

Introduction

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In Huntington's formulation, civilizations are primarily religious. For him, though, the clash of civilizations takes place between sovereign entities. In this light, the end of the European religious war in the Treaty of Westphalia, that substituted sovereign nations for the Church, profoundly shaped the contemporary international relations and global governance. Thus, the subsequent expansion of the European order through colonialism encountered multiple worlds that were embedded in various different cosmological imaginations. These strangers mingled after this continuous process initiated by such expansion. Even so, invaders and defenders have entrenched a self-other, believer-alien, or West-East binary in the mind of the ensuing generations to save the ostensibly pure beliefs of each.

Therefore, in the age of globalization, an intellectual history, informed by religious beliefs and practices, is indispensable for appreciating the irony of strangers in the self and the self in strangers. Amidst the perceived rise of China in the 21st century, however, defending purity is no longer restricted to reproducing the Christian-Islamic binary. However, China is not easily defined in religious terms as the population within the Chinese official borders and nor do Chinese overseas subscribe to a single, dominant religion. Such a land of multiple Gods complicates China's civilizational identity. With all Gods being plausible, religious multiplicity engenders both the hope for preaching any tenets and the danger of facing heathenhood. One noticeable form of the latter is Communist atheism.

In a nutshell, the religion-informed epistemology in China studies and China policy circles deserves more attention, not least because it complicates, rather than purifies, the binaries. This special issue aims to rediscover some of these religious legacies as a way to understand and appropriate China.¹

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Explicitly or implicitly, these legacies reconstruct, reproduce, and represent China to the effect that China, as a familiar category of reference, is either reinforced or deconstructed. The special issue will, likewise, reveal the prior relations that have commonly constituted, and thus connected, the modern narratives on China in terms of observers and activists' ethnicity, nationality, colonial experience, modernity, institution, intellectual history, conviction and cosmology, in combination with their religious beliefs. To tackle their ways of thinking and acting, the authors of this volume reflect upon the intellectual liaison provided by the missionaries, revolutionaries, academics, policy-makers, and political activists at different sites, geo-culturally as well as textually.

In this special issue, religion refers broadly to "practices of faith regarding the natural and supernatural forces." Practices contain many aspects, including running religious organizations, interpreting sacred texts, sending missionaries, engaging in national politics, translating cultural messages, dealing with rival religions, and reflecting upon and enhancing the self, among others. All of these aspects must take place in at least one relational community that undergirds the practices of a particular faith and provides appreciative feedback. Identifying the relational community, to whom observers and activists speak intellectually, reveals how contrasting civilizational narratives can alternatively re/construct the self and the other. These narratives are the source of the relational divides that politicians can evoke to realign the audience for an imagined clash of civilizations.

The special issue explores and considers dubious Chinese religiosity in accordance with the self-positioning asserted by an observer or activist *vis-à-vis* an imagined China, Chinese culture, or Chinese population. When a scholar or practitioner adopts a religious lens, e.g. Christianity, she may choose to adopt a universal approach to everything in the world. Her approach to Chinese religion in general, and a certain Chinese religion, e.g. Buddhism or Daoism, specifically, would constitute a straight application of that faith. Given the universal approach, there would be no necessity to differentiate the lens applied to the understanding of China or her own community. That said, she can be devoted to the integration and survival of her own community (China or not) alone, rather than converting or averting an external community through a universal lens. This latter focus on local identification would constitute religious nationalism. Finally, she may acquire joint lessons from a few religions on different sides of the alleged fault lines, e.g. Confucianism plus Hinduism, Confucianism plus Christianity, or Confucianism plus Islam, and compose a bridging narrative to improvise a hybrid China, so universalism, nationalism, and relationalism are practically all plausible.

Self-imagined positions reflect the intention of an observer or practitioner to enlist specific religious resources, which at least include beliefs and

institutions. The clash of civilizations can be a legitimate concern only if the enlisted religious narratives trigger the spread of a relational binary. On the contrary, a hybridity-conscious narrative undermines the imagination of the clash of civilizations. Derived from the implicit self-imagined positions reviewed in the ensuing chapters, three agenda that defy the theme of the clash of civilizations appear plausible:

1. Engagement, an agenda that studies how religious inspiration prompts the *active involvement* of the religious scholars and practitioners in engaging China in their respectively chosen category – (a) the Chinese nation, as in Yitzhak’s chapter, (b) the East Asian Sphere, as in Shin’s chapter, (c) Chinese civilization, as in Voskressenski’s chapter, as well as (d) the Chinese Communist Party, as in Lam’s chapter;
2. Self-fulfillment, an agenda that conceives of religion as resources for the self-fulfillment of the scholars and practitioners, that has implications for the understanding of Chineseness in their *resistance* to (a) colonialism, as in Shih’s chapter, (b) industrialization, as in Thomas’ chapter, and (c) socialist modernity, as in Buyanchugla’s chapter;
3. Scholarship, an agenda that traces and gathers the evolution of the religious *intellect* to bridge the two populations at a distance, through (a) linguistic expertise, as in Paternicò’s chapter, (b) classic humanities, as in Ertuğrul’s chapter, and (c) psychology, as in Poon’s chapter.

In these chapters, the clash of civilizations is not a dominant narrative. This is because, at the micro level, the external actors have the religious incentive to show their goodwill in order to engender trust in the *alter* population. Nevertheless, neither is it likely that an external actor would act on behalf of a universal spirit to become completely exempt from an imagined clash. This is because a sense of superiority or inferiority, albeit ambiguous and indirect at times, is inevitably registered in both parties to the encounter. The missionaries will assimilate Chinese values and ways of life (Voskressenski) while, concomitantly, at least a portion of the encountering intellects acquire a new religious lens from China to cope with strangeness or alienation (Ertuğrul; Thomas). Both sides may feel superior to some extent, (Poon) especially in the spiritual world, but the materially dependent party will not always suffer inferiority, for the stronger party has the will to engage (Thomas; Yitzhak; Paternicò).

Accordingly, no felt clash of civilization looms as inevitable. One major reason for this is that a call for unity that aims to resolve the political, social, and cultural split between allegedly indigenous and vicarious forces is impractical in daily life (Buyanchugla). The vicarious force represents the foreign civilization. An imagined fault line thus exists inside the indigenous population while, (Lam) in practice, all designated, vicarious actors are

consciously hybrid and, therefore, not convincingly on the other side. Another consideration is the interlocked imagination of a fault line between the nation and an alien force or resource (Shin; Poon). As such, the alleged clash assumes the political function of forcing the population within to choose sides (Lam). At least, it may serve the politics of identity by reproducing a discursive binary between two imagined entities (Shih). Moreover, politics of identity may reinforce an inferior-superior consciousness (Buyanchugla).

Ultimately, the clash of civilizations is, at best, an insolvent narrative, to the extent that a platform, hub, or bridge, which accommodates both civilizations, is too engaged to justify the use of a binary (Yitzhak; Ertugrul; Paternicò). This platform enacts mutuality, which is usually symbolized by in-betweenness. It can be an individual, organization, or geographical site. Its function is to maintain the process of continual exchange. The platform, e.g. student, missionary, or treaty port, can be either active or passive (Voskressenski). An active platform enlightens each party to sympathize with their counterparts (Shih). The two sides that find the other in the self will reduce the degree of estrangement and enhance the degree of appreciation (Yitzhak). A passive one absolves differences without forcing a resolution, as if no cognitive incongruence requires a solution (Buyanchugla).

Consequently, no civilizational binary commands popularity in our cases, except where the Chinese indigenous volition asserts a superior scholarship in Chinese psychology by appropriating Buddhism (Poon), or the Chinese authorities force believers to privilege patriotism over universalism (Lam). Pertaining to the relationships between scholars and practitioners, on the one hand, and their imagined China/Chineseness on the other, authors find that at least two alternatives to binary are plausible and relatively stable – (1) relationally hierarchical (Shin; Buyanchugla; Paternicò; Lam) and (2) hybrid/indeterminate (Ertugrul; Shih; Yitzhak; Voskressenski). They reveal that nationalism can contribute to both binary and hierarchical religiosity. In practice, though, universalism cannot help but evolve into pluriversalism. Finally, intersections of civilizations, cosmologies, ethnicities, and populations indicate relationalism.

This special issue contains three sections accordingly. The first section – Engagement – covers four papers that demonstrate how religion inspires practices. Yitzhak Shichor's presentation on Jewishness, as embedded in *Tikkun Olam*, insists on a connection between activists, despite their ideologically opposing stance. Their respective dedication to the Chinese socialist revolution and capitalist reform testifies to a beneficial commitment to the world that is shared by the disciples of Judaism. A reaching out gesture of this kind is ready to adapt to the Chinese conditions and wishes. It differs from another kind of universalism, that sets out to dissect and convert. Kawashima Shin traces the changing Buddhist perspectives on China before

WWII – from a source of inspiration to an example of inferiority. The latter arose during the Japanese imperialist expansion period. Imperialism obliged the proselytization of Japanese Buddhism to China from a self-regarded higher position. Alexei Voskressenski interrogates the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church regarding the establishment of professional Sinology in Russia. He attempts to offer a plausible answer by painstakingly analyzing the activities and achievements of the first 15 Orthodox missions in China, especially their recruitment of accompanying students, whose learning later proved an invaluable resource for Russian Sinology. Anselm Lam deals with the difficult conditions of Chinese Christianity, under which the Vatican has endeavoured to establish official relations under the prevailing demand of the CCP for the prioritization of patriotism over faith. China's religious policy has constrained the Vatican's view of Chinese Christianity but has not compromised the Vatican's universal concern.

The theme of the second section is self-fulfillment. It contains three papers. Chih-yu Shih's analysis of Taiwan's nationalist pursuit results in a less binary identity politics compared to the colonially-embedded anti-China sensibilities that are usually registered in this campaign. He finds that the Taiwan Presbyterian Church has offered an introspective alternative through its advocacy of "contextual theology" that inspired resistance to Japanese colonialism initially and the migrant regime of the Chinese Civil War tradition much later. Michael Thomas then reviews the appropriation of Chinese Daoism by Martin Heidegger to tackle "the meaning of the question of being" and explain his pursuit of Phenomenology in a philosophical struggle against a materialist understanding of being, which industrialization delineates. Buyanchugla Sajirahu's description of the healing function of Shamanism likewise illustrates this introspective orientation. Shamanism was reduced to a disposable practice under Socialist modernity. It has been permitted since the reform era, since when it has, unexpectedly, thrived because it shields Mongolian believers from the force of alienation inflicted by the overwhelming reform and openness, and ensuing global modernity. Resistance is internally tamed to the extent that reconnection to a supernatural spirit subdues the relevance of Socialist China.

The third section likewise contains three papers, focused on scholarship. Luisa M. Paternicò analyses the contribution of Protestant periodicals, including the *Chinese Repository* and *China Review*, to the study of Sinitic languages. Their authors – mainly Christian missionaries – and their background prove fundamental in understanding their dedication to learning the Chinese dialects, paving the way for modern analyses and perspectives on Chinese. Ertuğrul Ceylan argues that an uncharacteristic force of Hui-Confucians arose at the end of the Ming Dynasty to re-constitute Chineseness. This has proved to be an important legacy that continues to facilitate a mutual

understanding between disciples of Islam and Confucianism. He specifically introduces the indispensable Hui-Confucian scholar, Wang Daiyu, in this tradition. Finally, Joe Poon discovers an ironic string of Buddhist psychology that pursues a binary rather than transcendence. In this particular string, he notices an academic determination to show that Buddhist psychology is superior to Western psychology. However, comparative psychology within the Chinese literature that has emerged from Hong Kong and Taiwan complicates the East-West binary to some extent.

It is noticeable that Buddhism, which is presumably inward-looking, can be both nation-centric, as revealed in the advocacy of Buddhist psychology, and interventionist, as during Japan's proselytization of Buddhism to China before WWII. In comparison, Christianity, which is presumably interventionist in nature, as practiced within all missionary activities, can also be introspective, as demonstrated by the case of the nationalist pursuit of the Taiwan Presbyterian Church. Moreover, a nationalist religion can either inspire a focus on distinctive Chineseness, as in the obliged patriotism *vis-à-vis* the Vatican, or leave Chineseness in oblivion, as achieved by the healing through Shamanism. An in-between role is more active and conscious at the micro level, as enacted by Hui-Confucian scholars who reconcile Islam and Confucianism or Judaist intellectuals who seek to bridge ideological gaps of all sorts, compared with the macro level. Religion does not adhere to a particular political agenda, so Judaism primarily encourages engagement rather than specific tenets.

Together, we argue that the importance of religions in facilitating an approach to studying/understanding/enacting China is apparent; but how these religions function as a way to access deeper understanding depends on, in a nutshell, the choices of their believers as well as the perceived conditions of China.

Before closing, a note on hiatus appears appropriate. In the process of this collective project, we lost two papers. One was on the Sikh notion of *satnam*, which presumably shows how to break the cycle of rebirth, bring equality, and even move beyond the centrality of community. It insinuates an open cosmological order that renders the clash of civilizations inapt. The other was concerned with Chinese scholarship that served as a cultural bridge by translating Hindu texts and ideas for Chinese readers. We hope that these topics will emerge successfully elsewhere. Finally, we failed to recruit a discussant on the role and practice of atheism within the history of Chinese Communism.

SECTION 1

ENGAGEMENT

