

Concepts and Methods for the Study of Chinese Religions III

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Concepts and Methods for the Study of Chinese Religions III



Key Concepts in Practice

Edited by

Paul R. Katz and Stefania Travagnin

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Preface

Religion in the late Imperial and twentieth-century China has been object of a large number of publications in the past few decades. These studies had used archive and ethnographic research, but had 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 then the present state of analytical and methodological theories, and finally opens a new chapter in the history of concepts and methods for the field itself.

These three volumes explore religion in the so-called greater China, which includes mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Among the authors, some have been trained and published in the fields of anthropology and sociology; some others are historians, textual scholars, area studies scholars, and political scientists. The three volumes then 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 framework responds to the current call for interdisciplinary and cross-tradition debates on a trans-regional horizon and globalization, and therefore 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 major 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 selections 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 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 which each have 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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Preliminary drafts of the chapters by Weishan Huang, Paul R. Katz, Yen-zen Tsai, and Elena Valussi were presented at the international conference *Framing the Study of Religion in Modern China and Taiwan: Concepts, Methods and New Research Paths*, held at the University of Groningen on December 9–12, 2015.

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 our meeting possible. The discussions that took place during the conference were essential for authors as they revised their chapters, and also sparked the idea to produce an edited volume for analyzing critical concepts in the context of religious practice.

Each author offered 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.

Last but not least, we are deeply thankful to the editors of the book series *Religion and Society* at De Gruyter for the unstinting guidance and support they provided for our project.

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Francesca Tarocco is Associate Professor of Buddhist Studies and Chinese Religious History at Ca' Foscari University of Venice and Visiting Professor of Buddhist Cultures at New York University, Shanghai. Her main research interests are Chinese Buddhism and Chinese religious history, material religion, the senses and the body, urban Asia (in particular Shanghai), media, and contemporary art. She is the author of *The Cultural Practices of Modern Chinese Buddhism* and of several journal articles and book chapters on the genealogies and practices of religion in modern China. More recently, she served as the guest editor of a special issue of the *Journal of Global Buddhism* and as associate editor for China of the Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Buddhism. Her current project is *Buddhism and the Re-enchantment of Chinese Modernity*.

Stefania Travagnin is the Director of the Centre for the Study of Religion and Culture in Asia at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. Her research explores Buddhism and Buddhists in China and Taiwan from the late Qing up to the present time, religion and media in China, concepts and methods for the study of Chinese religions. Her publications include the edited volume *Religion and Media in China: Insights and Case Studies from the Mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong* (Routledge, 2016). She is also director of the three-year project ‘Mapping Religious Diversity in Modern Sichuan’ funded by the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange (2017–2020), with Elena Valussi as co-director.

Yen-zen Tsai received a Th.D. from Harvard University (1993). He is a Distinguished Professor in the Graduate Institute of Religious Studies at National Chengchi University. His expertise covers history of early Christianity, Confucianism, and theory of religion. He has published books and articles in these fields, including *Revelation and Salvation: Apocalypticism in the Early Western Civilizations* (Li-hsu, 2001, in Chinese), “Selfhood and Fiduciary Community: A Smithian Reading of Tu Weiming’s Confucian Humanism,” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* (2008), and is the editor of *Religious Experience in Contemporary Taiwan and China* (National Chengchi University, 2013). His recent research has focused on the rise of Christianity in contemporary China in relation to World Christianity.

Elena Valussi received an M.A. in Chinese Studies from the University of Venice, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Chinese History and Religious Studies, from the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. She is an Advanced Lecturer in the History Department at Loyola University Chicago. She has been a visiting scholar and researcher at the University of Venice, at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg. Prof. Valussi's research interests and publications revolve around the intersection of gender, religion and body practices in late imperial Daoism, printing and religion in the late Qing and Republican periods, and Republican period discourses on gender and religion. Recently she has also been focusing on religious diversity in the province of Sichuan, and she is co-directing a large project on this topic with Stefania Travagnin. Valussi is the co-chair of the Daoist Studies Group at the American Academy of Religions and a member of the editorial group for the International *Daozang Jiyao* Project.

Note on Chinese Names, Terms and Transliteration

We have used pinyin transliteration throughout, 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.

Paul R. Katz and Stefania Travagnin

Introduction

Continuing the narrative of Volume II, this book also addresses conceptual categories and values that have been foundational for the narrative of Chinese religions in the last few centuries. Unlike Volume II, the chapters in this book do not just assess the recent history of those values or their intellectual formation, but aim to analyze their role and development during processes of religious practice. Also similar to both Volume I and Volume II, the term *modern* does not appear explicitly in the title in order to highlight continuities and processes of connection, rather than a solid break, between what happened before and after the mid-nineteen century.

In the following pages we will explain why we think the study of concepts in practice can advance the field, the questions the contributors to this volume address, how this book positions itself within the existing scholarship, and how this research line may continue in the future.

1 The Study of Religious *Praxis* in Modern China and Taiwan

What do we mean here by concepts *in practice*?¹ Methodologically, the contributions to this volume draw from different perspectives.

First, in line with the recently developed field of ‘lived religion’,² this volume explores specific case studies of religious environments to unpack how certain values and concepts function in *praxis* and have informed religious practices in a non-Western area. Small communities or individual thinkers are analyzed vis-à-vis the wider overarching regional and more institutionalized (official) picture of Chinese religions.

Second, the study of the concepts in practice addresses the enactment of those concepts into forms of ritualization that eventually may generate new social and institutionalized phenomena.

¹ Among introductory writings on the concept of practice in religion we can list, among the others, Bourdieu (1977) and Catherine Bell (1992 and 1998).

² Scholarship by David Hall, Robert Orsi and Meredith McGuire represents the foundations of the study of lived religion, although their works have concerned only the Western regions.

Third, *praxis* is to be intended in terms of active processes that can intersect different domains and consequently unfold cross-boundary phenomena, give shape to new hybrid identities, and thus have the potential to revise our knowledge of the spectrum of Chinese religion. In this sense, the study of religious *praxis* can reveal new paradigms and refine conceptual categories that, as the following chapters argue, form the background of the religious narrative in China.

Building on the previous point, the study of religious practice needs to be conceived in constructive and continuous dialogue with the sphere of theories and methods. In other words, the exploration of religious ideas and values in ritual practices can also lead to a re-assessment and updating of the theories that frame academic research: concepts are studied through religious practices, and the result knowledge is employed to revise methodological theories. Here is how the spheres of theory and practice merge, the academic research completes a cycle and starts a new one.

Investigating practices in religion becomes crucial in China given the pragmatic behaviors that characterize the Chinese³: as situational etiquette and ritual practices mark every step in Chinese's daily life, then an articulated study of those practices in the religious sphere facilitate the understanding of meanings and structures of Chinese society.

Approaching religions in terms of living practices may also serve to defy the common misunderstanding of the situation of religion in China. If debates on secularization and political attacks on religion have dominated some of the academic sphere and most of the public opinion on China, the case-studies that are examined in this volume clearly confirm the opposite, and indeed that religious values can be hardly separated from social life or even the government level.

2 Book Narrative: Concepts, Practices, and Questions

Our volume opens with a chapter by Paul Katz, who considers the nature of the judicial continuum and what its presence reveals about the development of Chinese legal culture. To do so, he draws on data from his *Divine Justice* book as well as subsequent discussions with scholars in the field of legal history to

³ See for instance Adam Yuet Chau's argument that Chinese religions are not fixed and impermeable systems of belief but 'situation-based practices'.

expand our understanding of judicial practice beyond conventional academic boundaries. Katz defines the judicial continuum as a cogent system of practices that can be used for achieving legitimation and resolving disputes. Such practices include mediation (judgments made by elders and other elites), formal legal procedures (judgments made by officials), and performing rituals (judgments made by the gods). Such acts can be done in succession or in some cases even in tandem.

More recently, leading scholars of Chinese legal history like Jérôme Bourgon and Jiang Yonglin 姜永琳 have stressed the need to account for the institutional divisions between rituals and legal judgments, as well as distinguish between “official” legal philosophy and institutions as opposed to “unofficial” religious/legal values and practices. In response, Katz stresses the importance of the concept of “continuum” as covering an interlinked series of phenomena, while also arguing that the practices mentioned above are interrelated without being identical.

Nikolas Broy’s chapter traces the evolution of Chinese vegetarianism, namely abstention from meat, alcohol, and a number of pungent vegetables. Based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines document research and fieldwork, Broy’s research demonstrates that Chinese vegetarianism is not merely an expression of the Buddhist precept to refrain from killing living beings, but also features multiple meanings related to morality, individual salvation, spiritual power, health, and longevity. He also shows that most practitioners observe only part-time abstention, with a permanent vegetarian diet being important only for Buddhists and Daoist monastics as well as members of voluntary religious associations generally referred to as “sectarian religions” or “redemptive societies”. For members of such groups, strict vegetarianism was integral to the establishment of patterns of distinction, moral conduct, and salvation.

Broy’s chapter opens with a historical study of the emergence and significance of religiously informed vegetarian practices from early medieval China to the modern era. The chapter’s second part illustrates how vegetarianism is practiced among members of two voluntary religious groups: (1) Vegetarian sects (*zhaijiao* 齋教) that were prominent in China and Taiwan up to the Second World War; (2) The Sect of Pervading Unity (*Yiguandao* 一貫道), which emerged as a leading religious movement during the 1930s and has worked to spread Chinese vegetarian and moral practices throughout the world.

The chapter by Yen-zen Tsai also focuses on religion and dietary issues but from a very different perspective, highlighting the importance of food fellowship in contemporary Chinese Christian practice, including the crucial position the kitchen and dining hall occupy in a church’s physical setting.

Tsai's research centers on a case study of the True Jesus Church (*Zhen Yesu jiaohui* 真耶穌教會; founded in 1917), combining documents, interviews, and fieldwork among church communities in Fujian, Zhejiang, and Jiangsu provinces from 2011 to 2013.

Based on the wealth of data he has collected, Tsai observes that Christian practices of sharing meals merge neatly with the commensality that expresses familial ties in Chinese society, thereby branding Chinese churches as family writ large. Such ideas also find expression in vocabularies describing food and its gastrointestinal effects as part and parcel of the experience of scriptural reading. Moreover, Tsai makes the important point that food fellowship practices and the values they promote prove highly attractive in China and Taiwan today, in large part due to the fact that traditional familial ties have been rapidly disintegrating in recent years. Accordingly, food fellowship serves as a driving force behind the burgeoning growth of some Chinese Christian communities.

The book's fourth chapter, by Shuk-wah Poon, explores how Chinese lay Buddhists played a pivotal role in transforming the traditional Buddhist concept of "protecting life" (*husheng* 護生) into a key facet of lay activism during the Republican era. Poon provides a vivid portrayal of the Buddhist animal protection movement in Shanghai, which was initiated by a number of prominent lay elites, including the cartoonist Feng Zikai 豐子愷 (1898–1975) and the laywoman Lü Bicheng 呂碧城 (1883–1943). Lü appears to have played a pivotal role in Shanghai's animal protection movement, in large part due to her having spent much of her life in Europe, which led her to introduce Western ideas of animal protection and World Animal Day to fellow practitioners through her writings in Buddhist magazines.

One result of these lay Buddhist elites efforts was the founding in 1934 of the China Society for the Protection of Animals (*Zhongguo baohu dongwuhui* 中國保護動物會; CSPA), which strove to translate Buddhist ideas of animal protection into actual policies by utilizing the connections some of their elite leaders enjoyed with the political authorities. Poon's research further reveals that, despite claims of being a "secular" organization, the CSPA enthusiastically strove to implement the Buddhist concept of "protecting life" by advocating vegetarianism (see Nikolas Broy's chapter discussed above), building shelters for stray dogs, and calling on the authorities to ban the slaughter of animals on World Animal Day, a festival created by animal protectionists in the West and held on October 4 in commemoration of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals. Poon also identifies the CSPA's pragmatic approach to vegetarianism, one example being its dividing animals into the categories of "edible" and "inedible", despite its stressing the Buddhist teaching of non-killing.

Francesca Tarocco's chapter draws our attention to a more recent development in Chinese religious life, namely the advent of technologically mediated communities in the Chinese-speaking Buddhist world that utilize "technologies of salvation" in the practice of self-cultivation. Tarocco draws on a long-term perspective to show that various forms of contemporary Buddhist technoculture, including WeChat, web-based television, mobile phone apps, CDs and DVDs, karaoke VCDs, microblogging, etc., derive from historical precedents featuring commitment towards dissemination of the Buddhadharma (*hongfa* 弘法), which is now shifting from radio broadcasts, cassette tapes, phonographic records into the digital realm. These arguments are buttressed by data on how Buddhist urbanites in post-socialist China and Sinophone Asia's city-regions (Beijing, the Shanghai-Suzhou-Hangzhou-Ningbo corridor, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Hong Kong, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Taipei) are taking advantage of new technologies to produce a wide range of Buddhist digital religious goods for soteriological purposes.

In her chapter, Elena Valussi provides a sensitive treatment of the development of gender as both an analytical theory in the global scholarly community and a social practice in modern Chinese religion. As it includes a detailed section on the intellectual debates on gender and related concepts in modern Chinese history, this chapter also shares the objectives of the volume *Concepts and Methods for the Study of Chinese Religions II: Intellectual History of Key Concepts*, and it is of interest to its readers.

Valussi opens with a review of the growth of gender studies as an academic field, with particular emphasis placed on the adoption of gender as a conceptual tool that allows scholars to study women in the broader context of their variegated relationships with men. Valussi also draws our attention to the problem of double-blindness in current scholarship, with research in gender studies tending to overlook the importance of religion and research on religion often neglecting the role of gender.

The bulk of Valussi's chapter focuses on the religion's role in new forms of social positioning of Chinese women. Such phenomena began to take shape during the late Qing and Republican eras, which witnessed growing emphasis on the self-cultivation practices of individual women. Valussi pays close attention to two discourses of this era: (1) Those of religious practitioners and their leaders, which stressed the importance of self-cultivation for achieving women's emancipation and equality; (2) Nationalist discourses advanced by Chinese intellectuals, which linked the ideal of the "new women" (*xin nǚxing* 新女性) unfettered by traditional "Confucian" values to China's own emancipation and modernity. The late Qing and Republican eras also witnessed the repositioning of women as public agents in the religious sphere, including utilizing the mass media to learn

about religion and communicate their views to the general public, as well as becoming actively involved in the founding or management of various Christian associations, Buddhist schools, redemptive societies, etc. Such activities could prove invaluable to religious women as a means of pushing the boundaries between traditional and modern, while also discovering their own agency.

The next chapter, by Ya-ning Kao, examines the importance of gender among non-Han peoples, in this case the Zhuang 壮. Kao's long-term research on female shamans in southwest Guangxi delineates three networks they draw on to establish and perpetuate their careers: spiritual, professional and supporters. Such networks, which are created and then maintained through rites of passage and annual rituals, enable Zhuang shamans to solidify their status and influence in local communities.

Kao's chapter opens with an overview of studies on Zhuang religion and shamanism before proceeding to describe various shamanic rites of passage as well as the annual rites each shaman is required to perform. There are also detailed accounts of how the networks mentioned above function, as well as the main characteristics of Zhuang shamans and the spirits they worship.

One of the most striking findings of Kao's research Zhuang shamanism is the importance of kinship, including the prominence of female relatives. For example, shamans are usually recruited via kinship lines, while a shaman candidate and her family must go to the home of a prominent local shaman and beg that shaman to become her teacher and "ritual mother" (she also needs to ask a Daoist priest to serve as her ritual father). As a result of these practices, by the time a new shaman completes her training she will have established an entire ritual family, including not only the ritual parents mentioned above but also ritual siblings or half-siblings who are fellow apprentices of her ritual mother and father. Such relationships last a lifetime, with a shaman being required to assist in the ritual activities of all members of her ritual family, who in turn bear the same obligation. Moreover, apart from a shaman's ritual family, her natal family and spousal family (if married) all play supportive roles in her religious life, especially the rituals mentioned above.

The final two chapters feature new studies on the importance of globalization in contemporary Chinese religious life, particularly the ways in which religious groups and their practices contribute to the development of overseas Chinese communities as well as processes of identity formation. The first, by Junliang Pan, draws on a case study case study of Wenzhou natives in France to trace the mechanisms of their religious networks through three different vectors: Where (places of worship at the heart of religious networks), Who (actors who construct and utilize religious networks), and What (religious knowledge and norms which are imported into communities through religious networks).

Pan's data suggests that Wenzhou religious groups in France can be roughly divided into two categories: Christian groups and non-Christian groups. The first type of groups include congregations of the earliest Chinese Christian church in France, *Eglise évangélique des Chinois à Paris* (*Jidujiao Bali huaqiao jiaohui* 基督教巴黎華僑教會), the largest Wenzhou Protestant church, *Eglise protestante chinoise de Paris* (*Jidujiao Bali Wenzhou jiaohui* 基督教巴黎溫州教會), and the *Eglise protestante évangélique chinoise de France* (*Faguo huaren Jidujiao jiuentang* 法國華人基督教救恩堂), founded by a renowned charismatic pastor from Wenzhou. Non-Christian groups include those that maintain links to popular temple cults in Wenzhou, including those dedicated to Lord Yang (Yang fuye 楊府爺) and Lady Linshui (Linshui furen 臨水夫人; also referred to as Chen Shisi furen 陳十四夫人). In addition, Taiwanese Buddhist organizations such as Foguangshan 佛光山 and Tzu Chi 慈濟 exert considerable influence in some overseas Wenzhou communities. This is also the case for some redemptive societies and other new religious movements, including the Sect of Pervading Unity mentioned above as well as the Great Way of the Maitreya Buddha (*Mile dadao* 彌勒大道).

One particularly fascinating finding discussed by Pan is that while leaders or active members of some groups regularly go on pilgrimage to Taiwan for advanced training, others also choose to maintain close contact with the Chinese authorities. At one Buddhist temple, for example, senior officials from the Office of Religious Affairs of China and the Chinese Embassy in France accompanied monks from a prominent temple in attending a consecration ritual for statues of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas, thereby enhancing the temple's prestige and symbolic capital.

The concluding chapter, by Weishan Huang, is grounded in a transnational view of Chinese society and culture as no longer being constrained by the boundaries of the nation-state. Huang's research centers on a case study of Falun Gong 法輪功, a new religious movement that arose in China in 1992, with exiled members now residing abroad in more than 40 countries. Based on the analysis of printed and website materials, as well as fieldwork and interviews conducted in the United States between 2004 and 2005 (especially New York City), Huang makes the important point that some Falun Gong members have chosen to adopt the political and moral values of their new homelands by using these countries' legal discourse and practices as instruments of resistance against the Chinese government. She also argues that for some Falun Gong members the pursuit of legal action has multiple meanings, such as attempting to stop persecution, raising awareness of the plight of practitioners in China, etc. At the same time, however, some members view going to court as a ritual activity in its own right, namely a process of waiting for ultimate judgment realized by Buddhist Dharma (*Fofa* 佛法).

3 Updating the Field and Advancing New Research Paths

As the introduction of Volume I outlines in detail, the last two-three decades have witnessed the publications of many and solid studies of religious communities and practices in the modern period, works based on either archive research or ethnographic encounters. In addition, these decades also saw the emerging of new fields of study, like the research on religion and media/technology,⁴ which developed from the study of material culture and printing, and the analysis of religious communities in the shape of regional, transregional and transnational networks. The latter is partly a result of the recent ‘spatial turn’ in religious studies, and is also framed as a new development of the much earlier research on religious diplomacy and exchanges in pre-modern East Asia. Finally, the new opening to religion in contemporary China made in-depth and long-term ethnographic research possible, with the consequent development of the field of ethnology and ethnography and the emic investigation of more case studies. This research on the ground became crucial as it unveiled new aspects of the religious landscape in China, and eventually made necessary the refining of existing theories of investigation. A careful reading of the history of native and imported ideas shows that those ideas have been continuously reshaped into different activities and phenomena, see for instance the transformation of the traditional concept of *fangsheng* 放生 into new forms of social institutional practices.

Recent works on conceptual categories and the religious discourse of China include the book *Social Scientific Studies or Religion in China: Methodology, Theories, and Findings* edited by Fenggang Yang and Graeme Lang (Leiden: Brill, 2014), the volume *Globalization and the Making of Religious Modernity in China: Transnational Religions, Local Agents, and the Study of Religion, 1800-present* edited by Thomas Jansen, Thoralf Klein and Christian Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2014), and the two-volume publication *Modern Chinese Religions*, edited by Vincent Goossaert, Jan Kiely and John Lagerway (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

If the first differs from ours in focusing only on religion in the mainland and mostly during the post-1980 era, the other two publications are closer in themes and objectives. *Globalization and the Making of Religious Modernity in China* (2014) considered religions as “concrete manifestations” (Jansen, Klein, Meyer 2014, 4), highlighted practices, and underlined connections and exchanges between East and West. However, our volume does not limit its lens

⁴ See for instance Travagnin (2017).

of investigation to the concepts of globalization and global religiosity,⁵ and also includes studies on transnational networks and diaspora communities.⁶ *Modern Chinese Religions* (2016) considers a set of values and macro-areas, in their transformation under the imperative of ‘rationalization, interiorization, secularization’ (i.e., modernity), and that same transformation is seen in dialogue with the pre-modern milieu. Our volume continues a similar discussion by analyzing other concepts, doing so on the basis of alternative case studies, and going beyond the Han Chinese cultural sphere; moreover, the ‘religion project’ of post-Qing China is seen as transcending the interdependence between the religious and the secular, and framed within distinct local patterns.

Our volume integrates existing scholarship, and proposes new settings for the emic investigation of religion in Chinese societies. Like Volume I and Volume II, contributions to this book addressed subjects so far often neglected such as non-Han religions, the issue of gender, the use of media and technology, and transregional movements. This volume investigates concepts in *practice*, proposes a different method for the study of ideas and values, thus updating the theoretical frameworks of the field. Certainly, more research on this front is still necessary, and the introductions of Volumes I and II have already indicated new areas that we deem worthy of investigation.

Catherine Bell has argued, “Critical terms are not critical because they contain answers but because they point to the crucial questions at the heart of how scholars are currently experiencing their traditions of inquiry and the data they seek to encounter” (Bell 1998, 220). Similarly, this volume explores known questions, but also points to areas that have been overlooked, so as to open the possibility for new research trajectories, inquiries and encounters, and alternative traditions of scholarship.

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⁵ See Weishan Huang’s chapter on globalization in this volume.

⁶ Topics explored in this volume especially by Junliang Pan but also by Francesca Tarocco.

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