

Chapter 2

The Chinese Understanding of Religion

2.1 The Meaning of Religion

Ancient China did not witness the combined usage of the two words *zong* and *jiao* (“religion”), yet the religious connotations of each of them could be extracted from classical anthologies. The character “*zong*” originally has meanings related to the institution, structure and space of religions, including (1) “ancestral shrine”, as recorded in The Chapter Dayu Mo (The Counsels of Yu the Great) from *The Book of History*, and “Shrine of gods, or the Shrine of Wenzu” in *Amplification of the Book of History*; (2) “ancestors,” according to the note to “If no punishment was issued by Jingong, he could take the inherited position,” which reads “inherit the position of his ancestors” in *The Zuo Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals*, Cheng Gong, year 3; (3) “patriarchal clan,” according to “Songs of the Five Sons” in *The Book of Documents*, which records “Wildly have we dropped the clue he gave us, /Overturning our temple, and extinguishing our sacrifices” and its note “the neglect and abandonment of Taikang led to the loss of his profession, and the discontinuity of his ancestral clan and the termination of sacrificial rites”; (4) “turn to,” as in “the Yangtze River and Han River flow to the sea” from “Tribute of Yu” in *The Book of History*; (5) “to be presented at court,” as in “being presented at court in Spring is called *chao* and in the Summer *zong*,” from the section of “the Chief Overseer of ritual affairs” in “Spring offices” from *Rites of Zhou*; (6) “revere,” as in “When the sincere and polite clansmen are to meet the dukes, the rite is done according to order not unlike that of the sacrificial rite to heaven and earth” from “Announcement concerning Luoyang” in *Book of Documents*, and in the lines “to the powers above and below I have presented my offerings and then buried them/there is no spirit whom I have not honored” from “Cloud river” in the “Major Court Hymns” of *The Classic of Poetry*; (7) “original source,” as in “only for the present a mere man, but he will return to his original source” from “Knowledge Rambling in the North” of *Zhuangzi*; (8) “gist,” as in “being polite to guests and taking pity on those who are in straits constitute the gist of propriety” from

Discourses of the States (“Discourses of Jin,” *Jinyu*, No. 4); (9) “sect,” as in “Practicing the Southern Chan sect with one Alms bowl/An excuse of illness with the demeanor of a monk” from the poem “Twenty Lines to Master Yuanfu of Kaiyuan Temple on a Winter Day” by the poet Xu Hun in his *Ding Mao Ji*. From such expressions can be found meanings related to forms of religious organizations, locations of activities, social structures, ritual and institutions, historical continuity, etc. Back in the era of Yu Shun, one of Five legendary Emperors, there were already activities of religious worship and sacrifice, as recorded in “...sacrificed with reverent purity to the Six Honored Ones” from the chapter “Canon of Yao” of *The Book of Documents*. Six Honored Ones refers to the Heavenly Three, that is, the sun, moon and stars, and the Earthly Three, namely, rivers, seas and mountains. *Shuowenjiezi* (Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters) defines “zong” as “zong, ancestral shrines, with two radicals 宀 and 示.” The radical 宀 has meanings of buildings, houses and locations; 示 itself has the two radicals of “二” (denoting “above or heaven”) and “川” (the three vertical strokes, standing for Sun, Moon, and Stars). Thus, *Shuowenjiezi* defines the “zong” as follows: 示 implies that heaven uses the celestial movements and other signs to tell people when things will be good and when bad times are coming (it follows “二”); the three revelations are the sun, the moon and the stars, and if you observe the celestial movement to compare to current events, it will show you gods’ wills.”

The word “jiao”, in its lexical legacy, has meanings of school of thought, thought, theories, and doctrines, denoting “following the teacher” and “attaining the Tao through learning.” In this aspect, the “jiao” in “zongjiao” and that in “jiaohua” have no fundamental differences or absolute boundaries. The original meanings of “jiao” include: (1) “political education” or “civilization”, as in “as a senior governmental official,¹ you should revere and carry out the Five Teaching” from the chapter “Canon of Yao” of *The Book of Documents*, and *The Annotations of The Book of Rites* has “When we visit a country, we can sense what education is provided there”; (2) “educate” or “admonish,” as in “...and if they are well fed, warmly clad, and comfortably lodged, without being taught at the same time, they become almost like the beasts” from *The Works of Mencius-Teng Wen Gong I*, and Dalu in *Xunzi* has “*The Book of Poetry* says, give them food and drink/provide them with education and morality”; (3) “instruct” or “preach,” as stated in “...I know that I am insufficient even for this, and must be allowed even in the rule of my family to act as I shall be instructed by you” from *Zuo Zhuan, Duke Xiang, Year 26*; (4) “order” or “command,” as in “...brought about a communication between Wu and Jin, and made Wu revolt from Chu” from *Zuo Zhuan, Duke Xiang, Year 26*, and *Records on Tang Poetry* has the lines “O, Chase those golden nightingales away!/They must not chirp, keep chirping, up my tree”; (5) “doctrines or theory,” as in “fellows gather students to instruct and learn/Fellows swarm in companies” from “Epitaph for Mr He, the Traveling Soldier” by Emperor Jian Wen Di of the Liang Dynasty, and “Discourse on Turning the Wheel of the Dharma” in *Lalitavistara*

¹Translator note: 故作司徒 should be 汝作司徒.

Sutra also has statements like “The Buddha enlightens sentient beings with expedient means according to occasions.” As a matter of fact, the word “jiao” had already been used in China’s high antiquity to express people’s “faith in ways of the gods”, as manifested in the Guan Hexagram of the *Book of Changes*: “When we contemplate the spirit-like way of Heaven, we see how the four seasons proceed without error. The sages, in accordance with (this) spirit-like way, laid down their instructions, and all under heaven yield submission to them”; the Confucian classic *Doctrine of the mean* points out that “What Heaven confers is called nature/Accordance with this nature is called the Tao/Cultivating the Tao is called education (religion)”; “Meaning of Sacrifices” in *Record of Rites* provides a more definite explanation, “unifying gods and ghosts constitutes the ultimate pursuit of education.” The religious connotation of the word “jiao” originated in the Shang Dynasty, referring to the religious practitioners, taking on the meaning of “priest” in the Spring and Autumn Period, and later evolving to mean “educate”, “teacher”, “education” etc., so Cai Yunpei in his *Treatise on Buddhism Protecting the Nation* connected “jiao” and “guo (nation),” by stating that “A nation is formed by grouping men, and education functions in clarifying the Tao of inter-personal relationships. A nation without education would come to ruins due to the bestiality of men; therefore, all forms of education aim at protecting the nation. Our nation’s education started with Xie, an ancestor of the kings of the Shang dynasty, and with Confucius came the first educators.”

In China, the combined usage of the two characters “zongjiao” originated with the Buddhist terminology. In his “Answer to Master Fa Yun in Writing Against ‘On the Annihilation of the Soul’”, Yuan Ang (459–540) of the Liang Dynasty mentioned that “looking up to seek the sacred canons, with manifest expressions and no wu (nothingness); yet all should be rooted in teaching (*zongjiao* or religion) and take refuge in the you (thingness)”. In “Letter to Wendi Emperor in Presenting the Catalog of the Sutras”, Shi Fajing of the Sui Dynasty, when explaining the purpose for editing the sutras, emphasized “eulogizing orthodox scriptures, manifesting religions, glorifying previous traditions and promoting future learning”. In Chan Master Guifengzongmi’s “Answers to Shi, the Mountain Man”, Chapter 13 of *Record of the Transmission of the Lamp [Buddhist Doctrines] in the Jingde Era* is recorded “After the nirvana of the Buddha, the teaching was transmitted to MahaKasyapa, in a one-master lineage, which could be interpreted as the fact that the religious leader of a time is like the one and only sovereign of a state; it does not mean that the liberated ones are so few.” Chapter Seven (“Chan Master Huanglong Huinan”) of *Sequel to Record of the Transmission of the Lamp* states that “a senior named Shen Li, observing that the gentleman was exhausted from traveling, said to him that ‘I have long resided in the mountains, having not yet complemented the teaching from the root (*zongjiao*); how dare I burden you with temple affairs?’”. Since then, the Buddhist tradition regarded what the Buddha said as “jiao (teaching)” and what the disciples taught as “zong (sect)”, with zong being the sects of Buddhism, and the two, combined, was termed “zongjiao (religion)”. Originally, “zongjiao” referred to the “doctrines” of Buddhism; later it was used to as a general term for all “faith in the Tao of gods”; thus, the Chinese term “zongjiao” began to

denote “the tenets of life and the transformative education of the society,” taking on the meaning of religious faith.

The convergence of the Chinese term for religion and the Western word “religion” concurred in the latter half of the 19th century, reflecting the in-depth communication between Chinese and Western cultures. This correspondence of the two terms was introduced to China “via Japan”. Since 1868, the term religion had been translated into “宗教” in The Meiji government documents, and it kept appearing in treaties of commerce and navigation and works that introduced the West, for instance, in Yochi Shinzu’s *Records of Things Heard and Seen in the West*. The earliest influence on the Chinese use of religion into “zongjiao” was attributed to Huang Zunxian and his *Annals of Japan*. The draft of the book was completed in 1887 and published in 1895. Commenting on “Huaxia” and “Taixi”, the book mentioned “the differences between the customs, folklore, religions and politics of the countries” (Zheng 2014), employing the word “zongjiao” in many instances. However, the Chinese academia at the time did not commonly accept Huang’s translation of the term religion into “zongjiao”, with some scholars even preferring the transliteration of “erlilijing.” Peng Guangyu, the only Chinese representative who participated in the World’s Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893, translated “erlilijing” into “wu (spirit medium or shaman)” and the terms for Christian missionaries, priests and bishops into “zhu (Invocators)”, arguing that “religion” in Chinese should be termed as “divination with mystical theology” (Chen Wei Zi Xue). Later on, other scholars proposed the word “Tao” to interpret “religion”, yet circumstances change with the passage of time, and now “religion” is translated into “zongjiao” in today’s China.

With the unified continuity within the tradition of Chinese religions, the localization of foreign religions in China is also influenced by the features of “synthesis” and “unification” in Chinese culture. In view of the Chinese historical tradition, the Chinese religious faith has a high degree of humanistic bent, This-Shore orientation, and utilitarian inclination, so it is more secular and more reliant upon politics. Historically, there is a dualistic tendency in the development of Chinese religions, that is, the political and the scholastic religions will take “the upper-level line”, seemingly diverging from the grassroots and folklore religions, and creating an impression of differences even within the same religious faith. In addition, the “association” of Chinese religions is equally complicated, difficult to be clarified by the two modes of constructiveness and diffusiveness. Some religious associations are very conscious about their community, with strict and sound organizing principles, while others are more floating and lack in regularity. When it comes to the nature of traditional Chinese religions, there is the differentiation between “folk religions” and “folk beliefs”. But some religions, though having no religious orders in the strict sense, are affiliated to and manifested by the communities in the lower strata of the society. In this way, the Chinese faith development is closely and indivisibly linked to China’s social construction and cultural propagation. The Chinese religious faith endures today despite countless difficulties and setbacks, manifesting a strong presence in the contemporary multiculturalism. Thus, a recognition, tolerance and forbearance of the Chinese religious faith is indispensable to the sustainable and

sound development of the Chinese society. The Chinese religious faith serves as a historical mirror, making us view the world as clearly as a blazing fire, enlightening and shaping the future.

2.2 The Spiritual Aspiration of Religion

Religion manifests the spiritual aspiration of man, reflecting his uncertainty between the sacred and the secular, his indetermination between eternity and reality, and his lingering between the supernatural and the natural. The Chinese regard religion as also a yearning for and a pursuit of the sanctified way of life, believing in the divine law of “There is always a god overseeing you somewhere above your head,” and hoping to obtain a “catharsis” and purification of the soul through religious cultivation. According to Chinese Buddhism, “the heart of the faithful one is rendered clear and pure”; religion could help to “purify one’s mind,” and to develop “a profound righteousness and a pure nature”, which in turn enables one to “abstain from unwholesome deeds, and perform only the wholesome ones.” The Buddhist concept of “the original purity of human nature” emphasizes the purification of one’s heart and the restoration of human nature to simplicity and innocence, aiming to locate one’s inherent “Buddha nature” directly. With “Buddha nature” as a transcendence of the “human nature,” Buddhism reveals its spirit of seeking the abstract benti (origin–substance). Based on its “Treatise on Buddha-nature”, Buddhism proposes a “jumping out of” and transcendence of the mundane world, that is, seeing through the nature of the worldly existence, having an insight into the “great chiliocosm” (daqian shijie), and emphasizing that “the myriads of phenomena before our eyes belong to one true dharma-dhatuu”.

Taoism, as a classic model of the Chinese traditional religions, also stresses the simplicity and purity of “the way of Heaven is the state of the Self” and “Tao follows the ways of itself”. Yet, the actualization of this simplicity requires people to “appear plain, hold nativeness, reduce selfishness and diminish desires”; only in so doing can one rejoice in heaven and know about destiny, and achieve the realm of “Heaven, Earth and I co-exist, and all things and I are one”, that is, unity with the Tao. The Taoist detachment and tranquility enables one to contemplate and seek the Tao that “regulates the myriad of things” and “master the truth of all ages”. Taoism understands “Tao” as the transcendent benti (Origin–Substance) and the ideal realm man yearns for and pursues. In terms of its origin and transcendence, “Tao is the holding of nothingness, the root of creation, the origin of divinity, and the beginning of Heaven and Earth.”² Meanwhile, when “contemplating the Way of Heaven and sticking to the Heaven’s order,” man should observe “the Tao of man.” One’s aspiration in life consists in holding the “Way of Heaven” and the “Way of Man,” which could not be rendered as compulsory and burdensome; in terms of the Taoist

²*Treatise on the Mysterious Matrix* by Wu Yun of Tang Dynasty.

insight, “(Tao’s) placidity is unlimited, while all things to be valued attend them: such men pursue the way of heaven and earth, and display the characteristics of the sages.”³ If a man could achieve this state, he would “take all vicissitudes in life as manifestations of his destiny, which is the perfection of virtues.”⁴ Such tranquility and naturalness faithfully mirrors the religious spirit of rooting in the self and transcending the self.

Confucianism is generally viewed as man’s reverence for “humanistic spirit” and emphasis on “human learning”, rooted in “the measure of man”, a concept that reflects “the virtues of Heaven and Earth” and “the heart of Heaven and Earth”. Yet heaven worship transforms the Confucian School that upholds the “benevolence” of the family and state into the Confucian religion that expresses a transcendental pursuit. Heaven and earth, in their naturalistic aspects, do not necessitate reverence, and a “reticent” attitude towards them could have been adequate. However, the Confucian religion not only manifests appropriate worship to heaven and earth, but also investigates the “origin-root of the Tao of heaven”, professing a spiritual pursuit of “clarifying the origin of the myriads of things and the beginning of heaven and earth”, and manifesting the coexistence of the Three Teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism in Classical Chinese culture. Thus, according to the argument of Ren Jiyu, “though lacking in the external features of mass religions, Confucianism has all the fundamental characteristics of all religions” (Jiyu 1980). The Confucian religion attributes enlightenment to the ontological “The Tao comes from Heaven” and relates itself to the concepts of “Tao civilizes people” and “Tao moralizes people” in man’s social life, from which its religious spirit is manifested. In the Confucian religious tradition, “Heaven” has its unique status of supremacy; in the later feudal dynasties of China, it functioned as the “national religion” of the imperial power, and only the “Son of Heaven” (the emperor) was qualified to make sacrifices to heaven, while the subjects’ sacrifices to Heaven would be considered a transgression; anyway, various lower-ranked “sacrificing to the heavenly gods” became popular in the Chinese society.

In the Chinese religious tradition, many religions have the utilitarian worshiping of gods and praying for blessings, resulting in a sort of discomfort from the foul atmosphere of falling down to the tangible gods and various idols. But this is not the whole picture of Chinese religions; it is only the part that is “within shapes,” the part that needs constant improvement and adjustment. The true embodiment of the Chinese religious spirit is the “deification” and “sublimation” achieved through the “moralization” and “sanctification” of the human spirit that transcends the above mentioned tangible level of religious pursuit. We have not paid enough attention to this aspect in the past, or rather, it has been mostly ignored. And it is this true essence of the Chinese religions that we need to explore and promote. In the contemporary social life and religious practices, we should check the utilitarian degradation and promote the sublime spiritual realm.

³“Ingrained Opinions” of *Zhuangzi*.

⁴“In the Human World” of *Zhuangzi*.

2.3 The Social Existence of Religion

Religion is closely connected to Chinese society, and China's "ancestral clans" and "patriarchal systems" are too bound with it. The relationship of religion to Chinese society differs greatly from that of other countries or nations, for the dependence of Chinese religion on imperial power, its service for politics and its existence embedded in the society combine to make its "religiosity" less manifest, resulting in the conjecture that there was no religion in the ancient Chinese society, or other peculiar readings of Chinese religions. As opinions vary on whether religion is a "normal" phenomenon in China or whether China is a typical "secular country", no decision can be reached as a result of this cognitive disorganization.

It can be said that Chinese religion is a "normal" phenomenon in Chinese society. Yet, unlike other countries, Chinese religion's "normal" existence is subordinate to the "Kingly Way of Politics"; the Chinese political structure and the sovereign, the political autocrat, exert a great impact upon religions and hold sway over the social destiny of the religions. In the longstanding history of China, the Chinese society has not been a "secular country"; its overpowering political authority and its involvement in religions have rendered Chinese religions unable to exercise their supreme authority; the sovereigns have led and controlled the religions, molding China into a unique "unity of the political and the religious" or a "political and religious fusion". With political authority to "enforce justice on behalf of Heaven", acting as the "spokesperson for God", the "Son of Heaven" becomes the absolute "Heaven's Favored One"; people believe that "the heavenly father will love the 'Son of Heaven' as a father loves his son, and only the 'Son of Heaven', as the legal representative of man and heavenly God, can carry out the rituals of ritual sacrifice and worship of Heaven" (Tianshun 1982).

With the reform of "the isolation of Heaven and Earth", the Chinese religious authority came to be within the domain of the political institution, and emperors headed the grand ceremonies of ritual sacrifices to Heaven by means of Border Sacrifice, Temple Sacrifice and the fengshan offerings to Heaven and Earth. Such imperial authoritarianism in religious institutions and activities made it very difficult for Chinese religions to manifest their own authority, resulting in the absence of religions with a universal authority in its true sense. The Confucian religion, as the "national religion", had to be affiliated to the imperial power, and the deification of Confucius was an outcome of Emperor Wu of Han's policy of "Paying Supreme Tribute to Confucianism while Banning All Other Schools of Thought", thus initiating the transformation of the Confucian Teaching to Confucian Religion. With the founding of Confucian Religion by Dong Zhongshu, Confucius, though revered as the Lord of the religion, being granted titles such as "Sage Endowed by Heaven", "Heaven's bell with a wooden tongue", "Model Teacher for Ten Thousand Ages", "the Former Teacher, and the Great Completer, Supreme Sage", etc., was still regarded as a sage, not a "god"; besides, historically, the Confucian religion was always politically controlled and used, so its religiosity has always been blurred and questioned.

In view of the mixed nature of the Chinese ancient religions, as well as the complex relationships between religions and the patriarchal society, some scholars would rather prefer the term “traditional patriarchal religion” to Confucian Religion. Due to the political involvement and affiliation, the fate of Chinese religions is bound with that of the political system, and that is why the Confucian Religion died its natural death as a national religion when the The Xinhai (1911) Revolution overthrew China’s feudal rule. Nonetheless, ancient regions in China had not just their official manifestations; they had a parallel development in the folk forms. Some even believe that the true Chinese Confucian religion is not the one in the sense of the national religion, but its folk and non-official forms, which were closer to the society, for “when the rites are lost, people look for them in the wilds”. In reality, the folk Chinese religions have always been alive and active. After the “the isolation of Heaven and Earth” reforms and the retaking of power from the people as initiated by Zhuanxu, a mythological emperor of ancient China, the phenomena of “the mixture of human and deities” together with “everyone acting as ritual agents” had not been fundamentally changed; instead, the folk religions developed in wild profusion and “illicit shrines” seemed unstoppable. The kaleidoscopic nature of the Chinese religions made it difficult to find an accurate positioning and differentiation of the official and folk religions, and even the Confucian religion had diverse manifestations, both folk and official. The unified tradition of the Chinese “respect-heaven-follow-ancestor” also had its dual yet father-apart lines of official and folk development. Although these two poles both adhered to the tradition of “respect-heaven-follow-ancestor”, the religious impression is that the official practice is more devoted to revering heaven and the folk to following ancestors on the part of the clans and families.

This mainline religion is characterized by the correlation and differentiation of the Chinese concepts of respecting heaven and following ancestor, which comes to be aptly described by Mou Zhongjian in his “The Patriarchal Tradition of Religion” as “originating in the three dynasties of Xia, Shang and Zhou, and continuously reinforced later on, the traditional religion, which has at its core the heavenly god worship and ancestral worship, assumes all the basic features of average religions, that is, religious concepts, religious sentiments and sacrificial activities, but not independent organizations, with only the patriarchal, hierarchical institutions executing the various religious functions. The Son of Heaven, representing the royal family, would make sacrifices to heavenly gods, and the heads of the clan and the family would be in charge of sacrificing for ancestors. Respect-heaven-follow-ancestor and *shenzhongzhuiyuan* (paying careful attention in performing the funeral rites to parents, and being present at parents’ departure) are the basic requirements in terms of concepts and emotion. This type of religion has a close link to and a direct service for the patriarchal hierarchies and ideology” (Zhongjian 1989). This mainline religion of China, which “continued without interruption until the end of the Qing Dynasty”, also termed as “the Confucian Religion”, or fundamentally characterized as a “patriarchal traditional religion”, is in fact the main line or main trend manifested in the religious development of traditional Chinese society; moreover, according to Mou Zhongjian, it is precisely “an orthodox religious

tradition accepted by all walks of Chinese life and extending thousands of years without extinction.”

In fact, not only the Confucian Religion or “patriarchal traditional religion” has the combination of the official and folk characteristics; it is also the case with Buddhism and Taoism, being typical in the traditional Chinese society, though the latter two had more folk orientation and more connections to the life of the folks. These two types of religions, with both unique cooperation and competition or repulsion, manifest the fresh liveliness of the existence of religions in the Chinese society. China has never been a “secular society” since ancient times; instead, it is always full of religious elements and atmosphere.

In addition, against the background of cultural communication between China and the West, China embraces and absorbs not only Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, but also different religions that came to China from other countries. Thus, China has a rich and colorful religious existence, reflecting not only indigenous traditions but also exotic flavors. From times immemorial to today, the religious presence in China is an indisputable fact that can never be neglected when it comes to understanding China and clarifying its nature.

2.4 Religion and National Traditions

Religion is closely related to the development of China’s ethnic groups, constituting an important part of the Chinese national tradition. China is a multi-ethnic country, with the Han ethnic group as the mainline totaling 1.2 billion out of the whole population of 1.3 billion. In today’s China, there are 55 minority nationalities with a population of more than 0.1 billion, inhabiting an immense area. At present, the autonomous regions of China account for 64% of its land area, the west and border lands being densely populated by the minority groups. China’s land border extends about two hundred and twenty thousand kilometers, of which one hundred and ninety thousand is in the ethnic areas. Of the 55 ethnic minorities, regional autonomy is practiced in 44 of them, with 5 autonomous regions, 30 autonomous prefectures and 120 autonomous counties (or banners), accounting for 71% of the total minority population; besides, over 30 are cross—border ethnic groups, with complicated international connections, tremendous international influence, and diverse religious beliefs.

According to the national census of 2010, of all the minority ethnic groups of China, 18 have a population over one million and 6 have a population of less than ten thousand. In terms of population and distribution, the Zhuang nationality has a population of over 16,920,000, inhabiting the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Yunnan Province and Guizhou Province; the Hui Nationality has a population of over 10,580,000, inhabiting Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and provinces of Gansu, Henan, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, Qinghai, Yunnan, Hebei, Shangdong, Anhui, Liaoning, Beijing Municipality, Heilongjiang, Tianjin Municipality, Jilin and Shanxi; the Man Nationality has a population of over

10,380,000, inhabiting provinces of Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Hebei, Beijing Municipality, and Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region; the Uighur Nationality has a population of about 10,006,000, inhabiting mainly the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, with a small portion in Hunan Province; the Miao Nationality has a population of about 9,420,000, inhabiting provinces of Guizhou, Yunnan, Hubei, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Sichuan, Guangdong and Hubei; the Yi Nationality has a population of about 8,710,000, inhabiting provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region; the Tujia Nationality has a population of about 8,710,000, inhabiting provinces of Hunan, Hubei, Guizhou, Sichuan and Chongqing Municipality; the Tibetan Nationality has a population of about 6,280,000, inhabiting provinces of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan; the Mongolian Nationality has a population of about 5,980,000, inhabiting provinces of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Qinghai, Hebei, Henan, Gansu and Yunnan; the Dong Nationality has a population of about 2,880,000, inhabiting provinces of Guizhou, Hunan and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region; the Buyi Nationality has a population of about 2,870,000, inhabiting mostly Guizhong Province; the Yao Nationality has a population of about 2,790,000, inhabiting the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, and provinces of Hunan, Yunnan, Guangdong, Guizhou and Sichuan; the Bai Nationality has a population of about 1,930,000, inhabiting provinces of Yunnan and Guizhou; the Korean Nationality has a population of about 1,830,000, inhabiting provinces of Jilin, Heilongjiang and Liaoning; the Hani Nationality has a population of about 1,660,000, inhabiting mainly Yunnan Province; the Li Nationality has a population of about 1,460,000, inhabiting mainly Hainan Province; the Kazakh Nationality has a population of about 1,460,000, inhabiting Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region and Gansu Province; the Dai Nationality has a population of about 1,260,000, inhabiting mainly Yunnan Province; the She Nationality has a population of about 700,000, inhabiting provinces of Fujian, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Guangdong and Anhui; the Lili Nationality has a population of about 700,000, inhabiting provinces of Yunnan and Sichuan; the Dongxiang Nationality has a population of about 620,000, inhabiting Gansu Province and Xinjiang Autonomous Region; the Yilao Nationality has a population of about 620,000, inhabiting Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and provinces of Guizhou and Yunnan; the Lahu Nationality has a population of about 480,000, inhabiting mainly Yunnan Province; the Wa Nationality has a population of about 420,000, inhabiting mainly Yunnan Province; the Shui Nationality has a population of about 410,000, inhabiting mainly Guizhou Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region; the Naxi Nationality has a population of about 320,000, inhabiting mainly provinces of Yunnan and Sichuan; the Qiang Nationality has a population of about 300,000, inhabiting mainly Sichuan Province; the Tu Nationality has a population of about 280,000, inhabiting mainly provinces of Qinghai and Gansu; the Mulao Nationality has a population of about 210,000, inhabiting mainly Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region; the Xibo Nationality has a population of about 190,000, inhabiting mainly Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, Liaoning Province and Jilin Province; the Kirgiz Nationality has a

population of about 180,000, inhabiting mainly Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region and Heilongjiang Province; the Jingpo Nationality has a population of about 140,000, inhabiting mainly Yunnan Province; the the Daur [Tahur] Nationality has a population of about 130,000, inhabiting mainly Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Heilongjiang Province and Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region; the Sala Nationality has a population of about 130,000, inhabiting mainly Qinghai Province and Gansu Province; the Bulang Nationality has a population of about 110,000, inhabiting mainly Yunnan Province; the Maonan Nationality has a population of about 100,000, inhabiting mainly Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region; the Tajik Nationality has a population of about 50,000, inhabiting mainly Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region; the Pumi Nationality has a population of about 40,000, inhabiting mainly Yunnan Province; the Achang Nationality has a population of about 39,000, inhabiting mainly Yunnan Province; the Nu Nationality has a population of about 37,000, inhabiting mainly Yunnan Province; the Evenki Nationality has a population of about 30,000, inhabiting mainly Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and Heilongjiang Province; the Jing Nationality has a population of about 28,000, inhabiting mainly Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region; the Jino Nationality has a population of about 23,000, inhabiting mainly Yunnan Province; the Deang Nationality has a population of about 20,000, inhabiting mainly Yunnan Province; the Baoan Nationality has a population of about 20,000, inhabiting mainly Gansu Province; the Russian Nationality has a population of about 15,000, inhabiting mainly Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region; the Yugu Nationality has a population of about 14, 000, inhabiting mainly Gansu Province; the O'zbeklar Nationality has a population of about 10,000, inhabiting mainly Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region; the Menba Nationality has a population of about 10,000, inhabiting mainly the Tibetan Autonomous Region; the Oronco Nationality has a population of about 8,600, inhabiting mainly Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and Heilongjiang Province; the Dulong Nationality has a population of about 6,900, inhabiting mainly Yunnan Province; the Hezhe Nationality has a population of about 5,000, inhabiting mainly Heilongjiang Province; the Gaoshan Nationality has a population of about 4,000, inhabiting mainly Taiwan Province and Fujian Province; the Luoba Nationality has a population of about 3,600, inhabiting mainly Tibetan Autonomous Region; and the Tataer Nationality has a population of about 3,500, inhabiting mainly Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.

In China, Confucianism or the traditional patriarchal religions have the longest historical standing, indispensably connected to the development of the Chinese nationality, particularly the Han nationality. Since Emperor Wudi of the Han Dynasty's "Dismissing the hundred schools, and revering only the Confucian School" at the suggestion of the Confucian Scholar Dong Zhongshu, the Confucian School was elevated to the Confucian Religion, serving as the official religion of China. From Western Han Dynasty to the the Xinhai Revolution of 1911 that overthrew the Qing Dynasty, the Confucian religion continued for more than 2000 years as the official religion of China, exerting a profound influence on the Chinese people, particularly the Han nationality, and molding their national

uniqueness. After the Xinhai Revolution, the Confucian religion revived and survived tenaciously in the form of “the teaching of Confucius” (Kong jiao) among the grassroots level of the Chinese society and the intellectuals. In the patriarchal system of the Chinese society, as well as in the disposition and spirit of the Chinese intellectuals, we can still perceive the Confucian factors and sense the Confucian faith.

Of the 55 ethnic minorities, about 30 have retained their indigenous or primitive religious traditions. In the northeast and west of China, the Shamanistic traditions that originated in the later periods of ancient primitive religions still persist, manifest in the religious traditions of the nationalities of Hezhe, Oronco, Ewenkis, daur, etc. Naturalistic religions, such as animal worship, plant worship, celestial worship, ancestral worship, Totemism, etc., are found in the central and southwest regions, practiced by the nationalities of Naxi, Jino, Wa, Miao, Yao, Dong, Mulao, Luoba, Menba, etc.; besides, the traditional Bön religion of the Tibetan nationality and Zhuang nationality is also categorized in this tradition.

Buddhism, since its entry to China in 2 B.C., has until now a history of over 2000 years, branching into the Northern School, Southern School and Tibetan School, with the Mahayana Northern School accepted by nationalities of Han, Bai, Yi, Naxi, and Lahu, also popular among Zhuang and Mulao nationalities; the Southern Theravada School is followed mainly by nationalities of Dai, Deang, Achang, Bulang, and Lahu; Tibetan Buddhism is popular mostly among Tibetans, Mongolians, Tu, Yugu and luoba.

The indigenous Taoist religion originated from the thought of Laozi and Zhuangzi, with its religious existence later than the entry of Buddhism. Having a history of nearly 2000 years, it has followers mainly from the Han nationality, yet it also has a wide acceptance among the minority nationalities such as Yao, Tujia, Buyi, Mulao and Maonan. In addition, the Taoist religion also finds followers among the ethnic minorities such as Zhuang, Dong, Miao, Jing, Yi, Li, Naxi and Qiang.

Christianity first entered China in the Tang Dynasty, followed by Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox, Protestantism, spreading widely in the Han populated areas and some minority areas inhabited by ethnic groups of Korean, Russian, Qiang, Yi, Bai, Hani, Jingpo, Dulong, Lahu, Wa, Nu, Miao and Gaoshan. Such minority groups as Miao even integrated some Christian elements into their ethnic traditions.

Islam also entered China in the Tang Dynasty, undergoing complex evolution during its over 1300 years of development; it has now become the main religion of Hui, Uighur, Tartar, Tajik, Kirgiz, Uzbek, Dongxiang, Sala and Bao'an.

From the above, we can conclude that religion and the Chinese people are inseparable, as close as flesh and blood. In these ethnic areas, religion and ethnic traditions are intertwined, constituting even vital or main part of their ethnic culture. “All religious traditions have historically infiltrated people’s daily lives; traditional religious rites extend consecutively, forming a strong habitual force among believers. Especially in the areas densely populated by ethnic religious believers, religious life and ethnic life combine to form ethnic traditions, with the religious festivals constantly sparking believers’ religious sentiments; as a result of immersion in the religious rites, children raised in religious families tend to cultivate religious

sentiments, giving rise to a religious psyche hard to erase” (Wenxuan 1985). This combination of religions and ethnic traditions resulted in the important role or religions in the existence and development of the ethnic people, lending a religious element and an aurora of faith to the people’s values, morals, folklore, customs and aesthetic dimensions; therefore, when communicating with these ethnic groups, we should pay attention to, understand and respect their religious faith.

2.5 Religion and Politics

Chinese religions have historically been closely related to politics, yet this relationship is different from the traditional western sense of the term; thus, the Chinese classical and modern concepts of the relationship between the state and the religions cannot be adequately explained by the western political-cultural models of “the unity of church and state”, “the cooperation of church and state”, “the agreement between church and state”, “the coordination of church and state”, “the separation of church and state”, “the segregation of church and state”, “the coexistence of church and state”, “the antagonism of church and state”, etc. In terms of ideas, traditions and practice, the China’s religion-state relationship that has extended till today in uniformity is the subordination of religion to the state; even though there are expressions like “unity of religion and state” or “national religions”, the religion serving the state relationships of “with the state at the center”, “the state regulating the religions”, “religions supporting the state”, and “subordinating religions to the state” can never be fundamentally changed.

The imperial politics formed during ancient China and the ensuing Great Unity of the Chinese Nation had granted a holy seal to the political power and authority: the emperor’s power is given by gods, and the emperor calls himself the Son of Heaven, so the emperor’s political function is to “comply with heaven’s decree to usher in peace and prosperity”, generating the sacred significance of “enforcing justice on behalf of Heaven” and “exercising the power on behalf of the gods”. Therefore, China never allows parallel powers or authorities, not to mention religions over-topping imperial politics; the political authority is always in charge and the over-acting religion has never been a problem in China. So the Chinese history never witnessed the parallel rule of religion and the state, and religion never forms an antagonism to politics and political power. In the ancient traditions of “national religions” marked by “the unity of religion and state”, it is not that the religious leaders mastered political authority, but that on the contrary, worldly rulers dominated the destiny of religions; in other words, politics “unified” religions.

In the initial stage of the Buddhist entry from India to China, some Buddhist monks, sticking to the revolutionary thoughts of the Indian Shramana, wanted to stress the supreme status of the “Buddha Dharma” and not to yield to the secular imperial powers, hence the “Shramana not bowing to emperors”, whereby monks, “abandoning the family and entering the Dharma, do not kneel down to emperors” for their ordained identity. This attitude had led to the difficult development of

Buddhism, not recognized by the emperors and not accepted by the society; for hundreds of years it did not make much progress and achieved quite little. In view of this, the “sinicization” of Buddhism started from the change of its political attitudes. Monk Dao'an of the 4th century, noticing the awkward situation of China's Buddhist development, changed the other-worldly attitude of the Buddhists who had a condescending attitude to the emperors and made his fellow monks realize the harsh reality of “without the support of the emperor, the Dharma cannot be established.” Thus, Buddhism was redirected into the engaged and worldly “Shramana showing respect to the emperors”, and the real nature of China's relationship between the state and religion was located, which contributed to the smooth “proselytization”. It was also the case for Christianity and Islam when they entered China. These foreign religions all more or less made compromises to the Chinese politics and had always been under the control of Chinese political power. Nonetheless, the Christian missionaries, with their powerful western political background, were very reluctant to submitting to China's political authority. Their inconstant, hesitant, and swaying attitude to Chinese politics rendered the sinicization insoluble and their fate in China not as smooth and clear as Buddhism.

Accordingly, in the Chinese politics, there had been since ancient times a set of political institutions and administrative systems to regulate and control religions. For instance, the establishment of Emperor Wudi of Han Dynasty's “revering only Confucianism” was the fundamental condition for the formation of the Confucian Religion, and the later “theocracy” or “the rule by national religion” represented by Confucianism was actually still “imperial politics” and “sovereign politics”. In the Confucian tradition, the grand ceremony of “Sacrificing to Heaven” could only be led by the emperor and it could never expect to transcend the imperial power, not to the least extent. So it can be said that the Chinese “religion” has much political connotation, and “instruction and transformation through the way of the gods” is closely linked to and complement the political “social instruction and transformation”; therefore, the “jiao” in “zongjiao” (religion) does not go against the “jiao” in “jiaohua” (instruct and transform): there are inner echoes and complementary elements between them.

Although some Chinese emperors themselves may have a special liking or partiality for a certain religion, his faith in it would not interfere with his control and regulation of it. For instance, out of his vehement faith in Buddhism, Emperor Wudi of Liang Dynasty in the 6th century was said to have, for three or four times, abandoned his imperial status to reside in the monasteries, and his court had to spend a large ransom to get him back. But he was not at all merciful when it came to the regulation of the monks and nuns; he administered rather strict rules on them. The vegetarian codes and regulations were all stipulated by him. Kubla khan of the 13th century had a very tolerant attitude toward the entry of such religions as Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism, but his ultimate intent was to use all these religions to serve his political rule. The Qing emperors granted the titles of lamas to manifest their imperial authority and formed the system of “drawing lots from the golden urn” in confirming which children to be the reincarnated lamas. Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty had initially favored Catholicism, showing

much politeness and appreciation to it, but once involved in “the Rites Controversy of China”, he **banned** the religion *without any hesitation*. Thus, it is an indisputable fact that in the history of the relationship between state and religion of China, politics had always been more powerful than religions, and religions had always been in a relatively weak position.

In order to exercise effective control of politics over the religions, the imperial powers of Chinese dynasties set up specific institutions to manage or regulate religions. Ancient Chinese political authorities had established executive positions in dealing with religious affairs in relevant departments. In Tang Dynasty, the “Bofang” functioned to regulate Muslims, and its “Chief” had to be approved and appointed by the government; with regards to Buddhism, Tang Dynasty also stipulated the Taoist and Buddhist ordination certificates and residential registration system. The Song Dynasty had “Bozhangsi” to be in charge of Muslim affairs, forming the routine practice of government deciding on the appointing or summoning of abbots through proper applications. The management of religions was expanded and systematized in the Yuan Dynasty, from the first level “Department of Political Promotion” to regulate Buddhism, through the second level “Department of Gathering Talents” to manage Daoism, to the “Branch of Revering Happiness” to control Christianity and the “Bureau of Hadji” to stipulate Islam. The Ming Dynasty’s “Department of Etiquette” was in charge of the Taoist and Buddhist monks; “the Department of Ethnic Groups” regulated the religious affairs of the border areas and translation; “Honglusi” was in charge of religious rituals; “bingbu” and “weisuo” were especially concerned with the development trends of ethnic and religious affairs. The Qing Dynasty set up “Lipanyuan” to regulate ethnic and religious affairs. In the Republican Era, Committee for Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs was in charge of ethnic and religious affairs. It is due to this continuity of the state-religion relationship and the Chinese government’s management of religious affairs that the contemporary Religious Affairs Bureau or Committee on Ethnicity and Religions has been established on solid historical foundations and sociopolitical needs. Only through an insight into traditional Chinese culture and social structure can we clarify and understand the relationship between Chinese religions and politics.

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