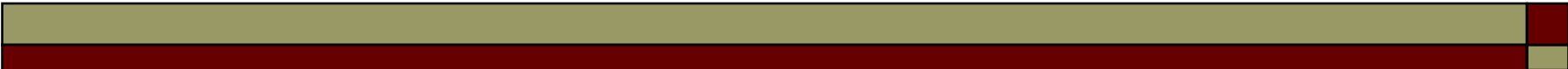


Chinese Religions at the Grassroots

Lecture 1: Understanding a divers religious landscape



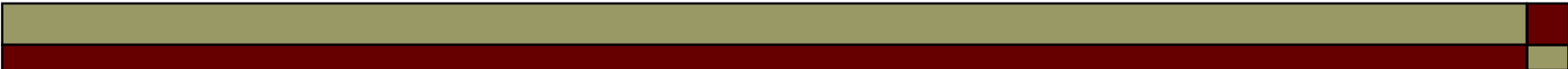
"The Chinese are emphatically not a religious people, though they are very superstitious." (Herbert A. Giles, *The Civilisation of China*, 1911)

Griffith John (1831–1912), *China: Her Claim and Call*:
"religion . . . as realised by the Chinese in their inward experience, is not worthy of the name, and it is a remarkable fact that they have not in their language a generic term for it. The Chinese are as immoral as they are irreligious."

"[N]o one ever engages with 'Buddhism' or 'Daoism' because these exist more as conceptual aggregates with only imputed concreteness and cohesiveness." (Adam Chau, *Religion in China*, p. 25-26).

‘Religion’ in China

- *zongjiao* 宗教:
 - *zong*: ‘main ancestral line, and in more abstract terms, it is often translated as ‘principle’
 - *jiao* can be glossed as to ‘teach’, ‘instruct’, and ‘set an example’
 - Roots of the term in Chinese Buddhist terminology dating back to medieval times; not a *new* term introduced via Japan.
- “the meaning of *zongjiao* for Chinese language speakers was from its inception fatally skewed in the direction of the beliefs and practices of the relatively few religious professionals, clerical groups representing such religions as Buddhism and Christianity, and so failed to ‘translate’ many realities of the Chinese religious world” (Barrett/Tarocco, 2008, p.
- Example: prior to the 20th century there is no equivalent for Daoism/Taoism in the Chinese language; *daojiao* or *daojiaode* is a modern coinage that has clear western connotations include church-like structures and explicit doctrines



The Buddhist religion came from India, the Protestant, Catholic, Christian and Mahommedan from Eastern and Western Europe. Our nation has originally no ‘state teaching’ (*guo jiao*). . . . Is it only in matters of religion (*zongjiao*) that we are not to have reform (*gaige*) and progress? China has from of old the Confucian religion; but since men only recognize that as a religion which holds some theology, Confucianism, which makes no mention of theology, cannot claim to be a perfect religion. But setting aside the question as to whether or not Confucianism is a religion, as well as the question of the origins of each religion, and speaking only of adaptation to changing conditions, there is advance in civilization, there is enlargement in physical science, there is revolution in government, and religion also cannot but adapt itself to circumstances and change with the rest. Then again, speaking only of the three religions (*san jiao*) held by the majority of the nation, from the ordinances and codes of these three religions, by combination and adaptation, a new religion (*zongjiao*) should be formed, called the Great Union New Buddhist religion. (Anonymous author. Quoted from Barrett/Tarocco, “*The Making of ‘Religion’ in Modern China*,” p.49)

Criteria for 'religion'

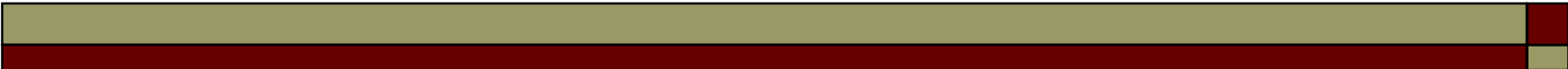
- ❑ a doctrine based on a canon of texts
- ❑ a separate organization
- ❑ distinctive places of worship
- ❑ a system to train and certify clerics

→ Monks and priests had to cut links with the wider context of Chinese religion. They had to leave the local temples where they lived, stop taking part in local festivals and withdraw to the monasteries.

Hanzu Shrine (Hanzu miao 韓祖廟)

Puming Temple (Puming si 普明寺)



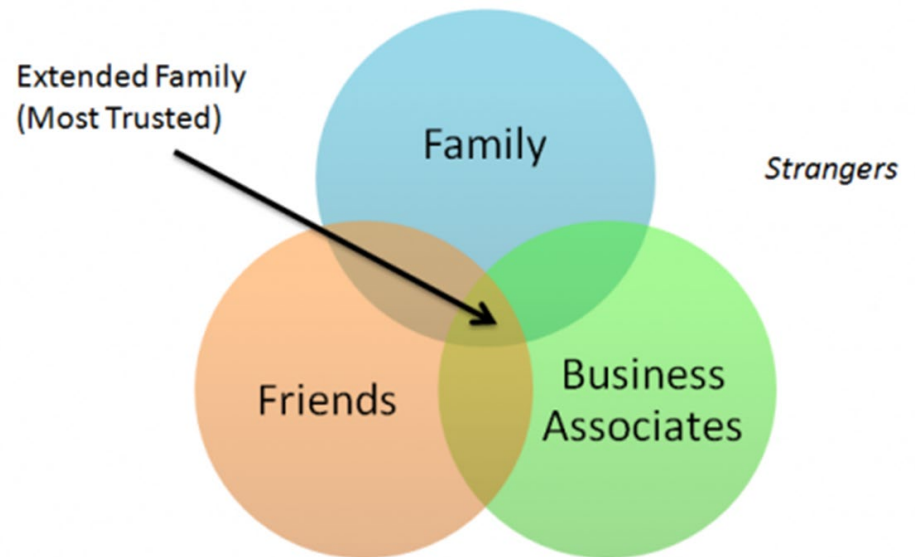


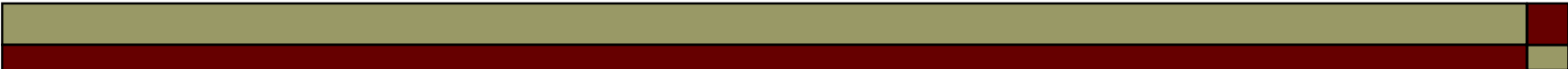
Religion before 19th century

- Religious knowledge and authority differentially distributed among
 - Several different institutions
 - Several categories of clerics
 - Laypersons
 - Local groups of different types

Relational approach

- Focus on practice
- *laiwang* ‘comings and goings’
- *guanxi* ‘relationships’





Five modalities of *doing* religion

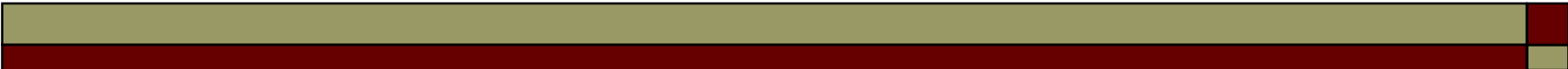
- ❑ Discursive/scriptural
- ❑ personal-cultivational
- ❑ Liturgical
- ❑ immediate-practical: key concepts are ‘efficacy’ and ‘to beseech for help’
- ❑ Relational (e.g., between humans and gods, ghosts, ancestors)

Efficacy based religion

- In Tokyo, Japan, there is a man belonging to the Japanese Christian Church who felt he had a call from God to do a great work for the [benefit] of his fellow-countrymen. But before doing much, he felt he must first learn more, and decided to go to the United States. He remained in one of the best Christian colleges for several years, then visited the most important places in Europe, Palestine, Egypt and India, and finally returned to Japan, having found that God had supplied his needs everywhere; his Lectures on Japan being well received wherever he went. He now wanted to build the biggest place of worship in the capital of Japan, but had not sufficient money. He prayed to God and sought subscriptions from good men. A fine church was put up, but a great storm came and blew it down. He was not disheartened, but put up another, promising the builders that he would pay them on a certain day. He begged for money in all directions, but when the morning for payment came, he still lacked 500 dollars. He prayed to God, saying that it was in obedience to His call he left home travelled to foreign lands; it was in obedience to Him he had put up the Church, in order to do good to his countrymen; now he prayed Him to come to his rescue, as he had done his very best. He then went to breakfast. When at breakfast the post came in with a letter for him. In it was a cheque for 500 dollars! All this was done by *Faith in God*. (Richard 1891b, 199. Emphasis in the original.)

Religious ecology model

- ❑ Religions as an ecosystem
- ❑ Different parts are interrelated → focus on relations and interdependence
- ❑ Homeostasis (the capacity of the body to maintain the stability of diverse internal variables) / referred to as balance
- ❑ Imbalance needs to be avoided (one player too strong; negative state interference)
- ❑ Plurality and diversity which needs to be maintained (bio-diversity)



Religious ecology model

“Ecological language is particularly useful in that it allows religious groups at the local level to see themselves more clearly as potentially complementing one another, sometimes sharing resources, often serving diverse populations, and now and then competing for the same pool of people, funds, and status. If, however, religious organizations see themselves as perpetually embattled because of limited goods or as singly responsible for the spiritual well-being of the entire community, they may be less willing to cooperate and be more inclined simply to vie for their share. While competition surely happens, it does not characterize the dynamics among many religious organizations. This is reason enough for developing a fuller ecological framework when discussing the relations among religious organizations.” (Nancy Eiesland)

Chinese religion in numbers

- Pew Templeton Foundation:
- Total population: 1,341,340,000
 - Buddhists 18.2% (244.12 mio)
 - Christians 5.1% (68.41 mio)
 - Folk religion 21.9% (293.75 mio)
 - Islam 1.8% (24.14 mio)
 - Hindus, Jews and other 1% (fewer than 11 mio)
 - Unaffiliated 52.2% (700.18 mio)

Implications

- ‘Interfaith’
- Competition is not, at least not primarily, between confessionally based groups but between different modalities of practicing religion
- ...