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RELIGION AS A CHINESE CULTURAL COMPONENT:
CULTURE IN THE CHINESE TAOIST ASSOCIATION AND CONFUCIUS
INSTITUTE

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Philosophy and Religion
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

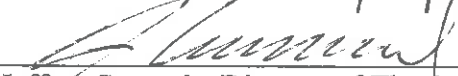
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
John Abercrombie

May 2016

RELIGION AS A CHINESE CULTURAL COMPONENT:
CULTURE IN THE CHINESE TAOIST ASSOCIATION AND CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE

Date Recommended 4/22/16


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RELIGION AS A CHINESE CULTURAL COMPONENT:
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128 Pages

Directed by: Jeffrey Samuels, Paul Fischer, and Timothy Rich

Department of Philosophy and Religion

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This thesis examines the role of the cultural discourse on the indigenous religious traditions of China and their place within an officially sanctioned construction of Chinese culture. It starts by examining the concept of culture as it developed in the modern era, its place within the construction of national identities, and the marginalizing effects this has on certain members of national populations. Next it turns to the development of the cultural discourse within China from the mid-1800s to the Cultural Revolution, highlighting the social and legal transformations as they restricted and reframed the practice and articulation of religious traditions in mainland China. Following these early articulations of a cultural discourse in China and the subjugation of religious traditions to secular standards of legitimation, it examines the official presentations and governmentally sanctioned forms of the Daoist tradition in post-Mao China during a “cultural revival,” through an analysis of official publications and online presentations. Finally, it examines the way teachers and administrators package Chinese culture for a foreign audience through the Confucius Institute.

This thesis argues that, despite greater freedom to explore indigenous traditions previously written off as “superstitious” within the cultural revival of contemporary China, the official cultural discourse in China continues to operate within the parameters of a modern cultural identity that marginalizes ritualistic forms of religion, allowing these

religious forms to survive in an official space only as exotic images, sanitized and secularized activities, or ethical ideals.

INTRODUCTION

“Because without destruction there can be no construction...What, then, is the way to effect our salvation and to achieve progress? The answer is that we must shatter at a blow the despotic and confused governmental system of some thousands of years; we must sweep away the corrupt and sycophantic learning of these thousands of years.” - Liang Qichao, “On Progress.”¹

“The second comrade tosses it off by asking in return ‘What is the value of culture?’ Production and food and building roads are important. ‘It is no harm to remove some ancient relics and to use some old Buddhas as scrap.’”²

“Now, ‘foreigners come in our temples, take photographs of the idols, show these photographs to each other and laugh.’” - Kang Youwei.³

Iconoclasts took the helm of national cultural construction in the beginning of the 20th century. The defining question was indeed, “What is the value of culture?” and it remains one of the prominent questions in contemporary China. When various intellectuals and political leaders asked this question in the early 20th century, it referred predominantly to the various religious traditions that had formed the backbone of Chinese intellectual, political, and social institutions throughout Chinese history. Did the Confucian tradition provide an adequate basis for creating a strong and modern China? Were the local deities distracting and weakening the Chinese people? If these traditions contained aspects that did not fit in a modern cultural identity, did they have anything to offer the new Chinese nation?

¹ Liang Qichao, “On Progress,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition: from 1600 through the twentieth century*, vol. 2, 2nd ed., eds. Wm Theodore de Bary and Richard Lufano, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 292-3. Hereafter, citations from de Bary attributed to *Sources of Chinese Tradition*.

² Richard C. Bush, Jr. *Religion in Communist China* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 328. Hereafter Bush, *Religion in Communist China*.

³ Vincent Goossaert and David Palmer. *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 46. Hereafter Goossaert, *Religious Question*.

Looking at the modern history of China, the notions of cultural identity and cultural transformation have played an outsized role. Two of the most significant movements in the last century employed the term in their names: the New Culture Movement and the Cultural Revolution. The first of these movements was the high-point of the early cultural discourse and sought to imagine a new national identity for the Chinese nation in the modern era. These thinkers advocated iconoclasm, creating violent rupture with the old regimes and structures of authority and knowledge. But their actions struck at religious institutions that had provided sources of authority, hope, and comfort in Chinese society in the eras preceding. Thus, many people in China at the time disagreed with the radical nature of the changes that early communists and nationalists proposed. One response to iconoclastic regulations during the early years of the People's Republic of China (PRC) despaired, crying out, "Spirits, spirits! I am not the one who wants to move you. It is the cadres who want to do so."⁴ The political authorities were imposing upon all citizens of China a new secular culture divested from divinity that benefited their claims to secular political authority. Fighting a battle over hearts and minds, party newspapers often proclaimed victory, such as in a 1966 article at the start of the Cultural Revolution stating, "After two or three years of tireless efforts, they at last caused the witches and sorcerers themselves to smash up the altars and throw the clay idols onto the field as fertilizer."⁵

As indicated by this quote, it took concerted effort, both in the intellectual and legal spheres, to eliminate the old structures of belief tied to various religious traditions and impose the new cultural ideology. But the efforts to instate a modern culture are best

⁴ Bush, *Religion in Communist China*, 399.

⁵ Bush, *Religion in Communist China*, 417.

seen as a continuing effort that operates in dialectic between voices advocating aspects of traditional culture and those advocating their complete elimination. Thus, even at the height of the Cultural Revolution, an elderly lady in China was quoted saying, “Last year was the lucky year of Chairman Mao, and the Old Man in Heaven and the God of Wealth were chased away. This year Chairman Mao is declining, so the God of Wealth came back to its proper place.”⁶ The reinstatement of old divinities within contemporary Chinese society is once again underway, termed a “Cultural Revival,” but with the changing times the role of religion in China is constantly renegotiated and repositioned, never quite the same as it was previously.

Today, the Chinese state has moved on from the most radical actions that fought to break with old cultural forms and establish a completely new communist cultural hegemony. But given the varied forms of traditional culture involved in the cultural revival today and the varied audiences for this revival, exactly how are these old cultural forms being revived and what are the conditions of revival? The conditions guiding the revival of religious systems in contemporary China and the effects these conditions have on official presentations of traditional Chinese culture are the subject of this thesis.

In order to examine the way the cultural discourse operates in official presentations of Chinese religions today, I will examine the publications and activities of the Chinese Taoist Association (CTA) within China and the Confucius Institutes (CIs) abroad.⁷ I have selected the CTA because the Daoist tradition faced the most difficulty

⁶ Bush, *Religion in Communist China*, 422.

⁷ This thesis will refer to the *Zhongguo Daojiao Xiehui* 中国道教协会 as the Chinese Taoist Association. Other names include the China Taoist Association, the Chinese Daoist Association, and the Taoist Association of China. The last is their official english translation provided in their charter, however, because most English-language newspapers have referred to them as the Chinese Taoist Association, it is this translation that I adopt. I will use the terms Daoist and Daoism rather than Taoist and Taoism

fitting within the modern Chinese culture due to its links to various superstitious activities and yet today relies heavily upon the cultural discourse to advocate its place in contemporary China as a source of the best aspects of traditional Chinese culture. I selected the CI because it represents the most polished presentation of Chinese culture organized through the Chinese state and given preference in international presentations thereof.

I will analyze the cultural presentations of these organizations in context of the development of a cultural and religious discourse in China since the mid-1800s, compared against the history of these traditions, their statistical realities, and ethnographic accounts of other scholars in contemporary China. I source the official presentation of Daoism within a discourse of Chinese culture from news articles, publications by official state organs such as the Religious Affairs Bureau and the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), the official websites of the CTA, and official English-language publications by the CTA, in an effort to see what they view as legitimate culture and what they place outside of the official Daoist tradition. My account of the CI presentations is informed by ethnographic work with CI teachers and cultural events in the United States. Taking into account cultural theory and post-colonial criticism, I will highlight aspects of religious traditions that are left out of these presentations and the rhetorical strategies that eliminate certain individuals and activities from the officially sanctioned Chinese culture.

In Chinese modernity, the discourse of culture was defined by iconoclastic regimes that fed into a larger movement of so-called anti-clericalism or anti-superstition.

throughout as these conform to the current *pinyin* transliteration, but the other spellings will appear in quotations and the title of the organization.

Those who held power defined the parameters of the discourse, namely those within the government and those in places of higher authority inside the legitimized tradition. In the contemporary religious and cultural revival in China individuals utilize a safe space of “traditional culture” to legitimize their existence. In this thesis I will argue that, despite greater freedom to explore these traditions previously written off as “superstitious,” the modern discourse of Chinese culture marginalizes these religions in the official discourse and this results in a sanitized and limited discussion of what religion, particularly Daoism, can be for the legitimate actors within the national and global discourse. Some activities get sanctioned while others are nearly impossible to even discuss. The official cultural discourse in China continues to operate within the parameters of a modern cultural identity that maintains an instrumental, functionalist view of religious traditions for social welfare and marginalizes ritualistic forms of religion, allowing these religious forms to survive only as exotic images, sanitized and secularized activities, or ethical ideals.

CHAPTER 1: CULTURAL THEORY

Origins of Cultural Theory

Roy Wagner claims in half jest that, “We could define an anthropologist as someone who uses the word ‘culture’ habitually.”¹ Beyond the anthropologist, today we all use the word culture habitually, and yet the use of this term is nearly unbounded by any agreed upon content. In my usage of the term culture means generally a broad system of meanings and meaning-making devices enacted by people and informed by history. Keeping in mind this definition and the complications of such an open term, this chapter will examine the origins and implications of this term. In the case of both objects of this study, the Confucius Institute and the Chinese Taoist Association, this term ‘culture’ is of central importance to the legitimacy of their organizations and activities. The term itself grants a certain legitimacy for these organizations because all have accepted the value of culture, even if (or possibly in virtue of the fact that) there is no agreed upon definition of the term or its content. Despite the term’s fuzziness, understanding the origins of and motivations for using this term will help analyze its usage today by official Chinese organizations.

A question that ought to be asked before embarking on the analysis of a particular term is whether that term is significant in and of itself to make a marked change in the circumstances of a discourse. The question is, does the term ‘culture’ play a different role in discussing the ideas or activities of a community than previous terms? Put differently, could people have been discussing culture without having the term for culture? People could have been talking about culture prior to the incorporation of the term into the

¹ Roy Wagner, *The Invention of Culture: revised and expanded edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 1.

discourse as such.² This chapter will argue that the term itself opens up opportunities to intellectuals and political actors, in China and around the world, which the previous terms did not make available and has resulted in new forms of structural violence and motivations for political oppression of individuals within national and religious communities.³

Culture was a concept developed in the West to accommodate new goals and changing circumstances within political and social thought, particularly during the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century but developing in the preceding century as well. As William Ray puts it, “All of the structural mutations that lead to the gradual emergence of ‘culture’ as a logic involve changes in orders of magnitude.”⁴ While there were terms used to discuss aspects or components of a culture, with the gradual positioning of culture as the central term in the discourse a conversation became easier to have, with all arguing about and imagining the composition of society in ways which were markedly different from ideas prior to cultural theory.

Ray points to *Utopia* by Thomas More to argue that in the early sixteenth century it was becoming possible to see members of a social group at any level as capable of determining values and rules for that group, rather than the ruling classes or a religious authority. This democratization of authority is a key aspect of the idea of culture, where the collective opinions and customs of a group have a determinative capacity and are

² This is the warning that Inglis cites Quentin Skinner giving when he argues, “it cannot be a necessary condition for my possessing a concept that I need to understand the correct application of a corresponding term.” Fred Inglis. *Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 4.

³ It is this impact of terms to create new orientations and produce new actions which Scott talks about in *Refashioning Futures* as “productive spaces” or “problem-spaces” created by the terms of the discourse, in particular nationalism. David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: criticism after postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 96.

⁴ William Ray. *The Logic of Culture: Authority and Identity in the Modern Era* (Malden: Blackwell, 2001), 17. Hereafter Ray, *Logic of Culture*.

acknowledged to have this power. Culture in this way is also and has always been a politically disruptive idea and is in many ways tied to the development of democratic values. More's writings contained seeds of the values that bore fruit with the development of the burgeoning cultural theory.

The idea of culture formed during the age of exploration when people of European states began to travel broadly, and this fostered unprecedented interaction between different groups of people. Cultural theory is fundamentally a product of confronting an 'other' and seeing this group operating to a different set of customs and forming a different society, looking for reason and logic within these foreign groups and attempting to fit them into a larger understanding of one's own background. A wide variety of European individuals set out—including scientists, anthropologists, merchants, military men, and missionaries—each with their own motivations, but all had to encounter and conceptualize new peoples and places. This meant that the conceptions around culture were always about those whom one knew and understood, sharing a similar background and customs, and those whom one did not know or understand.

In conceiving this difference, the two concepts of culture and civilization stand in opposition. Civilization was a term, arising in France in the 1750s and spreading quickly from there, that positioned all ways of living into a progressive, linear arrangement ending in the highest level of organization and the best customs. In this way, as Sahlins notes, “‘civilization’ was not pluralizable: it did not refer to distinctive modes of existence of different societies but to the ideal order of human society in general.”⁵

Culture, on the other hand, generally carried with it the notion of difference, possibly of

⁵ Marshall Sahlins. *How 'Natives' Think: About Captain Cook, for Example* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 10-1.

preference, but not of progression. It was in stark contrast to the idea of civilization, even if the two terms often were interchanged in common speech. Cultures were insular, ‘islands’ of being and knowledge and at least in theory they ought to be respected. This view was more prevalent in the anthropological discourse as social scientists attempted to be more ‘objective’ and ‘respectful’ of the people whom they studied. Thus recent scholarship still uses this idea that, quoting Geertz, “[u]nderstanding a people’s culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity.”⁶ If one can begin to see a group as normal this is a step towards respect and appreciation.

Given that cultures were insular modes of existence and interpretation as social groups, discussing cultures implies people having membership and a sense of belonging within this identity. This turns cultural discourse into one of belonging or exclusion and allows some aspects of the discourse to focus on identifying those who fit within the group (insiders) and those who belong to a different group (outsiders). As Inglis puts it, “Applied to culture, this maxim defines a culture, whatever else it is, as circumscribable and exclusive and, consequently, as ascribing to those members an unmistakable and unshakable identity.”⁷ Put to use, this way of conceptualizing a group can work to unite a group and give it pride in this identity, often tied to perceived fundamental ‘values,’ an idea which we will come back to repeatedly in our examinations of the nationalist cultural discourse discussed below.⁸ The necessary corollary of this is the possible

⁶ Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Cultures* (USA: Basic Books, 1973), 14.

⁷ Inglis, *Culture*, 14.

⁸ For a discussion of group identity around values, see Ted Cantele, *Community Cohesion: A New Framework for Race and Diversity* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 77-8. Hereafter, Cantele, *Community Cohesion*. See also, Marc Howard Ross. *Culture and Belonging in Divided Societies: Contestation and Symbolic Landscapes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 3.

exclusion from a cultural group or the use of cultural criticism to manipulate or denigrate a group of people.

These distinct groupings of people with common customs and conceptions will thus require an initiation of sorts into the group, a process of ‘acculturation’ after which one would presumably fit into the culture. Geertz cites Ward Goodenough as saying, “A society’s culture... consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members.”⁹ While this is a deceptively simplistic and problematic idea of culture, it gets at the idea that despite all its varied meanings, culture is something that is learned from the group and, much like language, can be mastered from birth or learned later through analysis and study. Further, like language, if one does not understand the culture, one can never fully understand the group with which one is interacting.

Geertz puts the definition of culture simply, saying that man’s culture is the “webs of significance he himself has spun.”¹⁰ Geertz then argues that the key to developing an understanding of culture is to analyze the “historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols... by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.”¹¹ One can, through observation and interaction, come to an understanding of a different way of understanding the world, one which stands apart from one’s own by virtue of a separate history and which contains within it different ways of knowing and feeling about the world. Focusing on story rather than symbol, Inglis argues that culture is the “provision of narratives to live within and

⁹ Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 11.

¹⁰ Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 5.

¹¹ Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 89.

purposes to live for.”¹² Regardless of the narrative, linguistic, or symbolic method of discussing culture, the undergirding of inherited meaning and the means of producing one’s own meaning form the center of the term culture. Understanding culture as compiled and established in society through historical processes, this cultural discourse has identified some of the key means by which to not only understand a culture, but also the components which can be manipulated to change a culture.

Culture as National Identity; Culture and Politics

Early cultural theorists and anthropologists saw culture as opposed to or outside of politics, with ‘primitive societies’ peaceful to the same degree that they did not need politics.¹³ Imagining utopias always placed these peaceful and perfected places in a distant place or time ‘beyond politics’ because “politics is struggle and culture is harmony.”¹⁴ However, given the political arguments embodied by utopian ideals and the othering of these whole people groups, it is important to realize how truly political these theories of culture were from the start.

The understanding that I advance about culture shares much in common with the ideas cited above for cultures as systems of meanings and meaning-making enacted by people and informed by history. However, following thinkers like Asad and other post-colonial theorists, I hold that it is important to focus primarily on the way in which these systems are enacted, manipulated, and changed through argumentation and power. In this sense, politics and culture are not separate and no group of people acts without some

¹² Inglis, *Culture*, 39.

¹³ Inglis, *Culture*, 31. Specifically addressing Tylor’s 1871 work *Primitive Cultures*: “Living in culture, primitive peoples had no politics.”

¹⁴ Inglis, *Culture*, 30-1. For further discussion of utopian fictions at this time placed onto real maps, see Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), 69. Hereafter Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

form of politics. The term ‘post-colonial’ draws from the response to colonial discourses, which attempted to categorize colonial subjects and by means of this regulate their activities. Tejaswini Niranjana defines colonial discourse as “the body of knowledge, modes of representation, strategies of power, law, discipline, and so on, that are employed in the construction and domination of the ‘colonial subjects.’”¹⁵ While China was not specifically a colonial subject, the incorporation of these discourses was influential to the way Chinese nationalists and intellectuals conceived of their own traditions in years to come, and thus some have described this process of continuing influence on cultural understandings as an “absentee colonialism.”¹⁶

The political nature of cultural theory is important to remember in particular because political thinkers utilized the discourse of culture to engage in cultural construction as part of national construction. Thinkers like Marx, Trotsky, Mussolini, and Gramsci utilized these terms to turn culture into a new political weapon, one which was also utilized in China during the late Qing and early national period starting at the end of the 19th century, and up to the present day. Like the shift mentioned above in the work of Thomas More and those to follow, public opinion and democratically established ideas of ‘the people’ created the ground for arguing against a monarchy divinely established and for a democratic nation supported by the voice of the public.¹⁷

¹⁵ Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), cited in Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 23. Hereafter Liu, *Translingual Practice*.

¹⁶ Johannes Fabian. *Time and the Other: how anthropology makes its object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 69.

¹⁷ Inglis, *Culture*, 34.

The creation of a popular ethic, the value undergirding the possibility of talking about culture in the first place, was central to constructing national identities. While the construction of a nation may not necessarily follow the acceptance of the idea of culture, all nations utilize this idea. Nations seek to construct an identity that is “both soul and body at once,”¹⁸ both the people and their values, which is founded on “the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories... [and] the present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form.”¹⁹ This memory and heritage is one way to speak of a cultural identity, imagined as bounded by specific national borders.²⁰ The components of this identity were created and pieced together at specific points in time, even as members of these national cultures often overlook their relative recent provenance. Those who crafted a national-cultural identity, as Plamenatz argues, did so “to preserve or enhance a people’s national or cultural identity when that identity is threatened, or...to transform or even create it where it is felt to be inadequate or lacking.”²¹ Drawing in interesting ways from both cultural and civilizational theories, nationalists foster both a distinct identity and a drive towards cultural progress into equality with other modern nations.

Plamenatz, speaking of nationalism in general, sums up well the “two rejections” that happened during the early years of revolution in China, starting in the late 19th

¹⁸ Ernst Renan. “What is a nation?” *Notion and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 18. Hereafter Renan, “What is a Nation.”

¹⁹ Renan, “What is a Nation,” 18-9.

²⁰ For a discussion of the unification of a cultural identity with a national identity, see Cante, *Community Cohesion*, 87. See also, Andrea Louie. *Chineseness Across Borders: renegotiating Chinese identities in China and the United States* (London: Duke University Press, 2004), 51-3. Hereafter Louie, *Chineseness Across Borders*.

²¹ John Plamenatz. “Two Types of Nationalism,” *Nationalism: the nature and evolution of an idea*, ed. Eugene Kamenka (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1973), 23-4.

century and peaking in the 1910s, in an effort to become a modern nation. Intellectuals argued for the “rejection of the alien intruder and dominator who is nevertheless to be imitated and surpassed by his own standards, and rejection of ancestral ways which are seen as obstacles to progress and yet also cherished as marks of identity.”²² Thus they are rejecting an external and an internal threat, one threatening sovereignty, one threatening progress. It is in this way that the discourse of culture and nationalism have determined the grounds for legitimacy of many of the religious institutions within Chinese culture since the turn of the 20th century.

Given the vastness of culture, nationalists and cultural theorists attempt to create a conception within which all ‘insiders’ can fit, and thus culture is “a strategy for understanding in dialectical terms, and thus legitimating as reciprocals of each other, the competing imperatives of social order and individual freedom, hierarchy and mobility, continuity and change, law and choice.”²³ This way of thinking about social identity is a constant struggle to operate within the parameters of the cultural discourse in an effort to define its limits. The identity of a group of people is intrinsically linked to the various component parts that constitute a culture as well as the way in which they are spoken about.²⁴

Because authoritative interpretations of culture, often those advanced by those in power or government, determine the parameters of the term and how it functions in society, a key aspect to examine is the construction of parameters for discussion and criticism. Asad notes that the enlightenment project of Kant divided the world along lines

²² Plamenatz, “Two Types of Nationalism,” 34.

²³ Ray, *Logic of Culture*, 6-7.

²⁴ See Talal Asad. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 31-2. Hereafter Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*.

of obedience to authority and rational criticism or argumentation using the distinction between the public and private roles of individuals. Asad argues that there are two limits placed on such criticism: “a *sociological* limit (the literate, scholarly minority to whom the privilege of public criticism belongs) and a *political* one (the conditions in which one must refrain from open criticism).”²⁵ Nationalists and reformers in China played within these limits and also defined these limits when in power. They advocated the use of vernacular literary forms to expand the sociological limits of criticism and when in power established limits on what could be said or done without punishment. Within this construction of public voices are the quite obvious denial of some voices and the use of force and politics to accomplish this silencing. Legal parameters were put in place to establish and maintain cultural forms that gained ascendancy in this period of national construction.

The argument and struggle over identity can be structural but also bloody and revolutionary, as it was at various points from the French Revolution onward. Culture is the grounds upon which national identities get argued and the manipulation of these cultural identities factored into all the nationalist, fascist, or communist discourses. Political thinkers and intellectuals were arguing against the old structures they no longer wanted in favor of new social structures. The terms that mapped onto the old ways of acting were “custom, prejudice and superstition” which “became blanket terms for designating any form of social practice — such as respect for the clergy or the nobility — that seems to have no basis of authority other than that of tradition.”²⁶ These terms became weapons to eliminate certain cultural components within reforming countries,

²⁵ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 204.

²⁶ Ray, *Logic of Culture*, 16.

China being no exception. Below we will see the playing out of struggles to find a space within the parameters of a discourse characterized by terms such as superstition and the way that positions individuals, their beliefs and actions, outside of protection or support by other members of society.

In the following examinations of religion as a Chinese cultural component, I provide a view into how different forms of religious practice were left outside the authorized, legitimized space of religion in modern China and remain there to this day. This perspective shares affinities with the post-colonial perspective which “bears witness to those countries and communities — in the North and the South, urban and rural — constituted... ‘otherwise than modernity.’”²⁷ The notion, starting all the way back in the early 16th century, of a ‘people’ who constitute some whole and who have a collective voice needs to be challenged.²⁸ The people is not and has never been a unified entity but rather by arguing for the construction of a citizenry or popular sovereignty the issue has always been one of argument for or against various ways of being, played out in a field of unequal power and exerted force. What follows is a history of the victorious cultural authors, the ones who determined or fit within the modern national identity. What should be remembered are those who sit uncomfortably outside or on the margins of this identity and the force that was exerted militarily and discursively to push certain actors out onto the illegitimate margins, an effort that continues to this day.

²⁷ Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 9.

²⁸ As Bhabha argues, “The people are neither the beginning nor the end of the national narrative; they represent the cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the ‘social’ as homogeneous, consensual community, and the forces that signify the more specific address to contentious, unequal interests and identities within the population.” Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 209.

CHAPTER 2: DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

Reinterpreting an Ancient Culture

While the idea of culture developed initially in the European nations it became incredibly important, through translation and re-imaginings, for the intellectuals and revolutionaries in China during the 19th and 20th centuries. In order to examine the contemporary manifestations of this discourse to present a Chinese identity for a foreign audience, it is first important to see the roots of this discourse in China as intellectuals and political leaders tried to modernize and re-imagined Chinese cultural identity. There were many strains of the cultural discourse in China through the late Qing dynasty in the 19th century and under the national regimes in China during the 20th century. Below I will present a range of voices in an attempt to show the contours of the debate, the terms of tension, and the relation of these discourses to authoritative power structures. Noting the development and contestation of the national cultural identity within China from the 1840s through the early days of the Chinese nation in the 1960s, in this chapter I will argue that the cultural discourse positioned religious traditions on the margins of society and defined their proper forms in a way that did violence to members of these traditions and dramatically changed their forms in Chinese society. In what follows I will emphasize the repositioning of religion outside of politics and authority structures in Chinese society as a product of the efforts to create a secular national identity tied to modernist notions of progress and rationality.

Chinese culture did not exist as such prior to the 19th century. By this I mean only that the term itself was not defined. After interaction with Westerners, new conceptual divisions and discourses offered a new chance to define many of the institutions and

practices of Chinese culture. Some powerful concepts entering China at the time were human rights, religion, philosophy, superstition, nationalism, culture, and civilization, none of which was used prior to this period in Chinese understandings. It is the intersection of these ideas and the stances towards them that key individuals took that shaped and continue to shape the religious policies and presentations of the Chinese nation to this day.

The necessity of defining one's cultural identity arises when outside cultures are met and continued interactions highlight differences. While there were notions of an ethnic identity which occasionally arose when outside kingdoms ruled over the Han state or through interactions with so-called 'barbarian' states, the notion of a cultural identity arose more fully with the arrival of the terms for 'culture' and 'civilization' in the 19th century. Liu argues that, "In its earlier usage, *wenhua* [culture] denoted the state of *wen* or artistic cultivation in contrast to *wu* or military prowess. The new ethnographic notion of *wenhua* did not enter the Chinese language until after *bunka*, the Japanese *kanji* translational equivalent of 'culture,' was borrowed back by the Chinese at the turn of the twentieth century."¹ As Wang Gungwu explains the term, it carried with it notions of literature or written heritage (*wen* 文) and the capacity to change others or dynamism (*hua* 化).² The choice of this term could be viewed as relating to Chinese cultural identity specifically because of its long literate history and the Chinese people's belief that their

¹ Liu, *Translingual Practice*, 239.

² Wang Gungwu, *The Chineseness of China: selected essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 144. Hereafter Wang, *Chineseness of China*.

culture had the capacity to change the cultures of its neighbors, while the Chinese culture itself did not undergo influence from outside.³

In the mid-19th century in China, the idea of culture was paired with the idea of civilization. While both terms conveyed the above senses, culture was largely value neutral and all groups were seen to have it, whereas civilization was used to describe the position of a group at the top of a chain of historical and cultural development. More traditional Confucian understandings of history emphasized a looking back to great men in history and attempting to re-establish the ways of the past. Buddhist ideas of history were more cyclical and based on the presence and disappearance of the Buddha and Dharma in the world. With the arrival of Western notions of progress and enlightenment came the idea that history was one of movement forward on a chain of development on which all peoples and cultures could be positioned. As Wang Gungwu puts it, “A new word that brought out the universality of the phenomenon was needed and *wen-ming* [文明, civilization] was adopted.”⁴ While cultures all had some value, the term civilization was applied to those that had a higher level of development and more to offer to other cultures. This was a push towards modernity and what values constituted a ‘civilized’ and ‘modern’ society were debated throughout the late 19th century, all the way through to the founding of the Chinese nation in 1949 and continue to this day.

³ For an example of this, see Benson Tong, *The Chinese Americans* (Greenwood Press: USA, 2000), 3-4: “Such premodern historical contact, however, remained one way. The cultures of Southeast Asia, Japan, and India only marginally shaped Chinese civilization. Furthermore, China’s closest neighbors were either sedentary peoples who consciously chose to emulate Chinese culture...or pastoral peoples...who occasionally offered a military challenge to China but never a cultural one.”

⁴ Wang, *Chineseness of China*, 145.

Chinese Cultural Discourse in the late Qing

At the fall of the Ming Dynasty the Chinese faced some difficult issues of identity and legitimacy. Many literati officials were trying to understand why their empire had fallen, how to react to the foreign rule by Manchus, and also dealing with the arrival of foreign missionaries and merchants. In response to these problems of political sovereignty and outsider presence, later thinkers would begin to question Chinese cultural traditions in a broad way as an explanation for national failings, but at this time those terms were not available and literati officials who held power and attempted to institute reforms did so through indigenous, Confucian terms. The literati who took the most active role in this discussion of reform initially focused on orthodoxy, an indigenous notion of change, and a conception of fundamental difference with the ‘barbarians’ to explain what had just happened and imagine a future course of action.

Writings from this time show a common theme amongst reform thinkers that officials and, in particular, the rulers of the day had failed to live up to the ways of the ancient sages. Due to hereditary rule, kings and princes ruled out of selfishness and did not listen to their ministers. The emperor had done away with the prime minister, and those ministers that remained were powerless or too fearful to properly direct the ruler. Thus, Huang Zongxi, the 17th century literati political agitator and author, argued, “The origin of misrule under the Ming lay in the abolition of the prime ministership by [the founder] Gao Huangdi”⁵ and the ministers could only “draft comments of approval and disapproval [on memorials] just like court clerks.... Could you say that they had real

⁵ Huang Zongxi, “Waiting for the Dawn,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 12. Hereafter, Huang Zongxi, “Waiting for the Dawn.”

power?”⁶ These comments indicate that one problem that literati officials and reformers identified which led to the fall of an empire and the subjugation of the Chinese people to foreign rulers was that the right people were not given the ability to speak and those with institutional power did not listen to those who could have saved the empire.

Arguments for institutional change sound simply political and could simply be about putting into practice the proper structures of governance. However, it is important to recognize that the Chinese thinkers at this time had no distinction between secular and sacred, no idea of political as contrary to religious, and thus morality and cosmology were tied intimately to questions of political legitimacy. The arguments and concerns of these scholars are rooted in the rectifying of heterodox practices or teachings and solving the failings of the rulers to live up to Confucian teachings. These arguments could be seen as utilizing religious concerns about moral relationships rooted in Heaven. Most of the literati wanted to establish proper relationships based upon neo-Confucian understandings. For instance, Lu Liuliang explains the fall of the empire, saying, “Cut off from Heaven, rulers did not understand that rites come from Heaven, ministers did not realize that fidelity [loyalty] is rooted in the moral nature, that the nature is Heaven, that Heaven is the moral imperative [and political mandate], that it is principle, and the nature is principle.”⁷ These suggested causes for the fall of an empire were traditional critiques of a failed dynasty, yet their use of the idea of a Heavenly authority shows one way that

⁶ Huang Zongxi, “Waiting for the Dawn,” 14.

⁷ Lu Liuliang, “Commentaries on the Four Books,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 24. For a brief discussion of the role of Heaven as a check to monarchic excesses, see Tu, Weiming. “The Enlightenment Mentality and the Chinese Intellectual Dilemma,” *Perspectives on Modern China*, ed. K. Lieberthal, Armonk (N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1991), 112. Hereafter, Tu Wei-Ming, “The Enlightenment Mentality.”

Confucian understandings of legitimacy would play into a potential religious argument once foreign ideas of religion arrived through missionaries and merchants.

Reformers at this time also found their voice in Confucian understandings found in such sources as the *Book of Changes* and used this language of change. For instance, Wang Fuzhi, a Ming loyalist and prolific writer, wrote in the mid-1600s, “When one accords with the times, one complies with that which the times make inevitable in order to save oneself and so escape from disaster.... The ancient institutions were for governing the ancient world and cannot be taken as general rules applicable in the present...”⁸ This argument for institutional change rooted in Confucian understandings was influential amongst the Self-Strengthening movement starting in the mid-19th century because it created a space for a strong Confucian identity while also allowing for change. However, contrary to later conceptions discussed below, the rhetoric of change did not yet have any of the modern notions of progress upon a linear timeline, tied to separations of the rational and irrational, the religious and superstitious. The changes that needed to be made were not framed as a sloughing off of old ideas that had passed their time, but rather a re-establishing of principles rooted in Heaven.

As these discussions indicate, Chinese reformers were looking to indigenous conceptions and indigenous solutions. They did have a notion of the ‘other,’ but this group did not have any authoritative, legitimate voice, and it was not yet a source of solutions. Wang Fuzhi writes of the difference between barbarians and Chinese, rooting his argument in what could be termed an environmental determinism that precludes foreign legitimacy. He says, “Since their climates are different, so too are their habits,

⁸ Wang Fuzhi, “Historical Trends,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 31.

and consequently all they know and all they do is different...”⁹ His arguments do not address specifics in the teachings of the barbarians nor does he show interest in learning from them. The barbarians are to be kept distinct and “the Chinese cannot be put in the same category as the barbarians” if they do not want to violate the categories of Heaven.¹⁰ Without specific reasons other than that the foreigners were overly concerned with trade and came from a different place, Wang Fuzhi keeps a traditional understanding of Chinese superiority. Seen above, at this point there is a concern with customs and an argument around something similar to culture, which provides fodder for many nationalist thinkers including Mao Zedong, yet it is not conceived of in those terms.

This general lack of concern over foreign teachings was the norm for much of the early Qing. Foreign teachings came through Catholic missionaries at first and yet Confucian structural hegemony in education and advancement made the foreign teachings largely irrelevant. Christians talked of salvation but they also brought advanced knowledge of astronomy and mathematics. Yet even these skills were not immediately relevant or practical to many. Taking a pragmatic view of the teachings brought by the Jesuits, most literati still gave preference to the Confucian traditions that would help with official advancement. As de Bary notes, “The Jesuits themselves, from the outset, observed that the general disinterest of the Chinese in Western science was a reflection of their preoccupation with studies that led to official preferment.”¹¹ While education and official positions were determined by traditional learning, the knowledge offered by Jesuits was of little importance, whether it be scientific or religious. What mattered more

⁹ Wang Fuzhi, “Historical Trends,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 33.

¹⁰ Wang Fuzhi, “Historical Trends,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 34.

¹¹ de Bary, “Han Learning and Western Learning,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 65.

was the examination system for advancement based upon Confucian tradition and the official system of ancestor worship granting local authority and tied ultimately to the state cult.

For those who did take interest in the teachings of the barbarians, either as converts or concerned Confucians, the question was their relation to traditional teachings which still stood largely unquestioned. An early convert Li Zhizao, talking of Matteo Ricci's teachings, said, "Particularly in respect to his emphasis on the great importance of knowing and serving Heaven, what he says tallies with the classics and commentaries."¹² Christianity was mapped onto traditional ideas of serving Heaven and the Lord of Heaven, and judged by Confucian standards of morality. This means that, like the concerns of the Pope and missionaries engaging in Chinese practices of ancestor or idol worship, the main concern was not a cultural one *per se*. Rather, the concern was over orthodoxy and heterodoxy, the traditional standards during the late-Imperial period for prohibition of various 'religious' practices.

Birth of a Cultural Discourse: Learning from the Barbarians

With the failings of the Chinese state to defend its interests against foreign economic interests during the First and Second Opium wars and the nefarious impacts of the opium trade, Chinese thinkers started to consider certain foreign technologies and understandings superior or in need of study. As Tu Wei-ming has put it, Chinese intellectuals felt they had gone "from the master of the Middle Kingdom to the slave of the West."¹³ The expansion of discussions to wider political or cultural appropriation was best shown in the arguments surrounding the Self-Strengthening movement and its call to

¹² Li Zhizao, "Preface to *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*," *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 146.

¹³ Tu Wei-Ming, "The Enlightenment Mentality," 113.

incorporate Western science and military learning. The debate lasted many decades and many contributed to this re-imagining of Chinese culture, questioning various interrelated fields including political institutions, educational structure, religious values, and social norms. Debates were held in court, but there was also a widening public venue of discussion such as intellectual societies similar to salons and a burgeoning print culture.¹⁴ With the questioning of all of these cultural forms related to the Confucian tradition, the debate expanded to a true questioning of Chinese culture as such.

Everyone agreed that they wanted the barbarian authority gone, particularly in the foreign concessions, but most agreed it could not be done by sticking to principles and classical education methods. While there were many conservative responses that sought to reaffirm Confucian orthodoxy and dismiss the foreigners, particularly seen in the views of the leading Confucian literati-official Woren,¹⁵ the voices that won out were the Self-Strengtheners. A representative statement comes from Feng Guifen, saying, “When we speak of repelling the barbarians, we must have the actual means to repel them, and not just empty bravado.... [The answer is that] we should use the instruments of the barbarians but not adopt the ways of the barbarians. We should use them so that we can repel them.”¹⁶

This discussion of the “ways of the barbarians” shows an appreciation of the difference between the West and China in some practical senses and it borders on a vague

¹⁴ According to Hans Schmidt. “Democracy for China: American Propaganda and the May Fourth Movement.” *Diplomatic History* 22.1 (1998), 4, “Wolfgang Mohr has listed 280 daily newspapers in China in 1919, and Chow Tse-sung estimated that “probably over 700” new periodicals were started during the May Fourth era, 1915–1923, and listed 587 of these.” Ray notes the significance of this shift in the intellectual forums and its democratization of authoritative discourse in *Logic of Culture*, 18. As does Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 42-54.

¹⁵ Woren, “Principle Versus Practicality,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 238. See also, Zhang Zhidong, “Exhortation to Learn,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 245-6.

¹⁶ Feng Guifen, “On the Manufacture of Foreign Weapons,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 236-7.

sense of culture. The discourse of difference plays more to ideas of ethnic superiority than any specific understanding of what constituted the differences between Chinese and barbarian 'ways.' However, some thinkers started to argue concretely about the core of Western culture and what they identified was individualism and "people's rights." This was usually understood as fundamentally opposed to Confucian teachings on the hierarchical Five Relationships which formed the backbone of Confucianism. It threatened the integrity of the state and violated the traditional norms. Zhang Zhidong argued,

Once the theory of people's rights is adopted, foolish people will certainly be delighted, rebels will strike, order will not be maintained, and great disturbances will arise on all sides.... Recently those who have picked up some Western theories have gone so far as to say that everybody has the right to be his own master. This is even more absurd. This phrase is derived from the foreign books of religion.¹⁷

The concerns of culture and state stability are intertwined, and we see the idea of foreign religion taking a more central place in the controversy. Thus, religion, capitalism, and science begin to combine to form a core of Western culture.

Those who approved of Western ideas also argued on the basis of these human rights and individualism. For instance, Yan Fu stated, "[There] is no matter in which their theories cannot be put into practice. The reason is that they take freedom as the essential principle and democracy as its application."¹⁸ But these values taken as fundamental to Western culture were not Chinese. What would happen to Chinese culture if it adopted too much of the West? After all, "Barbarian institutions are based on barbarian principles. Different principles make for different customs, and different customs give rise to

¹⁷ Zhang Zhidong, "Exhortation to Learn," *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 247.

¹⁸ Yan Fu, "On Evolution and Progress," *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 259.

different institutions.... If the institutions are to be changed, are not the principles going to be changed along with them?"¹⁹ At this point, notions of fundamental cultural differences take shape and these understandings inform reform thought at the start of Chinese nationalism.

Voices were finally appearing, those of leading Confucian reformers Kang Youwei or Tan Sitong, for instance, who argued for changing the fundamental principles as the only way to modern success. Tan argued for eliminating the hierarchies and modeling all relationships on the principle of friendship, the fifth relationship, because of its basis of mutuality and equality, because "no fundamental principles and systems can be introduced if the Five Moral Relationships remain unchanged, let alone the Three Bonds."²⁰ This contrasts sharply with the edict of the newly reforming court of the Empress Dowager Cixi, when it issued the Reform Edict in 1901 saying, "the Three Mainstays (Bonds)... and the Five Constant Virtues... remain forever fixed and unchanging, just as the sun and the stars shine steadfastly upon the earth."²¹ The rifts were widening between the radical reformers and more conservative voices because the core of Chinese culture was suddenly at fault for keeping people in the past. However, the parameters of the debate were largely set. A traditional culture needed to be protected or a new one formed that was rooted in some core values, and institutions relating to and supporting the selected values had to be put into place.

While all were arguing that China had to make changes at the beginning of the 20th century in order to regain its standing in the world, most recognized that cultures

¹⁹ Zhu Yixin, "Fourth Letter in Reply to Kang Youwei," *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 277.

²⁰ Tan Sitong, "The Study of Humanity," *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 284.

²¹ "Reform Edict of January 29, 1901," *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 285.

had to remain distinct. Thus, Liang Qichao argued, “When a nation can stand up in the world its citizens must have a unique character. From morality and laws to customs, habits, literature, and the arts, these all possess a certain unique spirit.”²² Nationalism was the foundation of the future for China, and it contained within it the understanding that a national culture was necessary that stood distinct from other nations. But the cultural had to “stand up” on the world stage and thus, one of the most important considerations for whether a part of Chinese culture was viable or worth advocating was its functional effects on the Chinese nation. Most discussion above related to the Confucian tradition because this was the hegemonic structure behind all of governance and officialdom in China prior to the Hundred Days Reform in 1898. However, the larger question was one of authority in a modernizing nation. The creation of this national culture drew upon theories of modernity emphasizing progress and rationality and this had deep ramifications for all religious actors or people claiming any authority based upon Heaven or divinity. Daoists and Buddhists, largely peripheral actors to state power, were also affected dramatically due to these developing notions of Chinese modern national culture.

Chinese Nationalism and Cultural Identity in the Revolution and Republic

At the turn of the 20th century, we finally see the beginnings of a well formed cultural discourse. At the same time there is the first introduction the terms ‘religion’ and ‘superstition’ by way of Japan, first used by the reformer Liang Qichao. These terms aren’t connected by historical accident, as Asad and Mayfair Yang both remind us. Asad argues that “the authoritative status of representations/discourses is dependent on the appropriate production of other representations/discourses; the two are intrinsically and

²² Liang Qichao, “Renewing the People,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 289.

not just temporally connected.”²³ The discourses of modern civilization and culture are intrinsically linked to the division of religion and superstition, and through them to notions of national identity, progress, modernity, and all the consequences of the political distinction between the public and private. Thus Mayfair Yang says, “The Protestant-informed categories of ‘religion’ and ‘superstition’ produced a new definition of ‘civilization’ (*wenming*) modeled on Western science and progress, and distant from the old Confucian notions of the cultured and cultivated sage.”²⁴ While I tried to argue a distinct difference between the terms civilization and culture above, and there certainly is a difference, the reformers at this time were using the term culture tied intimately with the notion of progress implicit in the term civilization.²⁵

The importance of the notion of culture in the Chinese nationalist discourse should be readily apparent. Following the overthrow of the Qing dynasty, the foundational movement in which all the nationalists took part, be they Republicans or Communists, was known as the New Culture movement. The debates, revolutions, and wars that took place during this period were fought to decide whose notion of Chinese culture would gain hegemony and determine the reconstruction of national institutions and identity. With consistent failures to uphold sovereignty in the face of foreign powers, reformers like Liang Qichao and Sun Yat-sen argued persuasively that the problem was not technological or failure to uphold orthodoxy, but rather, “We Chinese lack the

²³ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 31-2.

²⁴ Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, *Chinese religiosities: afflictions of modernity and state formation* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 8. Hereafter, Yang, *Chinese Religiosities*.

²⁵ For arguments about the notion of progress in Chinese cultural discourse at this time, see Leo Ou-fan Lee, “Modernity and its Discontents: The Cultural Agenda of the May Fourth Movement,” *China: Four Anniversaries*, ed. Kenneth Lieberthal (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1991): 158-77. See also, Leigh Jenco, “Culture as History: envisioning change across and beyond ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ civilizations in the May Fourth era,” *Twentieth-Century China* vol.38 no.1 (January, 2013): 34-52.

concept of the nation.”²⁶ In their minds, traditional cultural values, such as the importance of familial bonds and clan-based thinking, made China an insular culture which could not identify as citizens serving the interests of the state. Thus Sun says, “The Chinese people have only family and clan solidarity; they do not have national spirit.”²⁷ Loyalty to the state or the national people needed to replace the old loyalties to clan, and this meant finding a way to either change the meaning of traditional relationships or adopting a new culture entirely. Because creating a modern national identity was influenced by understandings of rational religion separated from superstitious belief, due to the close link between local authority and clan ties with popular religious cults, these affected the way Chinese thinkers thought about their own religious traditions.

The writings of Sun Yat-sen demonstrate a shift in the discourse towards a reliance upon the notion of culture. The effort to establish a national culture took the main-stage and values were seen explicitly in terms of overarching cultural systems. The term culture was not alone in this discussion, as many used the idea of culture and matched it with nationalist identity construction. Liu notes the earlier term, also taken from Meiji translations of Western ideas, of ‘national character’ (*guomin xing* 国民性) which played centrally into these debates alongside ‘national essence’ (*guocui* 国粹), ‘nation’ (*minzu* 民族), and ‘national learning’ (*guoxue* 国学), all of which were trying to define, with varying degrees of tradition and innovation, the nature and character of the Chinese people in opposition to a foreign other.²⁸ From the edict issued in July 1898 during the Hundred Days Reform, all local shrines not in the record of the official rites

²⁶ Liang Qichao, “The Concepts of the Nation,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 298.

²⁷ Sun Yat-sen, “The Three People’s Principles,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 321.

²⁸ Liu, *Translingual Practice*, 47, 240.

(*sidian*) were to be converted into schools. The question of how to modernize these schools was an open one, and many argued that they should maintain the educational foundation in traditional Confucian values. Thus, when Zhang Zhidong, Zhang Baixi, and Rongqing were appointed to formulate the ‘Guiding Principles on School [*Xuewu gangyao*]’ in 1903, they wanted to include Confucian teachings with the argument that, “In foreign countries schools all have a curriculum concerning ‘religion.’ In China the [Confucian] Classics are our Chinese religion.”²⁹ The relation of Confucianism to the idea of religion became significant.

Sun, in his more conservative mode, calls the people not to give up traditional values in favor of the foreign culture. “[We] must recover and restore our characteristic, traditional morality.... First comes loyalty and filial piety, then humanity and love, faithfulness and duty, harmony and peace. Of these traditional virtues, the Chinese people still speak, but now, under foreign oppression, we have been invaded by a new culture.”³⁰ Much like the problems we saw before of a Western culture obsessed with the individual and profit, Sun attempted to revitalize the notion of duty into a national discourse of citizenship where individuals were part of and also loyal to ‘the people’ of China. Chinese culture was valuable in its potential to encourage loyalty as citizens, with the national interest replacing kings and princes. The push for a national identity that would supersede local or familial ties meant that Sun felt one needed to keep traditional forms of culture but reinterpret them such that loyalties served a new concept of ‘the people’ or

²⁹ Hsi-yuan Chen. *Confucianism Encounters Religion: the formation of religious discourse and the Confucian movement in modern China*. PhD Diss. (Harvard University, 1999), 93-4. Hereafter, Chen, *Confucianism Encounters Religion*.

³⁰ Sun Yat-sen, “The Three People’s Principles,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 322.

a national citizenry instead of hierarchies linked to an imperial system, a shift discussed above as central to the notion of culture itself.³¹

In 1935 a group of ten university professors wrote a “Declaration for Cultural Construction on a Chinese Basis” for the magazine *Cultural Construction*. The primacy of the cultural discourse at this time shows through in the existence of this magazine and others advocating cultural construction, but what makes this essay interesting is its attempt to cater to the uniqueness of Chinese culture while acknowledging that progress would not come from rejuvenating the past. As they said, “ancient China is already history, and history cannot and need not be repeated.”³² This new culture required something distinctly Chinese because “China, which is neither England nor the United States, should have its own distinctive characteristics.... We demand a cultural construction on the Chinese basis.”³³ This striving for unique Chinese solutions to the problems of modern national construction was seen among many, including Sun Yat-sen in his Three People’s Principles and natively sourced five branches of government.³⁴ If one accepts Plamenatz’s division of nationalisms into two types, those which are culturally equipped but materially weak in comparison, and those which are culturally ill-

³¹ For a discussion of ‘the people’ as an object of religious duty and identity during nationalist construction, see the quote by Armand-Guy Kersaint from 1791: “The French people understand themselves as both the subject and the object of their ‘new religion’,” in Inglis, *The Logic of Culture*, 1. See the parallel advocacy by Sun Yat-sen in his “Three People’s Principles,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 322. Hu Shi, “Science and the Philosophy of Life,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 377. Hu Shi, “Our Attitude Toward Modern Western Civilization,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 386.

³² Sa Mengwu, He Bingsong, and others, “Declaration for Cultural Construction on a Chinese Basis,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 387.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Sun Yat-sen, “The Three People’s Principles,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 325-6. For a related development in China at the time, see Chen’s discussion of renewed interest in pre-Qin scholars as a means of finding evidence of Chinese foundations for scientific knowledge or innovations. Chen, *Confucianism Encounters Religion*, 71-80.

equipped for modernity and must transform more dramatically, these thinkers fall more towards the former, though straying this division.³⁵

The aspirational nature of this cultural discourse comes through clearly in their essay. They are walking a difficult line, which most reform thinkers walked at this time, between a desire for progress and a need to ‘recover’ a lost cultural identity and dignity. They said of the proposed new culture,

Cultural construction on the Chinese basis is a creative endeavor, one that is pushing ahead. Its objective is to enable China and the Chinese, who are backward and have lost their unique qualities in the cultural sphere, not only to keep pace with other countries and peoples but also to make valuable contributions to a world culture.³⁶

With this last sense of culture they argued in a way that recognized a global culture tied to the civilizational discourse, one in which there were competing cultural traditions that could leave their mark and advance other nations too.³⁷

The hope of a measured reevaluation and reinvigoration of traditional values was largely unsuccessful due to an even stronger desire to overturn old power structures, though this effort to reinvigorate traditional Confucian values continues to resurface.³⁸ Remember that the cultural values of Confucianism were tied to the Confucian state and

³⁵ Plamenatz, “Two Types of Nationalism,” 33-4.

³⁶ Sa Mengwu, He Bingsong, et al., “Declaration for Cultural Construction on a Chinese Basis,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 388.

³⁷ This is supportive of Plamenatz’s observation that, “Nationalism is confined to peoples who, despite their rivalries and the cultural differences between them, already belong to, or are being drawn into, a family of nations which all aspire to make progress in roughly the same directions,” in “Two Types of Nationalism,” 27.

³⁸ For a discussion of Kang Youwei’s and Liang Shuming’s early efforts at Confucian nationalism by means of religious reform, see Chen, *Confucianism Encounters Religion*, 88-94, 238. For contemporary legacies of this movement, see Chen, *Confucianism as Religion*, 57-65. See also, Billioud and Thoraval. “Anshen liming or the Religious dimension of Confucianism.” *China Perspectives* no.3 (2008): 88-106. Billioud and Thoraval. “Jiaohua: the Confucian Revival in China as an Educative Project.” *China Perspectives* no.4 (2007): 4-20. Billioud and Thoraval. “Lijiao: the Return of Ceremonies Honouring Confucius in Mainland China.” *China Perspectives* no.4 (2009): 82-100.

these hierarchical structures defined all levels of society, from the emperor to the local elites to the family. For this reason, even as Sun argued for a tempered maintenance of traditional values he called for revolution and radical reform. In his three stages of revolution the first was destruction and this included the destruction of “depraved customs” and “the scourge of opium, superstitious beliefs, and geomancy,”³⁹ amongst many other aspects of the political and cultural system of China. The revolution would mark the destruction of many cultural elements aside from institutional reforms. Why Sun wanted to remove these “depraved customs” was hinted at above, but in the following section we will examine this issue specifically as it impacts the various religious traditions throughout the years of revolution.

Some revolutionaries, including many involved with the Communist Party, called for even wider-ranging reforms. Members of the New Culture movement called for a complete rejection of Confucian values which were “the ethics of a feudal age,”⁴⁰ and only served the interests of rulers and aristocrats. All systems of the New Culture would need to serve the interests of the people. They would also need to motivate people to transform their country because they needed a revolution. Put in fairly clear terms, “[If] we do not personally take a large broom to sweep away the rotten customs of the ancestors, then how can we hope to foster the ideal China?”⁴¹ Constructing culture and progressing as a society towards modernity was a destructive and violent process, and violence against religious values and institutions featured heavily. The issues of culture and religion were intimately related, not only because both concepts entered China at

³⁹ Sun Yat-sen, “The Three People’s Principles,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 329.

⁴⁰ Chen Duxiu, “The Way of Confucius and Modern Life,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 356.

⁴¹ Zhang Binglin, “Letter Opposing Kang Youwei’s Views on Revolution,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 313.

roughly the same time and became important concepts in the discussion, but also because, as seen before, social values and beliefs in the supernatural were intimately tied to institutional authority, and because in the discussion of civilizations or cultures the idea of religious reform based on the public-private distinction was foundational to the discourse. United members of the Republican and Communist forces were the victors in the fight for national construction, and although they disagreed on some aspects of how to reorganize the state, they were largely in agreement on the role of religion in nationalist reconstruction. It is to the understandings of religion and policies directed towards religion that we now turn.

Religious Policies in the Chinese Nation

When constructing the new Chinese national cultural identity, the Nationalists of the Kuomintang (KMT, Nationalist Party) led first by Sun Yat-sen and then Chiang Kai-shek, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) both chose to position religion as external to Chinese politics and external to the official cultural identity. From intellectuals attempting to sway the imperial authorities, these thinkers finally gained power in 1919 and their visions of Chinese national identity became the official view with the force of law behind it. Viewing traditional culture and institutions as at fault for the failings of the Chinese state, they sought to radically overhaul state policies and chief among the components that had to be re-imagined for the modern state were religious traditions. While the Nationalists and the Communists differed in the degree to which religion should be eliminated, both created a space for religion outside of politics and modern culture, emphasizing protection of belief rather than action.

As the modern notion of culture entered the Chinese understanding, the term for religion, *zongjiao* 宗教, came into use. This term contains two components, one tied to the idea of a lineage, ancestors, or sect, generally having senses of a line of inheritance or transmission, and one meaning a teaching or instruction. It was not a completely new construction, having some precedent in classical Chinese, and had previously referred to some forms of Buddhism. However, the term *zongjiao* was used within a new context and thus took on new connotations and served different functions.⁴² Huang Zunxian, Secretary of Legation in Japan from 1877 to 1882, used the translated term for religion, *zongjiao*, in publication in 1890, and Liang Qichao popularized the term *zongjiao* while in exile in Japan after the Hundred Days Reform of 1898.⁴³

Prior to this term, what we might identify as religions today, namely Daoism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Confucianism, and popular religion, were talked about as “teachings” (*jiao* 教). The way these teachings functioned and the criteria by which they were judged differed depending on the tradition and the context, but the term religion as it functioned within the cultural imaginings of the early 20th century held all of these traditions to enlightenment standards of rationality. Asad identifies the new understanding of religion inherited from the Enlightenment as “anchored in personal experience, expressible as belief-statements, dependent on private institutions, and practiced in one’s spare time.”⁴⁴ Whereas the state initially was inseparable from public rituals, now religion was separate from politics, stripped of much of its public, communal practice, and belonging instead to the private sphere of belief. Religion became

⁴² Rebecca Nedostup. *Superstitious Regimes: religion and the politics of Chinese modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard East Asian Monographs, 2009), 7-8. Hereafter, Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*.

⁴³ Chen, *Confucianism Encounters Religion*, 55-6.

⁴⁴ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 207.

“inessential to our common politics, economy, science, and morality.”⁴⁵ Not only is religion kept separate from politics, but whenever it enters politics it is considered “a disguise for political power.”⁴⁶ Thus, you get quotes from Mao Zedong saying, “Nor, similarly, will our constitution and laws ever provide the slightest facility for those elements who engage in counter-revolutionary activities under the cloak of religion.”⁴⁷ *Zongjiao* was now a term packed with enlightenment conceptions separating the sacred and the secular, the private and the public, and the rational from the irrational; it elicited suspicion in secular national culture.

The Confucian representative to the World’s Parliament of Religion in 1893, Peng Guangyu, stated this division and suspicion of religion well:

Owing to the radical differences in customs and manners between China and the nations of the West, what is properly called ‘religion’ has never been considered a desirable thing for people to know and for the Government to sanction. The reason is that every attempt to propagate religious doctrines in China has already given rise to the spreading of falsehoods and errors, and finally to the [people’s] resistance to legitimate authority and the onset of dire calamities in the country.⁴⁸

Religion was not only suspicious but had in actuality led to resistance and rebellion. Religions posited authority that was not legitimate, whereas only political leaders could make legitimate claims to authority. One of the main grounds for criticizing religion was as an effort to ensure socio-political stability and thus, should religion exist in modern society it ought to aid society and the state in some way. This type of thinking meant that

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 29.

⁴⁷ Donald E. MacInnis, *Religious Policy and Practice in Communist China: a documentary history* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), 24. Hereafter, MacInnis, *Religious Policy*.

⁴⁸ Chen, *Confucianism Encounters Religion*, 29.

certain actions and beliefs could be censured by the state if they failed to further the secular goal of stability.

To make it further clear that this term was not the same as those used before, unacceptable religion also had a new term: superstition (*mixin* 迷信). Prior terms included heterodoxy (*viduan* 异端) or evil cults (*xiejiao* 邪教), and though both remained in use, superstition was the crucial term for conceptualizing religion within the modern.⁴⁹ The new term superstition was composed of characters meaning to be confused (*mi* 迷) and to believe or have confidence in (*xin* 信). Thus, its meaning was to have a confused belief, one without proper understanding, and this means that religions must have proper grounds for their beliefs. This term appealed to religious practitioners and revolutionaries alike due to its emphasis on the rational aspects of religion and ties to ideas of historical progress. Asad defines superstition as “practices that had survived beyond their proper time,”⁵⁰ and Inglis calls it “any form of social practice... that seems to have no basis of authority other than that of tradition.”⁵¹ Having superstitious beliefs could harm society by leading to rebellion, but more often it was tied to reliance upon foolish methods to seek gain or political authority. While traditional cultural norms had legitimized local and Imperial authorities through various ritual practices, now authority had to be based upon notions of rationality and progress. Thus, the reformer Hu Shi could praise Western religion for having “overthrown the religion of superstitions and established a rational belief,... destroyed divine power and established a humanistic religion...”⁵² By positioning the new state against the irrational and unscientific, the new leaders could

⁴⁹ Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*, 8-9.

⁵⁰ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 87.

⁵¹ Ray, *Logic of Culture*, 16.

⁵² Hu Shi, “Our Attitude Toward Modern Western Civilization,” *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 386.

claim a greater legitimacy through this opposition.⁵³ Politics based on rational policies had supremacy over religious understandings.

If there were any difference between the Republican government and the Communist government in their attitudes towards religion, it was that the Communists largely rejected a distinction between good and bad religion. An orthodox understanding held that, “Religion is also superstition. It is a type of superstition with deep roots and the support of material powers.”⁵⁴ Despite this difference, with regard to the majority of policy issues they were aligned and even used the same language of modernization to advocate their positions. The Communists talked of religion in a way that highlighted the wealth disparity of the religions that had propped up ‘feudalism,’ but this was in essence the same argument as the nationalists. Likewise, both groups argued against imperialists having any role in religious organizations. Both groups primarily sought to centralize authority through elimination of other sources of local or foreign authority outside of their regime, and in this way they advanced national well-being. Eng and Lin argue that, “The communist revolution destroyed the multi-centric power bases of the local elite and made the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) the single source of legitimacy,”⁵⁵ and this relied upon efforts to eliminate the prior superstitious authority structures.

Material concerns of poverty and production featured prominently in the discussions around strengthening and it was the functional argument against religion as weakening the state and populace that gained prominence amongst leading voices in both

⁵³ Yang, *Chinese Religiosities*, 17.

⁵⁴ MacInnis, *Religious Policy*, 191. For a similar argument from 1963 see p.44.

⁵⁵ Irene Eng and Yi-Min Lin, “Religious Festivities, Communal Rivalry, and Restructuring of Authority Relations in Rural Chaozhou, Southeast China,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol.61 no.4 (Nov. 2002): 1264. Hereafter, Eng and Lin, “Religious Festivities.”

parties. Mao Zedong made many public criticisms of religion utilizing this same logic of superstitious, illegitimate practices, and often united the arguments against superstition with the state goals of progress. Writing against clan authority and popular religion in 1927, he said, “You have worshiped them for centuries, and they have not overthrown a single one of the local tyrants or evil gentry for you! Now you want to have your rent reduced. Let me ask how will you go about it? Will you believe in the gods or in the peasant associations?”⁵⁶ Showing consistent opposition between the secular and the religious in accomplishing goals of progress, Mao said in 1965, “Gods are all right for the rich; the poor have the Eighth Route Army.”⁵⁷ As cultural critics looked at the system of religion in China they saw decentralizing forces, ones built upon irrational beliefs and practices of petitioning and propping up gods. For the Communists this meant that feudal exploitation built into the system of religion was holding back progress. For both Communists and Nationalists, religious cults were cultural forms of the past, and those who were part of the system of temples and local cults were quickly becoming an indigenous ‘other’ in the minds of New Culture thinkers, ones who were ‘other’ in the sense of belonging to another feudal time.

Having removed religion from the realm of political legitimacy or authority, constitutional understandings of religion crafted by both the Nationalists and the Communists protected religion insofar as it remained within the private realm of belief. From the earliest constitutions up to the present constitution of China, official understandings of the freedom of religion were determined by the language of belief rather than practice. An amendment to article 11 of the constitution of the Republic of

⁵⁶ MacInnis, *Religious Policy*, 10.

⁵⁷ MacInnis, *Religious Policy*, 18.

China in 1913 states, “Citizens of the Republic of China have the freedom to worship Confucius or to profess any religion; this freedom shall not be restricted except in accordance with law.⁵⁸ *Xinjiao ziyou* (信教自由, the freedom to believe a teaching) was adopted rather than *xinyang zongjiao ziyou* (信仰宗教自由, the freedom of religious faith) so that Confucianism was encompassed while not being a religion,⁵⁹ though it was a highly contested decision due to the contentious debate around upholding the Confucian state cult. The constitutional framers were attempting to ensure the freedom of all creeds but to limit any practices based on a religion that might violate other state laws. The explicit preference for secular law in the freedom of religion clause was only left out of the June 1, 1931 Provisional Constitution after heated debate, and in the next draft from 1936 the restriction returned. Secular law always took precedent and the only thing that was protected was privately held belief.⁶⁰ This matches Mao Zedong’s thought when he made official Communist Policy, “If religion does not interfere with the People’s Republic, the People’s Republic will not interfere with it.”⁶¹

The most vocal and significant advocates of religious freedom were the Buddhists, motivated by continued concerns over the survival of their tradition and legitimate fears of the state acquisition of temple property. Buddhist and Daoists, due to their association with various “superstitious practices,” had to adapt their traditions to the statements of Xue Dubi, Minister of Interior in 1928, who in a *Central Daily News* (*Zhongyang ribao* 中央日报) distinguished between “‘ignorant’ superstition in ‘the God of Wealth, City Gods, earth gods and worshipping wood, stone, foxes, and snakes,’ which

⁵⁸ Chen, *Confucianism Encounters Religion*, 187.

⁵⁹ Chen, *Confucianism Encounters Religion*, 190.

⁶⁰ Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*, 37-8.

⁶¹ Bush, *Religion in Communist China*, 399.

should be destroyed, and the country's ancient sages and 'formal religions,' protected under the party platform's freedoms."⁶² Xue called for Buddhists to "abandon such practices and instead emulate Christians.... [and] reform their religion so that it would promote world progress, prevent war in East Asia, and help China assert its sovereign rights."⁶³ These views from the state spokesman illustrate how religions should be rational and sublimate their motives to secular goals tied to progress. For both the Buddhist and Daoist traditions these divisions fundamentally affected their activities as they interacted with the local communities that supported them. Many of the practices that were traditionally central to the religions of the common people were explicitly denounced and made illegal due to their failure to promote modern goals of secularization and rationalism.

Taixu, leading Buddhist reformer during the revolutionary years, disputed proposals that involved confiscation of temple property in his magazine "Sound of the Tide" (*haichao yin* 海潮音), arguing that monastic property was jointly owned by the clergy, and "placed Buddhists and their property firmly inside an everyday social and civic framework."⁶⁴ But because religious institutions still carried with them the danger of sectarianism and revolt, and because they fit so awkwardly within modernity, the 1929 Rules for Temple Management forced "temples and clergy to a political litmus test [among other challenges]...[and] they enabled local governments and 'public groups' (*gonggong tuanti* 公共团体) to take charge of temple property in the event that test was failed."⁶⁵ In direct response to these challenges, the three main organizations for

⁶² Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*, 40-1.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*, 50.

Buddhism met in April in Shanghai and formed the Buddhist Association of China. The Third Party Congress created new categories under government jurisdiction in their continued struggle to deal with religious organizations. They added ‘social organizations’ (*shehui tuanti* 社会团体) and a sub-group called ‘cultural groups’ (*wenhua tuanti* 文化团体) to accommodate temples.⁶⁶ It seems that religion was saved by culture, but only tentatively.

The best strategy for keeping on the right side of the law was to shape religious organizations along the established lines of the government. Groups could at any time be deemed illegal and have their practices restricted for the protection of the public and this meant that the safest way to remain firmly legal was to register all of your institutions and your clergy through sanctioned national organizations.⁶⁷ While all schools and organizations were being molded to fit the goals of nationalism, religious groups were forced to fall in line in order to survive. Whatever other teachings they might have, they needed to also incorporate the goals of the party (‘partify’ *danghua* 党化).⁶⁸ A 1930 propaganda pamphlet on cultural organizations showed that the government needed support from local clergy to spread their message and that they were also carrying out a long-term strategy to convert the customs and beliefs of the people. It read, in part,

Although the responsibility of improving [customs] originally depended on the efforts of government, it is better to rely on the active moral leadership and discipline of cultural organizations. Since all kinds of unfortunate practices have long ago settled deep in the people’s hearts and minds, changing popular habits cannot be achieved simply with one government order. It is better to rely on the cooperation and the example of cultural groups to subtly change [these habits] and rectify them one by

⁶⁶ Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*, 51.

⁶⁷ Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*, 29.

⁶⁸ Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*, 36.

one. Then they will begin to disappear, and we can realize a new revolutionary society under the Three Principles of the People.⁶⁹

National religious organizations helped the government spread its new national culture and created a means of unifying the messages coming out of these groups. But not all groups could gain national recognition and protection, even if they were supportive of the government. Groups that were part of traditional culture but did not benefit society were ineligible for official recognition. For this reason, an organization for Mediums and Prognosticators was denied official status, with the government arguing they should no longer exist.⁷⁰ Further, the government could eliminate practices while protecting spaces, redefining the temple spaces as having cultural and historical value but no value as spaces for rituals to Confucius or other popular religious deities.⁷¹

This language of “changing the people’s hearts and minds” was not unique to the Nationalists. In Mao’s essay “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People” during the Hundred Flowers Campaign in 1957 he claimed that,

We cannot abolish religion by administrative orders; nor can we force people not to believe in it... In settling matters of an ideological nature or controversial issues among the people, we can only use democratic methods, methods of discussion, of criticism, of persuasion and education, not coercive, high-handed methods.⁷²

⁶⁹ Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*, 52.

⁷⁰ Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*, 215.

⁷¹ Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*, 263.

⁷² Bush, *Religion in Communist China*, 32-3. For a similar line of thought, see MacInnis, *Religious Policy*, 186: “In dealing with people such as ‘living guides,’ shamans and town elders, measures on solidarity, education and reform should be applied. In addition, they should be frequently called to attend meetings. They should be subjected to education and mobilized for use in promoting reform activities dealing with their national customs and rituals.”

Thus, be they Nationalists or Communists, they both advocated utilizing religious and secular organizations to convince the people of the new culture they were espousing in opposition to previous religious forms.

The Communist regime was more effective in creating external thought reform methods to promote their new cultural hegemony. They constantly enforced their understandings through socially and politically coercive means. One report from 1950 Nanjing claimed that things were normal but, “The noticeable differences were frequent interruptions of work for special lectures, parades, and other political functions usually announced at the last moment, thus involving constant changes in other plans and programs.”⁷³ The Soviets called these special groups and meetings “transmission belt organizations” and they were an effective means of eliminating other forms of truth from the public sphere.⁷⁴ An example of an attempt to do this was to put up signs which denounced the old cultural forms around town and within the institutions themselves. For instance, “Most churches had much simpler signs, such as ‘discard the old!’ or ‘This is forbidden!’ Crosses and other religious symbols were removed from tombstones in a cemetery for foreigners in Peking.”⁷⁵

The privatization of religious belief was so absolute at times during the early Communist government that a report from visiting Muslims from Pakistan in 1956 left them with the impression that there was no freedom of religion, speech, assembly, or the press. The library was filled with primarily pro-Communist literature and “all radio sets were tuned only to Peking. He tried to listen to other stations but every time his radio set

⁷³ Bush, *Religion in Communist China*, 75.

⁷⁴ Martin King Whyte, “State and Society in the Mao Era,” *China: Four Anniversaries*, ed. Kenneth Lieberthal (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1991), 260-4.

⁷⁵ Bush, *Religion in Communist China*, 257.

was connected to Radio Peking.”⁷⁶ This form of social pressure and officially permitted culture was only further strengthened during the Cultural Revolution when, in at least some locations, loudspeakers controlled by the government and tuned to approved stations were installed in every house and around town with no way of turning them off or changing the content.⁷⁷

Some might argue that political ideology or religious practices are the specific social categories that people were arguing against and that the term culture was not really that important. Contrary to this notion, I argue that the separate spheres of political and religious authority came with and were intimately connected to the notions of culture. Furthermore, in the actual rhetoric of the day, culture was a central term that people used to conceptualize and control religion. As an obvious example of this line of thinking dictating state policy during the Communist period, at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, the main campaign was against the “Four Olds” that had to be eliminated: old culture, old thinking, old habits, old customs. Various aspects of religion were connected to all of these four olds. As the Communists saw it “the budding culture...of primitive society was restrained by religion,”⁷⁸ and the budding culture of modern China needed to lose this restraint. The ideology was not different from those that came before, but the implementation of policy and regulation changed. All members of the state, particularly the youth, were encouraged to eliminate these aspects of the old China and implement the Marxist representations of the modern. Religion had once been regulated for safe-keeping and eventual elimination, but following the same logic, should

⁷⁶ Bush, *Religion in Communist China*, 280-1.

⁷⁷ Yan Yunxiang. *Private Life Under Socialism: Love, Intimacy, and Family Change in a Chinese Village, 1949-1999* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 35-6.

⁷⁸ MacInnis, *Religious Policy*, 72.

anyone hasten the destruction of religion or old culture, it was no great loss. Thus, in this period all of the official language about freedom of religion often took a backseat to the larger goal of eradicating religion as part of the old culture that needed to be replaced. While higher levels of government could always blame localized authorities for their ‘misunderstanding’ of the religious policies, for the arguments discussed in this paper, it is important to note that the way one talked about and constructed the ideal national culture had real effects on the people practicing religion and the people who were supposed to enforce policy towards these people’s activities. How much religion could exist in the public sphere? What counted as legitimate religion? What benefit did religion have for Chinese society? These questions formed the basis for all negotiations of religion with Chinese national culture.

As shown in this section, the national forms of religion were characterized by incorporation into a larger secular ideology and could legitimize themselves through their positive social roles. Having just seen some of the more staunchly articulated views of religion as external to a modern national identity, in the next section I turn to an examination of the ways the Chinese Taoist Association, arbiters of a tradition intimately connected with popular religion and superstitious practices, sought to legitimize its religious organization and how the arguments for a sanctioned form of traditional culture shape the Daoist tradition today and are utilized to maintain Daoism’s continued cultural relevance.

CHAPTER 3: CULTURAL REVIVAL AND THE CHINESE TAOIST ASSOCIATION

Introduction

For much of China's modern history, the discourse of culture was not a protective discourse for religious traditions. While different religious individuals attempted to use it to legitimize their tradition, by privileging the civilizational notion of progress and modernity the majority of Chinese political leaders identified Chinese traditions as part of an old culture that ought to be left behind or violently eradicated. The fundamentals of this belief in historical progress remain central to the official theoretical understandings of culture, however since the Reform and Opening period following Mao's death, a separate notion of culture has taken precedent.

After attempting to eradicate superstition and regulate religion under early Communist rule,¹ the 1980s saw the use of culture as a means to reinvigorate these practices.² This study investigates the success and consequences of this terminological game. This idea of culture is now tied to heritage and imbued with value as either local tradition or tourist attraction. While still theoretically and rhetorically tied to the past, the regulations and priorities of the government have shifted and created a "zone of indifference" for traditional religious practices to remain in the present. Because this narrative has particularly affected Daoism and local expressions of this tradition, below I will examine the ways that this cultural discourse has allowed for the continued existence and even revitalization of the Daoist tradition since the end of the Cultural Revolution.

¹ Bush, Richard C. Bush Jr. *Religion in Communist China* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 17-36. See also, Goossaert, *Religious Question*, 10.

² For discussion of this phenomenon, see Goossaert, *Religious Question*, 248. See also, Adam Yuet Chau, "The Politics of Legitimation and the Revival of Popular Religion in Shaanbei, North-Central China," *Modern China*, vol. 31, no. 2 (April, 2005), 246. Tim Oakes, "China's Provincial Identities: Reviving Regionalism and Reinventing 'Chineseness,'" *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol.59 no.3 (Aug. 2000): 667-92.

My arguments rely upon recent fieldwork by ethnographers in China and an examination of the publications of the Chinese Taoist Association. By examining these sources, I will argue that the use of the cultural discourse to create a space for Daoist practice privileges the official government views of culture and the Daoist tradition in a way that de-emphasizes the connection between popular religion and Daoism, encourages deconstruction of the tradition into safe pieces such as Taiji or calligraphy, and sterilizes the tradition into philosophical platitudes for the foreign audience. While this fits into larger historical trends, the modernist cultural discourse has changed the emphasis from religious or spiritual legitimacy to a concern over the appropriateness of traditional Daoist practices within modernity. To make this argument I will highlight the issues that arise from the continued reliance upon firm distinctions between religious traditions emphasized by Western notions of religion, and the continued rhetorical othering of superstitious discourses. Cultural revitalization does not eliminate these issues, it only puts them off for another day and leaves practitioners in a legal gray area. Further, the discussion of cultural heritage allows local superstition to resume but keeps it invisible from outside view, thus limiting its legitimacy and privileging only those forms that can safely be removed from religious practice or can be argued to be rational practices.

Creation of a Cultural Safe Space for Religion

As seen in the preceding sections, the foremost question of how to reshape Chinese culture and make it viable was the issue of modernization, particularly as viewed through the lens of strengthening the nation. While Mao crafted his Cultural Revolution around the eradication of the “Four Olds,” old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas, today most recognize a revival of many aspects of these traditional cultural forms.

In addition, by attempting to identify some characteristic Chinese culture that is distinct from all other modern cultures, the traditional cultural forms are a mark of pride in the international community. On both a local and an international scale, many Chinese are attempting to utilize the cultural discourse and imagine Daoism or popular religious traditions at the center of this identity in an effort to claim legitimacy for their activities.

One of the frequently used official phrases to emphasize this use of culture in the modernization effort was, “Culture building the stage and the economy doing the performance” (文化搭台, 经济唱戏).³ As this phrase indicates, cultural forms serve the pragmatic goal of economic advancement. Through a new category of “intangible cultural heritage” rooted in the system of heritage sites under UNESCO, there is a new way to imagine practices that are not modern inside a modern space. Their main value is in creating a vibrant tourist infrastructure that can attract foreign interest, and as the Chinese tourism industry expands it continues to use religious traditions to make China distinct and appealing to a foreign gaze. But this does not eliminate the importance of modernization, it simply creates a new way to partition and utilize religious traditions that could theoretically be nonthreatening to an image of a modern China.

By advocating both traditional culture and modernization, the official spaces for religious activities and traditional culture were re-imagined in post-Mao China, but on a theoretical basis the views were not reversed. The official pronouncements on religion still followed a Marxist or a modernist perspective that religion was a phenomenon of the past that needed to be shaken off. Marsh does find some evidence of understandings changing, with Lu Daji arguing for regulation rather than abolition of religion and Zhang

³ Ji Zhe, “Buddhism in the Reform Era,” *Religion in Contemporary China*, ed. Adam Yuet Chau (New York: Routledge, 2011), 42. Hereafter, Ji Zhe, “Buddhism in the Reform Era.”

Ji'an, writing in *World Religion Research* (世界宗教研究), describing religion as an anesthetic rather than an opiate.⁴ However, it is best to see these views as coinciding with views prior to the Cultural Revolution and fitting particularly well within early Nationalist understandings. Qu Hong quotes President Jiang Zemin at a National United Front Work Conference in December 2000 saying, "Religion has a long history and will continue to exist for a long time under socialism. The ultimate withering away of religion, to be certain, will be a long historical process, perhaps longer than that of the class and state."⁵ In continuity with this understanding, in 2008 he advocated working with religious personnel to "build an all-round moderately prosperous society while quickening the pace toward the modernization of socialism."⁶ While the leaders still use the language of struggle against religion, more often they stress the goals of prosperity or a harmonious society. Indeed, this language of harmony is one avenue through which they have sought to position the teachings of religions as in line with current socialist understandings and goals. While religion in the revolutionary period was viewed as weakening the state and incommensurable with the modern culture, now the government allowed some forms of religion in an effort to counteract moral decline and expand the economic development of the Chinese nation.

After Deng Xiaoping came to power following the death of Mao and the political trials of the Gang of Four, he stressed less ideological purity and more economic pragmatism. This has created an expansion of activity in the religious sphere. While official ideology has not changed from previous periods, the legal enforcement and

⁴ Marsh, *Religion and the State* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2011), 215-7.

⁵ Qu, Hong. "Religious Policy in the People's Republic of China: an alternative perspective," *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol.20 no.70 (Jun. 2011), 436. Hereafter, Qu, "Religious Policy in the PRC."

⁶ Qu, "Religious Policy in the PRC," 436.

classification of certain religious activities has changed. For instance, the Beijing Religious Regulation of 2002 no longer banned superstitious activities, classifying these activities “such as fortune telling, palmistry, face-reading, or astrology... under the favorable category of cultural heritage.”⁷ Cultural activities, though not given official approval, are now in what Potter has termed a “zone of indifference.”⁸ While it is important to note the shift in the official rhetoric under certain circumstances, this does not mean that the activities belonging to a Chinese cultural heritage should be kept alive or that they have moved in the popular imagination out of the realm of superstition.

Fenggang Yang proposes looking at religion in post-Mao China as an economy with different markets that provide people with options for religious consumption. Each of these provides different opportunities to participants but is also subject to its own regulatory and legal restrictions. He divides this religious market into three parts: red, black, and gray markets of religion. In his words,

A red market of religion consists of all legal (officially permitted) religious organizations, believers, and religious activities.... A black market of religion consists of all illegal (officially banned) religious organizations, believers, and religious activities.... A gray market of religion consists of all religious and spiritual organizations, practitioners, and activities with ambiguous legal status.⁹

The legal religious space is subject to regulation but within limits, while the other two categories are more likely to be subject to harsh treatment and classified as illegal activities. This division illustrates well how a religion could be partially legal as a result of its varied content. The discourse of superstition and religion resulted in some practices

⁷ Qu, “Religious Policy in the PRC,” 445.

⁸ Potter, “Belief in Control,” *The China Quarterly*, no.174 (June, 2003), 318. Hereafter, Potter, “Belief in Control.”

⁹ Fenggang Yang. *Religion in China: survival and revival under communist rule* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 86-7. Hereafter, Yang, *Religion in China*.

becoming illegal (e.g. divination, fengshui, etc.) while other actions remained protected under freedom of religious belief. The re-imagining and re-invigoration of the cultural discourse widened the space for these gray practices while the Chinese state authorities were not officially sanctioning or advocating any religious or superstitious outlooks.

Some of the gray market groups that Yang highlights include house-type religious services, private religious practices, proselytizing, and groups sponsored by the government to promote foreign investment (e.g. Mazu and Tianhou deities).¹⁰ These groups do not share a particular form of belief, but rather a form of practice that stands outside of the organized religious groups and spaces that the government has united with and supported. The practices within one's home are difficult to regulate and proselytizing, while legally restricted to official religious spaces, is often difficult to control or identify in a public space. The groups used for foreign investment, most important to this thesis, remain in a gray area and the legitimacy of these activities depends on the packaging of the messages and the types of activities promoted. Culture is a safe category and results in an emphasis on historical roots and historical value, but to the extent these activities reflect a religious nature they must reflect only those religious ideas and actions that fit the proper modern space.

We should remember that, while regulations come from the higher levels of government, the motivations are often quite local and grassroots. Villagers during the early 1980s responded to the environment of relaxing of cultural restrictions and engaged in temple reconstruction, seeking both religious practice that had been prohibited and also foreign investment in other temples and temple activities.¹¹ In efforts to gain foreign

¹⁰ Yang, *Religion in China*, 108-10.

¹¹ Eng and Lin, "Religious Festivities," 1272.

investment in local communities, these temples were stressed as reflecting a historical root that overseas Chinese could tap into, with historical relics “restored as reminders of the cultural roots of overseas Chinese with local origin.”¹² There is even evidence that villages with restored and revitalized temples had “a higher probability of paved roads and paths, a higher percentage of classrooms usable in rain, and a higher probability of running water...”¹³ It appears that the goal of economic development was in many instances met, but the relation of this goal to the actually cultural activities used to accomplish this goal is less clear. We will examine this local temple activity first as it relates to the Daoist tradition.

Local Religious Revival

The new freedom offered by the safe space of cultural heritage meant a quick and enthusiastic resurgence of religious practices and temple renovation in local communities. For an indication of how dramatic this revival was, Yanfei Sun claims that in the region she studied, as of 2009, 660 temples had been restored or built and “of all of the villages I visited, none has left its communal temple unrestored.”¹⁴ Kenneth Dean says that, “the first thing that people who had money did was not to buy televisions and refrigerators but to rebuild temples to their local cult god that had been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.”¹⁵ While this chapter looks at the way Daoism functions in the new cultural discourse of post-Mao China, these were not specifically Daoist or Buddhist practices. Chinese religion operates within a wider understanding of gods and religious

¹² Eng and Lin, “Religious Festivities,” 1270.

¹³ Goossaert, *Religious Question*, 257.

¹⁴ Yanfei Sun, “Popular Religion in Zhejiang: Feminization, Bifurcation, and Buddhification,” *Modern China*, vol.40 no.5 (2014): 460. Hereafter, Sun, “Popular Religion in Zhejiang.”

¹⁵ Kenneth Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of Southeast China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 4. Hereafter, Dean, *Taoist Ritual*.

beliefs that is common across most forms of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism in China. Most of these religious practices get identified under the catch-all term “popular religion” and their practices are currently identified as “superstition.” However, the Daoist tradition, particularly the Zhengyi (Orthodox Unity) sect of Daoism, is the most difficult of the traditions to partition off from popular religion due to its focus on local ritual. This is an important distinction because, even as the five official religions in China have gained more protection since the 1982 constitution, “popular religion remains a separate, leftover category, often equated with ‘feudal superstition.’”¹⁶ So for government officials the distinction is quite important, and due to the remaining insecurity of practicing popular religion, it is important to religious leaders of the official religions to maintain a distinct identity.

One key way to distinguish between popular religion and Daoism is to look at the authority in local temples and religious festivals. In popular religion, religious sites and events are almost entirely run by local residents, with the decision-making and authority resting almost always in the local secular leaders.¹⁷ This shows one reason that resurgence of popular religion props up local authority and has been seen as a threat to the centralization of authority since the early nationalists tried to re-imagine Chinese cultural institutions. Eliminating these superstitious practices was tied to a notion of modernizing the culture of the Chinese nation, but it was also partially an effort to limit this diffuse authority. With the formal religious traditions agreeing to form national

¹⁶ David Ownby, “Imperial Fantasies: The Chinese Communists and Peasant Rebellions,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* vol. 43 no. 1 (Jan., 2001): 65-6.

¹⁷ Eng and Lin, “Religious Festivities,” 1274. See also, Yanfei Sun, 459.

organizations they are more appealing to the national government because they are easier to regulate and subordinate to centralized authority.

The location of authority is perhaps the best way to distinguish these traditions, because if it were just about the contents of their underlying beliefs, many scholars see it more fruitful to avoid drawing divisions between high and popular religious traditions in China.¹⁸ In most forms, the traditional religions in China all support similar ideas within the local community. Daoism and popular religion share much the same beliefs in the areas of cosmology, divinity, and ghosts, which helps them maintain their legitimacy within the local communities to “function as a mediator between humans and spirits, as a communicator who is said to be able ‘to reach the gods and the sages,’”¹⁹ in various festivals centered around the seasons, rites of passage, or “destiny-correcting rituals.” While there were many different forms of ritual specialists in China during the Republican period, including ‘house-dwelling’ Daoist priests (*huoju* 火居) of the Zhengyi sect, Confucian ritualists (*lisheng* 礼生), scholarly elites (*shidaifu* 士大夫) and spirit mediums, who all provided different forms of ritual specialization selling “efficacy and authority,”²⁰ with time many of these were pushed out of the market as a result of anti-clericalism. Without distinguishing the contents of these beliefs dramatically, Daoists attempt to distinguish themselves from popular religions by adding a supralocal canon, a uniform ritual structure, and an organized national institution, all things which popular

¹⁸ Meir Shahar and Robert P. Weller, eds. *Unruly Gods: divinity and society in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 2. Hereafter, Shahar and Weller, *Unruly Gods*.

¹⁹ Fong-mao Lee, “The Daoist Priesthood and Secular Society: Two Aspects of Postwar Taiwanese Daoism,” *Religion in Modern Taiwan: Tradition and Innovation in a Changing Society*, ed. Philip Clart and Charles B. Jones (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press: 2003), 132. Hereafter, Lee, “Daoist Priesthood and Secular Society.”

²⁰ Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*, 195.

religion lacks. However, for many Daoist priests they maintain their underlying shamanic and ecstatic religious practices.²¹ Thus, while Daoist ritual masters (*fashi* 法師) or Daoist priests (*daoshi* 道士) often perform the same role as local shamans, their lineage claims, training, and subordination to a national organization give them added legitimacy in the community and in the eyes of the government.²²

Distinguishing along these lines of authority or institutional structure does not mean that they are removed from the popular religious practices. Kenneth Dean in his ethnographic studies of popular religion in Southeast China found that Buddhist or Daoist clergy were required for ritual activity, with Daoist ritual forming “the main structuring element in the vast liturgical framework that supports the festival of the local god.”²³ These festivals need Daoist priests in order to conduct a *jiao* ritual of purification or to invite the Emperor of Heaven and his troops to earth, which Confucian or Buddhist ritual specialists could not provide.²⁴ Thus, while the higher institutionalization of their practices, based in texts, training, and ordination processes, gives them more authority in religious events, they are not removed from communal rituals. This means that they engage in actions that many in local and national government view as superstitious. Further, the largest annual ritual conducted by Daoists, the *jiao*, is primarily used to

²¹ Dean, *Taoist Ritual*, 182. See also Vincent Goossaert, *The Taoists of Peking, 1800-1949: a social history of urban clerics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 39. Hereafter, Goossaert, *The Taoists of Peking*. Shahar and Weller, *Unruly Gods*, 1.

²² Alison Marshall, “Shamanism in Contemporary Taiwan,” *Chinese Religions in Contemporary Societies*, ed. James Miller (Denver: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 137-8.

²³ Dean, *Taoist Ritual*, 3, see also 83.

²⁴ Dean, *Taoist Ritual*, 83-4, see also 100-2.

“subdue wandering ghosts in the area,”²⁵ and a belief in ghosts falls squarely within the realm of superstition.

This lack of distinction on beliefs and participation in superstitious activities is problematic since superstition is still illegal. While local authorities have more freedom to determine the status of these cultural practices, many are still uneasy with the presence of these activities. Foreign investment, community cohesion, and cultural tourism all act to usurp concern over superstitious ideology in contemporary China, but issues do still arise. For instance, Kenneth Dean did fieldwork in Fujian and other parts of Southeast China during the 1990s and witnessed conflict between different villages as well as with the authorities. He provides an account of officials attempting to combat “superstitious practices” and arresting village participants, Daoists, and Buddhists during a public ritual.²⁶ He quotes a teenage villager yelling at the police that “this was their procession and that, even if Deng Xiaoping told them to stop, they wouldn’t.”²⁷ Mayfair Yang also reported that local leaders asked her how to define religion and superstition to defend against government accusations.²⁸

Most of what unites Daoism so closely with popular religion are the practices and structures of Zhengyi Daoism in Southeast China. While Quanzhen Daoism has stressed its cloistered and monastic nature as a mark of purity and pride, the Zhengyi tradition has non-monastic monks who marry and have children and are thus more closely involved in these newly revitalized popular religious practices. Lee sees this as a benefit because it

²⁵ Tam Wai Lun, “Local Religion in Contemporary China,” *Chinese Religions in Contemporary Societies*, ed. James Miller (Denver: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 66. Hereafter, Tam, “Local Religion.”

²⁶ Dean, *Taoist Ritual*, 104-113.

²⁷ Dean, *Taoist Ritual*, 113.

²⁸ Yang, *Chinese Religiosities*, 17.

“allows it to forge a very close union of Daoist myth, ritual, and worldview with the religious aspects of local community life, such as community temple cults, ancestor worship, and seasonal festivals.”²⁹ On the other hand, the popular religious forms lack firm legal legitimacy, falling instead within what Fenggang Yang terms the gray market of religion.

The best strategy to gain legal legitimacy is to register with the national religious organizations, be they Buddhist or Daoist. However, this is not always appealing to local temple leaders. In order to register, these groups are required to have “a suitable building, regular meetings, proper organization, professional leadership, governing rules, regular income, and payment of a registration fee.”³⁰ Oftentimes these were simply burdensome, especially since the government was mostly turning a blind eye to temple groups. Sun notes that the membership dues to the Buddhist Association of 5,000 yuan to register and 500 yuan annually were too high to appeal to these leaders. These high costs and the extortion of other funds during the year for various charitable activities has meant that “some registered temples have suffered a decline in wealth... [and] at least three of these temples had not paid fees to renew their membership for more than two years and thus have automatically given up their registered status.”³¹ Dean confirms the limited desire to register temples with the Chinese Taoist Association because locals saw it as an interfering regulatory body.³²

The decision to remain outside of these organizations, while pragmatic at this time, leaves the temples outside of the defined legal space for religious practice and

²⁹ Lee, “Daoist Priesthood and Secular Society,” 128.

³⁰ Qu, “Religious Policy in the PRC,” 443.

³¹ Sun, “Popular Religion in Zhejiang,” 477.

³² Dean, *Taoist Ritual*, 41.

means that the national government chooses simply not to acknowledge them. Popular religious practices do indeed have a safe space at present within China and it is attributable to the ability to claim legitimacy as part of traditional culture or intangible cultural heritage, but the limits of this form of legitimacy keep their visibility local. The nature of this cultural discourse means that most of what they actually do on a local level limits their viability on a national or global scale. At best they get recognized as heritage sites but their activities will remain hidden as superstitious and backward activities. To gain wider legitimacy as cultural components, they must participate more fully in the discourse of modernity by adapting their practices or institutionalizing their structures.

Daoists in the Modern and Reform Periods

Acknowledging that the revitalization of popular religion and local communal rituals was a result of the use of the cultural discourse to create a safe space for these practices, and further that it had wider appeal to diasporic Chinese living overseas, the identification as cultural practices was not enough to make these events globally appealing in the eyes of national officials. In order to see how people could effectively position religion and Daoism in particular within a globally visible version of Chinese culture, we need to look at the creation of modern Daoism since the Reform era. Daoists in the modern period have largely been motivated by the impulse to distinguish themselves more effectively from local ritual traditions and to identify their position within Chinese culture as one tied to sanitized philosophical ideals, ethical norms, and high culture products. Aspects of the Daoist tradition that do not fit these standards were pushed out of the official cultural identity of China and disadvantaged by higher institutional structures.

During the years of searching for a national essence (*guocui* 国粹) from roughly 1910 to 1930, the inter-related traditions of Confucianism and Daoism were often considered as viable options for this distinctly Chinese essence. In the renewed cultural discourse of post-Mao China, these claims are gaining importance. In fact, looking at the two books produced in cooperation with the CTA, both quote the famous vernacular novelist Lu Xun from the New Culture and National Essence periods saying just that: Daoism is the core of Chinese culture. These publications utilize the same unattributed quotation, saying,

Taoist culture has long permeated the everyday life of ordinary Chinese people since it exerted great influences on social customs in ancient China and on the shaping of national consciousness. The venerated Lu Xun, the great Chinese writer, once said, ‘China is rooted in Taoism.’ Taoism has played an important role in the making of traditional Chinese culture. To know it is to possess a key to a better understanding of traditional Chinese culture.³³

By positioning Daoism within the Chinese historical identity and claiming its contemporary relevance to Chinese thought, the CTA attempts to argue Daoism’s indispensability to China and thus the necessity of its preservation.

One interesting aspect of this use of Lu Xun to legitimize their tradition is that Lu Xun likely meant this quote, if he truly ever said it, in a negative, rather than a positive sense. As a leader in the radical reform movement, he was one of many who did not view traditional culture in a positive light. He was very interested in finding a national essence of the Chinese to solve for their weakness, giving up medicine in order to use literature to change the nature of the Chinese people. Lydia Liu notes that scholars are in

³³ Yin Zhihua, *Taoism*. (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2005), 11. Hereafter Yin, *Taoism*. See also, Wang Yi’e, *Daoism in China*, ed. Adam Chanzit, trans. Zeng Chuanhui (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2004), v. Hereafter Wang, *Daoism in China*.

disagreement on whether Lu Xun was identifying a positive or negative essence, with some thinking he meant it negatively referring to the failures and struggles against imperialism and feudalism, and others that he meant it positively about ideas, moods, social norms and history. However, all agree that the issue of identifying this Chinese cultural essence was very important to him.³⁴ Lu Xun wrote in the preface to the Russian edition of one novel (among other similar quotes): “I tried my best to paint the soul of our countrymen in modern times...”³⁵ Noting Lu Xun’s place as a critic of traditional Confucian ethics and centrally concerned on strengthening the Chinese people, I believe that he did not mean the quote regarding Daoism in a positive light and yet in its present use the Daoists in the CTA use it positively. This indicates a shift in perceptions from the days of the New Culture and National Essence movements.

During the effort to find a National Essence, there was a resurgence in the study of the pre-Qin philosophers in an effort to find elements of indigenous thought that had evidence of science or could serve to inject Chineseness into the modern version of China. In keeping with this desire to search Chinese traditions for value in modern China, some Confucian scholars started examining the Daoist Canon for truths, doing historical exegesis, but also searching for the same principled origins as they would from Confucian texts.³⁶ Liu Shipei read the whole canon in 1910 at Peking University and Hu Shi published a historical study of Daoism, as did other scholars.³⁷ The general goal was to find modern value from pre-modern sources that had indigenous origins. What this

³⁴ Liu, *Translingual Practice*, 64.

³⁵ Liu, *Translingual Practice*, 69.

³⁶ Liu Xun. *Daoist Modern: innovation, lay practice, and the community of inner alchemy in Republican Shanghai* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 29-30. Hereafter Liu, *Daoist Modern*, 29-30.

³⁷ Liu, *Daoist Modern*, 31.

amounted to is occasional derision of the tradition, but to the extent that it had value, the Daoist tradition was said to contain highly valued cultural forms such as art and medicine. The CTA still continually claims the true value of Daoism is in its “far-reaching influences on China’s philosophy, literature, arts, medicine and science.”³⁸ Daoism lays strongest claim to the foundational views in Chinese traditional philosophy related to yin-yang, health practices, and much more. The CTA today goes further to show that foreigners too see this truth, quoting the scholar of Daoism and Chinese medicine Joseph Needham saying, “Many of the most attractive elements of the Chinese character derive from Taoism. China without Taoism would be a tree of which some of its deepest roots had perished.”³⁹ Thus, people began deconstructing the tradition and selecting aspects of which they approved in modernity and this remains one of the main strategies for the Daoist tradition today.

Around this same time, some were searching for value in these traditions as active and national religions. Kang Youwei advocated making Confucianism the national religion but most rejected this effort to reform Confucianism into a religion, preferring to keep it as a social philosophy. Instead, to the extent that China had a religion, many argued for Daoism. For instance, Ye Dehui responded to Kang Youwei by arguing that shamanism was developed “first by the legendary Yellow Emperor then by Laozi, into Daoism, which became the origin of all other teachings in the world” and thus that Daoism was the greatest teaching.⁴⁰ These conclusions, having gone through various

³⁸ Yin, *Taoism*, 10.

³⁹ Yin, *Taoism*, 11. The CTA leader from Jiangsu Province also quoted Needham saying that Daoist thought is the root of Chinese science and philosophy during an opening ceremony a Dao Culture Convention. 赵青, “常州举行首届道文化大会开幕大典” 腾讯 (Mar. 28, 2016). Last Accessed Apr. 18, 2016, on <http://dao.qq.com/a/20160328/028688.htm>.

⁴⁰ Chen, *Confucianism Encounters Religion*, 67-8.

manifestations, remain the largely accepted view in the writings of the CTA and they gladly recognize Daoism's relationship with early religious forms in China.⁴¹

When the then abbot of the White Cloud Temple in Shanghai, Chen Mingbin, got recognition for the Daojiao hui (National Taoist Association) in April 1912, he did so on the grounds that Daoism could be the national religion of China. As Goossaert notes, their manifesto argued that Daoism was the oldest indigenous religion in China and for this reason should be the national religion. Not only should this religion be spread worldwide, but it was also emphasized as “a political vision of Taoism as the moral and spiritual arm of the Chinese state,” with Laozi providing “a blueprint for democracy and freedom, nationalism and social progress” and emphasizing belief and a potential “obligation for all members to congregate on Sundays to join in a Taoist service.”⁴² None of the Christian-like reforms were put in place for Daoism, unlike those implemented by Taixu for Buddhism, allegedly because they lacked a similar charismatic reformer, but the impulse to create this kind of religion existed during this period.

Alongside this impulse to create a Daoist church with Christian institutional forms was the more successful goal of turning Daoism into an object of study. In 1949, Master Juzan, a monk close affiliate of the CCP “launched the slogan ‘academicization’ (*xueshuhua*) as a method for eliminating ‘superstitious’ elements from Buddhism so that Buddhism may adapt itself better to the atheist ideology.”⁴³ This goal was mirrored in the defined objectives of the CTA from 1961 “to study the history of Daoism, publish

⁴¹ See for example, 庞进 “庞进在‘道德龙’文化研讨会上阐述” 庞进的博文 (Jan. 14, 2016). Last Accessed Apr. 18, 2016, at http://blog.voc.com.cn/blog_showone_type_blog_id_962379_p_1.html. See also, “首届白龙国学文化节暨白龙观玄机门、含元坛落成、福祿寿喜四神像开光活动圆满举办” 中国道教协会 (Jan. 3, 2016). Last Accessed Apr. 18, 2016, at <http://www.taoist.org.cn/showInfoContent.do?id=1639&p=%27p%27>.

⁴² Goossaert, *The Taoists of Peking*, 75.

⁴³ Ji Zhe, “Buddhism in the Reform Era,” 38.

journals, and set up training programs for our candidates.”⁴⁴ While Daoism was not recognized by the CCP until 1957 as the last national religious organization, since 1912 Daoists’ goals had shifted substantially and become more academic in nature. But this was not a new movement in Daoism starting in 1961, just the coming to fruition of the vision advanced by other noted reformers of Daoism starting in the New Culture period.

The most celebrated Daoist reformer was Chen Yingning, a highly educated practitioner and student of Daoist alchemical practices. Also seeking to find native solutions to China’s weakness, Chen sought the solution in strengthening the Chinese nation by strengthening Chinese bodies. Many thinkers at the time were taken by Darwinist theories and this fostered an increased interest in physical health. Interestingly, Mao Zedong’s earliest magazine article was advocating a course of national fitness, and arguments against foot binding and opium use in the writings of Yan Fu (1854-1921) were influenced by well-known reformers such as Liang Qichao, Cai E, and Mao Zedong.⁴⁵ Chen Yingning and others similarly advocated Daoist ‘nourishing life’ techniques. In this way, “the Chinese medical tradition was reformulated as part of China’s ‘national essence,’ a priceless gem that, along with calligraphy and art, should be proudly preserved by any self-respecting countryman.”⁴⁶

Chen and others started the promotion of these body cultivation techniques through two widely read magazines, *The Biweekly to Promote the Good* (*Yangshan banyue kan*) and its successor *The Immortals’ Way Monthly* (*xiandao yuebao*), and stripped them of their esoteric language to make them fit within a modern scientific

⁴⁴ Louis Komjathy. *Daoism: a Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 205.

⁴⁵ Liu, *Daoist Modern*, 22-4.

⁴⁶ Goossaert, *Religious Question*, 110.

discourse. As Liu argues, “Chen sought to preserve and continue the Daoist tradition of inner alchemic practice by reformulating it as part of ‘Daoist learning’ (*daojiao zhi xueshu* 道教之学术) closely associated with the now-sanctioned discourse of science,” and utilized a modern *qigong* method to supplement public health methods.⁴⁷ In so doing, he was repositioning the core of the Daoist tradition. As Dean argues, through the Zhengyi sect’s hereditary teaching, “the central beliefs of Taoism are... a set of ‘secret’ methods to assure the efficacy of the ritual.”⁴⁸ Chen de-emphasized this secrecy, calling for all scriptures to be made public and widely publicizing Daoist techniques.⁴⁹ They promoted and theorized the *Qigong* 气功 movement and ‘literati Daoism’ (*wenren daojiao* 文人道教), distancing these practices and teachings from their ritual importance.⁵⁰ All of these reforms are popular today in the writings of the CTA and in their public presentation because these forms of Daoism are appealing to a modern audience.

These modern Daoists were very involved in the same concerns of Chinese cultural identity and sought them in the indigenous Daoist tradition. Chen claimed not just that Daoism was the indigenous religion, but wanted to establish “the school of the Divine Immortals [神仙家] as the origin of all intellectual, cultural, and religious traditions in China,”⁵¹ tracing its lineage back to the Yellow Emperor. Their alchemical practices manipulated the spirit (*shen* 神) and vital force (*qi* 气) and strengthened the Chinese nation by cultivating an authentic Chinese body, making “the Daoist inner alchemic body... the site and conduit for the production of cultural nationalism, and the personal pursuit of

⁴⁷ Liu, *Daoist Modern*, 19-20.

⁴⁸ Liu, *Daoist Modern*, 73-4.

⁴⁹ Liu, *Daoist Modern*, 238.

⁵⁰ Liu, *Daoist Modern*, 7-10.

⁵¹ Liu, *Daoist Modern*, 89.

self-transformation came to be linked with the Republican state's quest for a new citizenship and cultural norms in the 1930s and 1940s."⁵²

While literati Daoists were re-imagining the Daoist alchemical and cultural identity, so too were government officials. In the "Standards for Preserving and Abandoning Gods and Shrines" put out by Xue Dubi of the Ministry of the Interior in late 1928, Xue emphasized the Daoist figures of Yuanshi Tianzun, Taishang Laozun, and Zhang Daoling, but he ignored the scriptural tradition so central to the liturgy and ignored all other divinities in favor of those three historical figures. Further, the Standards advocated True Daoists to "devote themselves to the course of self-improvement outlined in the *Daodejing*, censor anyone who dealt in incantations and charms, and reject the employment of priests at funerals."⁵³ In this way, from the Republican period, "Householding priests, who were the vast majority of the Taoist clergy, were granted no religious status whatsoever, and were stigmatized as promoters of feudal superstition,"⁵⁴ a diminished status that has lasting effects to this day.

The movements taking place from the New Culture period up into the 1940s show how Daoists attempted to modernize Daoism. Literati Daoists were not officially ordained but they studied the teachings made available through magazine publications. They opposed esoteric and superstitious understandings of Daoist teachings, instead choosing to use more scientific understandings to explain the efficacy of Daoist practices. They also attempted to form national organizations in line with the new secular cultural understandings. By studying their tradition as an historical phenomenon discoverable in

⁵² Liu, *Daoist Modern*, 17.

⁵³ Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*, 83.

⁵⁴ Goossaert, *Religious Question*, 159-60.

texts, they fit Daoism within an academic space and de-emphasized secret liturgical traditions that did not accommodate this form of democratization of knowledge. If the tradition fit along these modern lines, they could be a valuable core component of Chinese culture and these features continue in the current revitalization of Daoism today.

Contemporary Daoism as Presented by the CTA

One aspect of modernizing religions in China mentioned earlier, “partifying” (*danghua* 党化), remains important to the CTA. While the requirement of religious organizations to promote socialism, patriotism, and the national ideology was dropped in 2004,⁵⁵ this does not mean that doing so has stopped. This is still something that the national organizations are called to do and one means of maintaining their credibility. The latest version of the CTA charter provided on their website still maintains the language of promoting socialism. It reads in part,

The purposes of this organization are to promote unity, lead all Daoists in the nation to love the country and love the religion, protect the Communist Party’s goals of implementing socialism, obey the national constitution and legal regulations, provide training in the core socialist values, and promote the active adaptation [of Daoism] to socialism.”⁵⁶

Towards this end you see articles in the Chinese Taoist Association’s magazine with titles such as, “All Chinese Taoist Association Education Professionals Study and Discuss General Secretary Hu’s Perspective on Establishing the Socialist Perspective on the Eight Honors and Eight Disgraces”⁵⁷ and “A Discussion of Daoist Culture and the

⁵⁵ James W. Tong, “China’s National and Local Regulations on Religion,” at *Roundtable Before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China: One Hundred Ninth Congress, Second Session*, Hagel, Chuck, et. al. (Washington, DC: US Gov’t Printing Office, Nov. 2007), 12.

⁵⁶ “中国道教协会章程” [Regulations of the Chinese Taoist Association]. Last Accessed Apr. 17th, 2016, at <http://www.taoist.org.cn/getDjzsById.do?id=1653>.

⁵⁷ 尹志华, “中国道协全体教职人员学习座谈会胡总书记关于树立社会主义荣辱观的重要论述” *China Taoism*, vol.2 (2006). Last Accessed April 17th at <http://www.chinataoism.org/showtopic.php?id=9484>.

Construction of the Socialist Harmonious Society,” amongst many others.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the head of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), Wang Zuoan 王作安 often produces articles on Daoism and Socialism and attends events with the CTA, as well as making lengthy statements at various research conferences for Buddhism and Daoism.⁵⁹ This is just to note the primacy of socialism and compliance with the government in legitimating the national religion associations, even if the local associations are not required in all instances to promote socialism or the interests of the Communist Party. Much of the CTA’s regulations center around an emphasis on promoting the legal practices of Daoists around the country and promoting the goals of socialism.

CTA regulations also illustrate well the importance of the term culture in legitimating their activities and the role of this cultural discourse in deconstructing the Daoist tradition into socially appealing components. The third item under their important work and duties includes the goal of “vigorously promoting the outstanding Daoist culture.”⁶⁰ The eighth item calls for the CTA to “develop Daoist cultural art exchange activities, strengthen academic research, compile and publish Daoist research materials, and provide assistance in the protection of Daoist relics, historical sites, and intangible cultural heritage.”⁶¹ Further, in their items advocating their role in strengthening ties

⁵⁸ 胡麻林, “试谈道教文化与构建社会主义和谐社会” *China Taoism*, vol.2 (2006). Last Accessed April 17th at <http://www.chinataoism.org/showtopic.php?id=9502>.

⁵⁹ See 王作安, “论政教关系:坚持政教分离追求政教和谐” in *武当道教*, vol.4 (2015). Last Accessed February 15th at www.taoist.org.cn/showInfoContent.do?id=1689&p=p. See also, 王作安, “王作安局长在‘本焕长老与当代佛教’学术研讨会上的致辞” SARA. (Apr. 12, 2015). Last Accessed Apr. 17, 2016, at <http://sara.gov.cn/ldxx/wza/ldjh/208975.htm>. Also, 王作安, “王作安局长在第四届世界佛教论坛闭幕式上的致辞” SARA. (Oct. 25, 2015). Last Accessed Apr. 17, 2016, at <http://sara.gov.cn/ldxx/wza/ldjh/290809.htm>.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

between the mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and foreign countries, they group these activities under “Daoist cultural exchanges.”⁶²

The aspects of Daoism that they note in their charter are indeed the types of Daoist culture that they promote in wider events and on their website. The most widely publicized event for Chinese Daoism was the International Forum on the *Daodejing*. It lasted for a week in April of 2007 and was touted for its role in promoting the cooperation between the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong.⁶³ It involved many high-level officials and international figures, and in the quotes provided in most articles they advocated Daoism and the *Daodejing* as cultural resources for China and the world. Jia Qinglin, Chairman of the CPPCC National Committee, was quoted as saying, “Daodejing is part of the critical canon in Chinese traditional culture.”⁶⁴ Zhang Jiyu, Vice-Chairman of the CTA, made statements to clear up “misunderstandings” about Daoism and its relation to superstitious activities and argued that, “Its culture belongs to the entire world.... We should be proud of Daodejing and Taoism since it can increase our own cultural self-confidence as a nation.”⁶⁵ Leaders involved in this conference all highlighted the cultural value of Daoism and identified the core of Daoism as a culture of harmony.

As high-profile as this event was and acknowledging its uniquely wide publicity amongst Daoist cultural events, it shares much of the same characteristics with all Daoist cultural events. They stress the textual basis for the tradition and its rich philosophy, its ability to draw upon international groups of Daoists, its value towards promoting peace

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ “The Way to Harmony: International Forum on the *Daodejing*,” *China.org* (Apr. 19, 2007). Last Accessed Feb. 13, 2016, at <http://www.china.org.cn/english/daodejingforum/207901.htm>.

⁶⁴ Zhang Rui, “Grandstanding Taoist Forum Opens,” *China.org* (Apr. 23, 2007). Last Accessed Feb. 13, 2016, at <http://www.china.org.cn/english/daodeforum/208478.htm>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

and environmental awareness, and its colorful cultural components such as music and martial arts. While little is generally written in English about the CTA or Daoism in China generally, what is written highlights these aspects or its charitable given, for instance its donation of 1.1 million yuan in 2010 to the orphaned survivors of an earthquake in SW China.⁶⁶ The CTA also published alongside other Daoist groups the “China Daoist Ecology Protection Eight Year Plan (2010-2017)” in which they provided an outline for their ecological projects that included some quotes from the *Daodejing* to back their program and included plans to utilize most aspects of their teaching, events, and daily life to promote ecological awareness. This included the plan to institute youth camps, prayer, ritual, and story-telling to advance this goal.⁶⁷ Ecological awareness features prominently in the CTA’s media presence.

The CTA promotes stories on its website under its Daoist culture, Daoist lifestyle, and Daoist activities sections that likewise fit into these themes. Headlines include stories on research conferences discussing nurturing life, Daoist roots of Chinese medicine, and scriptures. The other large scale events that attract some international participants but focus primarily on domestic tourism include such components as Taiji, martial arts, music, art, calligraphy, scriptural studies, and the ever-present prayer for world peace.⁶⁸

Another aspect of the CTA website that indicates a secularization and academicization of their presentation are the images selected to show what goes into

⁶⁶ Li Wenjie, “Chinese Taoist Association Donates 1.1 Mln to Earthquake Orphans,” *All China Women’s Federation* (Sept. 21, 2012). Last Accessed Feb. 15, 2016, at <http://www.womenofchina.cn/womenofchina/html1/news/newsmakers/14/51113-1.htm>.

⁶⁷ CTA. “China Daoist Ecology Protection Eight Year Plan (2010-2017).” Last Accessed Apr. 18, 2016, at <http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/Daoist-8YP-English.pdf>.

⁶⁸ All articles found at the CTA website under “Cultural Activities” [文化活劫]. Last Accessed Apr. 18, 2016, at <http://www.taoist.org.cn/showInfoByCategory.do?c=whhd>

living a Daoist life. They include eleven images of “Daoist activities” and, of these, five are in conference rooms, two are award ceremonies on stages, one is a secular music festival, and three are ceremonies for big events such as the ghost festival.⁶⁹ They include twelve images under “Daoist lifestyle” (道门生活) of which three are students writing in classrooms, one is a tree planting activity, two are meditation, two are Taiji, one is scripture copying, one is a graduation ceremony, and two are lineage ceremonies.⁷⁰ These types of activities gain most credence in the online and media presentations of Daoism, but it is important to note what is missing from this presentation.

The Place of Non-Monastic Priests in Online Presentation

As noted above, the CTA is run by the monastic sect of Daoism, Quanzhen. The non-monastic sect, Zhengyi, has seen a diminishing role in the public face of Daoism in China and internationally. In an interview with the CTA and Wudangshan President, Li Guangfu 李光富, it is clear the degree to which the non-monastic monks of the Zhengyi tradition are disenfranchised by the primary status of the Quanzhen sect. The Quanzhen sect had already received privileged status under the Qing Dynasty because their monastic orientation was seen as more pure than the non-monastic monks, but use of the Internet to promote Quanzhen views only strengthens the reach of their bias against non-monastics monks. Li Guangfu’s five criteria for being a true Daoist are (1) Practice in a monastery, (2) Observance of the Monastic Discipline, (3) Study of the Daoist teachings, (4) Honor of the Dao and Respect of its Virtue (尊道贵德), and (5) Spreading Daoism.⁷¹

⁶⁹ “道教活动” 中国道教协会 Last accessed Apr. 18, 2016, at <http://www.taoist.org.cn/showImageByCategory.do?c=djhd>.

⁷⁰ “道门生活” 中国道教协会 Last accessed Apr. 18, 2016, at <http://www.taoist.org.cn/showImageByCategory.do?c=dmsl>.

⁷¹ 杨立刚, “中国道教协会会长、武当山道教协会会长李光富道长” 道教之音 (June 29, 2015). Last Accessed April 17th, 2016 at <http://www.daoisms.org/article/sort010/info-3863.html?from=timeline&isappinstalled=0>.

The first two of these qualifying traits for a true Daoist display an open preference for the Quanzhen style of Daoism. In fact, Li Guangfu addresses the failing of non-monastic Daoists of the Zhengyi tradition, *huoju* 火居, giving them a secondary status and marking their subordination by saying, “Even though Daoism has *huoju* Daoists who don’t leave home, they still have to register their *danwei* at a temple, and they have to practice Daoist meditation at temples.”⁷² This seems to admit non-monastic individuals within the Daoist tradition in a begrudging fashion, always acknowledging them as not truly Daoist.

The registration through temples is a key way in which to distinguish those who are legitimate monks and those who are frauds. The government in 2014 published further means of identifying fake monks and fraudulent Daoism through a searchable website of registered monasteries and temples.⁷³ Illegal activities they highlight are “fortune-telling and the sales of expensive incense and souvenirs.”⁷⁴ In this way, both the leaders of the CTA and the government officials are attempting to purify their tradition, both often using the language of purity and social welfare.⁷⁵

The CTA website includes a document on regulations for these Zhengyi priests. Under its tab for regulations within the CTA, it includes the regulating document amendments from the August 24, 1998, sixth session of the CTA representative conference. First thing to note is that they refer to the Zhengyi priests as “scattered” or

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ See An Baijie, “Religious venues verified to stop illegal Profiteering,” *China Daily USA* (Apr. 18, 2014). Last Accessed Apr. 17, 2016, at http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2014-04/18/content_17445924.htm.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ For one important instance of advocating purity and orthodoxy within a government document that received responses from the CTA see, “国家宗教事务局关于2013年以‘教风’为主题” SARA (June 16, 2014). Last Accessed Apr. 18, 2016 at http://www.sara.gov.cn/ztzz/dejqgcjhxsgjtxjjthxjgrfc/zywj_xjgr/86685.htm. For one response from the CTA using identical language as the SARA regulation seeking orthodoxy and purity, see, 丁常云, “关于新时期道教发展与教风建设的若干思考” 中国道教协会 Last Accessed April 18, 2016, at <http://www.taoist.org.cn/showInfoContent.do?id=301&p=%27p%27>.

“living scattered about” (*sanju* 散居) and they seem to view them as a problem to be dealt with. As part of their management, the CTA includes a list of activities that they cannot undertake, saying, “Spirit-writing, playing a god (跳神), fortune-telling, face-reading, exorcising demons, engaging in *fengshui*, and other such feudal-superstitious activities that harm society and the health of the people must all be prohibited.”⁷⁶ In effort to manage the parts of the Daoist tradition that do not fit modernity, the CTA lists many of the activities that a non-monastic Zhengyi priest or *huoju* might be most likely to participate in within their local community. This is one step that attempts to operate within the present day regulations dictated by the modernist state that takes seriously the distinction between religion and superstition. This does not mean that these very prohibited actions will not or do not continue to be a vital part of the community, it just means that they are not visible to an international audience looking at the activities of ‘true Daoists’ in China.

When the *huoju* appear in articles on the Internet through news outlets, to the extent that they are present at all, they are most often part of music troupes. This fits their acknowledged role in community ritual festivals as entertainers and performers. Yang Der-Ruey, in his study of the traditional skills training for *huoju* Daoist priests, emphasizes the importance of skills in blowing, striking, writing, reciting and singing, setting, arranging, pitching, drawing and coloring. These varied skills should enable them to handle all aspects of performances or opera staging within local ritual.⁷⁷ In Tam Wai

⁷⁶ “关于道教散居正一派道士管理暂行办法” 中国道教协会 (Aug. 24, 1998). Last Accessed Apr. 18, 2016, at <http://www.taoist.org.cn/getDjzsById.do?id=65>.

⁷⁷ Yang Der-Ruey, “From ritual skills to discursive knowledge: changing styles of Daoist transmission in Shanghai,” *Religion in Contemporary China*, ed. Adam Yuet Chau (New York: Rutledge, 2011), 87.

Lun's fieldwork he shows the importance of music and entertainment in the repertoire of these Daoist priests, saying,

At night the Daoists performed comedies by making fun of some religious terms and ritual instruments first, and then afterward explaining their meaning to the laughing audience. This obviously had a religious educational value. The Daoists used a moon-block frequently to check that everything they did was done correctly.⁷⁸

This religious value and ritual centered entertainment is the traditional role of these priests in the communities and within the religious revival in China they are once again occupying this role. For the purposes of this paper, the disparity between this active and lively ritual function of priests and the secular presentation given through cultural articles on websites indicates the re-orientation of these skills within the discursive safe-space of culture in contemporary China.

Searching for articles publicizing the activities of *huoju* for a national audience turns up very little. The articles I found include one on the basics of these Daoist priests in encyclopedic fashion, linking them to primitive practices and rhetorically distancing them from present significance,⁷⁹ the aforementioned interview where the Quanzhen leader of the CTA de-values their place in Daoism, and the remaining articles highlight their musical performances or clothing.⁸⁰ Very little in these articles indicates their continued relevance to village life or their positive value in contemporary life.

⁷⁸ Tam Wai Lun, "Local Religion," 76.

⁷⁹ 刘智杰, "试探火居道士仪式与传播" 道教之音(Apr. 6, 2016). Last Accessed Apr. 18, 2016, at <http://www.daoisms.org/article/zatan/info-22305.html>.

⁸⁰ 佚名, "斋醮科仪音乐: 海南道教文化之奇葩" 道教之音(Nov. 19, 2015). Last Accessed Apr. 18, 2016, at <http://www.daoisms.org/musice/info-19916.html>. See also 于长军, "吴信玄道长《道教义理在仪式中的运用和体现》讲座实录" 道教之音(March 19, 2011). Last Accessed Apr. 18, 2016, at <http://www.daoisms.org/article/lundao/info-2857.html>. Also, 李华涛, "浅谈武当山道教音乐(6)," 道教之音(Jan. 9, 2013). Last Accessed Apr. 18, 2016, at http://www.daoisms.org/musice/info-8030_6.html.

The CTA website has articles on music performances included as parts of their section on Daoist culture. However, much like what one might find in a newspaper, the music skills that were previously linked to traditional ritual songs and skills, are always depicted as part of larger competitions of various music troupes or colleges and done in concert halls.⁸¹ Notably absent is any indication that today these priests are playing music for the purposes of religious education or for ritual observance. In the presentations for a wider national audience, these priests are valued for their cultural skills divested of ritual or religious significance. Because this contrasts with their historical role and with the data obtained by ethnographers in Southeast China, this shift in emphasis and presentation style by the media shows a significant impact of the cultural discourse in China. It shows one more way in which Daoist practices or skills are repackaged for an audience in a way that is non-threatening, non-superstitious, and non-religious.

Daoist Summer Camps

One important avenue that Daoists in China are pursuing in effort to revitalize the tradition is the organization of Dao culture summer camps. While they are fairly recent in origin, with the first nationally organized camp starting in 2014, they show one more way that the language of culture provides a safe space for a form of Daoism appropriate on the national and international stage. In one article published about the most recent Daoist summer camp, the article provided two images of young participants, one of them engaging in Taiji and another of them marching in a line across the grounds behind Daoist masters. In what they bill as a “One Week Dao Culture Summer Camp”

⁸¹ 余墨, “上海城隍庙道乐团参加第十一届‘长三角’民族乐团展演” 中国道教协会 (Dec. 13, 2015). Last Accessed Apr. 18, 2016, at <http://www.taoist.org.cn/showInfoContent.do?id=1585&p=%27p%27>. See also, “澳门道教协会乐团受邀举办演奏会庆回归” 中国道教协会 (Dec. 19, 2015). Last Accessed Apr. 18, 2016, at <http://www.taoist.org.cn/showInfoContent.do?id=1599&p=%27p%27>.

(一周道文化夏令营), they list the activities provided for the students and describe the schedule of a typical day. The participants learn about the traditional instruments the *guqin* and the *guzheng*, tea culture, Dao culture general knowledge (道文化常识), Daoist medicine, cultivating life meditation, Taiji, and scripture copying and recitation, as well as having a campfire talk and some outings.⁸² In this way the article shows the way in which Daoist culture can be disassembled and utilized in ways that are almost entirely secular, teaching components that belong to a larger Chinese traditional culture.

The article also takes you through a typical day at the summer camp. Some of the activities are particular to the Daoist tradition and have an ostensibly religious purpose, such as the early morning scriptural recitations and a prayer for national peace. Just as the larger national conferences or ceremonies all include a prayer for world peace, these are activities that seem to rely upon some religious beliefs, but are easily appreciated by those who do not hold beliefs because most people would not object to the sentiment of world peace. Further, while they are reciting scriptures, the only scripture mentioned by name in the article is the *Daodejing* which is the most widely known and respected text within the Daoist canon, giving it the widest possible appeal. When they had four children reciting the *Daodejing* in traditional Han garb after a *guqin* and a *guzheng* performance, these presentations were described as the first class in traditional culture. Indeed, all of these activities had the purpose of letting participants “experience for themselves the typical daily life in a Daoist monastery, learn about Dao culture, and understand Dao culture.”⁸³ The author further asserts this connection between Daoism

⁸² “青年学子在天静宫体味道文化” 中国道教协会 Last Accessed Apr. 18, 2016, at <http://www.taoist.org.cn/showInfoContent.do?id=1318&p=%27p%27>.

⁸³ Ibid.

and traditional culture by saying, “When we are discussing the promotion and spread of traditional culture, we first need to re-introduce ourselves to it.”⁸⁴ These culture camps are in part an introduction to Dao culture and at least equally a re-introduction to aspects of traditional culture.

In most instances above I have translated the term *dao wenhua* 道文化 as “Dao culture” rather than Daoist culture. This is in effort to acknowledge the language game that the Daoist leaders and organizers of these camps are themselves playing. In an article published in *Hong Dao* 弘道 Magazine in 2014, they include an article in question and answer format in order to properly communicate the cultural rather than religious nature of these camps. The first question addresses this very distinction, asking, “Why is this camp called Dao culture camp (*dao wenhua xialingying* 道文化夏令营) and not Daoist culture camp (*daojiao wenhua xialingying* 道教文化夏令营)?” The response is, in part, “Historically Dao came first, then Daoism. The Dao and aspects of this culture are the root and mainstream of Chinese culture. If you really want to understand, you need the whole spectrum, not just the religion. So this summer camp uses the Daoist grounds as a means of spreading the best of traditional Chinese culture.”⁸⁵ Thus, from the start the author is uniting a select part of the Daoist tradition with the core of Chinese culture and advocating an emphasis on aspects that can stand separate from the religious aspects.

The next question asks, “If it isn’t a religious activity, just a cultural event, why is it done with these religious people in this religious place? How can it still just be a cultural event?” The author, He Jianming, responds in part by saying,

The core of religion is culture. According to the laws of China, religious rituals and activities based on beliefs are not appropriate for youth in

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ 何建明, “全國首屆道文化青年夏令營” 弘道, vol. 61 no. 4 (2014), 28-9. Hereafter, 何建明, “道文化青年”

college (or before), but we can do cultural activities in accordance with Chinese law. At the summer camp, participants absolutely will not be required to kneel or worship before Daoist deities, become believers in Daoism, or leave home to become Daoist monks/nuns. We just want to allow them to personally practice and experience splendid and treasured parts of our treasure trove of traditional culture.⁸⁶

This response undoubtedly is referencing the well-established understanding of freedom of religion in China which preferences the freedom from religion, as was reaffirmed in the legal regulations laid out in the 2004, article 2.⁸⁷ In response to the question of how youth participants are to interact with religion and religious personnel, the author can delineate the boundaries within which non-believing youth can legally interact with Daoist culture and feel safe from pressure towards any belief. The key to this renewed contact and outreach by the Daoists is the safe space of culture, but here it is clear that the doorway into Daoism is guarded against purely religious proselytizing or coercion. The question He Jianming poses, after noting the vastly greater popularity of Confucian learning these days compared to Daoist learning, is if we don't have knowledge of Daoism, "how can we possibly say we have truly passed on Chinese traditional culture?"⁸⁸

Acknowledging the complicated nature of Daoism in modern China as dictated by the discourse of religion and superstition, the author addresses the problem of the superstitious practices within Daoism. The question posed in the magazine is, "When we experience Daoist culture it really seems unique and special, but we see Daoists doing fortune telling, divination, fengshui, acting like gods and ghosts, and this seems too superstitious, to the point that society has a strange impression of Daoism and Daoists.

⁸⁶ 何建明, "道文化青年," 29.

⁸⁷ "Regulations on Religious Affairs," SARA (Nov. 30, 2004). Last Accessed April 18, 2016, at <http://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?lib=law&id=3862&CGid=>.

⁸⁸ 何建明, "道文化青年," 29-30.

How do you resolve this problem?” The author does what other Daoist leaders do in other places and argues that historical development has polluted the tradition with practices unsuitable to the present times. He argues that,

During its history, development and transformation, it adapted to various times and not everything was for every time, and some of the things just suited one period’s society, people, beliefs, and needs. This has led it to have great aspects but also some unsuitable aspects.... But all the things we teach as part of Daoist culture are the things that are suitable for all times and all peoples.⁸⁹

This argument from historical particularity allows one to argue, in the Chinese idiom utilized by the author, that the fish and the dragons have mixed together (*yu long hunza* 鱼龙混杂), and, in an English idiom, not throw out the baby with the bathwater. But more than this, his response carries with it the notion of a modern world religion that has teachings valid for any place and any people at any time. It is particularly interesting that He references questionnaires given to participants in previous sessions, saying, “Questionnaires from participants in three previous camps indicate that they were very opposed to these practices, and even advocated these as areas needing reform.”⁹⁰ The reforms on the Daoist tradition reflect the interests of the new generation and the leaders of the camp are listening to their concerns in efforts to reform. These practices, once quite central to the Daoist tradition and the Zhengyi sect in particular, are now relegated to the past as tertiary aspects of a pure tradition.

Conclusion

The Religious Revival that has been happening in China in the post-Mao years relies upon a new discursive safe-space centered around the idea of culture. This is clear

⁸⁹ 何建明, “道文化青年,” 31.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

from almost any article one reads on the CTA's website and the ubiquitous use of the term throughout all publicized Daoist events. From the charter of the CTA to the construction of its web content to the international activities it carries out, all utilize the idea of traditional culture or an appealing idea of harmonious Daoist culture. Two results of this discourse for the current Daoist tradition in China that I have highlighted are the deconstruction of the tradition into components appealing to the wider society and stripped of any overt religious content, and the relegation of the Zhengyi sect's non-monastic Daoists to near invisibility in the outward presentation of Daoism. The interaction of Daoist priests with popular religious practices is almost entirely absent, despite the importance of the cultural discourse in allowing these local religious activities to resume after the Cultural Revolution. While the term is useful on both the local and the national levels to allow most religious activities to resume that were once prohibited, the pervasive ideas of modernity about universality of religious messages and disavowal of superstitious acts in favor of rational or philosophical values has meant that the official presentation of Daoism as traditional culture has involved a virtual disappearance of ritual activities for the national or international audience.

In the case of Daoists in contemporary China, they have made many arguments attempting to equate Daoist culture with traditional Chinese culture. They have argued that Daoism is the root of Chinese culture, that you could not understand Chinese culture without understanding Daoism, and that the wonderful components of Chinese culture from the *guzheng* to calligraphy to medicine and Taiji all belong fundamentally to the Daoist tradition. In some instances they have successfully promoted themselves as arbiters of traditional Chinese culture, such as in the International Forum on the

Daodejing and in tourism activities at various temples. In the following section we will examine the place of various religious traditions in another international presentation of traditional Chinese culture, that which is constructed by the Confucius Institute abroad.

CHAPTER 4: CULTURE IN THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE

Introduction

In the cultural revival in China, as seen in the previous chapter, many of the cultural institutions linking China to the international community are linked to religious revitalization. Temple reconstruction draws upon investment from diasporic Chinese communities, temples function as tourist attractions, and religious groups organize conferences on their traditions and texts. While local communities and religious organizations function within the cultural discourse in these ways to foster an international image for China, the Chinese national government also seeks to formulate its own cultural presentations to an international audience through the use of government sponsored institutes of Chinese language and culture: Confucius Institutes (CIs). Acknowledging that religion is a difficult component of the modern Chinese cultural identity and also that it is often the subject of suspicion in the modern political arena, I seek in this chapter to identify the role religious traditions play in presenting Chinese culture in the work of the Confucius Institutes.

In order to understand how the Confucius Institute constructs a Chinese cultural identity and the place of religion within this identity, I will examine some official presentations organized by the CI and also the way teachers construct this identity through their lessons. Through these presentations I argue that, from the perspective of CI teachers and staff, religion as a Chinese cultural component requires too much explanation and involves too much risk of misunderstanding to be useful in Confucius Institute programming directed at language learners and new learners of Chinese culture. Further, it appears that the cultural revival in China does not make these religious traditions more suitable in the minds of the young teachers for inclusion in Chinese

culture or presentations thereof. Three primary factors influence the negotiations of cultural components, namely, historical importance, contemporary relevance, and foreign interest or knowledge. Due to religion's difficult place in modernity and the potential for misunderstandings from foreigners, teachers do not incorporate religion in the classroom. Thus, even if traditional ideas from Confucianism or Daoism are often seen as the core of Chinese culture, they are only presented as symbols or passed over completely in favor of the straightforward, uncontested cultural products such as food, music, and traditional clothing.

Methods and Structure of Study

This chapter is based on interviews and field observation conducted between September of 2015 and April of 2016. I conducted twenty-four interviews with thirteen CI teachers and staff, one Chinese language teacher outside of the CI at a US university, two university directors related to the CI, two Chinese exchange students, and three American students with varying interactions with the CI. Two interviews were group interviews conducted in person, the remainder were conducted either via video chat with teachers located in various schools around the US or in person with teachers in the Southern United States. Teachers were almost all instructors of beginning Chinese and all instructed outside of the university context, either teaching community members or K-12 students. This reflects a move within the US to keep CI instruction outside of universities for reasons that will be discussed below.

Interviews were semi-structured, starting with initial questions on teacher experiences with the CI and their understandings of Chinese culture and cultural instruction. In a secondary round of questions I structured responses around a selection of

fourteen images intended to depict a variety of Chinese cultural forms. These images included what could be considered uncontroversial, simple cultural images such as Chinese food or the Great Wall, and more complicated images of religious symbols or religious activities within China. This technique was used in an attempt to elicit longer responses during interviews with more in-depth discussion of the subject matter, following the work using photo elicitation discussed by Jeffrey Samuels. I had interviewees rank the images into three categories: very important, somewhat important, and not important, and then had them explain their ranking. I will attach point values to these rankings of 10, 5, and 0 respectively and compare their average ratings in the discussion. Nine teachers were shown these images, which can be seen in order in the appendix.

In addition to these formal interviews, I also attended various cultural events put on by the CI and other Chinese cultural organizations on US college campuses and in communities in the Southern United States. Additional informal conversations with CI teachers and the author's own experience on a CI cultural exchange trip in the Summer of 2015 inform the discussion. Responses were in both Chinese and English depending on the comfort of the respondent. Translated responses, all the author's own, will be indicated by italics.

All of the interviews will be discussed in reference to the larger scholarly conversation on CI activities around the globe and compared with official CI presentations. There are obvious limitations to the scope of this study, given the limited interactions and time period under discussion. However, I think these initial inquiries into the actual cultural understandings of those attempting to share and construct a Chinese

cultural presentation to a foreign audience is necessary and beneficial to understanding the actions of Chinese teachers sent out by the Chinese government.

CI Background and Scholarship

The first official CI was opened in Seoul, South Korea, in 2004 and since this first CI, the expansion of CIs around the world has been unprecedented. The activities of the CI include language instruction and community engagement centered around two kinds of locations, CIs on university campuses and CIs are established on university campuses and Confucius Classrooms located in K-12 schools or other community locations. As of 2012, there were 322 CIs and 369 Confucius Classrooms operating in 96 countries, with 81 CIs and 299 Confucius Classrooms in 48 states in the US alone.¹ According to a 2015 Annual Report, that number had increased to more than 495 CIs around the world and 109 in North America, showing their ambitious and rapid expansion.² Within the state of Kentucky, their 2015 Annual Report highlights that from 2010 to 2016 they went from 11 to 47 Hanban teachers for an increase of 327 percent, from 4 to 21 school districts for an increase of 425 increase, and from 1600 to 13580 students for an increase of 748 percent.³

The most useful and appropriate understanding of CIs is as a form of ‘cultural diplomacy,’ a subfield of ‘public diplomacy.’ As noted by Kwan, “Public diplomacy is defined as a nation's effort to influence the actions of a foreign government through influencing the attitudes of its citizens... Furthermore, a country may resort to its arts and culture to make a positive impression upon a foreign population as a strategy of public

¹ Chi-Cheung Leung and Hilary du Cros. “Confucius Institutes: Multiple Reactions and Interactions,” *China: an International Journal*, vol.12 no.2 (Aug. 2014), 73, 77.

² WKU *Confucius Institute Annual Report*, (2015), 2.

³ WKU *Confucius Institute Annual Report*, (2015), 2-3.

diplomacy. This is known as cultural diplomacy...⁴ Culture in this form is a national commodity which can be packaged and presented to other populations to produce appealing impressions and sway opinions of the country as a whole. Because the government sends out cultural representatives, scholars assume the values the CI promotes are those that the government wants promoted. However, the term ‘cultural diplomacy’ is broad enough to encompass things from arts to political propaganda, meaning that these institutes may contain political propaganda but not of necessity.⁵ This breadth of content creates possibilities for misunderstandings, and if the spreading of culture is seen as forceful, it can be termed cultural hegemony, cultural imperialism, or cultural colonialism.⁶ Some claim that the initiation of an application by the hosting university shows that it is not China promoting or actively pushing itself on others, but rather the Chinese government responding to an organic desire in countries around the world for Chinese language training and program funding.⁷

There is some survey indication of success at producing positive impressions of China,⁸ but most scholars note the failure to sway a foreign public on a “values level,”⁹

⁴ Kwan, “Cultural Diplomacy,” 111.

⁵ These are government forms of ‘soft power’ which Joseph Nye Jr. introduced in *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

⁶ Ding, “Talking up China,” 6. Mao Zedong held this understanding and, for example, in 1939 Yanan, Mao and others claimed, “The Imperialist Powers have never slackened their efforts to poison the minds of the Chinese people. This is their policy of cultural aggression. And it is carried out through missionary work, through establishing hospitals and schools, publishing newspapers and inducing Chinese students to study abroad.” Marsh, *Religion and the State*, 166. For some support for Mao’s claims, see Schmidt, “Democracy for China,” 1–28.

⁷ Kwan, “Cultural Diplomacy,” 114.

⁸ Christopher R. Hughes, “Confucius Institutes and the University: Distinguishing the Political Mission from the Cultural,” *Issues & Studies*, vol.50 no.4 (Dec. 2014), 71.

⁹ Hughes, “Confucius Institutes and the University,” 50, 57. Ding, “Talking up China,” 28. Randolph Kluver. “The Sage as Strategy: Nodes, Networks, and the Quest for Geopolitical Power in the Confucius Institute,” *Communication, Culture, and Critique*, vol.7 (2014), 201. Leung, “Confucius Institute: Multiple,” 82.

referring to political values and assuming that Chinese values are distinct from the values of the host country. This assumption that the Chinese government is a source of threatening values and is attempting to infiltrate institutions in host countries to change their feelings away from democratic and free forms of government is central to most studies on the institute and needs to be challenged.

The two central controversies of the CIs in the US are their location and educational content. Unlike other cultural institutes, CIs are installed on college campuses rather than in off-campus or community buildings. Scholars perceive this as a threat to the values of the modern university, namely free and unhindered inquiry on all subjects, because the Chinese government's contract may infringe upon the free inquiry into subjects deemed politically sensitive. Indeed, there have been a few widely publicized instances where this does seem to be the case, regarding inquiry into the topics of Taiwan and Tibet,¹⁰ and respondents in other studies have noted self-censorship.¹¹

Hughes best articulates these two concerns about the conflict of a university ethic and the Chinese government. He says, "The question of which values are being promoted by the CIs is what is important for universities in democratic societies,"¹² and ties Chinese cultural education back to Chairman Mao's views on the use of the arts to promote socialism. Hughes quotes current Chinese President Xi Jinping calling on teachers and officials to "implement the Party's literature and art principles and policies well, and grasp the correct orientation of literature and art development."¹³ This means for Hughes that the use of cultural products is employed to promote a single party and an

¹⁰ Hughes, "Confucius Institutes and the University," 72-3.

¹¹ Hartig, "Confucius Institutes and the Rise of China," 66-7.

¹² Hughes, "Confucius Institutes and the University," 57.

¹³ Hughes, "Confucius Institutes and the University," 53.

anti-democratic interest, as that describes the political status of China at present. It certainly indicates that party officials still view the instilling of values and manipulation of culture for its own citizens as a central goal of governing their nation, something discussed above as central to all nations. He does not see it as a benign fact that “three of the sixteen members of the Hanban’s governing Council are also members of the CCP Central Committee.”¹⁴ Further, “Like Chinese universities, the CIs operate under the higher education law that is designed to serve the Chinese Communist Party by promoting ‘socialist material and spiritual civilization’ and upholding the ideological orthodoxy of ‘Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory.’”¹⁵

This push for a “socialist culture” or “socialist values” in education and cultural programs inside China may or may not apply to the CIs. The educational goals and ideas of culture need not be identical for a domestic and a foreign audience. However, Nguyen, quoting a People’s Daily article from November 2012, sees evidence that in the Chinese state media, culture is explicitly tied to socialism and that this is intended for the CIs as well when the author emphasizes “the importance of the Confucius Institute as an instrument to bring the Chinese communist cultural values to the world.”¹⁶ Xu Lin, the Hanban General Director remarked at the opening of a CI in Vietnam that it was a “golden opportunity, not only a symbol of friendship but also a landmark of strengthened ties between the communist parties in both countries.”¹⁷ From this it seems that, on the

¹⁴ Hughes, “Confucius Institutes and the University,” 60. Accurate as of Dec. 2012.

¹⁵ Hughes, “Confucius Institutes and the University,” 59. He also notes the laws restricting teachers to be practitioners of Falun Gong, advocating against party interests, or the laws of China (58). It is puzzling how the education law could uphold all three of those thinkers, but the coherence of that doctrine is beyond the scope of this paper.

¹⁶ Nguyen, “Confucius Institutes in the Mekong,” 86-7.

¹⁷ Nguyen, “Confucius Institutes in the Mekong,” 95.

official level, many Chinese leaders do view their cultural presentation through the CI as tied to their politics and understand culture in China today as linked to communism or socialism.

The 2015 Annual Report for Western Kentucky University (WKU) illustrates how the directors of the CI are aware of the controversy. Not only was concern over controversy apparent during many of the initial interviews with program directors that I conducted, in their training session in 2015 for program directors they included three items, the second of which was “How to Deal with Negative Publicity.”¹⁸ In response, Ms. Bo Li, the Chinese Director from North China Electric Power University in Beijing, said,

One of the tones that must be established is that the CI program is not an ‘Academic Unit,’ and does not set curriculum, recruit students, or hire faculty. The CI program is only a feeder program into these Chinese/Asian studies programs on campus.... As with any good intention, there will be unintended consequences. Everyone is not going to buy into the programs’ mission, and will continue to look at the program as Chinese propaganda, a take-over, or soft power.... [N]ot speaking with the journalist, and not being transparent, will send the message that the CI is hiding something, and that there is something more going on. However, in doing so, one must be strategic about what is said, how it is said, and ensure that what is being presented is exactly what the CI wants shared.¹⁹

Image is very important for the CI and directors are aware that they face suspicions from host universities. But evident in these comments is that they are carefully crafting their presentation of the Institutes and it makes sense to assume that they also carefully craft their cultural presentations to avoid these fears of socialist propaganda in the host community. Creating and emphasizing a separation from direct university involvement is

¹⁸ WKU *Confucius Institute Annual Report*, (2015), 24.

¹⁹ WKU *Confucius Institute Annual Report*, (2015), 25.

one way to avoid criticisms like those of Hughes above, but transparency is their main strategy, assuming that all their activities and messages fit into a well crafted message.

The effort to separate culture and politics is not just a concern of the Chinese officials, but also of leaders in the host universities. During a training event I attended for CI teachers in 2015, Gary Ransdell, WKU President, made opening remarks and in them he brought up the issue of politics in an effort to create a space between politics and culture. He said that both sides of the partnership should create a space between the politics, the people, and the relationship between the two countries and cultures. Ultimately he was acknowledging that politics was a non-starter based upon the issues noted above, but you don't have to embrace the politics in order to want this relationship and have mutual respect. It is this negotiation between different problematic spaces that seemingly must occur for these cultural exchanges to take place.

Noting these negotiations, while culture may be defined as "socialist" in some sense on an official level, this does not mean that instructors see it that way, nor does it reflect the understandings of the foreign audience. While there is much to be praised about the concerns scholars are raising, my interviews with teachers and participation in various CI hosted events indicates that they are connected to "socialist culture" in only the most accidental way, namely connection to the Chinese state. Their espoused desire for transparency towards a well crafted message means that all they teach is meant to be made visible to the foreign audience and to be appealing. While other institutes, such as the Goethe Institute, may have explicitly political missions, Chinese culture from the CIs

is as explicitly apolitical as possible.²⁰ In what follows I will examine what teachers and recipients of Chinese culture understand by their use of the term and their rationale for the items they include in a presentation thereof.²¹ My focus is on religion's presence or absence from these presentations and the rationale for its place inside these cultural presentations. This will move the focus away from discussion of socialism and into the assumptions of modernity more broadly made by teachers when presenting an image that a foreign audience will appreciate and presenting China as a modern state, not a communist state.

Goals and Dynamics of Cultural Education

Much of the dynamics of the cultural revival discussed in the previous chapter function primarily within the Chinese nation for the purposes of legitimizing a traditional cultural identity amongst fellow Chinese. The CI utilizes the same discourse but, in

²⁰ The Goethe Institute's mission, as defined by the German Federal Foreign Office, is explicitly 'political' in that it seeks to make "a contribution to crises prevention, protection of human rights and democracy promotion." Quoted in Hartig, "Confucius Institutes and the Rise of China," 69.

²¹ While not the central purpose of this chapter, I do feel the need to make some observations of this line of thinking that the CIs are attempting to promote socialism or undemocratic political perspectives. My primary concern with this line of thinking is that it does not match the goals of cultural diplomacy, namely to present a product appealing to the foreign audience. If one went into a democratic, capitalist nation and sought to gain appeal by arguing against these values, this strikes me as counter-productive. Secondly, even if we admit that CIs are politically and economically beneficial to China, as they are surely intended to be, this hardly equates to advancing a political theory, least of all a socialist one. Finally, my interviews and personal experiences on a trip with the CI to Beijing in 2015 indicate that teachers and students, if they are supposed to uphold the values discussed above, are failing to do so. Using an image of a Mao Zedong statue to elicit responses from interviewees as a means of positioning socialism within the culture (though clearly a limited method), showed that teachers were extremely reluctant to identify with the first Communist leader of China. One cultural event organizer, Pam, paused for 18 seconds before uttering a word, and Chrystal, a CI teacher and director of cultural activities, said, "*He isn't culture, and what's more his culture is bad* (chuckles). *The Cultural Revolution was bad... For China it is a disaster.*" When confronted with the image of Mao Zedong's statue, all teachers were surprised by his appearance in the interview and struggled to fit him within the context of Chinese culture. Another respondent who had lived through the cultural revolution freely discussed the issues of Mao, but also recent figures and the failings of the party on the local level throughout its tenure. In private conversations, multiple respondents mentioned the desire for democracy and concerns about recent political trends. I did find evidence of self-censorship of political criticism in an official context, which supports some concerns about academic freedom, but discussing the effectiveness or even applicability of Chinese culture as 'socialist culture' seems inappropriate.

employing the cultural discourse in foreign communities, has different goals. Rather than the revival of traditions in a place where they once thrived, CI administrators and teachers are introducing aspects of Chinese culture in communities that have never had them before. The goals belong much more straightforwardly to the realm of cultural diplomacy. Chinese teachers imagined their typical audience to which they would present Chinese culture and this audience's perceived concerns. This audience determined the culture taught. For the interviews, I served as a representation of this audience as a white, American male, but would also often be contrasted with the imagined standard audience because of my perceived background knowledge.

The teachers expressed a nationalistic love of China that they hoped would be spread to Americans. They wanted to show something that would interest students and foster affection or love for China. But this was always played against the idea that Americans had either little idea about China or only negative misunderstandings. Representative understandings of their audience, either their young students or the wider community, can be seen from some standard responses. Pam remarked, "*But if you go to a small school in Kentucky, they only know 'China,' they don't know China anything...*" Chrystal put her hopes and goals for culture lessons this way:

I hope that Americans can learn more about China. You know, some Americans or some, you know, students... they have some misunderstandings... *Some things they don't know about, don't understand about China. This is common, ... And because China actually has a lot of culture, and really excellent culture, then in my teaching...some traditional culture, foreigners... maybe they just know a little, they only know a little but they don't know the meaning. I hope... We are original Chinese. I hope that when we come here we broadcast Chinese and Chinese culture, they understand deep... deeply (laughter).*

It's hard to say how effective they are at communicating this meaning, but the teachers and administrators put a lot of weight on the ability of an 'original' or 'authentic' Chinese person to simply convey the culture through their presence. Their teaching fosters love of the culture and country while combating misunderstandings by providing education that hopefully gives students a deep cultural understanding. The misunderstandings about traditional culture are attributed to lack of awareness and thus all that students need is some exposure and this should give them a proper understanding of what Chinese culture means.

Teachers would often assert the greater importance of teaching about modern China and a greater concern over misunderstandings about modern China, possibly due to media presentations.²² They wanted to assert a distinction between traditional Chinese culture and modern China, mapping well onto the cultural imaginings discussed in chapter two. In a significant sense, Chinese culture was modern and learning about the traditional things that the CI organized would not give a true understanding of Chinese culture. However, due to the perceived foreign interest in ancient Chinese culture and the inability to make Americans understand modern life in China without a direct encounter, they often chose to teach the traditional components. When asked about whether to teach modern or traditional culture, responses often looked like Jessica's, a CI high school teacher:

I think it's modern China, it's not ancient China. Yes, and the people, the living way. And now China... it's not old, it's not old country. It's also a very new country, I mean it's uh, economy and people, and it's different,

²² This concern over media bias is supported by other scholars, for instance, Hartig, "Confucius Institutes and the Rise of China," 71. Jeffrey Gil. "China's Cultural Projection: a Discussion of the Confucius Institutes," *China: an International Journal*, vol.13 no.1 (Apr. 2015): 217. Zhao Yanjun. "Toward International Harmony: the Role of Confucius Institutes in China's Soft Power Effort," *China Media Research*, vol.10 no.1 (2014): 25.

totally different from ancient China. And some people their understanding, or they know something about China, only know something about ancient China (laugh), or the Qin dynasty, not the modern China.

These responses indicate that the traditional culture is not actually seen as part of modern day China, or at least is being kept separate, replaced by the notion of a mostly singular, global culture. This response from Abby, a CI language teacher to elementary and middle school students, further gets at the dilemma of teaching Chinese culture which is now fully modern and to which traditional culture has little importance:

If you really want to know a country's people, you need to know their normal life. All of this stuff is pretty far from regular life (gesturing at traditional costumes and cultural props). I'm not saying they aren't important, just that for me I think... not sure how to put it... Of course when you are abroad and putting on a display of the culture this stuff is a very good choice, but if you want to really learn about a people group or country, more important is what's in their daily life... If you don't go learn about this, you won't understand...²³

The Chinese teachers and program organizers seek out those aspects that are most 'authentic' to attract the students, playing up the difference between the two groups. A lot is dependent upon the assumptions that the recipient culture is interested in the traditional, historical, and dramatically different aspects of Chinese culture, which some Chinese instructors admit does not constitute actual cultural understanding until students go and experience the daily life in China. But already evident here and repeated throughout my interviews is the idea that very little of the historical traditions or cultural commodities in China are present or relevant in contemporary China.

The Culture They Present

²³ Abby, CI teacher and cultural activity organizer. Regarding Chinese costumes and relevance to contemporary life, this was also supported by Pam and Sarah, a cultural activity organizer, during photo elicitation.

CI culture presentations come in a variety of different forms, including classroom activities, community events, and CI spaces on campuses. In the negotiation of the modern and the traditional, all of these forms present different possibilities and focuses. Looking first at the official spaces, each CI has its own focus but all seek to spread language and cultural instruction in a way that leaves a positive impression of China and its culture. This is done through crafting events and spaces to present this culture, all approved from the top down. WKU has a typical CI space where a visitor can see contents described as “the gems of Chinese culture” consisting of “Chinese artifacts and folk arts,” such as Chinese traditional dress, instrument displays, tea kettles, etc. In addition, the WKU CI has seven touch screen videos “highlighting Ancient Chinese Science & Technology, Chinese Characters, Famous Philosophers, Paper Cutting, Chinese Musical Instruments, King Fu (sic), and Chinese Cities.”²⁴ These videos or interactive displays are quite well produced and illustrate some themes in their presentation. They stress the traditional and show many benign cultural products such as paper cuts and music. When presenting pieces of their ancient thought they attempt to demonstrate its value in today’s world, interpreting components of ancient thought as scientific or philosophical in ways that share great affinity with the National Essence thinkers. The philosophers presented are Confucius, Zhuangzi, and Laozi, all potentially linked to a religious tradition, but all reduced to one sentence of insight on four topics: career, love, study, and friends. Seeing them as philosophers with one sentence to say on these general topics gives one the impression that they have nothing to do with religion or divinity whatsoever, which perhaps is the intention of the CI program coordinators. The

²⁴ WKU *Confucius Institute Annual Report*, (2015), 11.

stress put on the secular and the modern in these presentations of the ancient and potentially religious resonate with the strategies used by the Daoist tradition in China shown in the previous chapter.

The main programming for the CI outside of language instruction consists in community events where they teach about one topic or bring in art troupes. Visiting any website for a CI will link you to their activities in various Chinese or international festivals held in local communities around America. They put up booths typically containing some combination of “calligraphy, chopsticks demonstrations, fan painting, fan dancing, language table, traditional Chinese musical instruments, and more.”²⁵ Given that their presentation of China may be the only one that the community sees, the items they highlight are significant, and their presentations often argue for being both authoritative and all encompassing.

I attended the Bowling Green International Festival in both 2014 and 2015. This festival’s primary mission is “to promote appreciation of the various international cultures and people within our own community.”²⁶ Different communities could present themselves in different ways. I saw foods for sale, booths selling handicrafts, organizations such as the WKU Chinese Culture Club selling kitsch and promotional items, games, and other more political displays. The Burmese and the Irish displays presented themselves with politics at the center. In contrast, the CI display did not have kitsch, it did not have modern foods or candies, and it had no discussion of the complexities of politics or ethnicity in the country. While the Burmese display highlighted their different ethnic makeup, the CI display gave no indication of the various

²⁵ WKU *Confucius Institute Annual Report*, (2015), 19.

²⁶ Last accessed on April 7th, 2016 at <http://bginternationalfest.com/about/index.html>.

ethnic groups in China. All items were historical artifacts of the Han high-culture, given minimal if any context, and presented in an uncomplicated manner as a given and embodiment of what Chinese culture is. Other Chinese booths presented some modern things or games or some politics, but the CI stayed clear of this.

The CI booths also did not present historical background or discussion, instead favoring the interaction with cultural artifacts devoid of context. While CI spaces may present some form of philosophy or background knowledge, booths at community festivals did not include this. People could touch the objects of history and play games and produce their own artifacts, but there was no in depth discussion of either traditional or modern China. I had some discussions of modern culture with various teachers volunteering, but these were possibilities opened up by my having already been to China and having reflections to share and compare.

Looking at the types of lectures put on by universities, there was wide variety dictated by the focus of the given CI. For instance, University of Michigan and UC Davis focus on food culture with a lot of programming around Chinese cuisine. Indiana-Purdue has cultural lectures every week from professors and visiting scholars. University of Utah has varied lectures including recent ones on the politics of China's rise and the dynamics of Xi Jinping's administration. Most programs focus primarily on language instruction and scholarship opportunities, but the universities that do focus on providing frequent lectures and in depth cultural discussions tend to examine the same cultural aspects that festival booths do, just with more detailed discussion. When the topic of religion is hosted, the speakers are from America, usually scholars from the host university, and they always focus on traditional ethics or religion as an historical phenomenon. In this

way the CI, consciously or not, is supporting the view that these philosophical and religious traditions are phenomena of the past and separated from contemporary practice.

When talking to teachers with the CI, I asked about the topics they taught and also had them imagine what they would present to a foreigner if asked about Chinese culture. Confucianism and religious traditions did not make any of these lists. The list of topics considered worthy of teaching or that they actually taught mirrors presentations above and included food, tea ceremony, martial arts, paper cutting, Chinese knots, calligraphy, painting, colors and their significance, the significance of the Chinese flag, pandas, opera masks, fans, instruments, Internet slang, songs, dances, origami, Chinese medicine, fairy tales, the Monkey King, Taiji, and festivals. Some teachers did have required cultural content, but most teachers did not have a list of topics that they were required to teach and it is not readily apparent that the Hanban determines all of the topics covered. However, teachers did receive training prior to being sent to a host country and the cultural aspects emphasized in training were almost all newly learned by teachers prior to coming to the US, with various ‘cultural skills’ such as dancing or singing making one a better candidate. When the teachers did have to teach what the Hanban dictated, as for Lucy or Carol, this could result in the teachers teaching parts of the culture with which they were little familiar and being alienated from their cultural presentations, showing movies and struggling to act as specialists in the subjects that did not actually have a relation to their daily lives.

Usually, the main factor that determined what teachers taught was student interests, but this was generally guessed at by teachers. This resulted in presenting the traditional parts of the Chinese culture, but not in the sense of those core traditions of

Chinese culture. They taught the simple and the colorful. As Sarah said, "Because I'm teaching the kid, you know, so it need to be something that is easy for them to understand. I don't want to teach those very abstract concepts." This is one limiting factor of cultural education through the Confucius Institute, or through any classroom language instruction. The content is meant to attract and present a simple image of China, but this precludes the depth of discussion that results from confronting the ideas that some identify as the "core" of the culture. Those topics are either too difficult to teach or are fraught with controversy.

Mary walked me through the selection of topics. She would teach anything she thought was interesting, then figure out what concrete things could be brought into the classroom to facilitate an activity. She would teach the Beijing opera because you could also include mask painting and explanation, the four kinds of characters, the four important aspects of performance (唱念做打), all of this could be active and tangible, thus better for instruction.

What teachers said they teach matches with their responses to the images I showed. Images that I categorize as neutral or simple included the food, panda, Great Wall, dragon dance, and tea. The panda got a lower average score of 6.5 out of 10 because, upon consideration, a few concluded that it was just an animal and not culture. But they would still use it in classroom. The Great Wall had more culture and got the value of 9 out of 10. The food received a score of 9.5. The tea also received a score of 9.5. In considering these cultural components, I identified three primary concerns for whether something was important to the culture: historical importance, contemporary relevance, and knowledge or interest of foreigners. Below we will see some examples of

how this worked with the neutral images. The easiest images were deemed to contain all of these elements, while more difficult images either lacked one of these or contained a tension between two or more of the elements.

The true indication of the teachers' views on these cultural representations comes through in the quality of their responses. Later we will consider the more difficult images and the responses they elicited, but the responses elicited for these images were simple, less detailed, and often quite animated or excited. All of these images were worth showing to foreigners, regardless of whether they were actually used in class, and there was rarely hesitation when confronting the images. On the contrary, frequently a squeal or shriek of excitement was given. All of these responses of relief or excitement should be seen in contrast to the difficult images that came before in the interview. Some characteristic features of responses can be seen in responses to the image of food.

Ah! (sigh of relief) The food culture, yeah it's very, very, very important (laughs). It's very important. [How come? Is it something special about China?] So, nowadays lots of foreigners' opinions about China is about the food, right? Yeah, so it's very important! (She then goes into depth on the different kinds of food in China (五大菜系).) (Pam)

I love this. I would probably put this the most important. (Emily)

Oh! I told you! Chinese food culture, very important! Very important! Chinese people are great at eating! (Chrystal)

All of these responses show no question of food's historical importance and include a contemporary relevance, either personal or towards a foreign audience. Similarly, the Great Wall was rated important because it had history, was important as a tourist site, and (following the frequently stated misconception) could be seen from space. It was important as a mark of pride for China, had connections with the establishment of the Chinese empire, and no one had trouble imagining teaching about it. In fact, the only

teacher who gave it a middle rating did so because she thought her students knew more about pandas.

After struggling through some images of Islam and ethnic minorities, I showed them an image of tea. A typical response went like this:

“Ahh! Tea! Yes, this is very important, didn’t I just tell you? Chinese people really value drinking tea. When Chinese people drink they go sip by sip. This is very important. This is China’s specialty.” (Chrystal)

"Yeah! It’s the most important I think... For me, this is what foreign people interested in and this is, uh, truly, it's uh, culture in Chinese. Special culture in Chinese. You can see the teas, and the Chan (Zen). I know you, you foreign people like Chan, like that very mystery things, so I will show this to them, and the tea, you can see the tea. This is not about tea, it's a culture... Eating culture. And uh, it can reflect the... character of our Chinese people. It's very peaceful, right?" (Paul)

“Eee! Yes! That's important. [Why is that important?] As important as calligraphy, and Chinese painting, and Chinese knots. [And why are these things important?] Uh, western people they cannot understand why we like drink hot things. They think that's weird, yeah (laughs). You guys like cold things, and we like warm things... Calligraphy, painting, tea, is a high level for a very good life quality. 高雅 (elegant, refined) (laughs).” (Jessica)

Of all the neutral images, the Dragon dance was seen as least important. This was primarily due to its low contemporary relevance and possible low level of foreigner knowledge. It got a score of 6 because it was not the best way to represent a festival. A good response for the dragon was from Jane who said, “It’s wonderful, but it’s not that close to the modern culture. Maybe it’s fading away and one day it will vanish. But I do like it.” Paul rated it between very and somewhat important because of the quality of the picture but said, “But it’s good. At least the people happy, right?” Sarah explained her rating of somewhat important, saying, “The most important things are the well-known, every foreigner knows things like Great Wall, but middle things not everyone knows.”

Responses to these neutral images show the navigation of the three factors, historical importance, contemporary relevance, and foreign knowledge or interest. When all three factors were met without conflict, such as in the images of tea or food or the Great Wall, the images often elicited laughter, joking, and quick responses of approval at their inclusion in the culture. Further, they were related to the perception of Westerners and Western interest. They showed a difference or a specialty of China but not one that included within it perceived complications or potential for misunderstandings. Below we will see how the religious images related to these factors and the ways in which it created some complications in presenting the parts of Chinese culture.

Religions and Chinese Culture

Religion is not a topic that CI teachers necessarily avoid, but it does present problems. As discussed in previous chapters as part of the modern cultural discourse, religion sits uneasily within the Chinese state and often religion is an object of suspicion. Similar to the development of official understandings of Chinese culture throughout the twentieth century, nearly all teachers, in the course of dealing with religious cultural images, explicitly said that Chinese people have no religion. This was an argument against contemporary relevance, and navigating their understanding that Chinese are not religious or have no belief characterized one aspect of their difficulty dealing with the potentially religious images that I showed them and their place within Chinese culture.

Despite the revival of religion in China, my interviews suggest limited success at fitting religion within Chinese culture and sustained unease towards religion. One CI teacher, Paul, recoiled during our second interview when presented with the images of religious activities, asking, "Are we talking about Chinese culture or Chinese religion?"

Because most of this thing about Chinese religion I think. But I know that's your major.... Religion is one kind of culture.” Slight irritation or awareness of the repeated religious images was acknowledged by only one other interviewee, Jessica. Possibly significant is that both of these teachers identified all images that could be either religious or philosophical as religious, and thus were confronting many more religious images than others.

As stated before, the relevant categories for discussing the religious images were historical importance, contemporary relevance, and foreign knowledge or interest. One added aspect affecting these first two categories was the notion of belonging to the ‘authentic’ ethnic identity and this decreased if the religion has a foreign origin, thus decreasing its authenticity within Chinese culture. Another problem with religion in Chinese cultural presentations was a perceived conflict between the modern and the historical, which was discussed in terms of modern disappearance and superstition. For the teachers I spoke to, religion’s contemporary value lay in its benefit to society, but its main cultural value was historic, thus positioning religious activities outside of a modern Chinese identity. The metaphysics and philosophy behind native traditions were seen as persistent and the core to a cultural identity, so close as to be “in the blood,” but this did not carry over to religious activities, only ideas, fitting with the Enlightenment idea that religion was something characterized primarily by its internal nature.

Daoism

Daoism acts as the perfect foil to show the intersection of the various discourses surrounding religion. As noted in the previous chapter, the Daoist tradition sits most uneasily within a modern identity, linked with local religions and superstitious acts, and

yet it is also associated with many traditional cultural components, such as martial arts and medicine, that are proud aspects of Chinese traditional culture. In interviews, I provided two Daoist images. The first was the symbol known as the Yin-yang or Taiji. The second was of Daoist ritual taking place in a Daoist temple in front of the three figures of Buddha, Laozi, and Confucius. The first image of the Taiji symbol received as high of a score as anything else, 9.5 out of 10. However, the Daoist ritual masters received a much lower score of 7. There was a score discrepancy as well as much more difficulty navigating the Daoist practitioners.

The Taiji received quick and excited approval from almost all. Chrystal's response contains nearly all of the components of a typical response to this image. This image comes just after the Christian image which, for her, did not fit the culture and the typical response starts with some level of excitement, then talks about philosophy, science or medicine, balance, its long tradition, and possibly influence on other cultures.

Ah! Taiji, very important; Chinese people really value Taiji. Yin-yang, you know? Yin-yang. Chinese people really respect this. Yin-yang. For example, if we get sick, we won't go to see a doctor, we'll think, 'Ah! Our whole body system has problem'... We'll think that yin-yang has a problem, out of balance... Right, right, our body's qi... The whole body system... This is very traditional, traditional... Yeah, very important. Only China has this, really!... Ai! But I think Korea,... they also... they value, they treat the traditional medicine. Very important, because you know, a long, long time ago, Korea belongs to China.

All respondents were proud of this symbol. Occasionally they noted the fact that foreigners knew about the Taiji symbol and this made them value it more. Overall, the symbol was uncontroversial and entirely positive as a representation of culture. It also was a symbol that was recognizable but had deep meaning rather than just recognizability.

The picture of the ritual masters was much more difficult to classify and received middle marks. Respondents were equally split on whether it was somewhat or very important and most respondents created a division between the practitioners and the ideas of Taiji, Yin-yang. They often used the term superstitious to describe the activities, noted that young people did not do these things or believe in them anymore, and most teachers spontaneously made an unfavorable comparison of these Daoist Masters to the popularity of Buddhism. I'll include two responses to show the way respondents struggled to interpret the complicated fact of Daoist Masters in Chinese culture.

(Chrystal laughs upon seeing the picture and speaks rapidly.) This is Taiji! Daoist Masters, aren't these Daoist Masters? Chinese... uh Chinese superstition... This is superstition. See, they are worshipping Guanyin, etc. These Daoist Masters and such, it's Daoism... Chinese people, how to say it, Chinese people, they don't have... belief, right? No religion. But if they have a wish or desire they will go to the 寺庙, (Buddhist) temple, or 道观 (Daoist temple) to ask this person to give them good fortune or something like that. It's like that. Chinese people are very superstitious. Even now. [Important?] ... It's only in China, but it's traditional. Nowadays it's not popular at all. People these days, young people, like me, they won't go... Young people like me won't believe in these things. [Are the Taiji symbol and Daoist Masters the same?] Not the same... Because their Daoism, they can wear this clothing. Daoism is from Taiji, but it's also, like, their, they also believe in yin-yang, ba-gua, they also believe in these things. How about you put it in the middle (importance), because few people believe these days, especially... People today believe in Buddhism more. (Chrystal)

Taiji is a symbol, it has some wisdom in it... but for Daojiao [Daoist religion] I think there are much more things about Daojiao, some bad things, and I think Taiji is good things. So that's the reason why I think Taiji alone is important. But there are so many retard things in Daojiao. I can't say in detail, but I think I've read things about the bad aspects of Daojiao. And it didn't evolve to be a very important religion now. (Jane)

Looking at the practice of Daoism as part of Chinese culture is a much bigger task than putting the ideas or symbols within Chinese culture. For one, foreigners don't know about the rituals and it would breed misunderstanding, while "The Taiji is very famous,

so it somehow equals the brilliant China. That's how foreigners see China so yeah that is important" (Peggy). The living Daoist ritual tradition is, in the eyes of these young teachers, failing to survive in present day China and there is no sense that they want it to continue. In fact, there is a clear sense that the ideas should be kept and the practices should be dropped. To the extent that they are important to the culture it is as tradition or for older generations. It has historical value, but why would this be shown to foreigners? Foreigners would not understand and it clearly takes a lot more explanation to leave the proper impression than the Taiji symbol. Respondents had to communicate to me in a way that I would understand a form of Daoism that was either sanitized as scientific or medicine, or safely historicized and put in the past rather than the present. Their responses fit the presentations attempted by the CTA in the previous chapter, though they stressed even more separation from any kind of religious value and were far less invested in maintaining the value of Daoism for Chinese culture.

Buddhism

I provided one image of a Buddhist Guanyin statue apparently being celebrated at a festival by a large group of monastic and lay Buddhists. This image received a slightly lower culture score than even the Daoist Masters, coming in at 6.7 out of 10. This highlights a contrast of two factors, Daoism's authentic Chinese origins and Buddhism's contemporary relevance. Thus, it is possible that popularity and present practice is not as important to cultural value based on origin or authenticity.

As a note on contemporary relevance, most respondents spontaneously highlighted Buddhism's greater prevalence and popularity in China today compared to Daoism. This indicates a competition between the two traditions in their minds, but also

seems to reflect their awareness of trends in religious surveys on Chinese religion. Surveys always name Buddhism as the most popular religion in China, coming in at between 16 and 18 percent of the population or 185 million self-identified Buddhists, while most statistics put the number of Daoists in China at 1 percent or fewer, with 12 million adherents as an upper limit.²⁷ Teachers' beliefs match these statistics, however due to a reliance on Western notions of religious identity and self-reporting this image is too simplistic.

To find the beliefs of Chinese people hiding outside these self-identifications, surveys also ask about activities engaged in and beliefs held, though these results rarely get noted prominently on any website or news story. These questions are important, however, because for many Chinese religions there is no need to identify with only one or with any and still maintain beliefs or practices. If one held a higher bar for measuring Buddhists then only approximately 1.7 percent of the population had officially taken the triple refuge as Buddhists, a number roughly one tenth the number of reported Buddhists and similar in number to the amount of Daoists. On the other hand, of the 'non-Buddhists' "31 percent reported having at least one of Buddhist beliefs or participating in at least one of Buddhist practices,"²⁸ which could increase the number of Chinese actively holding some Buddhist ideas to roughly 400 million. The same survey data that puts Daoists at only 12 million showed that 173 million "had some kind of Daoist practices... difficult to differentiate from popular religion." Further, 215 million "believe

²⁷ Pew Research Center, "Religion in China on the Eve of the 2008 Beijing Olympics," May 2, 2008. Accessed on March 11, 2016 at <http://www.pewforum.org/2008/05/01/religion-in-china-on-the-eve-of-the-2008-beijing-olympics/>. See also, Katharina Wenzel-Teuber, "People's Republic of China: Religions and Churches Statistical Overview 2011," *Religions & Christianity in Today's China*, vol.II no.3 (2012), 34-5. Hereafter Wenzel, "Religions and Churches Statistical Overview."

²⁸ Wenzel, "Religions and Churches Statistical Overview," 33.

in the existence of ancestral spirits,” 745 million “practice some form of ancestral worship (such as attending and maintaining ancestral temples, venerating ancestor tablets, etc.),” 145 million “have observed *fengshui* restrictions or consulted a *fengshui* master in the last 12 months,” 141 million “believe in the existence of the god of wealth (*caishen* 财神), and 119 million have a picture or statue of the god of wealth at home or in their workplace,” and 362 million “in the previous 12 months ‘practiced divination one way or the other, including fortune-telling, face-reading, etc.’”²⁹

With such large proportions of the population engaging in Daoist or popular religious activities, perhaps the problem is not a lack of Daoists in China but rather a difficulty with the category of religion that hides most Daoist activities behind self-identification statistics. This would not be a problem except that it is internalized as part of what Benedict Anderson terms the “fiction of the census” which makes it seem that “everyone is in it, and that everyone has one — and only one — extremely clear place. No fractions.”³⁰ When people internalize this understanding, it reifies the notion that Daoism is not popular in China. But another impulse beyond the difficulty of the categories is to limit the significance or presence of these diffuse practices and beliefs when discussing them with a foreigner. The difference between these statistics and the affirmed realities of religion in China given by the teachers once again indicates that the modern cultural revival is allowing high levels of activity on a local level, but keeping this hidden from a wider audience.

Regardless, teachers were able to use their knowledge that Buddhism was more popular to position its practices as more important to Chinese culture in terms of

²⁹ Wenzel, Teuber, “Religions and Churches Statistical Overview,” 34-5.

³⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 166.

contemporary relevance. But this popularity did not amount to approval. Buddhism in practice was viewed on similar terms as the Daoist masters. All were in agreement that the majority of Chinese people have no religion, but many noted the importance of praying to Guanyin or another Buddhist figure for many Chinese when they needed something in their life, even as this was either negative or merely amusing. For both traditions, their popularity was amongst older generations or in the countryside, positioned away from youth and modernity. Jane gives a representative response:

I think in my opinion religions are... I don't know how to say... like Buddhism... some people in my family believe in Buddhism, so they go to the temple to, um, in certain times to give money and to 磕头? (Kowtow, bow and pray)... And when they have problems they will go to temple and ask the Buddhas to help them or to save them. I don't think that's good, so um... instantly I don't really have a good impression to religions...

For Pam, who identified as coming from a small town in the countryside, Buddhism was part of everyday life, but it was for the hopeless. When I asked if she had ever prayed to Guanyin, she said no because she had never felt that hopeless before. Paul said similar things, dismissing Chinese religion as mean or practical, not devout, and only taking place in times of need. This is surely not a favorable impression of Buddhism. Buddhism, like all religions, required careful navigation of ideas to properly communicate its place in modern Chinese culture. To the extent it was still present, it was a disappearing part of the past still lingering in the present, even if there is a revival happening. Two responses show a particularly interesting place for Buddhism in modern China. Jane said,

But many people in countryside still believe in Buddhism... And this like, this religion that was used by the Emperors or the people who have power for so many years, so it has influence, great influence in Chinese society for many years. So it has its position in China's culture... but... in modern China, um, especially guided by our government, few people believe in religion now. Our government told us... umm... uh... you know we learn

politics? [Yeah] It's more about opinions of the government. So... I think this, uh, fewer and fewer people are going to believe in Buddhism.

Jane sees the historical importance of Buddhism, but also the active use of education and government ideology to push out beliefs. She was the only participant to mention the government as actively educating against religion, but the younger generation all reflected this bias in their understandings of modernity. Either religion is in the past or it is in the backward presence of the past in the Chinese countryside.

Only one respondent seemed to take note of the fact that this festival may have been in a tourist site and not in the countryside. To make sense of this image, Paul noted the use of Buddhism to attract foreigners and investment, while stressing its inauthenticity, because presumably religion was only authentic if rooted in the past.

This is a modern. Modern model. Modern model. Not from the traditional, but it's ok if you show the stupid American people they don't know. (light chuckle) [Well do Chinese people know that it's not real?] Yeah, this is not... I talk about the... architecture, is modern China, made in the modern China. It's not traditional. Cuz you can see it's very tall. In the, (sigh), I don't know in the old (sigh) in the old China, we will... traditional... we will have, but not like this. But it's ok if you want to show the foreign people, they don't know. But I know... [You think it's good?] Yeah, and uh I know you people like huge things. Oh oh oh! (mocking excitement of foreigners seeing the statue) yeah... like that. You need that. [So this is for us?] This is for you. Yeah... Why the government want to build this? Cuz they want many visitors... to here... you know... to robust the economy, local economy. [So this is just about tourism, it's not really, like religion is not important, and it's not that important to culture?] No no no, it's important, it's kind of important. Uh, you can see many people here, we are very... happy. We are very... crazy, (chuckles) about this, so you can many people are there, so... (Paul)

Paul positions the local Chinese as people with the proper, insider knowledge of the tradition, and capable of manipulating the use of traditions to fool the foreigners. In this way he is presenting a way of seeing Buddhism in modern China that is different from the countryside, yet is inauthentic and a conscious 'self-orientalizing' which is meant to

attract the foreign gaze and the foreign dollar. His understandings appear to match the government use of religion quite well in its use of local traditions as tourist attractions. But this has the effect of making modern religious practice an attraction rather than an aspect of modern belief or ideology.

While Buddhism is attractive to a foreign audience and that might make it a good candidate for teaching in the classroom, the complexity means it, just like the other religions, does not get taught in the classroom. Given the difficulty of positioning it in modern China in a favorable light, and the negative view of religion for these young teachers, Buddhism and all other religions are left out of curriculum or representations in favor of other items imagined as pleasant for the foreign audience which do not contain the potential for misunderstandings or negative connotations. The hesitations and sighs from multiple teachers conform to this interpretation. Religion is a historical artifact with much baggage, its presence in contemporary China is fraught, and foreign understandings of religion are either inherently limited or mistaken. Thus, religion is not a good component of Chinese culture for a foreign audience, even if the ideas are important to their culture.

Confucianism

I provided teachers with three images that were related in some way to Confucianism. The first Confucian image I showed was of some traditional Confucian Virtues, *ren* 仁, *li* 礼, and *yi* 义. In scholarship these are traditionally translated as benevolence, ritual propriety, and righteousness. This image was rated at a 9.5 out of 10 for cultural importance or value. The second image was of a statue of Confucius that had been briefly controversial as it had been taken down from outside a museum near

Tiananmen square.³¹ This was intended to see if there was any cultural difference between the person and the values. It received a score of 9. The third image was of ancestor worship which may or may not be interpreted as specifically Confucian. It also received a score of 9. Teachers located all of these images near the ‘core’ of Chinese culture.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Confucianism represents a middle ground between the categories of religion and philosophy and is not recognized as one of the five official (legal) religions. Chinese people almost unanimously see it as a social philosophy. This distinction is very important for how one treats both Confucius and the requirements of identifying as Confucian and remains an actively debated topic. Teachers almost all spontaneously brought in the terminology of religion and philosophy, which demonstrates Confucianism’s complicated, borderline status in the conceptual world of religion. After bringing up religion, Paul said that it was not a religion because Confucius was not perfect, contrasted him to Jesus, and said that his ideas about women were bad, "but most of his saying are good, are very useful, even today...." Lucy, a teacher of a dedicated culture class at a high school, noted the absence of gods and strict codes, saying, "I think every religion has gods and you have to do certain things and obey certain rules, but not for Confucius."³² Emily, a Chinese teacher outside of the CI, struggled to know which words to use when talking about the image of Confucius.

What I should call this? It's a philosophy, or concept, or ideas? Which word should I use? [All of these work. Principles?] Oh principles, yeah, I like this. I like the principles, but I read a lot of things, not a lot of things,

³¹ Andrew Jacobs. "Confucius Statue Vanishes Near Tiananmen Square" (2011, April 22) Retrieved December 23, 2015, from http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/23/world/asia/23confucius.html?_r=0

³² I would be remiss not to mention the importance of rules and ritual codes to Confucianism throughout most of its history, but Lucy’s understandings reflect the trend of decreasing ritual importance and reducing Confucianism to social ethics.

some things about this person. Oh, he's definitely a good person! But what he taught... I think the principles are good, if you take away the emperor, authority, or money, or relig... oh no I shouldn't say the religion, maybe the religion things. I like all the principles, but I don't like people use it to do other things. To take power, to take authority, to earn money, do you understand? [But you do think of religion when you think of him?] I don't. I think of principles, or teachings, but not religions.

Clearly the terminology matters, and the available terms determine the degree to which Confucius or Confucianism can be seen as a good part of Chinese culture. Many settle on terms like principles, philosophy, ideas, and explicitly create a space away from religion. This matters because teachers understand and express religion as something Chinese people do not have, but Confucian thought is known as the core of Chinese culture and history. As seen below there are negative components of religion, and Emily noted some of them, such as authority, money, things outside of a beneficial philosophy. But religion also contains good components, and if the foreigner asks about religion and Chinese morality, they will note Confucianism as similar to religion in the sense of morality. Lucy says, "Maybe people say Chinese people don't have religion, but the philosophy of Confucius actually influence them a lot... just something I read." But unless asked, most would not discuss it in depth, either because foreigners would find it boring or because they have difficulty navigating its place in Chinese culture. They all noted its importance, but historically or in abstract contemporary ways, and only after labored consideration.

When confronted with the image of ancestor worship, teachers usually relate it simply to family. Confucian ritual was important in Chinese history and in imperial cults, but their discussion of these rituals reflects the historically recent shift away from ritual and towards a simple ethic of family respect. However, this shift seemed easy for some

and difficult for others. Eventually they all remarked on family being important in Chinese culture. Chrystal had this to say, full of excitement,

Ah! This is what I was telling you about! Ah! Paying respects to your ancestors. This is very important (laughs). We really attach importance to respecting our ancestors.... If they are going to return home you have to give them something to eat.... But Chinese people will believe this. Particularly people from ancient times. People before. People today also... even if they know their ancestors haven't returned or can't come back, they still will think, 'Ai ya! My ancestors are very important!'

Paul likewise expressed the importance of family, though sadly as he remembered his grandfather,

It show our emotional too... (heavy sigh, getting sad) I'm sorry, I think about my grandpa... Yeah, show our... our miss them, our emotion to the dead people. Cuz... show the family sense. They are our family members, they are our dad or grandpa, grandma, they are very important people for us. So it can reflect our heart, heart, from this picture. Oh and our family sense, from the other side, you can see.

The feeling for ancestors is still very important, but as Chrystal's response indicates, the practices are pushed to the past, with the present only maintaining the feeling. The spirits are gone, but the spirit remains. However, it is significant that ancestor worship was never used to teach foreigners about family sense, and all of the Confucian virtues were discussed simply as kindness, manners, family sense, and harmony, things which can hardly be said to be specific to Confucianism. If I had known nothing of Confucianism, I would not have learned much specifically about the tradition from these interviews, and that seems to explain in some way the lack of Confucius in the classroom. While most talked about principles and influence and his effects on all East Asian civilizations, the problem of teaching him in the classroom was best summed up by Peggy, a CI teacher at a High School:

What these three words represent is very, very important in our blood, in our culture, but people do not understand these words, they are too... these words represent too many things. They already in our blood, so we just take it as, take it for granted, we just do not explain it, and we don't say it, but it's... in our blood.

Confucianism is an ethnic identity. It's a symbol. It's a complex and multifaceted part of Chinese culture with both good and bad aspects, bordering on religion, yet more of a replacement for religion than a religion itself. It is most likely the core of Chinese and all East Asian culture. But it is beyond the level of early students that they teach and could not be communicated well. When it is taught, all historical baggage is stripped and the words used are kindness, manners, family feeling, or harmony. In this way, in the eyes of one teacher, Jane, a CI English teacher in a middle school, Americans were better Confucians than the average Chinese person.

Christianity and Islam

Christianity and Islam fell furthest outside of a Chinese cultural identity as a result of their foreign origin and either negative connotations or irrelevance in the modern context. I provided one image of Chinese Catholic Christians at a service and one image of ethnic Muslims at prayer. The Christian image provided some confusion because it did not have enough easily recognizable imagery for the teachers who were not familiar with the Catholic tradition. Three thought it was people dressed in traditional Han garb and identified it as of middle importance which might have helped its score, showing the way their expectations of Chinese culture did not include Christianity, but most eventually identified it correctly and Christianity received a score of 3.3/10 for cultural importance. This was the second lowest score with Islam receiving the lowest score of 2.8.

These low scores show that a combination of ethnic identity and a bias towards historical rather than contemporary relevance of religion decrease the value of these foreign traditions. Actual contemporary relevance can be difficult to determine because statistics on religious affiliation in China are considered fairly unreliable due to a large degree of underground religious activity outside of the purview of the government and surveys often under-count ethnic minorities due to the location of surveys. With estimates of just over 30 percent religious adherence in contemporary China,³³ official estimates from 2008 put Christianity at around 3 to 4 percent of the population and Islam at roughly 1.5 percent. Most religious demographers argue that Christians in unofficial churches, ‘house churches,’ roughly double those estimates to 7 or 8 percent of the population, making it quite a large presence.

Mirroring statistics and news stories about growing numbers of Christians in China, many of my informants were aware of an increasing Christian presence in China and if they viewed it as important to Chinese culture, this was the reason for the religion’s increased cultural importance. Jessica gave the single ‘very important’ score for Christianity and her reason for this score was that all religion is important. However, for most interviewees Christianity was foreign, unpopular, and churches were like museums. Even if they acknowledged growing popularity, it was not truly Chinese culture. A sample response is Abby’s, who said, after 15 seconds of hesitation,

I don't think it's Chinese culture. It's not. I think it's not, because, um... I think it's in a church, right? Yeah, so I, um... I know that China has some people who believe in Catholicism or Christianity, but this isn't really an original part of China. For China... Of course today there may be people

³³ Pew Research Center, “Religion in China on the Eve of the 2008 Beijing Olympics,” May 2, 2008. Accessed on March 11, 2016 at <http://www.pewforum.org/2008/05/01/religion-in-china-on-the-eve-of-the-2008-beijing-olympics/>. See also, ARDA, “Religious Adherents, 2010 (World Christian Database).” Accessed March 11, 2016 at http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_52_2.asp

in China who also believe it, but for traditional China people believed in Buddhism and Daoism. Yeah. [Ok, so not important?] Yeah. Uh... It's not a representative part of Chinese culture.

Abby acknowledges the presence of Christians in China, but not as part of an authentic Chinese culture, and she goes to Buddhism and Daoism for Chinese religious identity, positioning this identity in the past. Morality was one way that Christianity, as a part of religion generally, could have value in Chinese culture and this sometimes influenced the score. However, Islam was not viewed in such positive ways.

Islam received the lowest of all scores and informants consistently spoke of it as the image least appropriate for a foreign audience. It was a religion inseparable from ethnic groups, whether identified as Hui or Uighur. The complexities and tensions were unavoidable and the teachers would rather not have been confronted with the image. When asked if any image should have been removed, it was this one. Its value for representation was at best in multiculturalism, as expressed by Abby:

I don't really understand their culture, and I didn't have many Muslim friends, so I... 90% isn't ethnic minorities, it's Han, so they won't understand that. But you can learn from them the multifaceted nature of Chinese culture (中国文化的多样性). China has lots of ethnic minorities, they will all have their own beliefs. For example, Han Chinese will have Confucian thought and Buddhism, these things in our lives.

At best Islam is a little known or little understood part of China which could show the different cultures within China. At worst it is a complicated issue that foreigners have the wrong understanding of in China. Interestingly, Abby again brings up indigenous traditions to compare and provide an alternative religious identity, though this time leaving out Daoism. Paul criticized both Islam and foreigners' understanding of Islam within China (including the author's, as we had discussed this together before), noting the failure and bias of foreign media and the "double standard" by which we judge China.

The news, foreign TV, you come from the BBC, CNN, ABC, like that, not very have a positive attitude when they report this in China.... So you don't have a very positive attitude about this. So I will not show this the first time... Maybe if we are have a deep... deep, deeper relationship, develop... when we talk about this I will tell them the truth, but not the first time. We don't, they don't want to know. They don't need to know!, the most things. They just know uh, the common things, very popular things about China. Like this, like this (shows pictures he likes). Oh they are good, they are friendly, like that... yeah.

Not only are Muslims a negative presence in contemporary China, but they

present a bad image of China to the West, which breeds misunderstandings. Despite having some value as part of an ethnic minority, given the complications and distance from the main Han culture, Islam has little value in cultural education and would not make the curriculum. Considering the issues of constructing a cultural identity for China, this does show how members of the Chinese nation do not fit as truly 'Chinese' and engage in activities that belong to a different culture. If it must be said, this is hardly part of a communist ideology. What it does reflect is the complication of constructing a modern, national cultural identity and positioning these religions, very much present within China and growing in importance, within a cultural identity for presentation to a foreign audience.

Conclusion

This section has attempted to show the considerations that go into crafting teachers' and official CI presentations of Chinese culture for a foreign audience. I have identified three main criteria that go into judging the relevance of cultural components in international presentations: historical importance, contemporary relevance, and foreigner knowledge or interest. The aspects of culture that teachers easily confronted or happily taught all had high levels of each component. The religious cultural components were perceived to have deficiency in one or more of these aspects, and I argue that the issues

are related to the broader conflict that arises with the discourse of modernity in Chinese cultural construction as seen in previous chapters. This discourse creates a conflict between historical culture and contemporary culture with religion fitting poorly in contemporary China. Further, as teachers imagine a foreign audience with little prior knowledge of China, the religious or philosophical ideas may be too difficult for them. If the foreigners are thought to have knowledge or interest it is usually imagined as a biased understanding due to the American political media, so as they imagine the concerns of their foreign audience it is difficult to discuss it.

The personal understandings of teachers in this study utilize and fit within the modern, enlightenment dichotomies of religion/philosophy, traditional/modern, superstitious/rational, and authentic/inauthentic. These four dichotomies work together to determine the uncertain worth of religion within Chinese cultural presentations for a foreign audience. CI teachers' understandings of religion work within the same framework that CI official presentations do, often using the same strategies employed by thinkers during the National Essence movements or by CTA presentations that deconstructs religious traditions and selects the aspects that are most suitable for the modern world. All religions deemed authentic are unanimously considered at least somewhat important to Chinese culture, but usually not as important as the underlying philosophies nor the uncontroversial aspects of culture such as food, music, and traditional clothing. Those religions deemed inauthentic, Christianity or Islam, are often valued the least as Chinese culture.

CONCLUSION

From the early interactions with the Western cultural other, Chinese intellectuals sought to reposition indigenous religious and political institutions within the Chinese state to ensure the continued strength and sovereignty of their nation. The earliest forms of this effort, seen in the views of the Self Strengtheners, hoped to maintain Confucian norms and Chinese spiritual understandings while adopting Western science and technology. But in the developing cultural discourse of China, the radical iconoclasts won out, advocating rupture with the past and replacement of religious forms of authority with secular ones. In the contested development of a modern Chinese cultural identity, the traditional religious structures, institutions, and understandings were pushed onto the margins of society, kept separate from political authority, and made the constant object of suspicion.

In this thesis I have shown the impact of a previously non-existent cultural discourse in China and its continuing role in marginalizing previously integral components of Chinese society. In advocating a modern cultural identity, those who belonged to religious traditions had to reformulate their institutions and beliefs to fit the terms of the discourse. They formed national organizations, eliminated superstitious beliefs and practices that did not fit the ideal rational form of religion, and legitimized themselves through appeal to secular values such as health, charity, and high culture forms like calligraphy. This does not mean that the previous beliefs or practices were completely eliminated, but rather that they were relegated to an uncertain legal status and removed from official presentations of religion to an international audience.

These changes, rooted in a discourse of modernity and culture, remain to this day. They influence the presentations that the Chinese Taoist Association and the Confucius Institutes construct for a wider audience. For this reason, the CTA constructs media that subjects their tradition to open academic study, deconstructs their tradition into secular cultural components, de-emphasizes the role of divinity, and hides nearly an entire part of their tradition in media presentations. While the Daoist tradition continues to thrive within the new safe space of “traditional culture,” they play by the rules defined by national political authorities and the goals of modernity. This dictates the sanitized version of Daoism presented, one that stands outside of local communities even as they continue to have an active role in ritual and superstitious practices within them. Thus, the role of the present cultural revival in China allows local forms of religious practice, such as popular religion, to achieve more openness and legitimacy, but due to the terms of the discourse it does not give those acting within these local spaces a visible role in larger international presentations of the Daoist tradition.

As these methods of presenting religion as a Chinese cultural component are quite complicated and fraught with potential misunderstandings, the CI presentations and classroom lessons largely avoid religious traditions altogether. When they do appear, they are limited to articulated secular values on a touch-screen or discussed by Western scholars as active components of the Chinese past, but not their present. Their highest level of cultural value is as historical components, but their place in modern society is largely denied or devalued. The aspects of religion that are most central to Chinese culture, indeed often composing the very heart of a Chinese identity according to CI teachers, are usually defined as vague cultural values or ethical understandings that

teachers have difficulty articulating. These cultural values can act as emblems of cultural identity, like the statue of Confucius in a CI space or a *yin-yang* symbol, but to this extent they are emptied of articulated content, separated from any complicated religious heritage, and tied almost entirely to an essentialized ethnicity or nationality. The actual things that CI teachers teach avoid these complicated topics in favor of the simple and colorful.

By analyzing the presentations made by these large national cultural organizations I have attempted to show not only the continued importance of the relatively recent term “culture,” but also the parameters that define this cultural discourse and the effects this discourse has on Chinese religions as components of Chinese culture.

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