

Concepts and Methods for the Study of Chinese Religions II

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Concepts and Methods for the Study of Chinese Religions II



Intellectual History of Key Concepts

Edited by

Gregory Adam Scott and Stefania Travagnin

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永恆懷念

蔡彥仁老師
(1956–2019)



故人不可見，
漢水日東流。
借問襄陽老，
江山空蔡州。

～唐・王維〈哭孟浩然〉

Preface

Religion in late-Imperial and twentieth-century China has been the object of a large number of publications in the past few decades. These studies used archival and ethnographic research, but also relied upon an earlier generation of scholarship that had opened the field and created its methodological and theoretical foundations. Part of this early scholarship did not result from the work of traditional academics, but from explorers or photographers, and thus enriched the discourse of religion in modern China with different and less academic perspectives. Parallel to this publishing production, the organization of conferences, the establishment of research centers and the creation of international research networks on this theme have multiplied steadily. This flood of new research reflects the fact that the study of religions in modern China has emerged as a new and challenging field in both Asian and Western academia.

Within this emerging rich field of study, however, there is still an ongoing debate regarding what methods and theories are appropriate to be employed in this new field. The three-volume publication ***Concepts and Methods for the Study of Chinese Religions*** contributes to this debate. It reviews the past history of the field, highlights challenges that the scholars in this field have encountered, reconsiders the present state of analytical and methodological theories, and finally opens up a new chapter in the history of concepts and methods for the field itself.

These three volumes explore religion in the area known as greater China, which includes mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Among the authors, some have been trained and have published in the fields of anthropology and sociology; others are historians, textual scholars, area studies scholars, and political scientists. The three volumes present the results of a constructive dialogue and mutual integration of various disciplines of humanities and social sciences. This publication also aims to contribute to a discussion on analytical and theoretical concepts that could potentially be applied to the study of religion in other contexts, including in Western societies. In other words, China is seen not as an exotic outlier, but as a global player in the overall academic study of religion. Such a framework responds to the current call for interdisciplinary and cross-tradition debates on a trans-regional horizon and globalization, and thus methodologies for the study of East Asian religions should be engaged with Western voices in a more active and constructive manner.

The first volume, ***Concepts and Methods for the Study of Chinese Religions I: State of the Field and Disciplinary Approaches***, starts with an assessment of the earliest works and individuals who initiated the study of religion in modern China. Those individuals include Western and Chinese religious practitioners,

academic figures, explorers and photographers. The earliest works are predominantly textual, historical and ethnographic studies: these form the foundation of the field. Questions addressed include: Who are the pioneers in the study of religion in modern China and Taiwan? What were the first disciplinary approaches, conceptual categories, and objects of research? How did those choices shape the beginning of the field as well as the academic output of today? What were their contributions and their limitations, and how can we work to overcome those shortcomings? The second part of the first volume discusses methodological and disciplinary approaches that are currently used in the study of religion in modern China and Taiwan, with constructive conclusions on potential changes in research trajectories, and thus works toward an overdue improvement of research methods. The chapters address methodological disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, political science, and history, in their own micro-contexts as well as in the ways they relate to macro-fields.

The second and third volumes shift the focus from methodological concerns to critical reflections on analytical concepts, and include the re-evaluation of concepts and practices that inform the religious sphere and scholarship in the field. These two volumes look at endogenous Chinese concepts and exogenous ideas from the West and Japan that are foundational in thinking about the Chinese religious landscape. Some chapters address the introduction of new concepts or the reshaping of traditional ones in light of the intellectual, political, and social atmosphere of the late nineteenth century and the early Republican period in China, while others assess ideas that continue to permeate the religious sphere of China and Taiwan today. These key concepts are all interconnected because they participate in the same debates on traditional dichotomies and recent paradigm shifts. ***Concepts and Methods for the Study of Chinese Religions II: Intellectual History of Key Concepts*** analyzes key concepts in their intellectual history and development: these are concepts that have become core terms in Chinese religions but have each their own history of formation and use. ***Concepts and Methods for the Study of Chinese Religions III: Key Concepts in Practice*** analyzes another set of concepts that form the foundations of the Chinese religious sphere. Adopting an approach that differs from that of the second volume, these concepts are studied through their praxis in lived religions.

This project developed from the conference *Framing the Study of Religion in Modern China and Taiwan: Concepts, Methods and New Research Paths*, which was sponsored by the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange and the KNAW (Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen), and was held at the University of Groningen in December 2015.

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We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange and the KNAW (Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen) for their sponsorship, which helped make the meeting possible. The discussions that took place during the conference were essential for authors as they revised their chapters.

Each author has included specific acknowledgments in their own chapters. Here the volume editors would like to express their indebtedness to the anonymous reviewers of the manuscript, who offered significant and constructive feedback that helped all of the contributors enhance their studies.

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List of Contributors

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Jason T. Clower holds a Ph.D. from Harvard (2008) and is currently Associate Professor at the California State University Chico. Many of his writings address Mou Zongsan, an influential and modern Chinese philosopher, see his monograph *The Unlikely Buddhist* (Brill, 2010) and the edited volume *Late Works of Mou Zongsan: Essays in Chinese Philosophy* (Brill, 2014). Clower is also researching “Asian-inspired spirituality” scene in the New Age movement in California, and the so-called “lost world of Communism”, its art and material culture, its pieties, its intellectual and institutional life, and the shared remnants of Stalinist heritage that can still be found from Pyongyang to Prague.

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Note on Chinese Names, Terms and Transliteration

We have used pinyin transliteration throughout the volume, while adding traditional Chinese characters at their first occurrence. Chinese characters for well-known cities, institutions and individuals have not been provided.

In certain instances related to Taiwan, Hong Kong, and overseas Chinese communities, pinyin has been replaced with local transliteration systems to maintain names and terms as they are commonly known in the English-speaking world.

Gregory Adam Scott and Stefania Travagnin

Introduction

In the last few decades, several academic fields have begun to devote attention to an analysis of their respective critical terms and concepts. Publishers including the University of Chicago Press and Routledge have initiated entire book series on ‘critical terms’ within various fields, and a number of volumes along these lines have been produced. This genre of critical-reflective scholarship on key terms first emerged within the academic domains of arts and literature,¹ but was soon followed by volumes devoted to the study of religion,² particular religious traditions,³ and other fields.⁴

The present volume seeks to add to this existing scholarship on analytical concepts; it presents studies on a selection of categories that have been recurrent in the religious discourses of China. It is thus part of an attempt to start a new detailed and critical vocabulary, one that is grounded in religious and intellectual history, and that helps facilitate the analysis of contemporary religious phenomena in China. This volume further builds on – and seeks to integrate – recent scholarship that has also assessed values and ideas, both those central to Chinese religious culture and those imported from other cultural contexts (see, for instance: Lackner, Amelung and Kurtz 2001; Gentz 2009; Yang and Lang 2011; Spira 2015; Goossaert, Kiely and Lagerway 2016). The ever-increasing number of published studies on Chinese religions (and religion in China) has created an urgent need for us to deepen our discussion about the field. This applies not only to the topics of study methodologies and research foci, which we mainly discuss in Volume I of this series, but also of the key categories and values that constitute the conceptual framework of the religious landscape in China. This volume takes as its focus one set of important concepts in Chinese religions, examining their intellectual histories within religious communities and among scholars in related academic fields. Methodologically, this volume also connects to the idea of ‘conceptual history’ (better known as *Begriffsgeschichte*) and the pioneering theoretical studies by Reinhart Koselleck (1979 and 2002, among others), which are

¹ See Lentricchia and McLaughlin 1990; and Nelson and Shiff 1996.

² The volume *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, edited by Mark Taylor (1989) started this form of critical enquiry.

³ Like Lopez 2005.

⁴ For media studies, see Morgan 2008, Mitchell and Hansen 2010; for gender studies see Stimpson and Herdt 2014.

also addressed critically; some authors in this volume (see for instance Ya-pei Kuo) refer directly to this trend of scholarship.

In this introduction, we will explain *why* a study of the intellectual history of concepts and ideas such as this one is crucial, *how* this volume differs from and integrates the findings of previous works on the subject, and *what* the various chapters will contribute to our knowledge of Chinese religious conceptual categories. Finally, we will suggest some ways in which this research path could be developed further in the future.

1 Questioning and Investigating Concepts to Unpack Religious Phenomena

In his book (2009), Gentz reflected on patterns of transcultural encounters, the usefulness of an interdisciplinary approach in cultural studies, and the need to know “particular and relational meanings” of “analytical terms” that define cultures (5–11). Gentz selected a list of terms, which are found in Western and Chinese cultural systems, analyzed them following Western theories and categories, and concluded his examination by showing the limitations in the adoption of Western terms and ideas in the study of Chinese cultures. Contributors to this volume do not neglect Western theoretical approaches to the study of Chinese cultural ideas, but also show flexibility and innovative perspectives when Western theories alone do not shed sufficient light on Chinese concepts. Yang and Lang concluded the introduction to their 2011 volume by stating that the study of the Chinese domestication of Western-based analytical concepts still needed to be integrated with a better understanding of “Chinese-language concepts without direct translations,” and the role they played in the modern religious and academic sectors (Yang and Lang 2011, 19). In our volume, some of these “Chinese-language concepts” will be analyzed in light of their original meanings in the Chinese context, what they have come to mean in modern China, and how the ongoing and largely unresolved tensions between the academic and religious fields have influenced their use and understanding. Goossaert, Kiely, and Lagerway co-edited an important two-volume work, *Modern Chinese Religions (1850–2015)* (Brill, 2016), that investigates paradigm shifts in the history of Chinese religions. Chapters within these two volumes address how value systems have changed and developed from the mid-nineteenth century to today, and focus mainly on the religions of the majority Han culture. As such, *Modern Chinese Religions (1850–2015)* offers a parallel path of investigation to that undertaken in this volume, which discusses critical concepts and the intellectual history of ideas that have framed Chinese

religions from the late Qing until today, and which mainly explores Han culture but also examines other ethnicities. Spira (2015) does not explore religion, however his study concerns modifications that the modern period, and the impact of Western ideologies, applied to Chinese language and conceptual systems, the so-called “project of language modernization” (2), which resulted in the creation of a series of *-isms* (often rendered into Chinese as *zhuyi* 主義). The same reasoning can be adopted in the context of the religious sphere, even if, in a religious domain, the nuances of Western-imported ideas were not always translated with the term *zhuyi*; Hammerstrom’s chapter on ‘science’ and especially ‘scientism’ is a good example in this respect.⁵

Some chapters in this volume address the introduction of new religious concepts or the reshaping of traditional ideas in light of the intellectual, political and social atmosphere of the late nineteenth century and the early Republican period (1912–1949) in China, while others assess ideas that continue to permeate the religious sphere of China and Taiwan particularly in the present day. These key concepts are interconnected because they all engage with debates on traditional dichotomies and recent paradigm shifts. Thus, although each chapter focuses on one or two religious traditions, we can draw upon their arguments to better understand the larger context of Chinese religions more generally, and as such their findings are not strictly limited to the specific cases they explore. For one example, the chapter on new conceptualizations of ‘scripture’ in Chinese Buddhism deals with developments that also had an impact on Daoist communities, their organization, and conceptual identity of their scriptural corpus. In at least one case, the same publishing figure, Ding Fubao 丁福保 (1874–1952), worked on both Buddhist and Daoist collections, having a personal religious identity that was malleable and shifted over time. In addition, some chapters in the volume attempt to go beyond a binary model of Chinese concepts versus Western-imported concepts, and find that certain ideas that are normally identified as Western (such as ‘science’ and ‘education’) were in fact already present in the classical pre-modern Chinese world, although they were reshaped and re-imagined in the new intellectual milieus of nineteenth and early twentieth-century China.

In addition, and building upon the previous point, this volume also aims to open a discussion on analytical and theoretical concepts that could potentially be applied to the study of religion in other contexts, including those in Western societies. In other words, in this volume we approach China as a global player in the overall academic study of religion, not as an exotic outlier. In discussing

5 Lackner, Amelung and Kurtz (2001) is another important previous volume, which assesses capacity and ways in which Chinese language has accommodated Western ideas.

approaches to the study of Chinese history, Wang Hui has urged us to rethink a conceptual framework built upon a strict dichotomy between East and West, and between past and present. He argues:

The real world and the changes in it are endowed with significance and can be understood only through this world of thought. This internal perspective has developed step by step in the ceaseless dialogue between ancient and modern times. Methodologically, the dialogue not only provides a tool to interpret modern times by ancient times, ancient times by ancient times, and ancient times by modern times, but also an opportunity to translate this internal perspective into our introspective perspective. (Wang Hui 2008, 122)

Our volume follows a similar methodology for the investigation of religious factors, deconstructing and analyzing concepts and categories, bringing past and present into dialogue, and looking at East and West not as opposite domains but rather as two imagined zones within a larger shared field of human thought. Contributors to this volume study the intellectual evolution of concepts diachronically, examining how different Chinese terms came to be identified with a similar value through different historical periods, but also examine how values have changed over time. We also study concepts synchronically, the ways in which their intersection and interaction have helped to make China what it is today. In doing so, we hope to highlight the presence and participation of religion in shaping Chinese life and history, as well as the dialectical relation between the religious and the social in China, a role that has too often been occluded or ignored.

Finally, the title of this volume does not include the adjective ‘modern’, although its content does mainly focus on the religious landscape of China from the Ming and Qing dynasties up to the present. We are wary of the problematic implications of making a clear-cut division between the ‘pre-modern’ and the ‘modern’. Additionally, the term ‘modern’ is becoming ever more conventional but less often explicitly explained. In this volume we investigate ideas that have been circulating in recent times, neither implying that those movements and ideas are not rooted in the pre-modern era, nor denying intellectual and conceptual continuity in the history of China. Some chapters in this volume help to reveal precisely the strength and durability of that continuity, as well as developmental shifts within paradigms, in the historical development of Chinese religions. Finally, we note that ‘Chinese’ is taken here in the sense of the so-called ‘greater China’, that is to say, inclusive of the Chinese mainland and places such as Taiwan and Hong Kong, as well as non-Han cultures and ethnic minorities within these areas.

2 From *Jia* 家 to Environmentalism: Key Concepts in this Volume

The enduring relevance of Confucian values and a history of multiple ethnicities are two key features of the world of China, and this volume opens with a chapter that brings important conceptual categories belonging to both of these realities into dialogue. In this chapter, Yuan-lin Tsai also addresses how such a dialogue developed in the works of *jing-tang* scholars from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century such as Wang Daiyu 王岱輿 (1570–1660), Ma Zhu 馬注 (1640–1711), Liu Zhi 劉智 (1660–1730) and Ma Dexin 馬德新 (1794–1874). The chapter begins by identifying parallels between Islamic education and Confucian education, Sunni Islamic Law and Confucian *li* 禮 tradition, and the different worldviews that Confucianism and Islam have proposed. Tsai then analyzes the Chinese vocabulary that Muslim scholars adopted to define their own Islamic concepts and values, highlighting overlapping areas and contrasting them with the meanings that those same Chinese-language terms have assumed in the context of Confucian *li*-rites.

Jason T. Clower's chapter continues the discussion of Chinese inner ideas and values, and focusing on the core importance of family/clan and lineage that are most strongly identified with the terms *jia* 家 and *zong* 宗. Clower explores the development of both strict and loose family groupings in the history of Chinese religions, ranging from the formation of early Buddhist *zongpai* 宗派 to the much more recent overlapping groupings of cross-tradition teachings and teachers. Specifically, Clower selects a case study of how *jia* and lineage were redefined by New Confucians in the first half of the twentieth century. Tsai bases the discussion in his chapter on the dialogue between early Confucian and Islamic concepts and the vocabulary used in both, while Clower analyzes the concept of *jia* in the context of the dialogue between two protagonists of twentieth-century China: New Confucianism and the (apparently) non-Confucian movement of *renjian fojiao* 人間佛教 (which Clower translates as “humanistic Buddhism”). In contrast to Tsai, Clower analyzes New Confucians and Chinese Buddhist modernists as representatives of a single family tree due to what Clower identifies as shared ‘genetic relatives’. Clower's arguments encourage us to rethink our use of *jia* as a strict and exclusive identity marker, thus bringing into question the overall semantic spectrum of the term.

The four chapters that follow those by Tsai and Clower are concerned with changes that happened mostly within Buddhist circles from the late Qing up to today. Ester Bianchi analyzes the concepts of ethics and discipline in her chapter on the *vinaya*; Gregory Adam Scott reconsiders the role of scriptures and

their sacredness in the age of mass printing; Stefania Travagnin outlines the conceptual history of education, its actors, and structures; finally, Erik Hammerstrom discusses the values of science and scientism.

As Bianchi explains in her chapter, *vinaya* is a complex world, with different sets of codes, several categories of precepts, instructions for ritual performances, and regulations regarding monastic dwellings. The process of the Chinese domestication of Buddhism also involved a domestication of the Indian *vinaya* and the creation of separate Chinese-language and Chinese-authored codes, such as the *qinggui* 清規 (pure rules). After a detailed account of the different Chinese concepts and terms used to define each part of *vinaya* in pre-modern China, Bianchi then concentrates on the role of *vinaya* (mostly known in Chinese as *jielü* 戒律) as a unifying factor when Buddhism became a Pan-Asian religion in the modern era. At the same time, she also explores how the Pan-Asian perspective affected understandings and new definitions of *vinaya* in late-Qing and early twentieth-century China. Bianchi concludes her chapter with an overview of how this ‘*vinaya* revival’ has been addressed in modern scholarship of Chinese Buddhism, thus reassessing *vinaya* as a conceptual category in the modernization of Chinese Buddhism.

Scott opens his chapter by examining definitions of ‘word’ and ‘scripture’ in Chinese Buddhism, and continues by outlining the ritual and authoritative roles that scriptures have played in the history of Chinese Buddhism. The availability of scriptures and their teachings about the Dharma changed drastically with the development of modern printing, the foundation of scriptural presses, and the founding and circulation of a number of Buddhist periodicals. Creating and distributing copies of Buddhist scriptures were key activities undertaken in early twentieth-century Buddhism, and had a significant impact on the availability of the Buddhist ‘word.’ The core concept of scriptures as sacred writings did not change with the advent and spread of mass printing, though Scott concludes that it was rather the modality of access and transmission that were transformed.

As in the previous two chapters, Travagnin addresses an overarching concept, “education,” and analyzes a number of Chinese terms (from *xue* 學 to *jiaoyu* 教育) that have been used to name and define that concept. Travagnin explores the history of Buddhist education in mainland China from the time of the arrival of Buddhism and especially from the late Qing onwards, and Taiwan during the Japanese occupation. This chapter identifies a parallel between the history of Chinese public schooling and the changes within Buddhist Sangha education, and undertakes a cross-analysis of the Chinese semantics of learning and education. As in the other chapters on Buddhism in this volume, Travagnin also reminds us of the relevance of figures like Yang Wenhui 楊文會 and Taixu 太虛 in their capacity as paradigms in the project of Buddhist

modernity. At the same time she proposes a counter-paradigm by identifying alternative models and conceptualizations of education, and through highlighting the relevance of the Japanese influence on Chinese Buddhist education from the 1850s up to the 1910s.

In his chapter, Hammerstrom discusses the modern understanding and use of the concepts and values of science, scientism, and pseudoscience by focusing on how and why figures in modern China, Buddhists in particular, used science to discuss matters that were not directly related to science. As in the previous chapters, the concept of science is here assessed in part by looking at the plurality of Chinese terms used to identify it; for instance, *xue* 學 and *kexue* 科學. The author also pays close attention to the religious – especially the Buddhist – contexts where science became prominent, and to those voices that actually created the discourse of science in Chinese religions through influential speeches, essays, and other publications. This chapter further analyzes localized usage, systematic usage, and the methodological usage of science and scientific languages. In addition, Hammerstrom explains why, in his view, Chinese religious actors chose to invoke scientific language and ideas in their discussion of Chinese religions.

The chapters in this volume assess a transformation and redefinition of ideas and values about religion, a transformation that took place in the same era as a wider debate about the very conceptual category of ‘religion’ itself. The concept of religion was partly introduced by Western influences, both directly in the form of treaty protections for Christian mission work and indirectly via translations from Japanese, and partly created by Chinese intellectuals and political elites from the end of nineteenth century into the beginning of the twentieth. Ya-pei Kuo’s chapter examines all these debates on the idea of ‘religion’ vis-à-vis the context of Chinese adoption of the term *zongjiao* 宗教, and the competing voices within those debates, especially those of Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879–1942). As in other chapters, Kuo undertakes a two-level analysis: on the one hand she assesses the meaning and implications of the term *zongjiao*, within the context of the Chinese language and especially the pre-modern adoption of the characters *zong* and *jiao*; on the other hand, she also examines other terms and expressions that came to play when the debate on ‘religion’ emerged in Chinese discourse. Finally, this chapter also looks at the identification of *zongjiao* with Christianity specifically, and the effects that those debates on “Christianity as religion” produced.

One of the effects of the construction of *zongjiao* in Republican China was the gradual formation of new conceptual spaces within the public domain labelled with the term ‘religion’, and thus the creation of new relations between the state, religious beliefs, and society. Adam Yuet Chau’s chapter analyzes one of these recent spaces, the “religion sphere” (*zongjiaojie* 宗教界). Chau provides introductory remarks on the creation and role of *zongjiaojie* in China during the

Republican period as well as in Taiwan, and focuses the body of his chapter on its development in China after 1980. Chau relates the meaning and functions of the *zongjiao jie* to other social “spheres” (*jie* 界) that emerged in China, and thus considers the history of the ‘religion sphere’ within the overall context of the ‘venue-zation’ process that, Chau argues, has characterized the recent social history of China.

This volume closes with an analysis of another non-Han ethnicity. In the first chapter of this volume, Tsai outlines tensions and connections between Han and Hui cultures, while Annabella Pitkin closes the volume by highlighting similarities and oppositions between Han and Tibetan cultures. Pitkin’s chapter explains why and how Tibetans have chosen to focus upon and elaborate on the concept of ‘environmentalism’ in their culture; environmentalism is here also explored in relation to the concepts of ‘space’ and ‘sacredness’.

3 Suggestions for New Research Paths

Although we hope that our volume makes a significant contribution, there are many more concepts and values that could productively be examined in a similar way. These new research trajectories could be grouped under four main labels, namely (1) core concepts in non-Han traditions and languages; (2) cross-tradition patterns; (3) domestication of Western ideas; (4) traditional concepts in diaspora communities. We would especially welcome similar efforts directed at the religious traditions of non-Han minority cultures.⁶ Such research would continue to critically examine the key terms of our discourse on Chinese religions, it would potentially open up new perspectives on their history, and shed more light on the complexity of the Chinese religious and cultural landscape.

We also see the potential for additional studies of religious concepts as they, and the principle figures behind their articulation, have operated across the boundaries of religious traditions. In the context of Chinese religions, these boundaries were evidently porous, situational, and subject to change over time; how did the use and definition of key religious concepts shared by multiple traditions, such as the “Way” (*dao* 道), “trust/faith” (*xin* 信) or “heaven” (*tian* 天)

⁶ Besides the chapters by Tsai and Pitkin in this volume, the volume *Concepts and Methods for the Study of Chinese Religions III: Key Concepts in Practice* also includes Kao’s chapter on the importance of gender and the value of kinship among non-Han peoples, more specifically the Zhuang 壯.