused to accept the Chinese rites would be expelled from China. When Rome reaffirmed the ban in 1715, the Yongzheng Emperor (雍正, 1678–1735) proscribed Christianity as an evil teaching (*xiejiao*).[40] This ban remained in place until the mid-nineteenth century, when the British Empire forcefully opened China to foreign trade. Christianity was legalized through a series of treaties and agreements that China was obliged to make to settle conflicts with Western nations. However, missionaries of the late-Qing period would soon discover that the pre-existing hierarchical cultural patterns their predecessors had confronted were not to be readily obliterated, even as China lost the struggle over the position of political and economic power.

Secularism in Late Qing China

The Treaty of Nanking, which was signed in 1842 to end the First Opium War (1839–1842) between Great Britain and Qing China, stipulated the opening of treaty ports where missionaries could freely reside, build churches, and preach Christianity. Similar clauses were included in subsequent treaties and agreements. Treaties were usually written in Chinese and one or more Western languages that were "incommensurate" regarding the notion of religion. In the 1858 Sino-British Treaty of Tientsin, for instance, the "Christian religion" is rendered as *Yesu shengjiao* (耶穌聖教, literally: the Heavenly Teaching of Jesus) with "religion" left untranslated.

This omission is more than a linguistic issue. Chinese at the time had only a vague idea of religion as a concept. During the 1893 Chicago World Parliament of Religions held during the Columbia World Exposition, the Chinese diplomate Pung Kwang Yu (彭光譽, Peng Guangyu, b. 1844) transliterated "religion" into *erlilijing* (爾釐利景) to negate the correlation between religion and *jiao*, arguing that the Westerners who equated *jiao* with religion failed to comprehend its meaning of "teach" and "instruction."[41] He further commented that Confucianism was far superior to religion, which was for him "a kind of folk shamanism and more or less equivalent

[40]Kilcourse, *Taiping Theology*, 32–33.

[41]Sun Jiang, "Representing Religion: 'Chinese Religions' at the 1893 Chicago World Parliament of Religions," *Oriens Extremus* 54 (2015): 59–84, 64.

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to Buddhism and Daoism."[42] Pung's depreciation of religion was widespread among Chinese elites, whose hostility towards it might even have rationalized the forced reacceptance of Christianity. In fact, treaty clauses concerning evangelism did not explicitly stipulate missionaries' rights or obligations in any detail. Instead, only the ban on Christianity was lifted on the grounds that Christianity inculcated the practice of virtue. As such, the legitimacy of Christianity was acquired, once again, from its conformity with the Confucian moral standards of orthodox *jiao*.[43] Although China was subjected to Western hegemony, a new conceptual lexicon to describe religion was unnecessary, because Christianity had yet to break free from the Chinese cultural hierarchy.

This cultural hierarchy broke down in the late 1890s. In 1895, the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) cut short the Self-Strengthening Movement that concretized far-reaching military and economic reforms. China's defeat instantiated the insufficiency of technology alone to rescue the crumbing dynasty. In 1898, the Guangxu Emperor (光緒, 1871–1908) initiated the Hundred Days' Reform under the advisory of Kang Youwei (康有為, 1858–1927) and other reformers who embraced a parliamentary and constitutional monarchy. For this political regime to be operational, people had to be transformed from passive subjects to active citizens. To that end, a social enlightening movement, aiming to liberate people from sociopolitical shackles and educate them out of their ignorance, had to be launched alongside political modernization.[44] One such "backward" social custom impeding the population from meaningfully engaging in civil life was said to be the "improper" beliefs and practices such as fortune-telling and spirit writing that would later be labeled as superstition.

Kang Youwei's solution was to aggressively defend the Confucian orthodoxy. In an 1898 memorial, he urged the government to establish shrines to worship Confucius, adopt the Confucian calendar, seize the landed property of "illicit temples" (*yinci*, 淫祠), and uphold the Confucian cult (*Kongjiao*, 孔教) as the state cult (*guojiao*, 國教).[45] That cult would be conjointly observed by the throne and the people, but was also capable of resisting Christianity.[46] Despite this caution against Christianity, the Christian religious model largely informed his "ritualization" of Confucianism: the *jiaohui* (教會, church, building for worship) that he proposed to establish to practice the Confucian cult refers literally to a Christian church. Because of this obvious emulation of Christianity, the question now is one of determining whether the concept of *jiao* had taken on the characteristics of religion around the late 1890s.

[42]Ibid., 66.

[43]Chen, "Confucianism Encounters Religion," 40–41.

[44]Li Hsiao-t'i, *Qingmo de xiacengshehui qimeng yundong* (Movement of social enlightenment of the inferior society at the end of the Qing) (Taipei: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 1998).

[45]Kang Youwei, "Qing zun Kongsheng wei guojiao lijiaobujiaohui yi kongzijinian er fei yinsiqi zhe" (Memorial concerning the establishment of Confucianism as the state cult, the creation of a ministry of religion and shrines, the adoption of the Confucian calendar, and the ban on worships in illicit temples), in Tang Zhijun, ed., *Kang Youwei zhenglunji* (Political comments of Kang Youwei) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 279–83.

[46]Ibid., 282; Peng Chunling, *Rujia zhuanxing yu wenhua xinming: yi Kang Youwei, Zhang Taiyan wei zhongxin (1898–1927)* (The transformation of Confucianism and the New Culture Movement: On Kang Youwei and Zhang Taiyan [1898–1927]) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2014), 171.

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In one of Liang Qichao's (梁啟超, 1873–1927) 1897 articles on Confucianism, the correlation between *jiao* and religion was manifest. He attributed the prosperity of the West to Christianity, which he believed had spiritually nourished Western material achievements. Since Confucianism assumed the same function of social upliftment and political empowerment in China, a restructuration of Confucianism according to the Christian model laid the groundwork for a successful adoption of Western science and political institutions.[47] The emphasis, however, was placed on that model's social function rather than the otherworldly aspirations of religion and *jiao*. Kang Youwei also made this point clear in his dismissal of Christianity. He defined religion in 1904 as an established faith or principle (義, *yi*) capable of calling on and federating followers.[48] In this sense, Confucianism, as well as Daoism and Buddhism, were as much religions as Christianity was. To Kang, religion did not necessarily entail worship of deities, in which case religion should have been rendered as *shendao* (神道, literally: the way of deity). In fact, Christianity was for him an incomplete religion due to its veneration of God, which for Chinese literati was also a form of magic fundamentally against Confucian teachings.[49] The Christian vision of transcendence was also superfluous in China; not only had Confucianism elaborated on the supernatural without acknowledging its authority or purpose, but Buddhism could complement Confucianism to satisfy esoteric and mysterious needs.[50] While Kang praised the Christian religious practices as civilized, he was unimpressed by the doctrinal "superficiality" he perceived beneath: "Although their doctrine (*jiao*) is shallow, their practice is methodical and orderly. In contrast, our doctrine is refined, but our practice has been crude."[51]

In other words, the ritualization of Confucianism was more a refinement of Chinese tradition than any simple imitation of the Christian model. Nonetheless, this rearrangement of Confucianism was already too radical for traditionalist literati, since the worship of Confucius was a privilege reserved for the emperor. When Liang Qichao spoke of Kang Youwei as the Confucian Martin Luther, he most plausibly referred to Kang's effort to make Confucian doctrines accessible to every Chinese, who would be equally allowed to worship Confucius. In 1901, the Empress Dowager Cixi (慈禧, 1835–1908) consented to the New Politics (新政, *Xinzheng*), which retained most objectives of the abortive Hundred Days' Reform, one of which was the worship of Confucius. In 1904, new school regulations accorded a prominent place to the veneration of Confucius, which was to be performed on all ritual occasions, including the lunar New Year and the beginning of the semester. The worship was elevated to the scale of grand sacrifice of the court three years later.

[47]Liang Qichao, "Fu youren baojiao shu" (Letter to a friend concerning the protection of religion), in Zhang Pinxing et al., eds., *Liang Qichao quanji* (Complete work of Liang Qichao) (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1999), 150.

[48]Kang Youwei, "Yingguo Jianbuliezhu daxue Huawen zongjiaoxi Zhailushi huijianji" (On the meeting with Herbert Giles, professor director of Chinese at the University of Cambridge), in Jiang Yihua and Zhang Ronghua, eds., *Kang Youwei quanji* (Complete work of Kang Youwei) (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2007), vol. 8, 34.

[49]Ya-pei Kuo, "'Christian Civilization' and the Confucian Church—The Origin of Secularist Politics in Modern China," *Past and Present* 218 (2013): 235–64, 253.

[50]Kang Youwei, "Yidali youji" (Account on the trip to Italy), in Jiang Yihua and Zhang Ronghua, eds., *Kang Youwei quanji* (Complete work of Kang Youwei) (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2007), vol. 8, 398.

[51]Cited in Kuo, "'Christian Civilization,'" 255.

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Significantly, though, the traditional symbolism that made the worship of Confucius a religious ritual waned. As Ya-pei Kuo underscores, participants no longer observed the length of abstention before worship and paid little attention to the scrupulous, yet highly symbolic technical details put in place to ensure communication between the living and the dead. The ritual demarcation between the state cult and the Confucian worship by students was also later abolished. There was no longer any date so "sacred" that only the emperor and his high-ranked ministers had the prerogative to perform rites. Instead, the focus was on the sense of secular collectivity, whereby the emperor and the students belonged henceforth to one nation.[52]

As such, reformers conceptualized the Confucian cult in a secular way, as an effective method of forming citizens. The non-religious and secular nature of the so-called *Kongjiao*, is why I translate it as "Confucian cult" instead of "Confucian religion," and *guojiao*, which in modern Chinese signifies "state religion," as "state cult." Indeed, when the question of the place of Confucianism in the Chinese state was again raised during the course of drafting the constitution for the Republic, supporters of the Confucian cult did emphasize—albeit with little success—its secular nature, which made its enshrinement as the national cult compatible with religious freedom.[53]

By the same token, the church-like Confucian association would be politically autonomous and independent from the state. From an historical perspective, a belief system of this type is highly revolutionary. In a classic study on Chinese religion of the imperial era, C. K. Yang placed the three teachings on a continuum between "institutional religion" and "diffused religion."[54] Institutional religion mainly serves the spiritual needs of private individuals and is characterized by its independence in terms of theology, cults, and personnel. In diffused religion, these elements are intimately integrated into "one or more secular social institutions that they become a part of the concept, rituals, and structure of the latter, thus having no significant independent existence."[55] Diffused religion largely dominated the Chinese religious scene but was subject to secular institutions and their utilitarian interests.[56] Whether it is anachronistic to qualify the three teachings as religion remains debatable, but it is clear that, by preventing the state apparatus from intervening in how its personnel conducted the rituals and interpreted the classics, the new Confucian cult inverted the traditional political pyramid so that Confucianism would henceforth prevail over any regime that ruled over China.[57] In Kang Youwei's view, religious controversies with other nations would also be handled exclusively by the national supervisory Confucian organ, allowing the state to be committed entirely to secular affairs.[58]

[52]Ya-pei Kuo, "Redeploying Confucius—The Imperial State Dreams of the Nation, 1902–1911," in Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, ed., *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 80–83.

[53]Chen, "Confucianism Encounters Religion," 173–86.

[54]C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and some of Their Historical Factors* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 294–95.

[55]Ibid., 295.

[56]Ibid., 302.

[57]See, for instance, Liang Qichao, "Fu youren baojiao shu," 150.

[58]Kuo, "'Christian Civilization,'" 256–59.

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To Confucians, the state endorsement of Confucianism guaranteed the freedom of religion, since Buddhism, Daoism, and Christianity were allowed to be practiced in China despite Confucianism having been the state ideology for centuries.[59] The compatibility between state creed and religious freedom was exemplified by nations like Denmark, Argentina, and Italy, to which Confucians related.[60] In this regard, the state Confucian cult is conceptually similar to State Shinto that the Japanese government defined as a patriotic, civic, and non-religious national cult, embodying a cultural essence that characterized the spirit of the Japanese people regardless of their religious convictions.[61] The transportation of these foreign models to China was, however, weakly supported outside the Confucian circle, especially during the Republican era when iconoclastic intellectuals identified Confucianism as the culprit of oppression against individual freedom. But the failure to have Confucianism be officially endorsed was also due to Confucians' linguistic choices. Overemphasizing the commensurability between *jiao* and religion, they failed to effectively emphasize that their creed was conceptualized to be a secular faith, structured exclusively around moral values for citizen and national formation.[62] In other words, with Confucianism being the ethos that undergirded a national community, religion became a personal choice, making the modern China a secular Confucian state that would guarantee freedom of religion while combating superstition as an obstacle to modernization.

Although reformers clearly demarcated religion and superstition, the appeal to expunge superstition eventually, from the 1900s onwards, spearheaded the attack upon religion itself. The negation of religion during this period often reflected an ever-existing Confucian bias against Christianity. However, because a growing number of educated elites indiscriminately vilified all ritualistic and spiritual practices and customs, claiming the "ethos" peculiar to these belief systems could not be empirically proven, the traditional binary opposition between orthodox *jiao* and heterodoxy became obsolete. This view was replaced by the modern religion/ superstition formulation, which was negated by the emerging scientific worldview pursued by ever more "progressive" intellectuals. The Chinese translations of "religion" (宗教, *zongjiao*) and "superstition" (*mixin*) are both indigenous Chinese words that acquired the modern meanings in Japan around the beginning of the twentieth century. As DuBois argues, the shift of *mixin*'s meaning from heretical teaching to superstition entails a reconceptualization of the social repercussions of beliefs and practices that were once termed heretical or illicit.[63] The imperial Chinese

[59]See, for example, Cheng Dazhang, "Zhonghua minguo xianfa yi guiding Kongjiao wei guojiao reng xu xinjiao ziyou xiuzheng'an" (The constitution of the Republic of China should endorse Confucianism as the state cult while guaranteeing the freedom of religion), *Changming kongjiao jingshibao* 7 (1923): 1–4.

[60]See, for instance, Chen Huanzhang, "Mingding yuanyou zhi guojiao wei guojiao bing bu aiyu xinjiao ziyou zhi xin mingci" (Endorsing the historical state cult as the state cult of the Republic does not counter freedom of religion), in Shanghai Jingshi Publishing, ed., *Minguo jingshi wenbian* (Collection of articles on social and political affairs of the republican era) (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 2006), vol. 8, 5056–57.

[61]Thomas David DuBois, *Religion and the Making of Modern East Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 180.

[62]See, for example, Kang Youwei, "Yi Kongjiao wei guojiao pei tianyi" (Proposal of making Confucianism a state cult to conform to Heaven), in Jiang Yihua and Zhang Ronghua, eds., *Kang Youwei quanji* (Complete work of Kang Youwei) (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2007), vol. 10, 91.

[63]DuBois, "Local Religion," 395.

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state banned various "illicit" belief systems, but the main reason was not that the spiritual power they claimed to command was imaginary. On the contrary, the manipulation of magic power through "illicit" rituals was believed to cast an effective spell on the regime. Therefore, in the Ming code—the first imperial code with a specific subsection (entitled 祭祀, *jisi*, sacrifice) that sanctions "improper" belief systems and practices—those who cast spells or disseminated dissident ideas in "illicit" gatherings that might or had provoked mass mobilization were punished by death. However, propagandizing heresy in violation of social and moral orders for non-political ends was liable to much lighter penalties. Dressing like a deity in a ritual ceremony, for example, was punishable by one hundred strokes with a large stick (杖, *zhang*), remittable on payment of six *guan* (貫) of cash coins.[64] DuBois sees in this semantic change of *mixin* toward the end of the imperial period a new understanding of the latter's social consequences, whose main crime "was that it retarded national development."[65] This crime, however, could also be blamed on religion.

The Japanese term *shūkyō* (*zongjiao*), which originally designated a sect of Buddhism, became the standard Chinese translation of religion during the same period in which *mixin*, in the sense of superstition, entered Chinese vocabulary. Late Qing republican revolutionaries generally rejected religion and superstition while dismissing royalist reformers' "Confucian cult" as a nonsensical "Confucian religion," mainly for three reasons. First, as noted earlier, science was touted as the onward intellectual march of humanity that had surpassed religion to the point that it was common during the late Qing and early Republican periods to indiscriminately employ the term as a synonym of superstition.[66] Secondly, now the term *jiao* explicitly became the abbreviation of "religion," Confucianism was excluded from this category due to its lack of deity worship.[67] Third, Confucianism was condemned as countering republicanism because it had been the consolidating ideology of the political absolutism of imperial China.

The Confucian cult aside, revolutionaries considered theist religion in general to be counterproductive for national progress. The dismissal of religion was further validated by reference to the Western experience of secularization. During the revolutionary decade of 1900, revolutionaries enthusiastically promoted the Sino-Babylonianism of the French Orientalist Terrien de Lacouperie (1844–1894). This theory hypothesized that the maturity of Chinese civilization from the very beginning made it highly plausible that Chinese antiquity pointed to it having had a Western origin.[68] Because of their shared cultural genesis, the appropriation of Western science and liberal democracy in China served to discover an authentic Chinese

[64]Jia Ying, *Da Ming lü shiyi* (The Great Ming code with explications), repr. in *Zhongguo lüxue wenxian* (Materials on Chinese legal studies) (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 2005[1549]), vol. 2, 561–62. A *guan* equals 1,000 cash coins (or *wen*).

[65]DuBois, "Local Religion," 395.

[66]Huang, "Zhongguo jindai sixiang zhong de mixin."

[67]Deity worship did not necessarily constitute a defining element of religion, regardless of how the term was understood by Chinese elites at the time. Kang Youwei's ideal religion, analyzed in this section, took the form of atheism. Some intellectuals found it unproblematic to qualify Buddhism as an atheistic religion. But deity worship was generally regarded as a characteristic of religion, as Wang Jingfang's observation cited in the next section clearly shows. For Buddhism and religion, see, for instance, Zhang Taiyan, "Jianli zongjiao lun" (On the creation of religion), *Minbao* 9 (1906): 1–26.

[68]Terrien de Lacouperie, *Western Origin of the Early Chinese Civilisation, from 2,300 B.C. to 200 A.D.* (London: Asher & Co., 1894).

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civilization akin to the West. In this rhetoric, revolutionaries compared the state endorsement of Confucianism during the second century with the supremacy of Catholicism in medieval Europe, which they denigrated as a thousand-year benightedness awaiting the renaissance of antiquity to liberate the West from religious oppression.[69] The same gap of cultural and political darkness also handicapped China as a result of the hegemony of Confucianism that hindered other branches of ancient schools of thought. The encounter with Western civilization made the twentieth century the age of Chinese renaissance that would follow the same civilizational path of the West to intellectual and political prosperity.[70] It follows that China did not need religion, let alone a state Confucian religion structured around the ideological culprit of political absolutism.

Ironically, anti-Qing revolutionaries' general rejection of religion resembles that of the Qing loyalists, whose devoted allegiance to the Manchu dynasty made them hostile to the spiritual "corruption" brought by Christianity. The scholar and industrialist Liu Jinzao 劉錦藻 (1862–1934) once commented on the Taiping Rebellion that led the oppositional Christian theocratic Heavenly Kingdom in Southern China from 1851 to 1864, and condemned its dismantling of the long-established Chinese political principle of non-interference of religion in the state matters:

> Chinese were profoundly frightened by the military and economic powers that the West generated by science. We felt inferior to Westerners and were willing to learn from them. Christians then seized the opportunity to declare that the power of the West was due to religion (*zongjiao*). Our literati were mostly concerned with material gains and hardly interested in their religion. However, the few Chinese Christians failed to thoroughly understand Christianity and its shortcomings. As such, they blindly followed this superstition (*mixin*), allowing the Western poison to spread in China. The Taiping Rebellion united religion with politics, overthrowing completely traditional Confucian teachings.[71]

This 1909 commentary uses both *zongjiao* and *mixin* in their modern senses, confirming further the necessity of purging Christian elements from the Western knowledge useful for strengthening the Qing dynasty. Although Liu Jinzao did not define imperial China as a secular regime—a political idea probably unknown to him —it seems plausible to postulate that, for him, combining political power with religious power tore down China's political tradition, sowing a disastrous seed that grew into the Taiping Rebellion.[72] Revolutionaries might not condone traditional customs as Liu Jinzao did, but from a different intellectual framework they were

[69]See, for example, Deng Shi, "Guoxue zhenlun" (On the truth of the national learning), in Deng Shi and Huang Jie, eds., *Guocui xuebao* (Journal of national essence) (Yangzhou: Guangling shushe, 2005[1907]), vol. 7, 3025.

[70]See, for instance, Deng Shi, "Guxue fuxing lun" (On the renaissance of ancient learning), in Deng Shi and Huang Jie, eds., *Guocui xuebao* (Journal of national essence) (Yangzhou: Guangling shushe, 2005[1905]), vol. 1, 112.

[71]Liu Jinzao, *Qingchao xu wenxian tongkao* (Supplement to the documents of the Qing dynasty), cited in Huang, "Zhongguo jindai sixiang zhong de mixin," 189.

[72]The word "secular" was listed in major English-Chinese dictionaries published in the late-Qing period, which often translated the term as 俗世 (*sushi*, worldly affairs), 世事 (*shishi*, worldly affairs), 風俗 (*fengsu*,

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equally wary of religion's oppressive potential. Nedostup highlights that the revolutionaries did not countenance a state religion or any religious institution; the traditional culture they endorsed to characterize the Chinese nation culturally was a radically reinterpreted one, as I briefly analyzed above. This traditional culture, combined with their aim to overthrow the emperor, did not lead to any religion or religious-like belief system, such as State Shinto.[73] Although I find this argument convincing, I am less certain this politico-cultural position placed them "in a difficult position between total iconoclasm and cultural restorationism," as Nedostup argues. On the ideological level at least, the negation of religion, among the revolutionaries who were otherwise eager learners of Western civilization, reinforced the de-Christianization of Western knowledge. Indeed, once religion was withdrawn, revolutionaries concluded that what made the West forceful was science and nationalism.[74] The traditional culture that they endorsed was fashioned in such a way as to reflect the scientific spirit and the liberal political culture of the West, which revolutionaries believed was unlikely to be achieved if religion predominated.[75] As such, they were not caught between total iconoclasm and cultural restorationism, and instead they integrated them. In the due course, revolutionaries created and paved a way forward for an atheist secularism to which the current Chinese regime still adheres.

On the eve of the victory of the anti-Manchu revolution, Zhang Taiyan (章太炎, 1869–1936) argued for a cultural "purification" (淳化, *chunhua*) of the non-Han population. Until that was completed, they would be entitled to limited political rights within the future republic.[76] Wang Jingwei (汪精衛, 1883–1944) argued that not every ethnic community in China was intellectually and politically advanced enough to declare independence, which justified their integration into the Han

customs), and 世俗 (*shisu*, earthly minded, not pertaining to the spiritual world). "Coming once in a century" is also a common interpretation. In the late-Qing dictionaries I was able to find, only the 1908 *An English and Chinese Standard Dictionary* includes the term "secularism," which the author explained, in English and in Chinese, as "the principles of the Secularists, which are founded on an exclusive regard to the interest of this life (衹注重今生利益不信來生之學說, 惟俗論)," and a synonym of "secularity," which, according to the same dictionary, means "worldliness (俗心, *suxin*)" and "supreme attention to things of the present life (一心注重於現在生中事物, 衹知今世不信來生)." The secular/religious binary is conveyed in the translation of "secularize": "to convert from a regular or monastic into secular (還俗)" and "to convert from spiritual appropriation to secular or common use (抄聖物爲世用)." None of these explanations related the notions to a political regime, and the Chinese words chosen to translate these terms were easily understandable and commonly used by Chinese readers at the time, sometimes in a somewhat pejorative manner (a person only interested in pettiness, for instance). This nuance is also reflected in the translation of certain other entries in the dictionary. See Wei-Ching Williams Yen, *An English and Chinese Standard Dictionary* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1908), 2018.

[73] Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*, 4–5.

[74] A classic study on individual intellectuals is Benjamin I. Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yan Fu and the West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964). For a general study on the triumph of nationalist ideology, see Li Zehou, "Qimeng yu jiuwang de shuangchong bianzou" (The double changes between enlightenment and national salvation), in *Zhongguo xiandai sixiangshi lun* (On modern Chinese intellectual history) (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1987), 25–41.

[75] Aymeric Xu, *From Culturalist Nationalism to Conservatism: Origins and Diversification of Conservative Ideas in Republican China* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 102–16.

[76] Zhang Taiyan, "Zhonghua minguo jie" (On the Republic of China), *Minbao* 15 (1907): 1–17, 13–14.

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population for their own progress and protection.[77] Although the Republic of China was founded on the premise of "Five Peoples (i.e., the Han, the Manchu, the Mongols, the Hui, and the Tibetans) Under One Union" (五族共和, *Wuzu gonghe*), Sun Yat-sen (孫中山, 1866–1925) repeatedly affirmed Han cultural supremacy.[78] Alongside differences in language and customs, the most obvious cultural trait that set the Han Chinese apart from the other four ethnic groups was the religions practiced by the latter, namely Islam, Tibetan Buddhism, and shamanism. There was nevertheless a considerable gap between the revolutionaries' political conception and its implementation, since the new Republican state found that atheist secularism was inadequate as a tutor of society—a matter to which I now turn.

Secularism in Republic and Communist China

Immediately after the Republic's founding, "religion" remained a relatively new concept whose signification was yet to be firmly established. Member of Parliament Wang Jingfang (王敬芳, 1876–1933) observed that at the mention of *zongjiao*, "students are confused by the example of most of the world religions and thus they immediately think of the word 'deity (神, *shen*).'" [79] The association of religion with divinity was common among representatives of the Constitution Drafting Committee and was expressed in a controversial and ambiguous constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion.

The provisional constitution of the Republic of China guaranteed "*xinjiao ziyou*" (信教自由), a term modeled on the language of the Japanese Meiji Constitution (信教の自由, *shinkyō no jiyū*), literally meaning "freedom to believe in a teaching."[80] During the drafting of the first constitution, it was proposed that the Japanese-derived term be replaced with the more precise yet more restrictive "*xinyang zongjiao zhi ziyou*" (信仰宗教之自由, freedom to believe in a religion). The proposition was contested by Confucians, who wanted Confucianism to be constitutionally protected regardless of whether it was deemed a teaching or a religion.[81] *Zongjiao* was initially almost equivalent to Christianity but soon included Islam and later Buddhism and Daoism.[82] Whether Confucianism should be included in this category had been the subject of intense debate for years. Unlike State Shinto, established to reflect the emperor's divine origin, the privileged relationship of Confucius within the Chinese state and his symbolic values of national unity and spirit had already been exploded by revolutionaries who established the Republic. Confucians were fighting a lost battle. If Confucianism obtained the status of religion and, subsequently, constitutional protection, their advocacy for the compulsory study of Confucian classics and worship of Confucius in schools would be deemed against the constitutional freedom of religion. Yet if they insisted upon the secular and non-

[77]Wang Jingwei, "Yanjiu minzu yu zhengzhi guanxi zhi ziliao" (On the relationship between nation and politics), *Minbao* 13 (1907): 17–37, 31.

[78]Sun Zhongshan, "Zai Zhongguo Guomindang benbu teshe zhu Yue bangongchu de yanshuo" (Speech given at the bureau of the headquarter of the Kuomintang in Guangdong), in *Sun Zhongshan quanji* (Complete work of Sun Zhongshan), (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), vol. 5, 473–74.

[79]Chen, "Confucianism Encounters Religion," 176.

[80]Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*, 38.

[81]Ibid., 38.

[82]Goossaert, "Republican Church Engineering," 211.

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religious nature of the Confucian cult, the state could forbid the worship of Confucius without violating the constitution.[83] The Nationalist Government formed in 1927 inherited the religious policy of the previous Beiyang Government and recognized five religions, which remain the same today: Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Buddhism, and Daoism.

From a legal perspective, *jiao* lost its original meaning of teaching and was employed exclusively as the abbreviation of *zongjiao*. This linguistic adjustment occurred in tandem with a paradigm shift in which Christianity was substituted for Confucianism as the superlative *jiao*, which translated into a large-scale restructuring of the Chinese belief systems and their behavioral consequences. As Nedostup notes, although the regime understood itself to be secular and refused to defend orthodoxy, it rejected a more liberal freedom of belief and worship beyond the recognized religions.[84] A creed would be constitutionally protected and recognized as religion if it replicated the secular Christian model, being spiritual, ethical, well organized, and useful to sociopolitical causes.[85] Republican China as a secular state was not committed to freeing religions from state influence, given that religion was not constructed as a personal belief but through its association with a communal life acknowledged by the state as morally uplifting and socially participatory. Religion was fabricated alongside a separate but non-autonomous religious sphere that was encouraged or even required to be publicly visible, and the secular state favored religious practice as an effective strategy for deracinating superstition.

As such, religious policy of the Republican period combined the approaches to secularism that had been developed in imperial China. As late Qing revolutionaries, the Republican state was essentially atheistic. But unlike revolutionaries, the Republic found secular religion a useful tool for nation-building in the same way that Kang Youwei and his followers did, while a broad swath of Chinese belief systems that failed to conform to the official standard was to be eliminated as superstitions incompatible with modernization. Although the secular Christian model was upheld as the standard for proper religious practices, Christianity was reduced to one of many religious choices. The Christian secularism that appeared in China by the seventeenth century was made into state policy, possibly most palpably in the state-led de-Christianization of Western knowledge that came to be known as the Movement for the Recovery of Educational Rights (收回教權運動, *Shouhui jiaoquan yundong*). One contribution of the Christian missionaries to China was their effort to popularize education. By 1922, more than 210,000 students were enrolled in approximately 7,300 Christian schools, ranging from kindergartens to universities.[86] Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培, 1868–1940), soon after his nomination as minister of education in 1912, abolished Confucian education and worship in schools on the grounds of freedom of consciousness. Yet Christian education remained unregulated due to the privileges that Christianity had accumulated over previous decades and to the ever-present Western influence on the young Republic. These prerogatives are exemplified by the Shanghai Missionary College run by

[83]Chen, "Confucianism Encounters Religion," 149, 190.

[84]Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*, 27–28.

[85]Goossaert, "Republican Church Engineering," 213.

[86]Li Chucai, ed., *Diguo zhuyi qin Hua jiaoyushi ziliao—Jiaohui jiaoyu* (Materials on the history of education during the imperialist invasion of China—education in Christian schools) (Beijing: Jiaoyu kexue chubanshe, 1987), 15.

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Seventh-Day Adventists (三育大學, *Sanyu daxue*), which admonished students to cast off any nationalist consciousness since patriotism had no place in a church school.[87]

The Beiyang Government's 1921 ban on evangelism in Christian secondary schools marked the eruption of the Movement for the Recovery of Educational Rights. That movement soon swept the country and climaxed following the 1922 Anti-Christian Movement (非基督教運動, *Fei Jidujiao yundong*). That was led by nationalist students and intellectuals, such as members of the Young China Educational Association (少年中國學會, *Shaonian Zhongguo xuehui*), and condemned Christian education as failing to withstand scientific scrutiny and as being part of Western imperialism's encroachment on China's "educational sovereignty."[88] In 1929, the movement ended with the newly founded Nationalist Government legally requiring all private educational institutions to register with the Ministry of Education and to organize their curricula according to its guidelines, which forbade compulsory religious instruction.[89] Despite vast differences in historical conditions, concrete measures, and social repercussions, the position of the Nationalist Government in the Anti-Christian Movement resembled that of French republicans during the so-called *guerre scolaire*. The latter began during the French Revolution and peaked following institution of the 1905 law on the Separation of the Churches and State, which aimed to oust religion from the education system, and contributed to the emergence of a more secular nationalism.[90]

French republicans and socialists during the *guerre scolaire* vigorously condemned clericalism as "a new and dangerous evil that simultaneously weakened the state, disintegrated society, and threated national unity,"[91] and this mirrored views of Chinese anti-religious activists. The latter denounced religion as being opposed to scientific progress, modernization, and national sovereignty. The uncertainty as to what religion entailed enabled the state to create religion and a religious sphere under its supervision while putting forward the impression that the Republic was following international common law regarding religious freedom. In this process of creating a religious sphere, legal religion was distinguished from superstition, with science serving as the means of demystifying the religions authorized within the secular state.

The same scientific secular-religion-superstition trinary that Josephson noted in the transformation of Japanese religion from the Meiji era was replicated in China. This triad has aroused scholarly attention. Nedostup mentions that the religion/superstition formulation "rested on a declaration of universal scientific truth" while "discarding the Confucian righteousness and moral emperorship upon which [the earlier orthodoxy/heterodoxy dichotomy] stood."[92] Still, insofar as the invention of religion served to expand the state's control over society, the "universal scientific

[87]Yang Xiaochun, "Jidujiao zhi xuanchuan yu shouhui jiaoyuquan yundong" (Christian propaganda and the restoration of educational rights), *Zhonghua jiaoyujie* 14, 8 (1925): 1–9, 3.

[88]See, for example, Li Huang, *Xuedunshi huiyilu* (Memoire) (Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe, 1978), 32.

[89]Kaiyi Li, *Transnational Education between The League of Nations and China: The Interwar Period* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 17–18.

[90]Ibid., 18; Mona Ozouf, *L'École, l'Église et la République (1871–1914)* (Paris: Seuil, 2007); Claude Langlois, "Catholiques et laïcs," in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, Pierre Nora, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), vol. 3, 150–54.

[91]Langlois, "Catholiques et laïcs," 150.

[92]Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*, 9.

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truth" that distinguished religion from superstition was an artificial ideological construct. This construct allowed the state to formalize, in a seemingly objective way, legal religion, which, not unlike the traditional orthodox *jiao*, was also a creation of the state order. In other words, the politically charged "proper"/"improper" judgment inherent in the classical orthodoxy/heterodoxy dichotomy continued to inform the religion/superstition formulation because the criteria that distinguished superstition from religion were determined by the state in accordance with its political interests at any given moment. The state's ad hoc political purposes made scientific secularism and religion an unstable alliance in fending off superstition, especially in Communist China, which endorsed Marxist-Leninist atheism.

Communist China carried over these religious policies of Republican China to a large extent.[93] During its early decades, religion became one of many elements of life that would be eliminated as hindrances to a thriving socialist society. But religion was rarely purged solely for its own sake. That is, Christians were persecuted under the pretext that they were henchmen for Western imperialism, while Confucianism, Buddhism, Islam, and Daoism were deposed as "feudal" and "superstitious" institutions that exploited the masses and, in some cases, ethnic minorities.[94] The invasion of Tibet in 1959 was carried out partially to "liberate" Tibetans from a slave society that benefited an aristocracy and Buddhist monks.[95] This type of state secularism closely resembles the anti-religious rationale of late Qing revolutionaries. The communist regime's main target was not religion per se, but what a specific belief system was considered to embody, which countered the socialist ideal of nation and society. The constitutional reestablishment of freedom of religious belief after the Cultural Revolution politically marks the dissociation of religion from Western policies, traditional sociopolitical arrangements, and the superstition against which it had been defined. Although the government acted to bring science into harmony with legal religion, the scientific rationale in question was anything but objective or free of political bias. Instead, science was defined as a vehicle of Marxism-Leninism and Maoism that placed the religious sphere under strict state regulation by accentuating a party-oriented patriotism as one of the indispensable constitutive elements of religion.[96] As such, the official invention of religion is ideologically charged by non-theological and secular matters, while a belief system that refuses to "firmly support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and socialism" is denied of any religious quality.[97]

[93]Ibid., 176–77.

[94]Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 155.

[95]Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, "Introduction," in Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, ed., *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 25.

[96]"Zhonggong zhongyang yinfa *Guanyu woguo shehui zhuyi shiqi zongjiao wenti de jiben guandian he jiben zhengce* de tongzhi" (Notice on the issuance of *Basic Viewpoints and Policies on Religious Issues during Our Nation's Socialist Period* by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party), in Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi Zonghe Yanjiuzu, ed., *Xinshiqi zongjiao gongzuo wenxian huibian* (Selection of documents on religious work during the new period) (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2014), 58–59.

[97]See, for example, Jiang Zemin, "Baochi Dang de zongjiao zhengce de wendingxing he lianxuxing" (On maintaining the stability and continuity of the religious policy of the party), in Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi Zonghe Yanjiuzu, ed., *Xinshiqi zongjiao gongzuo wenxian huibian* (Selection of documents on religious work during the new period) (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2014), 210.

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In 1982, the Secretariat of the CCP issued *Document No. 19* on religious policy. It states that the legislation guarantees the right to believe in any religion—that China as a secular state does not endorse or forbid any specific religion—while also preventing "religion from interfering in state administration, jurisdiction, and education."[98] These general principles are commonly found in secular states with no official religion. However, the state's power in China disproportionally overshadows that of society. Consequently, the state has the exclusive power to set the standards for acceptable religious practices. To Xiaofei Kang, the modern Chinese state committed itself to "a secularization process that aimed to separate religion from Chinese social, economic, and political life," and redefined religion "as personal beliefs and philosophical pursuits, whereas Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism were uprooted from local life and reinvented into national religious institutions based on a 'Christian-secular normative model.'"[99] This contention only addresses partial aspects of contemporary Chinese secularism, since religion is not constructed around personal beliefs and pursuits but formulated as membership in an institution affiliated with one of the official government supervisory organs. Muslims who practice their faith privately and Christians affiliated to "underground churches," for example, are liable for prosecution for engaging in illegal activities.[100] Allowing this type of religious practice would have led to a religious scene diametrically opposite to the reason religion was invented and allowed limited freedom in the first place: to extend state power.

Conclusion

Following Josephson's scientific secular-religion-superstition trinary that characterized the transformation of Japanese religion, this article has attempted to reconceptualize secularization theories, which have derived mainly from Christian experiences, employing China as a case study. My reflection on the Chinese history of secularization does not depart from criticisms of the Eurocentrism of constantly referring non-Western experiences are back to the West. Theorists such as Talal Asad have reminded us that the universalization of the concept of religion—originally particular to the West—resulted from the geographical and cultural outreach of Western powers.[101] Recent scholarship has highlighted the inadequacy of "religionizing" indigenous Chinese belief systems. That is why Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, for example, favors the term "religiosity" to avoid two "damaging"

[98]"Guanyu woguo shehui zhuyi shiqi zongjiao wenti de jiben guandian he jiben zhengce" (On the principles and policies on religion during the socialist period of our nation), in Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi Zonghe Yanjiuzu, ed., *Xinshiqi zongjiao gongzuo wenxian huibian* (Selection of documents on religious work during the new period) (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2014), 54–72.

[99]Xiaofei Kang, "Women and the Religious Question in Modern China," Jan Kiely, Vincent Goossaert, and John Lagerwey, eds., *Modern Chinese Religion II: 1850–2015* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 491–92.

[100]Graham E. Fuller and Jonathan N. Lipman, "Islam in Xinjiang," in S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2004): 324–25; Jacqueline E. Wenger, "Official vs. Underground Protestant Church in China: Challenges for Reconciliation and Social Influence," *Review of Religious Research* 46, 2 (2004): 169–82.

[101]Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). See also Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

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distinctions—between religion and superstition, and inner faith and collective religious institutions—that the Western notion of "religion" implies but do not capture the complexities of the Chinese "religious" phenomenon.[102] Although I acknowledge the relevance of these critical terminological examinations, I have shown how these terms were part of the historical language Chinese adapted to indigenous political forces, cultural norms, and social expectations. They were not simply imposed on passive Chinese subalterns.

It also bears stressing that, as in Japan, "religion" in China constitutes not simply an academic category, but is also a legal, diplomatic, anthropological, and ethnographic term.[103] Although missionaries applied the term in a cultural sense to describe Chinese belief systems, a fixed translation of the word only entered the Chinese lexicon some five decades after "religion" in its diplomatic sense was introduced to China through the Treaty of Nankin. The power imbalance between China and the West produced the "indicibility" of religion in the Chinese language in the period between the introduction of these two categories of religion. Until the late nineteenth century, Christianity failed to make "religion" understandable, and it was made expressible only by its being integrated into the preexisting language of Confucianism. Consequently, although the observation that secularism is Christian in nature is valid when contextualized in the Chinese case, it is an overstatement to say that the prominence of the West established the concepts of secular and religious everywhere outside of the Euro-American world. Christianity arrived in imperial China only to be reduced to one of many spiritual pursuits, detached from Western knowledge and used to complement the predominant local belief systems, and to be, therefore, secularized. This is similar to what happened in premodern Japan.

The reduction of Christianity is on-going today, despite the fact that religion was created by imitating the Christian-secular normative model in post-imperial China. For Steve Bruce, a defender of neo-orthodox secularization theory, the prominent place religion still occupies in sub-Saharan African states is the direct consequence of local governments' failure to respond to peoples' demands for basic facilities, while the rise of Islamic fundamentalism is led by reactionary religious beliefs but fails, in general, to convert others.[104] In other words, much like Habermas' consideration of modernity, secularization is also an unfinished project that is still maturing. But the validity of this argument is limited by its lack of empirical and historical diversity, especially when it comes to post-imperial China, which, despite the lack of a religious tradition comparable to Christianity and Islam, actively created religion and encouraged or even required the religious sphere to be publicly visible for political ends. As such, the imposition of the Christian-secular normative model in modern China was nonetheless a reduction of Christianity. It resulted less from Western cultural hegemony than a voluntarily adopted strategy for the building of a secular state, wherein the invention of religion alongside the secular Christian model—a doctrinal, spiritual, and ethical social organization stripped of superstition—proved to be the most effective measure to expand the scale of state control.

[102]Joël Thoraval, "The Western Misconception of Chinese Religion: A Hong Kong Example," *China Perspective* 3 (1996): 58–65; Yang, "Introduction," 18.

[103]Josephson, *Invention of Religion*, 4.

[104]Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In Defense of an Unfashionable Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 189–90.

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Insofar as the state confers on itself the exclusive power to orchestrate the invention of religion, science is less an absolute value than an ideological justification that enabled the state to repress some "anti-state" activities in a seemingly objective way. No scientific reason can be offered for why, for example, the CCP dismisses spirit writing as superstitious while formalizing the legal conditions required to validate Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leaders' rebirths.[105] The CCP's determination to enlarge the scale of social control is manifested in its attempt to reformulate the scientific secular-religion-superstition dialectic. Since the anti-Falungong campaign in 1999, *xiejiao* (evil cult) seems to have officially replaced superstition as the negation of the secular and its political implications in contemporary China. Legally, *xiejiao* denotes those pseudo-religious and pseudo-*qigong* organizations that resort to superstitious or heretical ideas (*xieshuo*) that, in violation of public order and good morals, endanger human relations, economic order, and the legal framework.[106] As Palmer highlights, the charge against *xiejiao* indicates that they are not so much unscientific and superstitious, but rather destabilizing of the sociopolitical order, which stands "in striking contrast to the central role of scientism and anti-superstition campaigns that oriented religious policy in the first half of the twentieth century."[107] The legal definition of modern *xiejiao* largely resembles that provided by the Shunzhi Emperor in 1656 and reveals a "redeployment of the classical Chinese paradigm of the conflict between the State and the Sect." However, is it safe to argue that, by upholding legal religion as a preserver of order, the current regime has returned to "the traditional paradigm of the state as protector of the orthodox Order against the heretical and demonic forces of Chaos"?[108] Since a secular state's mere observation and prevention of "sectarian aberrations" can provoke highly polemical questions about secularism (as in the case of the *Mission interministérielle de vigilance et de lutte contre les dérives sectaires* in France[109]), a return to the classical orthodoxy/heterodoxy formulation would imply that the state defines orthodoxy and even represents the religious/cosmic order. Such a radical rupture from socialist secularism calls for a more meticulous and thorough examination of the conceptual foundations of CCP's religious policies, but this lies beyond the scope of this study.

[105]"Zangchuan Fojiao huofo zhuanshi guanli banfa" (Measures on the management of the reincarnation of living buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism), http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2008/content_923053.htm (accessed 8 Sept. 2022).

[106]"Quanguo renmin daibiao dahui changwu weiyuanhui guanyu qudi xiejiao zuzhi, fangfan he chengzhi xiejiao yundong de guiding" (Notice of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on the ban on evil organizations, and prevention and suppression of the activities of evil cults), effective 30 October 1999, in Zhongguo fazhi chubanshe, ed., *Xinbian xingshi shiyong fadian* (A practical manual of the criminal code) (Beijing: Zhongguo fazhi chubanshe, 2005), 186–87.

[107]David A. Palmer, "Heretical Doctrines, Reactionary Secret Societies, Evil Cults: Labeling Heterodoxy in Twentieth-Century China," in Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, ed., *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 134.

[108]Ibid.

[109]Jean-Pierre Chantin, "*Les sectes en France. Quel questionnement sur la laïcité?*" in Patrick Weil, ed., *Politiques de la laïcité au XXe siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007), 553–69.

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