

Contents

<i>LECTORI BENEVOLO!</i>	3
CALENDAR OF EVENTS	5
MY ENCOUNTER WITH NISHIDA'S PHILOSOPHY	7
James W. Heisig	
ANNUAL UPDATE <i>Japanese Journal of Religious Studies</i>	22
Matthew D. McMULLEN	
EVEN THE TRANSLATOR SOMETIMES MUST HAVE TO STAND NAKED	26
Reading the English Translation of Tiantai Zhiyi's <i>Fahua xuanyi</i> for a Nanzan Seminar	
Paul L. SWANSON	
RECONFIGURING CHRISTIAN UNIQUENESS AND PARTICULARITY THROUGH INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE	31
Catherine CORNILLE	
WHAT CHRISTIANITY MIGHT HAVE LEARNED ABOUT "SALVATION" FROM THE DIALOGUE WITH CHINESE RELIGIONS	48
LAI Pan-chiu	
THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND IN ISLAM	67
Reinhold BERNHARDT	
ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTIONS BY INSTITUTE MEMBERS	82
INSTITUTE STAFF	90

Edited and published annually
by the Nanzan Institute staff

Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture
18 Yamazato-chō, Shōwa-ku
Nagoya 466-8673
JAPAN

〒466-8673

名古屋市昭和区山里町18
南山宗教文化研究所

nirc-office@ic.nanzan-u.ac.jp

TEL: (81) 52-832-3111

FAX: (81) 52-833-6157

The *Bulletin* is distributed worldwide
free of charge and is also available for
downloading at the Nanzan Institute's
website:

<http://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp>

© Nanzan Institute for Religion & Culture
ISSN 0386-720X

BULLETIN
of the
Nanzan Institute
for Religion & Culture

Lectori benevolo!



Since its founding in 1976, the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture has strived to promote the academic exchange between scholars of religion, both domestically and internationally. Furthermore, the Institute has contributed to the study of religion in Japan through the publications of the internationally acclaimed journal *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (JJRS) and the Nanzan Library for Asian Religion and Culture book series published with the University of Hawai'i Press. In recent years, the Institute has undergone a change in staff, with several long-time researchers retiring and new personnel taking over the management of research activities. Our goal is to expand on the past successes of the Institute while adapting our mission as an international research institute to meet the challenges of studying religion in a post-COVID world while considering the needs of a new generation of scholars.

I arrived at the Institute in April 2021 as a Senior Research Fellow and became the Director of the Institute in April 2022. As the first female Senior Research Fellow at the Institute, I hope to guide it in new directions, while building on its past achievements. Moving forward, the Institute will endeavor to abide by the following three policies. First, to provide a place where researchers from various fields of expertise, both domestic and international, can develop interdisciplinary networks. Second, to support the work of junior scholars and provide them with opportunities to present their research. And third, to promote research activities that emphasize diversity and equality, without discrimination based on gender, age, nationality, ethnicity, race, or sexual orientation.

Although the pandemic has forced us to scale back many of our activities, the Institute has switched to an online presence and has been involved in a number of events. One major event was a Zoom webinar, organized by Senior Research Fellow Matthew McMullen, to celebrate the publication of *Yasukuni Fundamentalism* in the Nanzan Library series. The webinar, featuring author Mark Mullins and Jolyon Thomas of the University of Pennsylvania, was a success with about eighty participants, mostly from Japan and North America, engaging in lively discussion. The participation of not only senior faculty members but also many graduate students from overseas institutions was very encouraging for our goal of creating spaces where junior scholars can engage in

current research. The discussion in this webinar will be published in the spring issue of the *JRS* and downloadable from the Institute's new website.

There will certainly be unpredictable challenges waiting for us in the coming years. However, the 2022 fiscal year is off to a great start. Nanzan University's Fifth Internationalization Promotion Project will begin this year, and we will host events aimed at "revitalizing a network for the international collaboration of research on Japanese religions." Furthermore, the Institute welcomes Enrico Fongaro as a new Senior Research Fellow as well as Suemura Masayo and Ishihara Yamato as Van Bragt Research Fellows. Together with these new members, we look forward to blazing a trail toward a new history for the Institute.

Moriya Tomoe, *Director*
Nagoya, Japan
1 May 2022

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April 2021–March 2022



2021

- 21 April Paul Swanson held the First Session of the Nanzan Seminar for the Translation of Buddhist Texts.
- 19 May Paul Swanson held the Second Session of the Nanzan Seminar for the Translation of Buddhist Texts.
- 16 June Paul Swanson held the Third Session of the Nanzan Seminar for the Translation of Buddhist Texts.
- 9 July A workshop on a Japanese translation of Wilfred Cantwell Smith's *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 2021) was held with presentations by Iseki Daisuke, Atsuhiko Horo (Tsukuba University), and Yamada Shōtarō (University of the Sacred Heart, Tokyo).
- 16 July A Nanzan Salon was held with a presentation by Moriya Tomoe on the "Formation of American Buddhism."
- 15 Sept. Paul Swanson held the Fourth Session of the Nanzan Seminar for the Translation of Buddhist Texts.
- 16 Oct. The 4th Forefront of Religion and Gender workshop, co-sponsored by Ryukoku University (Kyoto) and the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, was held at Ryukoku University (online).
- 20 Oct. Paul Swanson held the Fifth Session of the Nanzan Seminar for the Translation of Buddhist Texts.
- 5 Nov. The first Faith among Faiths lecture was held by Catherine Cornille on Re-con-figuring the Uniqueness or Particularity of Christianity through Interreligious Dialogue.
- 13 Nov. The symposium Mystery and Mysterium: Detective Stories at the Intersection of Literature, Philosophy, and Theology was held. Kim Seung Chul presented on Considerations about the Possibilities of Literary Theology: Detective Stories as a Means of Transmission.
- 17 Nov. Paul Swanson held the Sixth Session of the Nanzan Seminar for the Translation of Buddhist Texts.
- 25 Nov. James W. Heisig received the Third Kanazawa University International Award in Commemoration of Daisetz T. Suzuki and Kitaro Nishida and gave a lecture in Kanazawa City on his Encounter with Nishida's Philosophy.

- 2 Dec. *A Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* Book Reviews discussion was held with presentations and a discussion by Mark R. Mullins, author of *Yasukuni Fundamentalism: Japanese Religions and the Politics of Restoration* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2021) and Jolyon Baraka Thomas, author of *Faking Liberties: Religious Freedom in American-Occupied Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).
- 10 Dec. The second Faith among Faiths lecture was held by Pan-chiu Lai on "What Christianity Might have learned about 'Salvation' from the Dialogue with Chinese Religions."

2022

- 14 Jan. The third Faith among Faiths lecture was held by Reinhold Bernhardt on *The Second Coming of Jesus Christ in Christianity and Islam*.
- 13 Mar. Moriya Tomoe moderated a workshop on the Ruth Fuller Sasaki Collection, held in collaboration with Kamishitiken Bunko. The workshop marked the launch of a series of events to be held on the occasion of the Ruth Fuller Sasaki Collection's relocation to the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, which started in April 2022.

MY ENCOUNTER WITH NISHIDA'S PHILOSOPHY



James W. Heisig

Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture (emeritus)

The following is a translation of a commemorative lecture delivered on 25 November 2021 the occasion of the author's reception of the 3rd Annual Kanazawa University International Award for his work on Japanese philosophy.

From time to time, when I am alone with my thoughts and reflecting on my years in academia, I am overwhelmed by how unexpected and fortunate my encounter with the writings of Nishida Kitarō was. I hesitate to claim that there is anything particularly instructive about my experience. But today, at the receipt of this award, seems the right time to speak freely about my good fortune in tribute to this truly unique philosopher. His place in the history of philosophy is too well established to need any further argument from me here. Rather, I should like to look back over my shoulder and talk about his place in my life.

When I was invited to come to Japan some forty-four years ago, it was to aid in the establishment of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture and help fulfill the dream of Johannes Hirschmeier, then president of Nanzan University. He was convinced that the time had come to bring Christianity closer to the religions of Japan. The basic problem, as he saw it, was that the established religions lacked the proper language to speak to one another. Simply put, he was convinced that the language of “apologetics” with which one religion defended its doctrine against “heresy” needed to be reformed to learn a second language of “dialogue” to speak to those with religious beliefs, and that this long process of reform could not begin without a solid academic base. It was in fog and uncertainty of that ideal that the Institute began.

Frankly, I was poorly prepared for the task. I found myself like an adult in a Montessori children's house who had to acquire a second education through “learning by doing.” The first Director of the Institute, Jan Van Bragt, was my guide and my guardian angel as I stumbled and fumbled my way around a new language, a new culture, and a world richer in religious diversity than any I had

known. Van Bragt had received his doctorate from his native Belgium and, after coming to Japan, had studied under Takeuchi Yoshinori at Kyoto University and had worked closely with Nishitani Keiji to prepare a translation of his master work on religion into English. There could hardly have been a better choice for the job of Director, and the light he brought to our pioneering efforts shines as brightly today as when he was with us.

Shortly after I had settled into my office, Van Bragt brought up the idea of editing a series of books in English to complement our Japanese publications. As a first step, he proposed that I translate a recently published work in German on Nishitani's thought as a foundation for interreligious dialogue. I threw myself into the task and the following year, 1980, the book appeared. In the course of the work, I would often sit down with Van Bragt to ask for his help in understanding the ideas that were being introduced there. Although he patiently gave me the quick answers I was looking for, he recommended that I go back to the primary sources and read for myself. Not surprisingly, no sooner had I dug into Nishitani's work than I found myself drawn to the writings of Nishida. I began with his *Inquiry into the Good*. It was not at first a happy experience.

During the writing of my doctoral dissertation on the psychologist C. G. Jung's idea of God, I had read widely on the notion of God in western philosophy, focusing on modern thinkers since the Enlightenment. When I read what Nishida had to say about God, I found its style of argument curiously like the kind of thinking one would find in the nineteenth-century theologians' version of pantheism: a mosaic of esoteric aphorisms and half-ideas stitched together with allusions from mainstream philosophy. I recognized the authors Nishida was citing—thinkers like Schopenhauer, Wundt, James, and Bergson—but I could not for the life of me follow his reasoning or identify what was the question for which he was seeking an answer. I surmised that it had something to do with achieving a “unity of consciousness” in which the mind is intuitively fully in tune with reality. He spoke of a “great intuition or at work” behind all great thought like the philosophies of Plato and Spinoza, something like the “knack” or “feel” that artisans have with their tools or musicians with their instruments. Whatever Nishida's driving intuition was, I couldn't find it. Rather than blame myself, I blamed Nishida. If, as Nishida scholars claimed, this is the work whose ideas run like a red thread throughout the rest of his writings, then I thought it best to spend my time elsewhere.

As it happened, no sooner had I finished my translation than Van Bragt approached me with another task. After some sixteen years of going over his translation of 『宗教とは何か』 line by line with Nishitani himself, his work had been completed. Before submitting it to the publishers, he felt that the work

needed the touch of a native English hand. For months on end I labored over the task. The intensity of the work kept Nishida out of sight—but not out of mind. Each night after supper, Van Bragt would go over my revisions with me word by word. Not only did he teach me a great deal about the scholarly conscience of translation, he would also stray from time to time to talk about the background against which Nishitani was writing. Of course, that meant summoning up the ghost of Nishida. Then, and for several years after, it was through Nishida's disciples that I was drawn back to his writings.

The summer after Nishitani's book was published under the title *Religion and Nothingness*, we had an unexpected visit from a young scholar who had just finished her doctoral work at Santa Barbara under Raimon Panikkar. Panikkar was a thinker whose pioneering work on interreligious dialogue was well known to us and who was to become a close friend for over twenty years. Yusa Michiko herself would go on to become a central figure in the spread of Nishida's philosophy to western academia, an achievement for which she was deservedly honored by Kanazawa University last year. But fresh out of graduate school and on her way to her first academic position in the United States, she was anxious to establish ties with scholars in her native Japan. Over the years she often joined us at the Nanzan Institute during summer vacation, and in 1994 she spent a sabbatical year with us to complete her renowned intellectual biography of Nishida.

On that first visit, Yusa requested our help in publishing an English translation of Nishida's final essay, "The Logic of *Basho* and the Religious View of the World," which she had prepared as part of her doctoral dissertation. I recall how insistent she was that Nishida's thought had an important contribution to make to the dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity. The idea was in fact very much in the air at the time. Just a year earlier in 1982, the first meeting of the Japan Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies was held in Kyoto and focused on a series of lectures and discussions with Takizawa Katsumi, a theologian whom Nishida had considered one of his most understanding commentators. Three years later, Nishitani was the featured speaker, and four years after that, Ueda Shizuteru. Over the years, the influence of Nishida and his circle proved crucial to the dialogues of the Society, for which the Nanzan Institute was proud to serve as a headquarters and subsequently took over publication of its journal 『東西宗教研究』.

In any event, it was through Yusa's persuasion that I returned to Nishida and a close reading of that final essay in which he tried to wrap up his conclusions. It was hard going, not only because of its dense prose and broad scope, but also because at every page I became more aware of the immense gaps in my knowledge of the intellectual history east and west that Nishida seemed to navigate

with ease. The more I read to fill in those gaps, the more I came to realize that I was in the presence of a truly great mind.

That same year, 1983, I translated a volume of essays by Takeuchi Yoshinori. At the time, Takeuchi, a Pure Land philosopher, was conducting a series of open seminars at our Institute which he had begun in 1976, the year after he had retired from Kyoto University. At Takeuchi's request, I began working on the translation of *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, the magnum opus of his teacher, Tanabe Hajime. With its publication in 1986, I felt my feet firmly planted in the Kyoto school, whose works I continued to read with growing interest. I took advantage of my graduate school lectures and seminars to discuss what I was reading with my students. Abe Masao spent a summer with us that same year to review his new translation of Nishida's *Inquiry into the Good*. Through long hours of discussion and tracking down its references, I came to appreciate how *creatively* Nishida used his sources. At the same time, the Institute had just published a translation of his *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness*, a work which convinced me also of how *critically* Nishida read the philosophers he turned to for inspiration.

I should also mention the Kyoto Zen Symposium which began in 1983 through the cooperation of Hirata Seikō, chief abbot of Tenryū-ji in Kyoto, and a number of philosophers from Kyoto, including Nishitani, Ueda, and Mori Tetsurō. I participated in several of these conferences which, over the course of sixteen years, brought scholars from around the world together to consider timely philosophical topics. Nishida's presence was front and center in the proceedings. The eleventh conference was held on the Kyoto School and the war, at which presentations by Ueda and Yusa went a long ways to clearing away the pot-shots at Nishida's "collaboration" and presenting a more balanced examination of the issues involved. Soon thereafter, John Maraldo and I arranged to translate and publish the papers in 1995 under the title *Rude Awakenings*.

In 1989 I was invited to give a keynote address on "The Religious Philosophy of the Kyoto School" to an international conference at Smith College in the United States. It was my first, and somewhat clumsy, attempt to gather my notes and thoughts about Nishida and his circle. The following year I was invited to teach for a term in the graduate school of the University of Hawai'i. During those few months I completed a translation of Nishitani's book *Nishida Kitarō: The Man and his Thought*. What affected me most was seeing how Nishitani was able to read Nishida's *Inquiry into the Good* through his own lens in search of answers to his own questions. It gave me the push I needed to stand shoulder to shoulder with Nishida's texts in order to clarify my own questions. I remembered something the Anglo-American philosopher Alfred North Whitehead used to tell his students, "To be refuted in every century after you have written

is the acme of triumph.” Students of philosophy who enshrine a philosophical text out of respect for a philosopher, or ignore those who approach it through another language and cultural background, will only kill it in the end.

But first, one has to grasp that elusive *kotsu* that Nishida talked about.



As I look back, it is not hard to see what attracted me to Nishida’s thought. Of course, there were the colleagues whose work I admired and whose criticisms guided me through the exhaustive second education I underwent in Japan. But more than anything, it was wrestling with the thought of Nishida himself and trying to uncover the guiding question that motivated his thought. I took as my compass the words of the existentialist philosopher Karl Jaspers, who once described philosophy as “the concentrated effort to become oneself by participating in reality.” In particular, I was predisposed to center on two aspects of this effort: self-transformation and communication. In Nishida, I found them both in abundance.

Regarding self-transformation, two years before he died, Nishida wrote: “Philosophy is a way for the self to become self-aware and to live.” The goal of becoming self-aware” through a disciplined study of the enlightened mind lay at the heart of Nishida’s philosophical vocation. We see a hint of this in a promise he made to himself during his years of training in Zen meditation: to let go of ego and academic ambitions for the sake of a greater Life, and never to think about what he had not first seen for himself. In his enthusiasm he had declared that he would not take up philosophy until he had attained enlightenment; and that, succeed or fail, he would practice for the rest of his life. In fact, Nishida gave up his practice and study of Zen for the world of books and ideas, and never found a formal place for Zen or meditation in his philosophy. In the end, allusions to spiritual cultivation in any form, religious or otherwise, are all but absent from his published writings. Nevertheless, the ideal of awakening to a greater Life was something he carried with him to the end.

Rather than take any of the standard Buddhist expressions for enlightenment over into his philosophical vocabulary, Nishida preferred neutral and non-denominational language. After some years he settled on “self-awareness,” a term that had long since broken free of its classical Buddhist roots and come into common parlance to express being “aware” or “conscious” of something other, and in philosophical circles was being used to translate “self-consciousness.” The ambiguity suited him perfectly. He could muffle the word “enlightenment” without having to silence the Buddhist echoes entirely. It is only near the end of his life that he brought the connection between his philosophical notion of self-awareness and the Buddhist notion of enlightenment out of the shadows.

This should not give the idea that Nishida was only interested in personal psychological growth or some other form of self-improvement. He understood the transformation undergone to become oneself—or, as the old Greek proverb has it, “become what you are”—as recognizing that the truest and most original form of what one is can be described as “no-self.” We often think of the term as a negation of one’s original state, but for Nishida the ordinary, everyday idea we carry around with ourselves about who we are is rather the negation of what we truly are. Here again, Nishida replaced the Buddhist term “no-self” with “True Self.” He spoke of it as “a seeing without one who sees,” “a working without a worker,” and said his goal was “to give a philosophical grounding” to the “voice of the voiceless and form of the formless.” It was only in later life that he characterized this as a distinctively Oriental contribution to philosophy, but I have every reason to believe he was aware of this from the start. If one reads through his diaries and then has another look at *Inquiry into the Good*, one can see that he was absorbed in a question that had not occurred in western philosophy, namely, “What is enlightenment?” He scoured western philosophy for the tools to sharpen that question and look at it with fresh eyes. Like an alchemist on a quest for the philosopher’s stone, that elusive element that it was believed could turn base metals into gold, the answer that Nishida sought was nothing less than a way to express, in the universal language of philosophy, what it means to “participate in reality.” His answer: the self-awareness of absolute nothingness.

It is worth pausing a moment to pull that unfamiliar phrase apart. First, to understand what he meant by *self-awareness*, we need to look at the *double entendre* of the meaning of the “self-” of “self-awareness.” On one hand, it means the self’s awakened knowledge of itself. The logical problems this gives rise to are obvious. How can I know myself as an object? Like Baron von Münchhausen trying to pull himself out of the swamp by his own bootstraps, I am bound to subjectivity when it comes to thinking myself. There is no place I can stand to look at myself looking at myself in the mirror of mind. These are the problems that Nishida wrestled with after he realized, partly as a result of criticisms provoked by *Inquiry into the Good*, that his talk of a unity of consciousness not bound to the subject-object dichotomy raised many more questions than he had anticipated. But he did not back down, and this brings us to the second meaning of the “self-” of “self-awareness”: an awareness that takes place *of itself*. It is not something that one does *by oneself* but something that happens to one *by itself*. You might say, it is a kind of knowing that one “participates in” rather than intentionally carries out—a knowing without a knower. Far from signaling a mere ambiguity or unclarity of expression, both these meanings need to be present simultaneously in Nishida’s idea of “self-awareness” in order to replace the idea of a knowing subject standing before itself as an object to be known. It

is not that there is no subject but only that the subject is an aspect of a greater reality it participates in rather than observes from without.

This is not as esoteric as it might at first sound. Nishida recalls the buzzing of a fly near his head while on a walk. Before he swats the fly away, identifying himself as a subject dealing with an object, there is a moment of “buzzing” in which he and the fly were both caught up. Nishida’s idea was that if one could return to this state of mind without forfeiting the richness of conscious knowledge, that awareness of being a subject before actually separating oneself from the surrounding world would open the mind to a reality immeasurably richer than the sum of the objects we think about. In effect, we become our truest self in the awareness that we are participating in the reality of events taking place around us. In his words, we participate by “seeing by becoming what we see, doing by becoming what we are doing.” In a word, self-awareness was Nishida’s name for the highest form of *participation* in reality.

When it came to expressing the ultimate nature of the *reality* in which we participate, Nishida eventually settled on the term “absolute nothingness.” Having already decided that reality was not a world of objects that the mind sees and works on, he could not make nothingness *absolute* by having it “cut off” from or transcendent to the world of events in which the mind finds itself. Instead, he saw mind and world as “mediators of the self-expression of the absolute.” In other words, our seeing and our doing are not merely *ours*, but are also reality’s way of expressing itself. So too, our self-awareness in what we see and do is not merely our own achievement but also the self-awareness of reality itself for which we are the medium. In a word, the “self-awareness of absolute nothingness,” in its most elemental sense, is the achievement of absolute nothingness, its way of expressing itself in time and history. So, too, when the human mind is aware of the fact that not only does mind participate in reality but that reality participates in mind, “self-awareness” is both subject and object at the same time.

Here again, true to his philosophical method, Nishida did not draw on Buddhist terminology to speak of “the absolute.” He did not speak of Dharma in the sense of “cosmic law and order” or of “Buddha nature.” Instead, he picked up elements of the notion of “God” from various western philosophers and reinterpreted them in his own way. With no sense of obligation to theology or Christian orthodoxy, he recreated God in the image and likeness of his own philosophy. In short, the attributes of God were seen as symbols to express the absoluteness of absolute nothingness. For Nishida, the most important of these symbolic functions was that of self-negating love.

As mentioned earlier, Nishida did not conceive of the absolute as a supreme being, as something cut off from the world of beings and minds and events. But

neither was it a relative being. On the contrary, it had to be something related essentially, at all times and all places, to everything that exists—an ultimate ground that was itself groundless. It had to be a nothingness which manifests itself in the world as relatedness, the purest form of which is self-negating love. The Christian image of God emptying itself of its divinity in order to become human was the supreme expression of such an ideal love in which the distance between self and other is erased. Nishida never saw the western God as the equivalent of his idea of the absolute; nor did he argue his idea of God as a substitute for what he found in western philosophy and theology. He simply saw the received idea of the self-emptying God as a fitting symbol for the self-transformation at which philosophy aims: the achievement of a self-awareness through the negation of self.

I find that I find that one way of bringing these lofty speculations back down to earth is to think of absolute nothingness—and God as its symbolic ideal—as connectedness.

Consider us gathered together here in this hall at this moment. Imagine yourself sitting still and stretching a thread from your chair to each of the large objects to which you yourself are directly related by one or more of your senses—to the floor, the ceiling, and those seated around you, to the lights, the speakers and the sound coming out of them, the podium, the microphone, the walls and windows—until you feel as if you were strapped to an enormous web. Now imagine that everyone around you is doing the same thing; and then that all the things attached to persons are threading their own ties into the weave. No matter where you pinpoint the event of being here and now, it is the center of a field of vectors, each of which is only one among many centers altogether too numerous to count. And that includes only the small fraction of connections that our senses allow us to perceive. If our unfiltered brains had direct access to our surroundings, all the thread in the world would not suffice to spin that web.

The scene we have just imagined is frozen in time and space to include only a small number of more or less direct connections. But let those restrictions melt away and we are connected, literally and in the very same sense, to everything on earth, to everything in our galaxy, and to everything in the billions of galaxies stretching beyond it. Only a few of these connections are direct at any given moment, but each and every item in the whole of the cosmos remains connected indirectly with each and every other. Everywhere it is possible for light to reach, however long it takes and however many objects it has to bounce off of along the way, the totality of all existing universes are connected end to end, piece to piece, such that everything has a road to everywhere. What we call

the totality of space is the sum of connections, the stable and the shifting, the strong and the weak, the direct and the indirect.

We have grown so used to the astronomical enormity of the cosmos that we have grown numb to its awe and find it hard to feel shame for espousing religious beliefs that trivialize it in order to secure a place for human beings as the unsurpassed axis of existence. It is not enough that we transcend ourselves by improving and enhancing our persons. We cannot truly get over ourselves without awakening to the transcendent reality of this world and the moral consequences which that entails for its human community: to exist is to be connected; nothing that exists is disconnected. This fact, which is as close to a universally literal fact as we can come, is the original miracle of existence. It is also what Nishida meant by absolute nothingness.

If there is anything absolute in reality, anything, that is, whose reality is absolved of dependency on anything else, it would have to be something absolutely relative, unlike the relative relativity of beings. It would have to be related to everything directly and at each moment, which is something that nothing in existence can lay claim to—in short, a nothingness. This means that its relationship to beings is not that of one more vector, albeit a more powerful one, added to each field of connections that hold individual entities in existence. At the same time, as a nothingness, it is not perceptible or knowable except through its manifestations in the world of being and becoming. This manifestation cannot be associated with any particular entity or group of entities inasmuch as that would disqualify it from being absolutely relative to all beings. The one thing that is manifest in the entire cosmos of interrelated beings without itself existing is, as you must have realized by now, connectedness, the sole universal and literal commonality of existence. If the concrete relatedness between human beings is an instance of the relatedness of all things that reaches indefinitely in all directions, that relatedness, in turn, is a concrete manifestation of an all-embracing connectedness that is in this world yet not of it. It is not quite right to speak of it as finite and this-worldly, nor as infinite and other-worldly. If anything, it fairly subverts these distinctions.

If, as Nishida thought, there is something we can only call “divine” about the nothingness of connectedness, then there is also something divine about its manifestation in that human passion for the reformation of relatedness towards justice, mercy, and love that continually draws us beyond our own small selves. In love that is selfless and self-aware we participate in reality to the fullest and reality participates in us to the fullest.

Let us now turn to the second mark of philosophy’s “concentrated effort to become oneself by participating in reality”: communication. One often hears the complaint that Nishida’s writing communicated poorly. Anyone who has

read him understands this. I admit to having been disappointed at how little impact the literary style of the philosophers he read in French, English, and German had on his own prose. But once he had put his thoughts on paper in Japanese, however formidable his style and terminology, there is no doubt that new doors were opened. Readers are relieved when Nishida's prose comes to a clearing where he can take his bearings and begin to lay out an argument smoothly and quickly, after having watched him hack his way step by step through the dense underbrush of possibilities with the logic, "If so, then it must be that..." It seems to me that writing was not a way to systematically present his conclusions, but a way for him to evaluate what he was thinking. His chosen mode of communication was to lay bare the journey to the conclusions. Nishida wrote as if he were on a voyage of discovery. He did not set sail on a clear course for a determined destination. It is as if he had drawn up the rudder and unfurled his sails to be driven by the winds and currents towards whatever there was to be found. His books and essays are a running log of that journey.

When I introduce graduate students to Nishida's writing, I often recall something I heard Takeuchi say many years ago in an interview on Sunday morning NHK's "Religion Hour." Religion, he said, is not primarily a noun but a verb. It is not a thing that exists somewhere in texts and buildings, but something that "takes place." The same can be said of the way Nishida pursued philosophy day and night, from his first book to his last essay. What he was communicating was not a record of past ideas but a way of life taking place at the moment he was writing. Rather than just research philosophy, he philosophized.

In approaching his question of the enlightened mind through the traditional logic of western philosophy, Nishida also made a contribution to that logic with his idea of *soku* and his logic of *basho*. That said, shortly before his death, he could not suppress the feeling that his logic had been "misunderstood and neglected by the academic community," that nobody had captured his *kotsu*. We now think differently about that, and part of the reason lies in the impact that translations of works by Nishida and his circle into western languages, and the groundswell of enthusiasm for Japanese philosophy in general, had on the academic world in Japan.



This brings me to one more important but often overlooked fact about Nishida's philosophical writing. The claim by many Japanese commentators that his writing must be read in the original to be understood, that it suffers badly from translation, is misguided. Obviously, he wrote in Japanese; and just as obviously, there was almost no reading audience for Japanese philosophy outside of Japan. I have done enough translation work in enough languages to realize

how nuances and oblique allusions often get lost in translation. But there are at least three reasons for not disparaging the study of Nishida's thought through translation.

First, and most important, Nishida was *not* writing for a Japanese audience. He was writing for those who had the same questions as he and understood the contribution that philosophy had to make to our understanding of human existence and its place in reality. I have no doubt that Nishida would have welcomed the criticisms and suggestions of the growing number of scholars abroad who read his work with different eyes from his native Japanese readership. At least he would have valued it more highly than unquestioning adulation. As we said, it was the "universality" of the philosophical vocation that enthused him, not the creation of something for domestic appreciation that would block its inner meaning to outsiders.

To put this in a larger context, I recall something Thomas Kasulis, the renowned scholar of Japanese philosophy, used to say: Where would we be if only Danes had the final say about Kierkegaard's writings? What if only a native speaker of English could be trusted to grasp the true meaning of the writings of William James? The answer is clear. There would be no such thing as a western philosophical tradition. There would only be national philosophies isolated behind the impenetrable curtain of native linguistic skills. I have never seen any indication that Nishida thought of himself as a philosopher *for Japan*, nor that he was ever silenced by his failure to appreciate the literary subtleties of what he read in foreign languages.

Second, translation is a door to deeper criticism and greater clarity of thought. Not only does the translator expand the reading audience of what they are translating, they identify blind spots in the original text that the eye of a native reader may skip over. Anyone who has translated their own work knows the feeling of wanting to clear up unclarities in their original text. If I may say so, I believe that if Nishida had seen his own work in translation, he would feel differently about his own responsibility for having been "misunderstood," and might even look more kindly at the insight of Tanabe Hajime and other critics he locked horns with and acknowledge more explicitly how they changed his own thinking.

And third, translation reminds us that where Nishida philosophy ends, ours begins. To really understand Nishida, it is not enough to catalog Nishida's ideas or track the development of his thought. Historians of ideas who never get beyond hunting down mistakes in translation and misreadings of texts end up burying Nishida's philosophy alive. The virtue of correct and accurate representation becomes a vice when it gives Nishida the last word on what Nishida philosophy is. As Goethe once wrote, we honor those who influence

our thinking not by repeating their responses but by emulating their courage. If Nishida indeed approached philosophy as a voyage of discovery, we dishonor his idea of what philosophy is by carving his ideas in stone and planting them in his native soil. In the end, the *kotsu* is to be sought not only in the guiding ideas but in the spirit of adventure as well.

If there is one thing students of Japanese philosophy in the twentieth century have in common, it is the judgment that Nishida changed the way we define philosophy both inside Japan and in the West. At the time I arrived in Japan, the dominant assumption in the West was that Japan has no philosophy and that in any case, the name “philosophy” is to be reserved for the tradition originating in sixth-century BCE Greece. Even in Japan’s bookstores Nishida’s books were classified under “thought,” and the shelves marked “philosophy” were exclusively for western philosophy. Things are different now, and the re-importation of the interest abroad in Nishida and other Kyoto School thinkers back to the homeland had a considerable part to play in Japanese philosophy’s change of fortunes. To make a complex story shamefully simple, once it became clear that the academies of Europe and the United States were beginning to take these thinkers more seriously as philosophers than their counterpart in the Japanese homeland, it was not long before more academics in Japan followed suit and actively sought to restore the imbalance.

By “taking seriously” I mean publishing introductory texts, organizing research associations, and directing graduate students in their theses, and producing quality scholarly work. A word about the last two.

There is no doubt that the existence of even the modest presence of translated material helped Japanese philosophy gain a foothold in western graduate schools. On one hand, young Japanese studying abroad were able to convince their teachers to let them work on large bodies of texts by virtually unknown authors. On the other, growing numbers of young western students with an appetite for non-western thought were motivated to learn Japanese and carry out research on Japanese philosophers. Many from these two groups went on to become professors and expose their own students to the world of Japanese philosophy. Although it is still common to find Japanese and Chinese philosophy restricted to departments of “Asian Studies,” the inroads into departments of philosophy had been advancing steadily.

It is, of course, in the quality of scholarly work that the acceptance of Japanese philosophy in western academia is most clearly demonstrated, and the evidence here is unmistakable. Having been involved for the past any years in the publication of the *European Journal of Japanese Philosophy*, I am continually surprised by the high level of material being produced. Even so, I would only like to express some misgivings about how too much attention to “comparative

philosophy” has obscured an important question for the true “universality” that Nishida sought through his writings.

At first sight, the most obvious path to bringing Nishida’s thought to the attention of a wider philosophical forum is to compare his thought with leading philosophers past and present. It comes down to this: by demonstrating that there are elements in his thought that coincide with, complement, or contradict the thought of respected thinkers in the West, his place in the dialogue among philosophies becomes more secure. To put it simply, there are two main strategies by which this is carried out in academic philosophy today.

One way is to select certain key ideas and take them at face value without attention to temporal and cultural differences. This relies on the belief, often tacit, in a core of “perennial philosophy” reaching from the ancient Greeks to present-day western philosophy. Even where attention is given to historical circumstances that shape particular ideas, as long as the fundamental questions are taken to be transhistorical, the answers can bring us closer to a universal truth on which all philosophies can agree. The benefit of this approach is that it frees Nishida’s thinking from its Japanese origins and allows it to be more cosmopolitan. The danger is that “universal” come to mean “uniform,” which strays from Nishida’s intentions which was to seek the universal by identifying the modes of relationality that can bring the particulars of one cultural or history system of thought into dialogue with other particularities. Comparing ideas across traditions without attention to specificities of history or culture does break through the limits of a single philosophical tradition, but it risks subsuming all traditions under a blanket of archetypal ideas that are in fact excavated from one of those particular traditions but masquerading as universal. Even where attention is given to historical circumstances that shape particular ideas, as long as the fundamental questions are taken to be transhistorical, the answers are granted the right to ignore those circumstances. This is not the place to go into detail, but I believe that Nishida’s logic of *basho* needs to be broadened to include philosophical traditions themselves so as to protect the distinctness of Japanese philosophy rather than minimize them in order to find acceptance on a general philosophical forum.

A second strategy is to compare ideas across cultures but within a common temporal frame of reference. The idea is to identify global changes that bring philosophies into conversation with one another, such as industrialization, modernity, or scientific-technological world views. These approaches may all have been western inventions, but from the time Japanese words for philosophy and religion were first created in the mid-nineteenth century their academic study has always been comparative in this sense. It is only natural to suppose that the best way to bring Nishida into dialogue with other philosophies is to

assume that the present world has thrown our traditions together to enrich one another by searching for a shared vocabulary to discuss ideas of very different origins. Much scholarship today follows this strategy by singling out live and momentous questions that cut across cultural, philosophical, and religious barriers. In so doing, the merits and demerits of comparing particulars are of less interest than the role that ideas play in prompting an awakening on all sides as a requisite for morally acceptable action. The underlying idea is that only when comparison is in service of something outside the framework of the comparison is it worth doing at all.

Each of these comparative approaches can be treated in two very different ways. If you will pardon me a rather mundane example, it is like the difference between Japanese and western wedding receptions. In the former, the scholar is like the go-between introducing two traditions of ideas to one another without obliging them to interact immediately. It is enough that the similarities and differences are laid out accurately but kept at separate tables. In the latter, after the proper introductions have been made, the two traditions are invited to join on the dance floor. In either case, the goal is the same: to stimulate philosophy to move beyond theoretical speculation to reflection on the practical consequences of ideas.

For a long time, I lived and worked as if the task of engaging philosophies and religions in intellectual dialogue ended there. In time, I began to realize that there is more involved than a search for the universal in the particular and a personal awakening to the moral consequences of our ideas. In arriving at that realization, Nishida's example of the philosophical life was an inspiration, both for what it achieved and for what it has yet to achieve.

As we have been saying, the *kotsu* of Nishida's philosophy consisted in thinking questions thrown up to him by his own life and the intellectual history of Japan under the lens of western philosophy in order to uncover what is universal in them and return it, in a new expression, to the world of philosophy. To understand Nishida's contribution, it is not enough to retrace his steps historically and paraphrase his ideas accurately. One has also to walk in his shoes, "to reread Nishida by becoming Nishida." For Nishida's thought to be alive in contemporary philosophy, we need to turn the tables on his method, that is, to ask questions of it that he did *not* ask himself and put the universality of his logic to the test in the effort to answer them. To fear his brilliance, even out of respect, is ultimately to disrespect the *kotsu* of his own "comparative philosophy." To exempt him from the very critical conscience with which he shaped and reshaped his thinking is to deny his legacy the life that I am convinced it deserves.

Of all the questions Nishida failed to ask himself, there is one that stands out above the rest for us today: What has philosophy to contribute to the protection of this endangered hometown we call the earth? Never before in the history of civilization has the human race so badly needed a common story grounded in the earth and its history. It is against this backdrop that our philosophers face their most pressing challenge. Although academic philosophy is a long way from admitting it, I am convinced that its future hangs on its contribution to a story of the common good encompassing enough and mythical enough to capture our imagination and release us from the comfort of our petty biases—academic, cultural, political, economic, and personal. For this we need a sturdier philosophy than Nishida was able to forge.

Absent the will to believe in such a story, the gap between the thoughts we can think and the actions we are prepared to take will always be greater than any society of human beings can breach. Globalization on such a high constructive level cannot be a new story composed from scratch. It needs to integrate long-formed traditions, in a critical reprise, giving them a new dynamic inflection. In this sense, it is not so much a question of “comparing” but of reactivating traditions in mutual solicitation and in openness to the signs of the times. Care for the earth and for the common good in the deepest sense imposes a hermeneutical imperative that bids us make sense of our traditions and scholarly specializations in a new way. Academia has been largely immune to such attempts, or at least has tended to marginalize them, while our native philosophical and religious instincts leave us gasping for air.

Nishida’s life work taught us that the walls that separate the philosophies of the world are not as high as the heavens. To honor his memory, we now need to find a way to reconstruct his thought in order to tie it more tightly to the earth.

ANNUAL UPDATE

Japanese Journal of Religious Studies



Matthew D. McMullen

Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture

The following is a summary of activities and circulation of the Japanese Journal of Religious Studies during the 2021 academic year. This update includes table of contents for published issues, an overview of online engagement with articles, and notes on present and future plans for the journal.

The year 2021 marked the forty-eighth year of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies (JJRS)* and forty years since the journal arrived at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture. The *JJRS* was founded by David Reid at the International Institute for the Study of Religions in 1974 as a rebranding of *Contemporary Religion in Japan*, which had been established by William Woodward and Hideo Kishimoto in 1960 as a continuation of their research on religion in postwar Japan. Since its inception, the *JJRS* has published academic articles by scholars both from within Japan and abroad on a triannual and, since 1995, a biannual basis. The journal has endeavored to strike a balance between modern and premodern topics as well as represent research from scholars working in the diverse array of fields constituting the humanities and social sciences.

The spring issue of 2021 was one of the largest issues we have ever published. The six articles cover topics such as music, food, animality, sectarian unification, regional temple networks, and the adaptation of the Gion Festival to COVID-19 restrictions. The issue also includes an assortment of book reviews. Initially, we planned to publish a special issue in the fall as the culmination of a series of conferences jointly hosted by Columbia and Nagoya Universities, but more time was required to translate the Japanese-language contributions to the volume. Fortunately, we had a waiting-list for special issues, so we switched the order. Although this change of plans put us behind schedule, “Religion and Identity in Japan since 1940,” edited by three-time guest editor Peter Nosco (University of British Columbia), is now available print-on-demand from your

local Amazon marketplace. As of this moment, the online version is on hold until the launching of our new website (more on that below). The special issue includes articles by several veteran scholars, including our former colleague at the Nanzan Institute Okuyama Michiaki. See the table of contents below for details.

The upward trend in online activity for the *JJRS* continued with 97,162 successful DOI searches between April 2021 and March 2022, almost doubling the number from the previous year (see the *JJRS* update in *Bulletin 44* for an explanation of DOIs). On JSTOR, which collects its own data for searches in their database, *JJRS* articles were accessed 108,339 times between April 2021 and March 2022. These numbers do not include downloads directly from the Nanzan Institute or *JJRS* (jjrs.org) websites. Only 28 print-on-demand copies were sold during the same period.

As noted above, the website of the Nanzan Institute through which we publish the *JJRS* is currently under construction. Databases such as EBISCO, WORLDCAT, and CINI link to articles on the website, and search engines such as Google redirect there as well. Therefore, online publications are on hold until the new site is launched. The new website will include additional information about *JJRS* articles, such as abstracts and links to other publications by authors.

The spring issue, like the previous year, is turning out to be a big one. In recent years, we have been fortunate to receive a large number of quality manuscripts. This influx in articles has not only resulted in longer issues but has increased the waiting time for publication. Some authors have been waiting for more than two years to see their work published. Therefore, beginning this year, we will publish two “at large” issues, one in the spring and the other in the fall. Special issues will be published on a rolling basis. Special issues, which are more akin to edited volumes than journal issues, tend to take much longer to complete than issues containing unsolicited articles. This new flexibility will allow us to publish two regularly scheduled issues, while special issues will be published when the editors agree they are complete.

As I mentioned in last year’s update, we are planning to host an event in the summer of 2023 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the *JJRS*. We hope to host speakers from within Japan and abroad, assuming travel restrictions are lifted. A special issue related to the event will be published the following year. We hope to see you all at the celebration.

ARTICLES

- 1 The Human-Fish
Animality, Teratology, and Religion in Premodern Japan
Andrea CASTIGLIONI
- 45 The Dharma of Music
Gagaku and Buddhist Salvation in Medieval Japan
Fabio RAMBELLI
- 73 An Amendable Argument
The Unification of the Nichiren Sect in Sixteenth-Century Kyoto
Dan SHERER
- 103 Authority and Competition
Shingon Buddhist Monastic Communities
in Medieval Japanese Regional Society
HUANG Xiaolong
- 125 Faith as Authenticity
Kyoto's Gion Festival in 2020
Mark TEEUWEN
- 165 Japanese Food Offerings
Allan G. GRAPARD

REVIEWS

- 187 Fumiaki Miyazaki, Kate Wildman Nakai, and Mark Teeuwen, eds. *Christian Sorcerers on Trial: Records of the 1827 Osaka Incident*
Rebecca SUTER
- 189 Ōtani Eiichi 大谷栄一, *Nichirenshugi to wa nan datta no ka: Kindai Nihon no shisō suimyaku* 日蓮主義とはなんだったのか—近代日本の思想水脈
Jacqueline I. STONE
- 194 Niwa Nobuko 丹羽宣子, “*Sōryorashisa*” to “*Joseirashisa*” no *shūkyō shakaigaku: Nichiren-shū josei sōryo no jirei kara* 「僧侶らしさ」と「女性らしさ」の宗教社会学—日蓮宗女性僧侶の事例から
KOBAYASHI Naoko
- 198 Michael Pye, ed., *Exploring Shinto*
Joseph S. O'LEARY
- 202 Brian Daizen Victoria, *Zen Terror in Prewar Japan: Portrait of an Assassin*
Joseph S. O'LEARY
- 205 James Mark Shields, *Against Harmony: Progressive and Radical Buddhism in Modern Japan*
Joseph S. O'LEARY
- 209 Rafal K. Stepien, ed., *Buddhist Literature as Philosophy, Buddhist Philosophy as Literature*
Joseph S. O'LEARY
- 215 Contributors

ARTICLES

- 217 Editor's Introduction
Religion and Identity in Japan since 1940
Peter NOSCO
- 225 We are Warriors for the Movement
Misogi Training in the Imperial Rule Assistance League
Helen HARDACRE
- 245 Shards from a Wooden Shoe Shop
Religious Experience, Historical Change, and Suzuki Daisetsu
James E. KETELAAR
- 267 "We Alone Can Save Japan"
Soka Gakkai's Wartime Antecedents
and Its Postwar Conversion Campaign
Jacqueline I. STONE
- 299 Constructing Identities through the Shikoku Pilgrimage
Ian READER
- 321 Traversing the Natural, Supernatural, and Paranormal
Yōkai in Postwar Japan
HIROTA Ryūhei
- 341 New Religions in Kōshien
Religious Identity and High School Baseball
OKUYAMA Michiaki
- 365 Religious Change in Modern Japanese Society
Established Religions and Spirituality
YAMANAKA Hiroshi
- 383 Epilogue
Japanese Religions and their Contributions to One Woman's Identity
Makiko HAMAGUCHI
- 395 Contributors

EVEN THE TRANSLATOR SOMETIMES MUST HAVE TO STAND NAKED



Reading the English Translation of Tiantai Zhiyi's *Fahua xuanyi* for a Nanzan Seminar

Paul L. Swanson

Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture (emeritus)

The first online “Nanzan Seminar for the Translation of Buddhist Texts” was held across six two-hour sessions in 2021 (21 April, 19 May, 16 June, 15 September, 20 October, 17 November), during which between thirty and forty participants joined us to read and discuss a new and on-going English translation of Tiantai Zhiyi’s Miaofa lianhuajing xuanyi 妙法蓮華經玄義 (“The Profound Meaning of the Sutra of the Lotus Blossom of the Sublime Dharma”).

After the successful publication of the translation and study of the *Mohezhiquan* 摩訶止觀 (*Clear Serenity, Quiet Insight*, University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), and facing an imminent retirement, I decided to attempt a dual (fully annotated and non-annotated) English translation of Zhiyi's influential tome on the “profound meaning” of the *Lotus Sutra* as a companion set. A section of the *Xuanyi* was the focus of my PhD dissertation in the mid-1980s and had resulted in the publication of *Foundations of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy: The Flowering of the Two Truths Theory in Chinese Buddhism* (Asian Humanities Press, 1989). I was intrigued with the possibility of updating, expanding, and correcting my translation from more than thirty-five years ago. With the first draft translation approaching the halfway point, my Nanzan colleague Matthew McMullen suggested sponsoring an online seminar to present the tentative results and receive feedback through discussion and suggestions. Here is a summary report on the proceedings.

The seminar proceeded by reading the English translation while participants kept an eye on the Chinese text (Taisho no. 1716, volume 33, pp. 681–814), followed by my comments on points of interest on the content, translation issues,

variant interpretations, further information in the notes, and so forth, then allowing for questions and comments by the participants. We did not read the Chinese text aloud, since I am unable to orally recite in Chinese, and reading aloud in the Japanese *yomikudashi* style would not be particularly helpful. After briefly summarizing the place and importance of Zhiyi and his Tiantai works in Chinese Buddhist history, we turned to examine the opening introductions. The “Private Notes on the History of the Lotus” by Zhiyi’s disciple Guanding (who transcribed and edited Zhiyi’s lectures) lists ten “highlights” and exceptional qualities of Zhiyi’s life and career, and comments on how the text came to be compiled and edited. Zhiyi’s own “Majestic Introduction” briefly presents the structure of the text, that is, an analysis of the components of the title of the *Lotus Sutra*, Kumarajīva’s *Miao fa lianhua jing* (Sublime Dharma Lotus Blossom Sutra). It opens with the famous statement that “sublime means inconceivable” 妙名不可思議, which captures the theme of this work in a nutshell. This is followed by a concise explanation of six variations of the symbolic meaning of the “lotus blossom.”

Although our main focus was to be the section on “Objects as Sublime,” in the second session we took a quick look at the preceding content in order to understand the context and flow of the argument. First, Zhiyi outlines the structure of his text in terms of “five layers of profound meaning”: 1. Explaining the name (that is, explaining the title of the *Lotus Sutra*, which takes up most of the content of the text), 2. Discerning the essence, 3. Clarifying the gist, 4. Discussing the function, and 5. Classifying the teachings. These themes were further dissected into “seven common hermeneutical perspectives”: 1. Interpreting the five themes, 2. Quoting scriptural proof, 3. Origins and arising of the five themes, 4. Exposing and merging, 5. Examination through questions and answers, 6. Contemplation of the mind, and 7. Merging differences (by classifying the teachings). At this point we took some time to look at Zhiyi’s use of the “four *siddhānta*” 四悉檀, or “methods of teaching (or accomplishment)” (worldly, individual, therapeutic, and of supreme meaning), a common trope in his analysis. One interesting point related to translation: Zhiyi decides to keep the transliteration 悉檀 instead of a translation of this term because of its various meanings that could not be expressed in a single Chinese term, and yet he also parses the term using the meaning of these characters, as “all” 悉 and “giving” 檀 (since this character was used to transliterate the Sanskrit *dāna*)! This example provided us with an example and warning to take care in choosing our translation terms when interpreting the text.

In the third session we finally began to read the long central section on the above-mentioned five themes, of which the first is “interpreting the name (or title of the *Lotus Sutra*), again of which the section on “sublime” is the most

detailed. Although in the title “sublime” comes before “Dharma,” Zhiyi begins with an analysis of “Dharma.” He begins by criticizing other scholars of his day, especially Fayun, and then presents his “correct” interpretation. This involves categories such as the “ten dharma realms” 十法界 (from hell to Buddhahood) and the “ten suchlike characteristics” 十如是 (also key themes in the *Mohezhi-guan*) whose interpenetration provide the basis for the influential idea of “three thousand realms in a single thought” 一念三千. It should be noted that these comments on “reality” (including the discussion on various “truths” that follows) are more epistemological than ontological. That is, Zhiyi is not trying to establish or describe in a scientific way exactly how “reality” exists outside of us, but focuses on how we experience and (mentally) interpret the world.

This was the beginning of the section I had translated and used as the basis for my PhD dissertation and for the book on *Foundation of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy*. When I began to translate from the beginning of the *Xuanyi*, I was looking forward to reaching the section I had already worked on, thinking I could get through it rather quickly and easily. I discovered, however, that I had to considerably revise the translation and expand the notes, and that this section took as much time and effort as other, newly translated, sections. On a positive note, this reflected the advantage of having had thirty more years of experience dealing with Tiantai texts, as many of the sections that left me puzzled in the past were now clearer, and the advantages of increased digital access to information provided more assistance.

This takes us, in the fourth session and beyond, to the longest and most important section of the text, on the meaning of “sublime,” which occupied the final three sessions of the seminar. The bulk of the discussion consists of “ten aspects of sublime,” that is, objects (or reality), wisdom, practice, stages, threefold Dharmas, empathy and response, supranormal powers, preaching of the Dharma, attendants, and meritorious benefits. Again, the longest and most important section is on “objects (or reality) as sublime.” As mentioned above, this focuses on the epistemological meaning of truth or reality as we experience it, in terms of the ten suchlike characteristics, twelvefold causes and conditions, the four noble truths, the two truths, the threefold truth, one truth, and no truth. Unlike previous sessions, where we skipped through many passages, this section was read (almost) in its entirety, with close attention to the details, focusing on the logical progression and interweaving themes. As the argument progresses, the details are left behind and the focus clearer. That is, we experience the world in terms of four noble truths: of suffering, the causes of suffering, extinction of suffering, and the path to extinction. We experience the world in terms of worldly, mundane, conventional truth and of supreme, real truth. Again, in one of Zhiyi's most unique contributions, we experience the world as

three interpenetrating and simultaneous truths of emptiness, conventionality, and the Middle path, or a “threefold truth.” These “two truths” and “threefold truth” are actually one truth. But, to say “one truth” is still a verbalization, and to verbalize something is still a conventional means, so it must be said that there is “no truth.” And yet, we must use words and concepts, so there is threefold truth, two truths, four noble truths, and so forth, which again must be denied if one becomes attached to the verbal and conceptual expression of the objects of our experience. So concludes the section on “objects as sublime.”

This summarizes the readings in our final three sessions, but I should add that we often stopped to look more closely at some details, such as the use of scriptural quotation, particularly thorny translation issues, other topics (such as the fourfold classification system of the Tripitaka, Shared, Distinct, and Perfect teachings) and their interconnectedness, peculiar details (such as Zhiyi’s unusual reference to Paramārtha), questions raised by the audience, and so forth. In the end we mentioned briefly the sections that followed, how I found the section on “stages” of attainment rather tedious and irrelevant to current discourse, and looked ahead to two particularly interesting sections on “threefold Dharmas” and “empathy and response.” The section on threefold Dharmas listed ten such categories (such as threefold Buddha nature), which fit neatly into the threefold pattern (such as the threefold truth and threefold contemplation) that is the hallmark of Tiantai Buddhism. The section on “empathy and response” (the empathy of sentient beings reflected in their capacity, and the Buddha’s response to such capabilities) shows Zhiyi at his most creative, presenting a more distinctly “Chinese” development rather than trying to make sense of detailed scholastic Indian categories (such as in the section on “stages”).

The seminar came to an end, but my translation of the *Xuanyi* continues. The latter sections contain an important (but convoluted) presentation on the “original basis” (the long ago and far away awakening of the Buddha) identified *somehow* with reality itself (the Dharma body and Dharma nature) and expounded in the second half of the *Lotus Sutra*. This is in contrast to the phenomenal historical “traces” of the Buddha in our conventional world, expounded in the first half of the *Lotus Sutra*. This theme of the “basis and traces” requires careful parsing, as Zhiyi tries to explain the reality and relationship of the “ideal/real” with the “conventional,” similar in many ways to Christology in Christian theology that tries to explain the relationship between the Father/God (the “original basis”) and the incarnated son or Christ (the historical “traces”). Also coming up in later sections is a more detailed analysis of the “lotus blossom” as a symbol, a discussion of the term “sutra” (and whether or not this term should be translated), and a final detailed discussion of the

doctrinal classification of the Fourfold Teachings. Perhaps these sections and issues could be discussed in another online seminar in the coming years.

In closing, I found it a very encouraging and helpful experience to read and share my translation with many interested participants of different backgrounds and expertise. Some of the advantages of doing such a seminar were suggestions for possible alternate translations, pointing out some mistakes, discussion of ambiguous contents, confirmation of some translation choices, and so forth. For example, I received much help regarding Abhidharma matters, an area where my expertise is sorely lacking. I hope that this is only the first of many more online “zoominars” on the translation of Buddhist texts to be sponsored by the Nanzan Institute.

RECONFIGURING CHRISTIAN UNIQUENESS AND PARTICULARITY THROUGH INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE



Catherine Cornille

Boston College

The notion of Christian uniqueness has traditionally been regarded as a stumbling block for interreligious dialogue. This article focuses on interreligious dialogue as itself a means to discover the particularity or uniqueness of Christianity. It looks into the experiences of religious hybridity, holy envy, and interreligious theology as three avenues for developing the idea of the uniqueness of Christianity (or of any other religion) in a relational way.

The topic of the uniqueness of Christianity has played an outsized role in the areas of theology of religions and interreligious dialogue. The Christian belief in the unique salvific role of Jesus Christ has been regarded as the main impediment or stumbling block for genuine openness and dialogue with other religions. Hence, for the past decades, Christian theologians of religions have put all their effort in rethinking the traditional understanding of the uniqueness of Jesus. This has led to the well-worn paradigms of inclusivism, exclusivism and pluralism, and to decades of discussion of their validity and overall usefulness. This discussion and critique of Christian uniqueness has been conducted strictly within Christian theology of religions and on the basis of *a priori* faith commitments and convictions. While the various positions one may adopt regarding the uniqueness of Jesus may affect the degree of openness toward the religious other, it says little about what Christianity might contribute to the dialogue itself.

The term interreligious dialogue encompasses a variety of different types of engagement between religions, from friendly neighborly relations to advanced theological exchange, and from collaboration for the common good to immersion in one another's spiritual and religious practices. The goals of interreligious dialogue may range from peaceful coexistence to genuine learning from one another. In order to overcome potential tension and in order to find common

ground, the dialogue between religions has often focused on similarities or points of connection. This is indeed an important step beyond the old and natural animosity that may arise when individuals meet whose heartfelt beliefs, practices and values do not overlap and at times directly contradict one another. But it misses out on what different religions may bring to the conversation and learn from one another. The dialogue between religions may also become a privileged occasion to discover one's own particularity. Just as individuals discover their own unique personality traits only in relation to others, so religious individuals may only become aware of the particularity of their beliefs and practices in relation to the religious other. Daniel Madigan also points out that:

So much of interreligious dialogue tends to be based on the finding of mutual echoes in sacred texts and common ethical teachings. Yet surely one of the great values of our encounter with the other—especially with an other who contests our version of the same tradition—is to discover our particular identity rather than any generic similarity.¹

Interreligious dialogue may thus become a process of self-discovery, of discovery of one's own particularity through the other. Here, the notion of uniqueness is not posited *a priori*, but uncovered *a posteriori*, in relation to the religious other. Every dialogue may then reveal various dimensions of one's particularity, as they stand out in relation to the particularity of the other religion.

This relational approach to particularity may in turn enhance the contribution of Christianity (and of each religion) to the dialogue and to the common good. With regard to the role of religion in the public sphere, Lenn Goodman also states that “What social bodies need is a way of learning and profiting from differences—not denying, minimizing, trivializing, or romanticizing them.”² It is true that dialogue may reveal all kinds of particularities, some edifying and some less so, some relevant to the partner in dialogue and some not. Dialogue may take the form of mutual critique, of critical awareness of particular inconsistencies, gaps, failure to live up to one's own highest ideals, or violence toward the religious other. But it may also lead to a renewed appreciation and repossession of particular beliefs or practices that stand out in relation to other religions and that may contribute to the common good.

There are various ways in which the relational particularity of a religion may come to the fore. It may surface in the experience of religious hybridity or

1. Daniel Madigan, “God's Word to the World. Jesus and the Qur'an, Incarnation and Recitation,” in *Godhead Here in Hiding: Incarnation and the History of Human Suffering*, edited by T. Merrigan and P. Glorieux (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2011), 166.

2. Lenn Goodman, *Religious Pluralism and Values in the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 194.

dual belonging, where individuals come to identify with elements of another religious tradition while holding on to certain aspects of their original tradition. The particularity of a religion may here surface in those elements one would not wish to abandon or compromise in spite of the serious appeal of the other religion. A second avenue for discerning particularity is through the eyes of the religious other. Whereas members of other religions will of course detect many differences with their own religious beliefs and practices, it is those differences that are the occasion for what Krister Stendhal calls “holy envy” or what Yaerly calls “spiritual regret” that may raise awareness of certain treasures in one’s religion. A third way to discover religious particularities is through lengthy immersion in another religious tradition which allows one to rediscover the values or admirable aspects of one’s own religion.

Each of these approaches to religious particularity may lift up different aspects of a religion, depending on the particular individual and tradition involved. We will here focus on elements of Christian particularity that have surfaced through engagement with Hinduism in the experience of Hindu-Christian hybridity, in the Christian teachings or practices that Hindus have found particularly inspiring, and in the rediscovery of Christian particularity of Christians immersed in the Hindu tradition.

Religious Hybridity

One of the religious phenomena that has garnered considerable scholarly attention over the past decades is that of religious hybridity, variously referred to as dual religious belonging, multiple religious participation, or spiritual fluidity. It refers to individuals who identify with more than one religion. While this has been common in the East for millennia, where Chinese have identified with Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, and Japanese with Shinto and Buddhism simultaneously, it is a relatively new phenomenon in many other parts of the world. The ready access to the teachings and practices of any number of religions, combined with a looser attachment to traditionally dominant religions has led to a marketplace of religions, where individuals have come to choose elements from a variety of religious offerings according to their own taste and judgment.

Religious hybridity may be regarded as a form of internal dialogue. In his approach to interreligious dialogue, Raimon Panikkar states that the deepest forms of dialogue take place “in the depth of the person... in which one struggles with the angel, the daimon, and oneself.”³ The literature on religious

3. Raimon Panikkar, *The Intra-religious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), xvii.

hybridity has focused mainly on the possibility or desirability of such dual or multiple belonging. It has been approached from doctrinal, practical, spiritual, or phenomenological points of view, and has generated a variety of arguments for and against dual belonging.⁴ In the newly edited volume *Hindu-Christian Dual Belonging*, the focus is mainly on the possibility of dual belonging from a Christian theological point of view. The emphasis is thus still on whether the incorporation of Hindu elements is permissible and possible, rather than on which Christian elements are worth saving in the plunge into Hinduism.⁵ Our question, here, however, is not precisely what particular Christian elements are emphasized or preserved in combination with Hinduism.

The earliest examples of Hindu-Christian hybridity were Hindus who had come to identify with Christian elements without converting to Christianity. Many of the nineteenth century Hindu reformers were profoundly shaped by the example and teachings of Jesus Christ. Referring to Rammohan Roy as a “Protestant Hindu,” M. M. Thomas states that it was in particular Jesus’s ethics and monotheism that attracted him, and that framed his own approach to Hindu reform.⁶ Though never converting to Christianity, Keshab Chandra Sen was even more deeply shaped by the example and teaching of Jesus Christ. He sought to establish a “Hindu Church of Christ,” the Church of the New Dispensation which would combine Christian teachings with Hindu cultural elements. For him, it was in particular the teachings of forgiveness and self-sacrifice which stood out as distinctly Christian and necessary for the reformation of Hinduism and India:

I assure you, brethren, nothing short of self-sacrifice, of which Christ has furnished so bright an example, will regenerate India.... And the better to stimulate you to a life of self-denial, I hold up to you the cross on which Jesus died.⁷

Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya (1861–1907) was a Brahmin who converted to Christianity without fully renouncing his Hindu identity. He developed elabo-

4. Catherine Cornille, ed., *Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002). Paul Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could not Be a Christian* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009). Rose Drew, *Buddhist and Christian? An Exploration of Dual Belonging* (London: Routledge, 2011). Gavin D’Costa and Ross Thompson, *Buddhist-Christian Dual Belonging. Affirmations, Objections, Explorations* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016). Peniel Jesudason Rajkumar and Joseph Dayam, eds., *Many Yet One? Multiple Religious Belonging* (Ferneby: World Council of Churches, 2016). John Barnett, *Christian and Sikh. A Practical Theology of Multiple Religious Participation* (Durham: Sacristi Press, 2021).

5. Daniel Soars and Nadya Pohram, eds., *Hindu-Christian Dual Belonging* (Abington: Routledge, 2022).

6. M. M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Hindu Renaissance* (London: SCM, 1969), 8 ff.

7. Quoted in M.M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Hindu Renaissance*, 57.

rate apologetics about the truth of Christianity. Among the things that drew him to Christianity were the comprehensiveness and the universality of the teachings of Jesus:

Jesus Christ claims to have given to mankind the completest possible revelation of the nature and character of God, of the most comprehensive ideal of humanity, of the infinite malice of sin and of the only universal way to release from the bondage of evil (*avidya*). It is for *all* nations, for *all* ages, for *all* climes.⁸

He also believed that Christianity offered examples of what he calls a “super-human love” which “moves towards objects not because of their having any attraction of their own but because God loves them.” Referring to examples as St. Francis and Father Damien, he asks:

Where—we ask in wonder and amazement—where in the whole history of the world can you find instances of such heroic, supernatural love outside the fold of the Christian and Catholic Church?⁹

In spite of these early examples, the phenomenon of Hindu-Christian religious hybridity has come to be mainly discussed in terms of the immersion of cradle Christians into Hindu spiritual teachings and practices, and more specifically into the tradition of non-duality or *Advaita Vedanta*.¹⁰ The question here is thus why these hybrids still remain attached to their religion of birth, and what elements in particular they do not wish to abandon in spite of the appeal of the other religion? Some of the pioneers of this type of religious hybridity are Henri Le Saux (Abhishiktananda) (1910–1973), Bede Griffiths (1906–1993), and Raimon Panikkar (1918–2010). Each of them was deeply steeped in the Christian tradition as monks and/or priests, but came to be personally transformed through their experience of living in India and immersing themselves in Indian spirituality. Christians who identify with another religion tend to mainly feel the need to explain and justify the appeal of the other religion, rather than reflecting on the reasons why they are still grounded in or inspired by their Christian faith. For many, it is in the first place their attachment to the person of Jesus Christ which informs their loyalty to Christianity. But beyond this, there

8. Julius Lipner and George Gispert-Sauch, eds., *The Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay*, vol. II (Bangalore: United Theological College, 2002), 192.

9. *Ibid.*, 24–26.

10. While Hindu social customs (such as caste and untouchability) and ritual elements have long infused Christianity in India, and while both Hindus and Christians occasionally visit one another’s shrines in search for divine help and miracles, the term religious hybridity is here used only for cases of conscious and sustained identification with the teachings and practices of another religion.

are particular teachings and principles that come to stand out in relationship to the other tradition.

For Abhishiktananda, the distinctiveness or particularity of Christianity lies in its communal aspects and in its emphasis on love as the essence of the divine reality. The two elements are intimately intertwined in the following statements:

Christianity is the revelation that Being is Love (cf. 1 Cor 13: 2, 1 John 4: 16).¹¹

The mystery of the Holy trinity reveals that *Being* is essentially a koinonia of love; it is communion, a reciprocal call to *be*; it is being-together, being-with, *co-esse*; its essence is a coming-from and going-to, a giving and receiving.¹²

The Church is essentially *agape* (love) and koinonia (being-with, being-together). She is the sign and sacrament of the divine koinonia of Being. By her very nature she is communion in love, and her function in mankind is to produce a ferment of love.¹³

Though the element of love is also present in Hindu devotion or *bhakti*, the non-duality of ultimate reality in the tradition of *advaita vedanta* does not allow for relationship in or with the divine reality. Bede Griffiths, who followed in the footsteps of Le Saux, also argued that what distinguishes the Christian understanding is that “Being is not only consciousness, but also love, that there is relationship at the heart of reality.”¹⁴

Another element that these pioneers of Hindu-Christian religious hybridity noticed is the particular Christian attention to time, history, and to human limitations and dependency on divine grace. Le Saux, for example, states that “in the Christian’s acceptance of his limitations and his involvement in time there is a depth of love and surrender which is beyond the understanding of the Stoic or the Vedantin.”¹⁵ Raimon Panikkar’s journey in the field of religious hybridity is captured in his famous statement: “I ‘left’ as a christian, I ‘found’ myself a hindu, and I ‘return’ a buddhist, without having ceased to be a christian.”¹⁶ Though Panikkar ubiquitously draws from the Christian biblical and theological tradition in expounding his cosmotheandric approach to reality, he does not

11. Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda. A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience* (London: ISPCK, 1994), 136.

12. *Ibid.*, 135.

13. *Ibid.*, 137.

14. *Ibid.*, 35.

15. *Ibid.*, 145.

16. Raimon Panikkar, *The Intra-religious Dialogue*, 42.

often elaborate on what may be considered distinctly Christian. Among the rare exceptions is this quote which emphasizes the existence of a divine reality which is independent of human existence and imagination, and which reveals itself in the world:

The central Christian concern is a timely reminder to Buddhism and to all the humanisms that no amount of self-effort and goodwill suffices to handle the human predicament adequately; we must remain constantly open to unexpected and unforeseeable eruptions of Reality itself, which Christians may want to call God or divine Providence. Christianity stands for the unselfish and authentic defense of the primordial rights of Reality, of which we are not the masters.¹⁷

It must be said that the experience of religious hybridity involving Christianity and the Hindu tradition of *advaita vedanta* often involves the dissolution of all particularities in the reality of non-duality. Abhishiktananda, for example, struggled his whole life in India with the attempt to preserve the uniqueness of the person of Jesus Christ in light of his embrace of the philosophy of *advaita vedanta*. In the Ajatananda interreligious ashram, inspired primarily by Abhishiktananda and his disciple Ajatananda, the focus is barely on the particularity or distinctiveness of Christianity. While the person of Jesus Christ is revered, he is regarded as one among many religious masters who have realized the non-duality of reality.

Holy Envy

One of the ways in which the distinctiveness of a religion reveals itself is through the eyes of the religious other. Believers tend to take their tradition for granted and rarely consider what may be different or unique about their own beliefs and practices. They may regard the metaphysical claims of other religions as strange or absurd without often considering how their own metaphysical beliefs come across to others. Or they may admire certain insights or practices in other religions without being aware of what others might find admirable in their own tradition.

While religious others often offer an important critical mirror which draws attention to the problems and shortcomings of one's own religion, they also may help us to discover one's more noble or edifying particularities. This may be expressed in terms of "holy envy" or "spiritual regret." The term "holy envy" was coined by Kristen Stendhal at the occasion of the inauguration of the Church

17. *Ibid.*, 131.

of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints in Stockholm. In response to the opposition to this, he proposed three principles of interfaith understanding, one of which is that one should always be willing to recognize elements in the other religion that one admires and that one wish could be incorporated in one's own religious tradition.¹⁸ The notion of "spiritual regret" expresses the same feeling of admiration and awe for certain teachings and practices of another religion that are not (yet) found in one's own tradition and that may or may not be reconcilable.¹⁹

The most famous Hindu to engage Christianity in depth is undoubtedly Mahatma (Mohandas) Gandhi. His experience of Christianity was filled with ambiguity. In his youth, he had an aversion for meat-eating and alcohol-drinking Christians:

I heard of well known Hindu having converted to Christianity. It was the talk of the town hat, when he was baptized, he had to eat beef and drink liquor, that he also had to change his clothes, and that thenceforth he began to go about in European costume including a hat. These things got on my nerves. Surely, thought I, a religion that compelled one to eat beef, drink liquor and change one's clothes did not deserve the name. I also heard that the new convert had already begun abusing the religion of his ancestors, their customs and their country. All these things created in me a dislike for Christianity.²⁰

After arriving in England, Gandhi's perception of Christianity changed through his friendships with Christians and through reading the Bible. He relates that the Sermon on the Mount "went straight to my heart," in particular the words "but I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man take away thy coat let him have thy cloke [sic] too."²¹ This became the inspiration for his leitmotif of non-violence. The cross was for Gandhi a magnet as a symbol of nonviolence and voluntary suffering:

18. The two other elements are "not to compare the best in one's own religion with the worst in the other" and "to seek understanding of the other religion by asking its adherents and not its enemies." For a further use of the term, see Barbara Brown Taylor, *Holy Envy. Finding God in the Faith of Others* (New York: Harper, 2019).

19. The term tends to suggest a fundamental incommensurability. However, the very appeal of those particular elements may also generate possibilities for learning from the other.

20. Gandhi, *An Autobiography. The Stories of My Experiments with Truth* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 33–34.

21. *Ibid.*, 68.

Though I cannot claim to be a Christian in the sectarian sense, the example of Jesus' suffering is a factor in the composition of my underlying faith in non-violence, which rules all my actions, worldly and temporal. Jesus lived and died in vain if he did not teach us to regulate the whole of life by the eternal law of love.²²

The centrality of self-sacrificing love was thus for Gandhi a distinctive element in the experience and teaching of Jesus. He did not accept the Christian interpretation of Jesus death as atonement, stating that the argument that Jesus died for the sins of mankind "utterly failed to convince me." He noted that it seemed to provide license to Christians to commit transgressions, and stated that "I do not seek redemption from the consequences of my sin. I seek to be redeemed from sin itself, or rather from the very thought of sin."²³ The cross and suffering of Jesus thus represented for Gandhi an example to follow, rather than an article of faith. In addition to the "eternal law of love," Gandhi also singles out the radical forgiveness taught and exemplified by Jesus as a particular element of appeal:

Jesus Christ prayed to God from the Cross to forgive those who had crucified him. It is my constant prayer to God that He may give me the strength to intercede even for my assassin. And it should be your prayer too that your faithful servant may be given the strength to forgive.²⁴

While Gandhi thus admired these elements in the life and teaching of Jesus, he saw no reason to convert to Christianity. He believed that each religion contained within itself resources for attaining the highest end of salvation or liberation, and that the policies of conversion had more to do with institutional power than with spiritual development.

A general aversion to conversion combined with the development of a more nationalist and defensive orientation in Hinduism seems to have muted the inclination of Hindu thinkers to engage Christianity in positive and constructive ways, or to pay attention to the particularity of Christianity. A notable exception to this is the Hindu scholar Anatanand Rambachan, who is one of the foremost contemporary thinkers within the tradition of non-duality. In a recent lecture, he mentions a 1981 interreligious dialogue meeting in Rajpur,

22. From a conversation on the train to Bardoli, 1939, quoted in S. Shamir Hassan, "Gandhi, Jews and Zionism," *Proceedings of Indian History Congress* 54 (1993): 748–751.

23. *Autobiography*, 124.

24. M. K. Gandhi, "Advice to Muslims" (26 October 1947). Quoted in *Gandhi's Bible*, edited by William Emielsen (London: ISPCK, 2009), 123.

where his encounter with Christians for the first time drew his attention to the importance of justice at the center of religious consciousness. He relates that his own traditional training had not engaged social questions and problems in connection to the pursuit of liberation. This encounter with Christianity, and in particular with the Biblical texts on the last judgment (Matt. 25: 31–46), which he states is his “favorite Christian text” led him to a critical reflection on his own tradition and a search for theological resources in the Hindu tradition that would affirm the dignity of every human being and combat social injustice. All of this led to the publication of *A Hindu Theology of Liberation* in which he tackles with the problems of patriarchy, homophobia, casteism, anthropocentrism, and childism, inspired by Catholic Social Teaching but drawing from resources available in Hinduism. Like Gandhi, he also turns to the Cross as a source of inspiration. While Hinduism has many divine manifestations, he states, none project the image of the divine “executed in pain and humiliation.” The image of Jesus on the Cross is for him not only an example of non-violence (*ahimsa*), but of the depth of God’s love that has no limits. *Ahimsa*, he states, is here “the outcome of love.” In the case of Jesus, this love expressed itself in a special concern for the oppressed, the victims, the powerless. While divine love certainly embraces all, this focus on the marginalized, and the Christian tradition of liberation with its “preferential option for the poor” is what Rambachan has found particularly inspiring in Christianity.

Intercultural and Interreligious Theology

Even though there is no better way to become aware of one’s own particularity than through the eyes of the other, one may also come close to the same realization by deep immersion in the culture or the tradition of the other, which often generates a new critical self-awareness. As individuals live and work in cultures that have been dominated by other religions, the distinctiveness of their own beliefs and ways inevitable comes to the fore. This is the case in particular with missionaries or representatives of one religion who intensively engage another religious tradition. While such deep engagement may lead to dual belonging (as mentioned above) it may also simply lead to a new self-awareness. The work of the Indian Jesuit, George Soarez-Prabhu, may serve as an example. A renown biblical scholar, he was also deeply involved in the dialogue with Hinduism.

He distances himself from the way in which the uniqueness of Jesus and of Christianity has been discussed in Western academic theology:

The problem of the uniqueness of Christ as discussed in theology today seems to me an academic problem with little significance (for no one doubts that salvation exists outside the Christian community,

and whether or not it is through “Christ” operating in some mysterious way, does not really seem to matter), and of much presumption (for it presumes to know the mind of God).²⁵

Soares-Prabhu rejects any attempts to establish the superiority of one religion over the other as “neither practical nor wise” and celebrates the diversity of “forms of religiosity as abundantly as the flowers in a forest.”²⁶ However, in most of his writings, he does reflect on the distinctiveness of Christianity, especially in relation to Hinduism and Buddhism. In this, Soares-Prabhu focuses mainly on the experience and teachings of Jesus. He argues that Jesus’s experience of God as unconditional love was “absolutely unique.”²⁷ He elaborates on the particularity of the parent-child relationship, on the elements of intimacy, dependency, vulnerability, and mutual love and trust as characteristic of the Christian experience of God. He points out that this does not mean that Christianity has a rich set of teachings on prayer. Compared with Hinduism or Buddhism “prayer techniques are poorly developed in Christianity.”²⁸ However, “what Jesus gives us is a new attitude in prayer, emerging out of a new experience of God.”²⁹ Prayer is “an interpersonal ‘conversation’ with God, in which love is experienced and given, and relations of intimacy founded.”³⁰

Even more important than the particular approach to prayer is Jesus’s insistence on the inseparability of love of God and love of neighbor:

It is just this intimate pairing of the love of God and the love of neighbor that constituted the specificity and the uniqueness of the teaching of Jesus. Interhuman concern is obviously an element in all religious traditions. The liberated Buddha sends his disciples out on a mission ‘for the profit of many, out of compassion for the world, for the bliss of many, for the welfare, the profit, the bliss of Gods and humankind. (Mahavagga I 10: 31).... But the interhuman concern here is always a secondary attitude which follows from a prior religious experience

25. George Soares-Prabhu, *The Dharma of Jesus*, edited by Francis D’Sa (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003), 96.

26. *Ibid.*, 96.

27. *Ibid.*, 88.

28. *Ibid.*, 210. He adds that “Even the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola, one of the more technical treatises on prayer in the Christian tradition, would appear curiously unfinished to an Indian reader, accustomed to the meticulous instructions on diet, posture, breathing, and methods of concentration that are detailed in Indian texts on meditation.” *Ibid.*, 218. Abhishiktananda similarly states that “In the Gospel Jesus gave no teaching to his disciples either about methods of meditation, dhyana, or about systems of yoga. He simply commanded them to love one another.” In *Saccidananda* (London: ISPCK, 1974), 200.

29. *Ibid.*, 210.

30. *Idem.*

(liberation) or a primary commitment to God (the Covenant). It is only with Jesus that the ethical attitude becomes, as it were, an integral part of the religious experience itself, for to experience God as “Father” is to experience the neighbor as “brother.” The horizontal is thus inseparably welded into the vertical, and love of neighbor is brought onto a level with love of God.³¹

Soares-Prabhu believes that this represents or should represent the distinctive Christian way of being in the world. “Like the Buddhist attitude of ‘mindfulness,’ the Christian attitude of agape is thus an existential attitude derived from a change in one’s being.”³² This love is to focus in particular on the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalized, and is to include one’s enemies. One of the distinctive features of Jesus’s life “is his table fellowship with sinners and outcasts.”³³ Soares-Prabhu is thus particularly distressed about the fact that caste discrimination continues to exist in Christian communities in India³⁴ and states that “the fact that Christian Dalits do exist (and suffer) among us is a sign of how little Christian we are, and of how much we stand in a state of serious and, one suspects, unrepentant sin.”³⁵ With regard to the command of loving one’s enemies, he recognizes that it “is not a uniquely Christian demand, as is sometimes suggested.”³⁶ But for him, “there is something particularly impressive in Jesus’s command that we love our enemies” insofar as it calls for “not just the resolution of personal antagonisms within the group, but for the acceptance of members of alien and hostile groups as well.”³⁷

This is also how Soares-Prabhu interprets the Christian notion of sin (which is at times regarded as part of Christian distinctiveness) in relationship to love, since “Jesus has so radicalized the norms of right conduct (love) that all

31. *Ibid.*, 198.

32. *Ibid.*, 92. He elsewhere puts this in more contrasting terms when he states “For Jesus, the ultimate goal is not unconditional freedom (as in Hinduism and Buddhism) but unconditional love.” *Ibid.*, 170.

33. *Ibid.*, 117. Soares-Prabhu also refers to the Jewish scholar Geza Vermes who mentions this as distinctive of Jesus’s life.

34. He puts it powerfully when he states that “When caste discrimination enters into the celebration of the Eucharist, the sin becomes sacrilege.” *Ibid.*, 128.

35. *Ibid.*, 130.

36. *Ibid.*, 198. He states that “it probably features in some form or other in all religions and is certainly strikingly conspicuous in Buddhism.... Indeed the “love command” for Buddhism (and Hinduism) is in a sense more comprehensive than that of the Christians, for it reaches out to all sentient beings and not to humankind alone. Christianity with its curious insensitivity to non-human life—its tolerance of bull-fighting and blood sports, of the ruthless hunting down of animals for fun, and the reckless extermination of whole species of living things for ‘profit,’ has a lot to learn from the Hindu-Buddhist tradition of reverence for life.”

37. *Ibid.*, 199.

claims to sinlessness are effectively foreclosed.”³⁸ However, even as Christianity acknowledges human limitation in living up to the highest religious ideal, it also emphasizes the possibility of forgiveness as a constant and core element of Christian faith. In reflecting on what Hindus might consider to be essential and distinctive about Christianity, Soares-Prabhu states:

The Indian reader would at once identify active concern and forgiveness as the two poles, positive and negative, of the Dharma of Jesus—of that complex blend of worldview and values, of beliefs and prescriptions which ‘hold together’ the followers of Jesus and integrates them into a recognizable community. For if these are not exclusively Christian attitudes, the importance given to them in the teaching of Jesus and the concrete forms they assume in the New Testament give them a specifically Christian significance.³⁹

This attitude of forgiveness requires “the cultivation of a non-judgmental attitude toward self and others” which has also been developed in other Indian religions, and from which Christians might learn.⁴⁰ However, in Christianity, forgiveness is ultimately and uniquely grounded in an all-loving and forgiving God.

In the end, for Soares-Prabhu, the uniqueness or distinctiveness of Christianity is not to be argued in theoretical or doctrinal terms, but is to be shown through a particular way of being in the world, as “The true ‘uniqueness’ of Christ is the uniqueness of the way of solidarity and struggle (a way that is neither male nor female) that Jesus showed as the way to life. That uniqueness cannot be argued but must be lived.”⁴¹

This centrality of loving and self-giving commitment to the poor and the vulnerable is a constant theme in the work of other Christian theologians in India and throughout Asia. In the closing document of the conference and publication *The Future of Asian Theology*, the participants state:

We are encouraged by the fact that due to the many efforts by the Asian Churches and Asian theologies, people’s theologies—Minjung theology, Dalit theology, Tribal/Indigenous People’s theology, Feminist theology, Environmental theology, Public theology have emerged

38. *Ibid.*, 225.

39. *Ibid.*, 220.

40. “The way to self-forgiveness that would empower us to forgive others is the cultivation of a non-judgmental attitude toward ourselves and others.... This will be particularly appreciated by the Indian reader, because in his tradition too non-judgmental awareness is the beginning (and the end) of wisdom and the heart of all forgiveness.” *Ibid.*, 224–225.

41. *Ibid.*, 97.

to engage in dialogue of religions, cultures and people. These emerging theologies point to the foregrounding of Asian Churches and Theologies at the centre of the lives and struggles of the people of Asia, especially of the poor and the vulnerable.

Asian Churches and Theologies have attempted to become the Church of the poor and theologising with the poor.⁴²

Conclusion

In shifting from *a priori* notions of Christian uniqueness to *a posteriori* awareness of religious particularity or distinctiveness, dialogue with other religions is indispensable. It is only through dialogue, through partial identification with the other and through the eyes of the other that the particularity of one's own tradition comes to light. Such dialogue may reveal various types or kinds of particularities, from the particularity of ritual dress, gestures and implements to the peculiarities of institutional structures, and from historical contingencies to particular doctrinal grammars. Many of these particularities may be a matter of indifference or even scorn on the part of the religious other. The particularities that are relevant for the dialogue, however, are those that are considered to be a source of enrichment by the partner in dialogue and a contribution to the common good. While these particularities may surface in different ways, they become particularly evident in the experience of attachment and nostalgia of religious hybrids, in the holy envy of the religious other, and in the judgment of individuals who have immersed themselves deeply in the tradition of the other. It is thus through the dialogue itself that one becomes aware of the particularities that matter for the dialogue. While we have focused here on the particularity of Christianity, it is evident that this method may be used to discern the particularity of any religion in relation to other religions.

In approaching Christian uniqueness or particularity not as a theological and religious given, but as a reality discovered in and through the dialogue with other religions, Christians may attain greater humility while simultaneously assuming greater self-awareness and efficacy in the dialogue. The shift from uniqueness to particularity may be regarded as controversial, as a new form of apologetics that seeks to affirm or salvage the idea of the superiority or the exclusivity of Christianity over against other religious traditions. However, the notion of relational particularity does not presume exclusivity or hierarchy. First, the particularity of one religion necessarily implies the particularity of

42. Paul Hwang, ed., *Asian Theology for the Future* (Seoul: CATS, 2012), 342.

another. It is only in the interplay between religious particularities that any religion comes to awareness of its own. Each religion thus assumes its own particularity in relation to others. Second, the notion of particularity does not imply its exclusivity. Attention to religious particularity or distinctiveness does not suggest that whatever stands out in one religion is completely absent in another religion. As various religions develop through history, certain elements may have been more explicitly emphasized or developed at the expense of others. Religious traditions tend to be complex and internally diverse, and, as Perry Schmidt-Leukel points out in his fractal theory of religious diversity, it is often the case that “central aspects of the other’s religion have parallels in one’s own tradition.”⁴³ As such, the particularity of another religion may often serve to awaken one to forgotten, neglected or marginalized aspects of one’s own tradition.⁴⁴ And even when certain practices or beliefs may not seem to be present or developed in a tradition, they may not be incompatible.⁴⁵ Attention to the particularity of each religion may thus serve the process of mutual development and growth in dialogue. To be sure, there may be particularities that are indeed unique and that have no parallel in other religious traditions, or that are not immediately compatible. But that, too, may serve a deeper self-awareness.

The notion of relational particularity, moreover, preempts any sweeping claims to exclusivity or superiority. It is only in relation to a concrete other that certain features come to the fore. Different relationships with differing religious other may thus evoke different particularities. And different individuals involved in dialogue may come to notice different particularities. This approach to religious particularity is thus far removed from the nineteenth-century attempts to distill the universal and timeless essence of Christianity (Loisy, Von Harnack, Troeltsch). Any such attempt was seen to reveal mostly the identity of its author. In critiquing von Harnack and Loisy for presenting a form of Christianity that looks a lot like a “Pietist of Halle” or a “French layman of the pietist unlettered sort” the Anglican T. A. Lacey suggested that instead of a modern European “one would wish for the work of a Jew, not too modern, not too Western.”⁴⁶

In the engagement with Hinduism and Hindus, various elements of Christian particularity come to the fore. The elements that are noted by Hindus, by

43. Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism and Interreligious Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2017), 235.

44. This is the type of learning in comparative theology that I have designated as recovery or rediscovery. In Catherine Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology* (Chichester: Wiley, 2020), 124–129.

45. The discovery of elements in other religions that are compatible with one’s own may lead to religious learning and enrichment through a process of borrowing or appropriation.

46. T. A. Lacey, *Harnack and Loisy*: 14–15, quoted by Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity*, 143.

Christians and by Hindu-Christians are emphasis on the inseparability of love of God and love of neighbor, the call to self-sacrifice and care for the poor and the vulnerable, the reality of mercy and forgiveness and the requirement to forgive one another. The Christian conception of God is essentially relational and recognizes the limits of religious or spiritual autonomy. Though not absent in Hinduism, or in certain traditions of Hinduism, these elements seem to stand out as particular to Christianity and of particular value in the Hindu-Christian dialogue.

Though the focus of relational particularity may be seen to diminish claims to universality, it may also be seen to enhance the universality of certain teachings or practices insofar as they are considered relevant not only for Christians or from a Christian point of view, but more broadly. In its ability to relate to other religious traditions, and to give and take through dialogue, the universal relevance of a particular teachings and practices is demonstrated, rather than assumed or presupposed. The more Christianity is related to religious others, and the more broadly and deeply those relationships developed, the more it becomes “universal.”

The shift from the theological language of uniqueness to the more phenomenological language of particularity is not meant to discard or downplay the former. For Christians, the notion of the unique salvific function of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ forms an essential element of faith which cannot and should not be sacrificed for the sake of dialogue. The discourses of uniqueness and of particularity are moreover not entirely unrelated, since it is because of the belief in the uniqueness of Jesus Christ that certain teachings and practices have gained particular weight in Christianity. Christian theologians may thus continue to debate the meaning of Christian uniqueness in light of the reality of religious plurality. But this internal Christian theological discourse is of little import for other religions (except insofar as it might hinder genuine openness and respect for the other). What matters for religious others, and for the common good, involves those elements of particularity or singularity that exercise a more universal religious and ethical appeal. Interreligious dialogue serves not only to become aware of what these particular religious elements are, but also to repossess them in a way that they become more effective in serving the religious other and the common good. Since religious faith and practice encompasses a complex whole of teachings which cannot all be assumed or embodied with the same intensity or passion, dialogue with the other may allow us to pay particular attention to, cultivate and embody those teachings and practices which make a genuine difference. It is not because of her theology that Mother Teresa of Calcutta is universally remembered and admired, but because of her single-minded dedication to the vulnerable in Indian society.

In his famous book *The Dignity of Difference*, Jonathan Sachs calls on religions to respect the particularity of each religion, and allow it its own integrity and autonomy.⁴⁷ This is an important message insofar as religious difference and particularity has often tended to be regarded as a threat to other religions and subject to erasure, especially by dominant and numerically powerful religions. The idea of respecting and affirming religious difference would thus represent a significant corrective, and a step toward peace and dialogue. But I argue here that the understanding of difference may be itself the fruit of dialogue, and that it may become the occasion not only for mutual respect, but also for mutual enrichment. It is of course up to each religion to determine what it may want to learn from other religions. But it may also serve the dialogue when each religion becomes aware of its particular strengths or gifts and what it may contribute to the feast of interreligious engagement and mutual enrichment.

47. Jonathan Sachs, *The Dignity of Difference. How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003).

WHAT CHRISTIANITY MIGHT HAVE LEARNED ABOUT “SALVATION” FROM THE DIALOGUE WITH CHINESE RELIGIONS



Lai Pan-chiu

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Through (1) a reflection on the concept of “salvation” in the Western theological discourses concerning religious diversity, (2) an exploration of the comparable concept in Chinese religious context, and (3) an analysis of the prevalent Chinese Christian discourses on religious diversity, this study attempts to argue that contemporary Chinese Christian theology can and should articulate a multi-dimensional understanding of salvation(s). In comparison with a conventional monolithic concept of salvation, this multi-dimensional understanding matches better the richness of the Biblical understanding as well as the Christian experience of salvation and can facilitate better the Christian dialogue with other religions, especially the Chinese religions.

In contemporary Christian theology, especially the theology of religions, “salvation” is one of the key concepts in dealing with the problem of religious diversity. It is usually assumed that there is only one salvation, and the issue at stake is whether there is only one way or many ways to salvation.

It is well-known that John Hick (1922–2012) argues for a pluralist hypothesis that the world religions are responses to the same ultimate reality and equally valid ways to the same salvation, which is defined monolithically in terms of transformation from self-centered-ness to Reality-centered-ness.¹ Against Hick and some other pluralists, S. Mark Heim queries if the “pluralism” advanced by the representative pluralists is thoroughly pluralistic, and if we should better talk about “salvations” (plural) instead of “salvation” (singular), given the diversity of the world religions’ respective understandings of and approaches

1. See: John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

to salvation(s).² Heim is perceptive in highlighting the diversity of the world religions' understandings of salvation(s) and the inadequacy of a monolithic understanding of salvation. However, one may wonder if a more "pluralistic" understanding that the world religions are different ways to different ends (rather than the same end) is a tenable position. When all the world religions claim for the universality of their respective salvation, it is very difficult to imagine how all these claims can be true without contradiction and how all world religions can be equally valid and true ways to the radically divergent ends (salvations). In fact, even Heim himself identifies himself as a "convinced inclusivist" instead of a pluralist.³

This debate raises the most basic question: what is salvation? This study aims to revisit the concept of salvation from a Chinese Christian perspective. It will start with an analysis of the Western theological approaches to religious diversity, especially their conception of salvation. It will then outline the Chinese religious context and indicate how Chinese Christian discourses on religious diversity have been shaped by the other religions as well as the cultural, social and political contexts of China.⁴ With this understanding, it will review existing Chinese Christian discourses on salvation, especially how they respond to socio-political discourses on "salvation" in modern China and the concepts of "salvation" in Chinese religions. This study will conclude with a proposal concerning how Chinese Christian theology may articulate a multi-dimensional understanding of salvation(s) through dialogue with the Chinese religions.⁵

Western Theological Approaches to Religious Diversity

It is obvious that the Christian doctrine of salvation plays a pivotal role in the Western Christian theological approach to religious diversity. In the contemporary discussion of the theology of religions, especially the widely used tripolar typology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, the dividing lines among the major positions or paradigms are based primarily on their respective positions on salvation, especially whether and in what sense other religions are valid

2. See: S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995).

3. S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 8.

4. See further: Pan-chiu Lai, "Christian Discourses on Religious Diversity in Contemporary China," *Religious Diversity in Chinese Thought*, edited by Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Joachim Gentz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 215–230.

5. See further: Pan-chiu Lai, "Religious Diversity and Public Space in China: A Reconsideration of the Christian Doctrine of Salvation," *Interactive Pluralism in Asia: Religious Life and Public Space*, edited by Simone Sinn and Tong Wing Sze (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt 2016), 43–58. Some parts of this paper are derived from this book chapter.

ways to salvation. In other words, these Western theological discourses on other religions are dominated by the theological judgments on the salvific status of “non-Christian” religions. In this kind of discourse, Christian theology seems to play the role of a judge, passing on a theological verdict on the salvific validity of other religions. When doing this, Christian theologians usually adopt a particular and monolithic understanding of salvation derived from the Christian tradition. In addition, they tend to disregard the divergent understandings of salvation advocated by other religions. This assumption concerning monolithic salvation seems to be shared by the divergent positions on religious diversity.

- For pluralism, taking Hick’s position as an example, all the great religions share the same salvation, which can be defined monolithically in terms of transforming people’s lives from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness.
- For exclusivism, there is only one salvation, which is accomplished by Jesus Christ and can be accessed through Christianity alone.
- For inclusivism, there is only one perfect salvation, which is entirely accomplished by God and completely embodied in Christianity, while other religions may partially share this perfect or complete salvation.

In recent years, this tripolar typology, together with the assumed normative monolithic understanding of salvation, is challenged directly by particularism and indirectly by comparative theology.

In addition to exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, some contemporary theologians of religions argue for a fourth position called “particularism.”⁶ For the advocates of particularism, Christianity is a particular way to salvation and has its own peculiar understanding of salvation. Different from the position of exclusivism, the particularist affirmation of the particularity of the Christian salvation does not explicitly exclude the salvific validity of other religions. Particularism tends to assume that the world religions have radically different understandings of salvation, and it is illegitimate to assume that they share the same understanding of salvation. This assumption might echo the view that even the concept of “religion,” though pretended to be “objective” and/or “universal,” is merely a western modern academic construction. For particularism, a common mistake shared by exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism is that they all assume a monolithic understanding of salvation, and thus fail to respect the particularity of the Christian salvation as well as the divergent understandings of salvation promulgated by different religions.⁷

6. For a contrast among these four positions, see: Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Philips, eds., *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996).

7. For a summary and criticism of particularism, see: Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 146–196.

In my opinion, many of the criticisms made by particularism against the other positions are largely valid. However, this particularist position itself is by no means better. It is reminiscent of the cultural-linguistic paradigm proposed by George Lindbeck, which argues that different religions are comparable to different languages with incommensurable grammars or rules of game, borrowing the famous ideas from Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951).⁸ When highlighting the radical divergence among the religions, particularism may be able to respect the diversity among religions and their respective integrity, but it may also overlook that there may be significant similarity or commonality among the religions' understandings of salvation. Whereas the other three positions naively assume a monolithic understanding of salvation, particularism may risk the danger of swinging to the other extreme that different religions have radically divergent and even incommensurable understandings of salvation(s). Its emphasis on the incommensurability among the religions may prevent Christian theology from imposing theological judgement on the other religions, but it may also undermine the necessity, desirability and workability of inter-religious comparison or dialogue.

From an epistemological point of view, one may query whether it is possible to be certain whether and how far the religions' understandings of salvation(s) are radically different from each other without a proper empirical study of other religions. For example, some decades ago, it was quite common among Protestants to assume that Christianity is unique because Christianity is a religion of grace, promulgating salvation of *sola gratia*, whereas other religions are religions of work attempting to attain salvation through human efforts. However, this understanding of the uniqueness or particularity of Christian salvation might be challenged by the case of Shin Buddhism, which also emphasizes the inability of human beings to save themselves and that the only possible way of salvation is to rely solely on the saving grace of Amida Buddha. As Karl Barth (1886–1968) acknowledges, the doctrine of “Salvation by Grace through Faith” might not be unique to Christianity; given their apparent structural similarities, both Protestant Christianity and Shin Buddhism can be recognized as religions of grace, and the only decisive difference is constituted by the name of Jesus Christ.⁹ For Barth, the affirmation of Christianity as the “True Religion” should be understood in terms of the doctrine of justification by grace. But this does not mean that Christianity has a unique doctrine of justification by grace and is thus superior to other religions. Instead, as a human religion, Christianity is not

8. George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (London: SPCK, 1984).

9. See: Timothy C. Tennett, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 135–164.

better than other religions. Its status as "True Religion" is based entirely on the divine election and comparable to a justified sinner. Obviously, this "*a priori*" affirmation of Christianity as "True Religion" is based on the "divine revelation" or the relevant Christian doctrinal tradition, rather than any "*a posteriori*" academic comparative studies of Christianity and other religions.¹⁰ Considering Barth's discussion about Shin Buddhism, one may wonder whether the particularist affirmation of the particularity of Christian salvation should be based entirely on the *a priori* affirmation of the distinctive name of Jesus Christ or a *a posteriori* observation of the similarities between the Christianity and, say, Buddhism. However, it is important to note that as a theology of religions, particularism remains a theological discourse based on the doctrinal tradition of Christianity, and it may tend to adopt an *a priori* or "tradition-specific" approach to Christian theology. Its advocacy for particularism is not based on comparative studies of religions, and it may not require or favor empirical comparative studies of religions.

The particularist *a priori* approach to the affirmation of the particularity of the Christian way of salvation may lead to an "agnostic" attitude towards salvations of other religions and leave open the possibility of salvation of other religions. However, it also allows or even invites other religions to make comparable counterclaims for particularity, superiority, uniqueness, or being the "True Religion." In addition to the problem of comparability or incommensurability among these claims, one may also wonder whether there is any room for genuine dialogue among religions with all these *a priori* claims and counterclaims.

The particularist position may imply that there may be no such thing called "salvation" (singular) but only different (understandings of) "salvations" (plural). Furthermore, the concept of "salvation" is merely an intellectual construction of western academia, and there is no "essence" of salvation shared by the salvations advocated by different religions. If this is the case, a possible consequence of particularism is that the Christian salvation is so particular that it is incommensurable with the "salvations" of other "religions." One may further query if this implies that a comparative study of "religions" is impossible and undesirable. However, against these possible queries concerning the possibility and desirability of a comparative study of religions, "salvation" remains one of the key terms used in religious studies, especially when scholars attempt to define "religion." In a sense, Frederick J. Streng's famous definition of religion in terms of "means to ultimate transformation" already implies a

10. Pan-chiu Lai, "Barth's Theology of Religion and the Asian Context of Religious Pluralism," *Asia Journal of Theology* 15.2 (2001): 247–267.

concept of “salvation.”¹¹ Martin Riesebrodt’s *The Promise of Salvation: A Theory of Religion* even explicitly makes use of the concept of “salvation” to define “religion.”¹² These seem to indicate that for some scholars of religious studies, at least, the understandings of salvation(s) championed by different religions may have a certain family resemblance, even though there may be no commonly shared “essence.” For example, the multi-dimensional understanding of salvation advocated in this study may echo the broader theological understanding of salvation in terms of “*yshuwah*” in Hebrew (meaning liberation, protection, safety, success, restoration, etc.) as well as the Latin concepts of “*salvus*” and “*salus*” (meaning health, well-being, safety, etc.). It may differ significantly from the more restricted concept of “*go’el*” (in Hebrew) or “redemption,” which tends to assume a sort of passive reception of the redeeming act performed by a redeemer. For the traditional Chinese religious concept of “*jiu du*,” which combines the meaning of “save” (救 *jiu*) and “passing through” (度 or 渡 *du*), may come closer to the broader theological concept of “salvation” than to the more restricted concept of “redemption.” Though these terms or concepts may have different meanings and are subject to various interpretations, they remain comparable to a certain extent rather than absolutely incommensurable. Furthermore, the assumption concerning the incomparability or incommensurability among the religions’ understandings of salvation(s) seems to be implicitly challenged by the approach of comparative theology.

Unlike the “*a priori*” or “dogmatic” approach adopted by the theology of religions which is based on the doctrinal tradition of Christianity rather than empirical studies of other religions, comparative theology prefers a more “experimental” method to theology together with a more “empirical” approach to other religions. Instead of making judgements on the salvific status of other religions, comparative theology attempts to study the texts of other religions in order to reflect critically on relevant issues in Christian theology.¹³ According to this approach, the questions concerning whether and in what sense other religions have salvation(s) should be *a posteriori* rather than *a priori*, and can be answered only after certain empirical studies of particular religions and “experimental” reflection on the Christian tradition. Any simplified “yes or no”

11. Frederick J. Streng, *Understanding of Religious Life*, Third Edition (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Inc., 1985).

12. Martin Riesebrodt, *The Promise of Salvation: A Theory of Religion*, translated by Steven Rendall (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago, 2010).

13. Francis X. Clooney, *Theology After Vedanta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology* (Albany: SUNY, 1993), 1–10; John Renard, “Comparative Theology: Definition and Method,” *Religious Studies and Theology* 17 (1998): 3–18; Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Paul Hedges, *Comparative Theology: A Critical and Methodological Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

answer or indiscriminating judgment on “other religions” in general should be avoided. Theoretically speaking, this kind of comparative study should be more “open minded” to the salvation(s) of other religions or their understandings of salvation(s).

To a certain extent, I share this approach of comparative theology. I have edited a special issue of a journal to introduce comparative theology to the Chinese speaking world,¹⁴ and adopted the experimental method of comparative theology in articulating a Sino-Christian theology through comparison with Mahayana Buddhism.¹⁵ However, based on my reflection of my experiments as well as the others’ theories and experiments, I would like to point out two possible limitations of prevailing practices of comparative theology. First, the prevailing practices of comparative theology tend to focus on how Christian theology may reflect critically on itself through learning from other religions. This humble attitude to other religions is admirable. However, this unilateral way of learning from non-Christian religions may overlook the reverse possibility of letting people of non-Christian religions learn from Christianity through comparative study or bilateral dialogue. This mutual or reciprocal sharing approach may be as humble as the unilateral approach, and even more in line with the Christian spirit of *agape* (love) and *koinonia* (fellowship, participation, or sharing) as well as, say, the Bodhisattva attitude of compassion and the practice of reciprocal altruism (non-duality of helping oneself and the others) advocated by Mahayana Buddhism. This is precisely one of the lessons to be learnt from the dialogue between Christianity and Chinese Buddhism.¹⁶ The other limitation is that since comparative theology tends to focus on conducting theological reflection through reading the texts of other religions, its theological reflection may not cover non-religious texts properly. However, Christian theological reflections on salvation may be done through dialogue with other religions as well as voices beyond the religious sphere. For example, the political liberation movement in Latin American may have provoked Christian theology, especially liberation theology, to rethink the Christian concept of salvation. Besides, the contemporary environmental movement has also made Christian theology reconsider the concept of salvation in the ecological context.

14. See: 賴品超 Lai Pinchao (also known as Pan-chiu Lai), ed., 《比較神學》(Comparative Theology), special issue of 《道風》 Logos & Pneuma 25 (2006): 17–164. The citation of Chinese document below will follow the same style: starting with the Chinese name of the author, followed by the transliteration, Chinese title of the publication, and then the title in English translation.

15. See: 賴品超 Lai Pinchao, 《大乘基督教神學:漢語神學的思想實驗》Mahayana Christian Theology: Thought-Experiments of Sino-Christian Theology (Hong Kong: Logos & Pneuma Press, 2011).

16. Pan-chiu Lai, “Buddhist-Christian Relations in China: A Christian Perspective,” Buddhist-Christian Relations in Asia, edited by Perry Schmidt-Leukel (St. Ottilien, Germany: eos Verlag, 2017), 375–398, especially 391.

As we are going to see, Chinese Christian discourses of salvation have been shaped by both the religious and socio-political contexts of the Chinese-speaking world. Furthermore, in order to explore the salvation(s) of religions, one may have to take into account the relevant disciplines, including neuroscience, which traditionally do not belong to theology, religious studies or even philosophy. I would thus prefer to take “reciprocal illumination” as a more appropriate method and replace “comparative theology” with “comparative philosophy of religion” for my own endeavor.¹⁷

Religious Diversity in Contemporary China

In contemporary China, there are five religions legally recognized by the Chinese Communist government. They are Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism. Of course, the legalization of the five religions does not mean that there is no adherent of other religions in contemporary China. In fact, other than the institutional religions, “diffused religion” also plays a prominent role in Chinese society.¹⁸ Apart from Chinese popular religions, Confucianism was traditionally regarded as one of the three teachings or religions, alongside Buddhism and Daoism. In contemporary China, some people propose to make Confucianism the state religion, while some others prefer to recognize it as the civil religion of China.¹⁹

The recognition of five legal religions betrays the political reality that religions in China are largely controlled or regulated by the government.²⁰ In other words, although the Chinese government allows a certain degree of religious diversity, it also tends to pro-actively control and regulate the religions, including their expressions in the public sphere. Legally speaking, religious meetings are restricted to registered religious places. Religious education is forbidden in state schools, and there is no private school or university run by religious organizations. This contemporary situation reflects the influence or continuation of the historical tradition of “subordination of religion to the state” (政主教從 *zheng zhu jiao cong*) in imperial China, where the state, instead of being

17. See: 賴品超 Lai Pinchao, 《宗教都是殊途同歸? 宗教研究與漢語神學的視角》 Divergent Religious Paths to Convergent End? Perspectives of Religious Studies and Sino-Christian Theology (Hong Kong: Logos & Pneuma Press, 2020), especially chapters 3 and 4 on “comparative theology” (73–100) and “comparative philosophy of religion” (101–121).

18. See: C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society* [1961] (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 1991).

19. See: Philip J. Ivanhoe and Sungmoon Kim, eds., *Confucianism, A Habit of the Heart: Bellah, Civil religion, and East Asia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016).

20. See: Pitman B. Potter, “Belief in Control: Regulation of Religion in China,” *Religion in China Today*, edited by Daniel L. Overmyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11–31.

entirely secular, had its own cult and bore certain religious characteristics.²¹ In a similar vein, Communism and nationalism, which perform certain “religious” and “ideological” functions in contemporary China, can be recognized as “quasi-religions” according to Paul Tillich (1886–1965).²²

It is important to note that the Chinese government’s control extends to religious or theological discourse. When the government attempts to launch the political propaganda associated with the slogan “building a harmonious society,” the religions will be “encouraged” to emphasize their messages of harmony, the harmonious relationship among religions, and how the religions may contribute to the building of a harmonious society. Any discourse which may provoke or intensify hostility among religions will be suppressed. Instead, inter-religious dialogue on “harmonious society” will be strongly encouraged.²³

Given these characteristics of the contemporary Chinese context, it is quite understandable that contemporary Chinese Christian discourses on religious diversity as well as salvation might have been shaped not only by its religious context but also the social and political factors in China.²⁴

Christian Salvation and Public Issues in China

It is interesting to note that the terminology of “salvation” was rather popular in the public discourse in modern China, especially during the Republican period (1911–1949). At that time, many Chinese intellectuals felt the national crisis and endeavored to explore various ways of “saving the nation” (救國 *jiu guo*). Some modern Chinese intellectuals criticized religions, especially their longings for other-worldly salvation at the expense of concerns for the present life, as irrelevant or even detrimental to the salvation of the nation. In response, some Chinese Christians attempted to interpret how the Christian gospel might be relevant and could contribute to the salvation of the nation.²⁵ This kind of socio-political discourse on the salvation of the nation remains quite popular among the intellectuals in contemporary China. Many of them are interested in

21. See: Pan-chiu Lai, “Subordination, Separation, and Autonomy: Chinese Protestant Approaches to Religion-State Relation,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 35.1 (2020): 149–164.

22. Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963).

23. For a Christian contribution to this kind of dialogue, see: Pan-chiu Lai, “Interreligious Dialogue, Harmonious Society, and the Kingdom of God,” *Asian Christian Review* 5.2 (2011): 69–84.

24. Pan-chiu Lai, “Christian Discourses on Religious Diversity in Contemporary China,” *Religious Diversity in Chinese Thought*, edited by Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Joachim Gentz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 215–230.

25. See: Fredrik Fällman, *Salvation and Modernity: Intellectuals and Faith in Contemporary China* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, revised edition 2008).

examining or exploring the relevance of Christianity to modernization, and a few of them, especially the “Cultural Christians,” might also look for individual and spiritual salvation or liberation from the Christian faith.²⁶ In recent years, Sino-Christian theology, a cultural qua theological movement associated with this small group of Chinese intellectuals, became interested in public theology and launched various inter-religious and cross-disciplinary research projects on public issues.²⁷ Some of these research projects might have involved the Christian doctrine of salvation, but not in a very prominent way.²⁸

The influences of the socio-political context on Chinese Christian discourses on salvation are particularly explicit in the institutional churches. Bishop 丁光訓 Ding Guangxun (also known as K. H. Ting, 1915–2012), the then leader of the official Three-Self Protestant Church in China, adopted a largely accommodating attitude to the socio-political context of contemporary China and advocated a more inclusive understanding of salvation. With the concept of “cosmic Christ,” Ding affirmed that the grace and salvation of God could be found beyond the church boundary and even outside the religious realm. For Ding, this affirmation of the universality of salvation might help the Chinese churches to recognize the values of the works done by non-Christians, including people of other religions and members of the Communist Party. Of course, this might also imply that political liberation could be considered a form of salvation. However, Ding was well aware that the liberation theology of Latin America might not be so appropriate to Communist China, which had been politically liberated. According to Ding, considering the severe socio-political conflict during the Great Cultural Revolution, the most appropriate interpretation of the Christian doctrine of salvation should be articulated in terms of reconciliation theology, instead of liberation theology.²⁹ In line with the policy of “establishing a harmonious society,” Ding further proposed to “dilute” the doctrine of justification by faith in order to overcome the apartheid between

26. For a brief survey of the Chinese Christian theological responses during the Republic period, see: Wing-hung Lam, *Chinese Theology in Construction* (Pasadena, CA: W. Carey Library, 1983).

27. Pan-chiu Lai & Jason Lam eds., *Sino-Christian Theology: A Theological Qua Cultural Movement in Contemporary China* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang, 2010); Alexander Chow, *Chinese Public Theology: Generational Shifts and Confucian Imagination in Chinese Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

28. For example, Zhibin Xie, Pauline Kollontai and Sebastian Kim eds., *Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Social Justice: A Chinese Interdisciplinary Dialogue with Global Perspective* (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore PTE, 2020).

29. For an analysis and response to the proposal, see: Pan-chiu Lai, “Forgiveness, Reconciliation and Peace-Building: A Sino-Christian Perspective,” *The Role of Religion in Peacebuilding: Crossing the Boundaries of Prejudice and Distrust*, edited by Pauline Kollontai, Sue Yore, and Sebastian Kim (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishing, 2018), 35–51.

believers and non-believers and avoid the impression that Christianity “abolishes” morality by despising the good works done by and for the neighbors.³⁰

Apart from the socio-political issues, the Christian doctrine of salvation is also involved in the discussion related to ecological concerns. It is noticeable that there are many Chinese Christian theological attempts to address the ecological issues.³¹ One of the theological issues raised is that the theological mainstream of Chinese Christian churches seems to emphasize salvation more than creation. Other than its anthropocentric interpretation of creation, its doctrine of salvation is not only anthropocentric, but also rather individualistic and other-worldly. To be more precise, the doctrine of justification by faith seems to assume that only human beings can be saved because only human beings can have faith. All non-human creatures are thus excluded from the scope of salvation. In response to this individualistic and anthropocentric understanding of salvation, some Chinese Christian ecological discourses propose to emphasize the unity between creation and salvation,³² to rethink the ecological relevance of the doctrine of justification by faith, and to reconsider whether and how the scope of salvation may be extended to cover non-human beings.³³

The above survey of the Chinese Christian discourses on salvation indicates that there are various actual and potential criticisms on the Christian doctrine of salvation in the public sphere. These criticisms may remind Christian theology to explore the meaning of “salvation” in social, political and even ecological contexts, instead of restricting the meaning of “salvation” to the spiritual or religious realm, where Chinese Christian theology meets different challenges.

Salvations in Chinese Religions and the Chinese Christian Responses

As Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism are considered integral parts of Chinese culture, though some Chinese Christians vehemently reject them as false religions or idolatries, some other Christians affirm the cultural and/or religious values of Chinese religions as preparation for the gospel.³⁴ Based on

30. For an analysis and response to the proposal, see: Pan-chiu Lai, “Justification by Faith and Protestant Christianity in China: With Special Reference to the Finnish Interpretation of Luther,” *International Journal of Sino-Western Studies* 16 (2019): 21–33.

31. For a review and analysis of these discourses, see: Pan-chiu Lai, “Ecological theology as Public Theology: A Chinese Perspective,” *International Journal of Public Theology* 11.4 (2017): 477–500.

32. See: Pan-chiu Lai, “Creation and Salvation in Chinese Perspective,” *Creation & Salvation*, Vol. 2: A Companion on Recent Theological Movements, edited by Ernst Conradie (Berlin: lit Verlag, 2012), 344–349.

33. Pan-chiu Lai, “The Ecological Heritage of Protestantism from a Chinese Christian Perspective,” *Ching Feng (New Series)* 19.1–2 (2020): 21–47.

34. Pan-chiu Lai, “Chinese Religions: Negotiating Cultural and Religious Identities,” *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, edited by Alan Race and Paul M. Hedges (London: SCM Press, 2008), 270–288.

the latter attitude, some theologians attempted to indigenize or contextualize Christian doctrine of salvation by employing some expressions from Chinese culture, especially Confucianism.³⁵ However, the Chinese religions are not merely raw materials waiting for Christian theological explorations—not to say the Western theological judgement on whether Chinese religions have salvation or not. In fact, this sort of Western imperialistic theological attempt will meet serious resistance and challenges in the Chinese context.

Since religious diversity is part of the Chinese religious tradition, the Chinese religions are very experienced in engaging in inter-religious disputes and ranking different religions in a hierarchical way according to their doctrinal profundity or spiritual attainment. This hierarchical method of handling religious diversity, which might be derived from the Chinese Buddhist practice of doctrinal classification (判教 *pan jiao*), aiming originally at handling the doctrinal and scriptural diversity within the Buddhist canon, exhibits an inclusivist attitude towards other religions.³⁶ In any case, the Chinese religions have no difficulty proposing their judgments or counter judgments on the salvific value or status of Christianity and assigning Christianity to an inferior rank or even the low end of a hierarchy of religions.

In fact, representatives of Chinese religions did raise their criticisms against Christianity and rank it as an inferior religion. For instance, some Confucians criticize that the Christian doctrine of salvation, especially the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith, together with the doctrine of original sin, emphasizes the sinfulness of human nature and the futility of moral cultivation. This approach to salvation is morally inferior to the Confucian approach, which emphasizes the goodness of human nature and the approach of becoming sage through moral cultivation. This Confucian criticism of Christianity attracted many Chinese Christian theological responses. For example, 黃保羅 Paulos Huang (also known as Huang Baoluo) points out that there are significant differences between Confucianism and Christianity with regard to the object of salvation, the means of salvation, etc.³⁷ But he also notices that the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith may be only part, rather than the whole, of the Christian doctrine of salvation, which should include sanctification as well.³⁸

35. For a recent example, see: Jackson Wu, *Saving God's Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2012).

36. See: Kristin Beise Kilblinger, *Buddhist Inclusivism: Attitudes towards Religious Others* (Aldershot, England/Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 44–68.

37. Paulos Huang, *Confronting Confucian Understandings of the Christian Doctrine of Salvation: A Systematic Theological Analysis of the Basic Problems in the Confucian-Christian Dialogue* (Helsinki: Department of Systematic Theology, University of Helsinki, 2006), 279–283.

38. Paulos Huang, *Confronting Confucian Understandings of the Christian Doctrine of Salvation*, 280.

Huang has certain reservations on the Orthodox doctrine of deification (*theosis*) and is more sympathetic to the Finnish interpretation of Luther's theology. Huang believes that this interpretation of Luther's theology, though different from the official Lutheran doctrinal tradition, may be more capable of integrating justification with sanctification, on the one hand, and preserving the distinction between Christ and Christians as well as between Christianity and Confucianism.³⁹

Alexander Chow addresses to a similar issue, but in comparison with Huang, Chow is more positive on the Orthodox understanding of theosis. Based on Justo L. Gonzáles' typology of Christian thought, Chow surveys the three types of theology in China and further argues that unlike the Latin/Western theological tradition, which is quite dominant in Chinese Christian theology, Orthodox theology, which is more associated with the type C of Gonzáles' typology, will be more beneficial to the further development of Christian theology in contemporary China. What is particularly important is the Orthodox doctrine of deification, which is more compatible with the Confucian doctrine of unity the Heaven and humanity.⁴⁰

Similar to Chow, I also find the theological tradition of deification embodied primarily in the Greek fathers and the Orthodox Church relevant and beneficial to the Christian-Confucian dialogue on salvation.⁴¹ However, I argue that the concept of deification can also be found in the Latin-Western theological tradition and is not restricted to the Greek fathers and the Orthodox Church.⁴² Furthermore, there are some other contemporary theological alternatives, for example, process theology, which can respond to the Confucian criticism on the Christian doctrine of salvation.⁴³

These theological responses seem to share the view that the Christian doctrine of salvation does not necessarily contradict Confucianism. It is noticed that many of the Confucian criticisms of Christianity actually focus on the Protestant understanding of salvation, especially the Lutheran doctrine of

39. Paulos Huang, *Confronting Confucian Understandings of the Christian Doctrine of Salvation*, 262–263.

40. Alexander Chow, *Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment: Heaven and Humanity in Unity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

41. Pan-chiu Lai, "Christian Transformation of Greek Humanism and its Implications for Christian-Confucian Dialogue," *Korea Journal of Systematic Theology* 22 (2008): 245–269.

42. Pan-chiu Lai, "Shaping Humanity with Word and Spirit: Perspectives East, West and Neither-East-Nor-West," *Word and Spirit: Renewing Christology and Pneumatology in a Globalizing World*, edited by Anselm K. Min and Christoph Schwöbel (Berlin & Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 131–149; "Chinese Explorations of Orthodox Theology: A Critical Review," *International Journal for the Study of Christian Church* 18.4 (2018): 315–331.

43. For the example of process theology, see: Pan-chiu Lai, "Process Christology and Christian-Confucian Dialogue in China," *Process Studies* 33.1 (2004): 149–165.

justification. Through a more thorough and/or comprehensive exploration of the Christian theological tradition, including the Orthodox doctrine of deification, one may find that the Christian doctrine of salvation is not restricted to the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith and does not necessarily assume an Augustinian doctrine of original sin. In other words, many of the Confucian criticisms of Christianity are based on an inadequate understanding of Christian theology, and thus not entirely fair to Christianity as a whole. These Chinese Christian responses to the Confucian criticisms highlight the plurality of understandings of salvation even within Christianity.

It is interesting to note that, borrowing the distinction between “other-power” (他力 *tali*; *tariki* in Japanese) and “self-power” (自力 *zili*; *jiriki* in Japanese), whereas the Confucian criticism of Christianity is focused on the “other-power” character of Christian salvation, this might not be an issue at all for Chinese Buddhism because salvation by “other-power” is part of the Chinese Buddhist tradition, especially the Pure Land School. In fact, being a champion of Mahayana Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism tended to emphasize the universality of salvation, and might query if the Christian understanding of salvation is a restricted “Hinayana” salvation. The universality of salvation advocated by Chinese Mahayana Buddhism is exhibited in four major ways. First, according to the Buddhist doctrine of skilful means, the Buddhas and bodhisattvas can offer divergent and even contrary ways to salvation, including both “self-power” and “other-power,” in order to meet the divergent needs and orientations of the sentient beings. Secondly, according to the story about Amida Buddha, he vowed to save all those who might have called upon his name by receiving them right after their death to a pure land built by him. Thirdly, according to the story about Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva, he vowed to save all the evil-doers’ suffering in hell before his entering into nirvana. Lastly, according to the doctrine of Buddha-nature, all sentient beings have buddha-nature and can equally become Buddhas eventually. In response to the Chinese Buddhist understanding of universal salvation (but not point-by-point), I proposed a Mahayana Christian understanding of salvation that has the following features. First, there can be a variety of paths to salvation in accordance with different people’s diversified orientations. Secondly, it is legitimate to hope for the eventual salvation of those who suffer in hell or have not accepted the gospel during their lifetime. Thirdly, the Christian salvation can cover all lives, including non-human beings. Fourthly, salvation includes various dimensions of life and reaches its perfection in complete participation in the divine life.⁴⁴ I

44. Pan-chiu Lai, “Reconsidering the Christian Understanding of Universal Salvation in Mahayana Buddhist Perspective,” *Ching Feng* (New Series) 12 (2013): 19–42.

then further offered a Mahayana Buddhist reinterpretation of Barth's position on universal salvation.⁴⁵

In addition to the challenges derived from Confucianism and Chinese Buddhism, Daoism and the Chinese popular religion(s) may make the challenges even more complicated. It is interesting to note that the ancient Chinese religion is characterized by "in search of personal welfare,"⁴⁶ which is contrary to Hick's understanding of salvation in terms of transformation from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness. This character of self-centeredness can also be found in Chinese popular religions, including the practices of Chinese geomancy (also known as 風水 *fengshui*), changing-name and fortune-telling. One may then ask whether Hick's theory of salvation, which is part of his criteriology for religion of the axial period, is applicable to or compatible with Chinese popular religions.⁴⁷ Of course, if Hick's theory aims to cover the "world religions" originated during the axial period rather than all religions, it does not matter whether Chinese popular religions match the soteriological and/or ethical criteria proposed by Hick. This is especially the case if one recognizes Chinese popular religions as independent religious traditions. However, Chinese popular religions are indeed intertwined deeply with Chinese Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. On one hand, Chinese popular religions have incorporated various elements from Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism in its ethics and beliefs; on the other hand, they have also influenced Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism.⁴⁸ This can be seen clearly in the Daoist religion, which includes not only the Daoist philosophy, which understands salvation in terms of individual spiritual liberation such as "easy-wandering" (逍遙 *xiao yao*) or following the course of nature, but also the Daoist religious practices, such as exorcism, Tai Chi, Qigong, fasting and interior alchemy, aiming at longevity, good health, and becoming immortal. Similar trends can be found in popular Buddhism in China, exhibiting certain syncretism between popular religion and Chinese Buddhism. Unlike Theravada Buddhism, which tends to understand salvation or liberation primarily in terms of nirvana, Chinese Buddhism, which includes worship of the Mahayana bodhisattvas, might long for salvation in terms of escaping from physical danger, having good health, prosperity, longevity and

45. Pan-chiu Lai, "Karl Barth and Universal Salvation: A Mahayana Buddhist Perspective," Karl Barth and Comparative Theology, edited by Christian T. Collins Winn and Martha Moore-Keish (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 85–104.

46. Mu-chou Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare: A View of Ancient Chinese Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

47. See: Wai-Yip Wong, "Incompatibility between Chinese Folk Religion and John Hick's Criteriology," *Journal of Comparative Scripture* 2 (2013): 153–192.

48. See: Wai-Yip Wong, "Incompatibility between Chinese Folk Religion and John Hick's Criteriology," 153.

even obtaining off-spring (especially male child). It is quite unclear if the Buddhist and Daoist multivalent understandings of salvation should be classified as self-centered or Reality-centered.

The diversity of understandings of salvation among the Chinese religions and the multivalent understanding of salvation in individual Chinese religions seem to challenge the validity or workability of the assumption of a monolithic understanding of salvation. These understandings of salvation seem to converge on a multi-dimensional understanding of salvation covering various dimensions of life. They thus raise a rather basic theological question concerning whether salvation should be restricted to a spiritual and other-worldly salvation, or it should cover various dimensions of life in this world.

Multi-dimensional Salvation

Apart from the challenges derived from individual Chinese religions, there are also challenges related to Chinese religions as a whole. Daniel Overmyer (1935–2021), an expert of Chinese religions with training in Christian theology, in addition to an analysis of the understandings of salvation in Chinese religions, raised questions concerning whether and how Chinese religions are to be considered as part of the history of salvation from a Christian perspective.⁴⁹ In response to Overmyer, I mentioned the examples concerning how some of the Greek fathers affirmed the positive role played by Greek culture in the divine economy before the incarnation or the arrival of the Christian gospel, and further elaborated the soteriological implications of Tillich's theory concerning life as a multi-dimensional unity.⁵⁰ I suggested that, corresponding to his understanding of life as a multi-dimensional unity, Tillich interprets salvation primarily in terms of healing and wholeness, which may include not only the physical and psychological dimensions but also the socio-political dimension (or healing of broken relationship) and the spiritual dimension. This inclusive and multivalent understanding of salvation not only affirms the participation of Chinese religions in the history of salvation, but also offers a better alternative to Hick's monolithic understanding of salvation. In comparison with Hick, Tillich's understanding is more universalistic, for it affirms the participation of nature in the process of fall and salvation instead of focusing on humankind. Furthermore, Hick's theory tends to assume that the world religions are equally valid ways to the same salvation. This may impose a monolithic understanding

49. See: Daniel L. Overmyer, "Chinese Religions as Part of the History of Salvation: A Dialogue with Christianity," *Ching Feng* 40.1 (1997): 1–14.

50. Pan-chiu Lai, "Chinese Religions and the History of Salvation: A Theological Perspective," *Ching Feng* 40.1 (1997): 15–40.

of salvation on various religions and disregards the differences among their respective understandings of salvation(s). In contrast, Tillich's understanding of salvation allows different religions to have their own understandings of salvation, which may correspond to different dimensions of life and may have different emphases on different dimensions. According to this multi-dimensional understanding of salvation, salvation is not a matter of none or all.⁵¹

This multi-dimensional understanding of salvation can be found not only in Tillich but also in the writings of some other theologians. For example, in line with his Wesleyan theological tradition, John B. Cobb, Jr. also advocates a holistic view of salvation, which includes various dimensions of life such as personal salvation and social justice.⁵² In comparison to a monolithic understanding of salvation, this holistic multi-dimensional understanding of salvation may do better justice to the richness of the meaning of salvation in the Bible as well as the salvific experiences of ordinary Christians, who might have recognized the salvation of God through their various experiences of physical healing, psychological healing, healing of the broken human relationship, political liberation, struggle for social justice, healing of the environment, etc. Furthermore, this multi-dimensional understanding of salvation may offer a better account of the results of recent neuroscientific studies of religious experience. It is interesting to note that Hick argues that the neuroscientific studies of religious experience support his pluralist hypothesis.⁵³ However, as I have argued elsewhere, upon closer scrutiny of the most recent neuroscientific studies of religious experience, one may find that religious practices of different religious traditions activate responses from various areas, instead of the same area, of the brain.⁵⁴ In addition to the diversity of the nature of these practices in their respective traditions, these religious experiences can bring forth various psychological impacts and behavioral changes of the individual concerned, and thus can make further impacts on society and even the natural environment. In other words, salvation in the spiritual and/or psychological dimension(s) will affect salvation at social and/or physical dimension(s).⁵⁵

51. Pan-chiu Lai, "Chinese Religions and the History of Salvation: A Theological Perspective," 25–26.

52. Pan-chiu Lai, "Inter-religious Dialogue and Social Justice: Cobb's Wesleyan Process Theology in East Asian Perspective," *Asia Journal of Theology* 25.1 (2011), 82–102.

53. John Hick, *The New Frontier of Religion and Science: Religious Experience, Neuroscience and the Transcendent* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

54. Malcom Jeeves and Warren S. Brown, *Neuroscience, Psychology and Religion: Illusions, Delusions, and Realities about Human Nature* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2009), 96–97.

55. 賴品超 Lai Pinchao, 〈宗教比較學、神經科學與多維度的拯救:再思宗教多樣與宗教對話〉(Comparative Religion, Neuroscience and Multi-Dimensional Salvation: Reconsidering Religious Diversity and Inter-religious Dialogue), 《景風》Ching Feng (New Series) 17.1–2 (2018): 93–116.

This multi-dimensional understanding of salvation may query the distinction between exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism employed in Christian theology of religions. According to this multi-dimensional understanding of salvation, it will be very difficult to hold the exclusivist claim that all other religions cannot bring forth any salvation—not even healing of the human body. It is also difficult to justify the inclusivist claim that only Christianity has the most completed salvation, while the other religions have only some portions of it. For there is evidence indicating that sometimes other religions are more effective than Christianity in healing in certain dimensions, such as psychological or physical health. It will also be difficult to justify the pluralistic view that all religions are equally valid paths to the same salvation because obviously different religions may have relative strengths and weaknesses in different dimensions of salvation. In fact, this view of salvation also challenges the so-called “particularism” that, in its critique of the pluralist’s monolithic understanding of salvation, tends to stress the radical divergence and even incommensurability of the understandings of salvation among the religions. The multi-dimensional view of salvation may challenge that although the religions’ understandings of salvation of the spiritual dimension may be quite different, there may be similarities in some other dimensions, for example, psychological health. Although different religions may understand the concept of “human liberation” differently, it remains a useful concept for inter-religious communication because there remains certain commensurability in the understandings of it in different religions.⁵⁶ The rhetoric of particularism seems to pay full respect to the diversity of the religions’ understandings of salvation. However, it may actually disregard the complexity of the respective religion’s own understanding of salvation as well as the overlapping among the religions’ multivalent understandings of salvation. It may then adversely affect the comparison and dialogue among religions.⁵⁷

Concluding Remarks / Tasks Ahead

From the brief survey and analysis of the challenges to the Chinese Christian discourse on salvation, one may find that in order to address these challenges, what is needed is not a theory of salvation, but various theological models of

56. William R. Burrows, “Commensurability and Ambiguity: Liberation as an Interreligiously Usable Concept,” *World Religions and Human Liberation*, edited by Dan Cohn-Sherbok (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 127–142.

57. For a critique of the position of particularism, see Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 146–196.

salvation. Given the metaphorical nature of theological language,⁵⁸ including the metaphorical nature of the Christian doctrine of salvation,⁵⁹ it is legitimate to affirm the plurality of soteriological models.⁶⁰ Without denying that the reality of salvation remains a mystery beyond the capture of one single theological model, one may explore the possibility of the complementary use of several soteriological models.⁶¹ This complementarity of soteriological models may assume a holistic and multi-dimensional understanding of salvation, which is what Christianity might learn from the dialogue with Chinese religions. A more systematic articulation of this multi-dimensional understanding of salvation may be one of the tasks ahead for Chinese Christian theology.⁶²

In China, Christians as a minority group must work with people of other religions for the common good. With an articulated multi-dimensional view of salvation, Chinese Christianity may be able to clearly affirm that even though Christianity and other religions may have divergent ultimate religious ends, they may share some "preliminary" goals, including relief from physical suffering or danger, bodily and psychological healing, political liberation, harmonious social relationship, sustainable environment, etc. Christians can thus engage in inter-religious dialogue and work with people of other religions or no religious affiliations on these preliminary goals.⁶³

58. See: Ian G. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms: The Nature of Scientific and Religious Language* (London: SCM Press, 1974); Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

59. Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 27–52.

60. John McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992), 26–52.

61. See: Ian G. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms*, 152–155.

62. 賴品超 Lai Pinchao, 〈漢語神學與拯救論〉 (Sino-Christian Theology and Soteriology), 《道風》 *Logos & Pneuma* 44 (2016): 153–179.

63. An earlier draft of this paper was presented as an online lecture for the "Faith Among Faiths Project: What has Christianity Learned from the Interreligious Dialogue?" organized by the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, Nagoya, Japan, 10 December 2021. I would like to thank the organizer for the invitation and the participants for their comments and suggestions.

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND IN ISLAM



Reinhold Bernhardt

Universität Basel

The article deals with a seemingly outdated topic of the “Apostolic Creed,” the classical Christian confession of faith: the return of Jesus at the end of time. In the tradition of Islam, it also plays an important role. Muslim theologians often regard it as an important issue of Christian-Muslim dialogue. In the first part of the article, I sketch out and compare the main references of this topic in the New Testament, the Qur’an, and the tradition of Islam. Then I discuss the question of how the belief in the second coming of Christ can be interpreted today.

The “Apostolic Creed” states that Jesus Christ “is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.” This indicates that the second coming of Christ played a central role in Christian belief in its early stage when that confession was formulated. This creed is still the normative articulation of Christian faith and is recited in many Sunday services. By doing so, Christians express the hope that at the end of time Jesus will return to earth after his ascension to heaven. However, in today’s academic theology and in the theological declarations of the mainline churches, this topic is rather marginalized, as though it were merely an artifact in the museum of Christian history. As opposed to early Christianity, the majority of Christians in the Western world today are not expecting that the history of the world will come to an end soon, that the Last Days will be any time near and that the time of judgment is just around the corner.

We find that expectation present mainly (but then with a strong emphasis) in some Christian denominations like the Jehovah’s Witnesses, or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or the Seventh-day Adventists. Some of these and other groups and individuals even tried to calculate the date of the Last Day.¹

1. A list that shows the dates and details of predictions of when Jesus was, or is, expected to return, can be found at: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Predictions_and_claims_for_the_Second_Coming_of_Christ.

Why did I come to deal with such a topic in a series of lectures aimed at finding out what we can learn from other faiths? It was by an invitation to a conference in Qom, Iran, a few years ago, that I realized that the belief in the second coming of Christ is also part of Shia-Islam's eschatology. The conference was on the "Reappearance of the Mahdi," the 12th Imam who—according to the belief of Twelver Shia Islam—is living in occultation (Arabic: *ḡayba*²) and will reappear (*ẓohūr*) at the end of time to establish an Islamic state of peace and justice. Jesus will come to assist him.

Participating in that conference on the Doctrine of Mahdism was an eye-opener for me. The topic was strange to *me* but crucial for *them*. The conference was more a celebration of the political Shia ideology of the state and military leaders than a theological discourse: proclamation rather than reflection. The daily program started with a recitation of the Qur'an, immediately followed by the national anthem, accompanied by a film that showed the military forces in action. The message was: with all our social, political, and military efforts we prepare the ground for the Mahdi to reappear and take over the power. It was a political theology.

The purpose of the conference as a whole was not to get into interreligious dialogue. The quest for the second coming of Jesus was only a marginal issue. But even in the workshop where it was debated, a real dialogue did not occur. It was not the "soft dialogue" that I was familiar with: an open exchange of insights, trying to foster mutual understanding, esteeming the perspective of the other, and so on. Rather, it was a "hard dialogue" based on an inclusivism which presupposed that the Doctrine of Mahdism had the final truth.³

Many dialogues—not only with Muslims—are hard dialogues. The issue at stake is not mutual learning but struggling with strangeness. And that means not only coping with strange ideas but also with strange cultural settings, strange habits and standards of communication, strange expectations, and so on.

For me, the conference was also a challenge to return to those concepts of Christian theology that had once played an important role in Christianity. They are still a part of our creed but have taken a back seat today. So, the interreligious encounter provoked me to deal with the question of how to understand the belief in the second coming of Christ in today's theology.

In my paper, I will first take a brief look at the biblical testimonies of Jesus Christ's second coming, before I turn to the Qur'an and some *hadiths* for some

2. ranicaonline.org/articles/gayba (18.01.2022).

3. I am aware that there is a much broader discussion on eschatology among Muslim scholars as was represented at the conference. An overview is given in Jane I. Smith, "Eschatology," *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, vol 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00055.

hints on that topic. I will then discuss the question of how to understand the belief in Jesus Christ's second coming in Christian theology today.

1. The second coming of Jesus in the Bible

In Paul's 1 Thessalonians (4: 13–16), the second coming of Christ is heralded. The verses read: “We believe that Jesus died and was raised to life. We also believe that when God brings Jesus back again, he will bring with him all who had faith in Jesus before they died. Our Lord Jesus told us that when he comes, we won't go up to meet him ahead of his followers who have already died. With a loud command and with the shout of the chief angel and a blast of God's trumpet, the Lord will return from heaven.”

Paul is not supposed to proclaim something in announcing that Jesus will return. He presumes it and takes it for granted. The question he wants to answer is not whether Christ will come again or when he will return, but rather: What will happen to believers who died before the second coming of Christ? Will they not be included in Christ's saving mission? Will they be eternally lost? Paul responds to these questions by assuring the Christians in Thessaloniki that Christ will come to save not only those believers who are alive but also those who died in the meantime. The living believers have no advantages over the dead. This is the scope of his message.

Paul expects the second coming of Christ to happen soon (1 Corinthians 7: 29). The next generation of early Christians had to cope with the experience that this expectation was not fulfilled. The period between the resurrection of Jesus and the second coming got longer and longer. In organizing the life of the Christian communities, they had to account for this greater duration. Not the belief in the return of Christ faded away but the belief that this second coming was about to happen in the near future. The delayed return of Jesus (“delay of Parousia”) seems to already be considered in the Gospel of Luke. No one knows when the hour of judgment comes.

The Jewish prophetic tradition does not teach that the Messiah must come twice. The early Christians had to cope with the dissonance between their belief that Jesus was the expected Messiah and savior on one hand, and their experience that the Messiah had not fulfilled the expectations attributed to him by the messianic prophecies on the other hand. The world went on as if nothing had happened. The theological processing of that dissonance led to the expectation that the messiah will return and fulfil his mission.

Let us take a closer look at 1 Thessalonians 4. It is firstly important to note that for Paul, the return of Christ is not directly connected with the Last Judgment. It is a pure salvific act for those who believed and believe in Christ. Christ

will gather them into a heavenly community in the immediate presence of God. Expecting the coming of Christ is thus supposed to give hope, not to evoke fear. In 2 Corinthians 5: 10 Paul refers to Christ as a judge, but according to 1 Thessalonians 1: 10, the judge is the savior.

It is secondly important to note that for Paul there is no conflict between that future-oriented eschatology and his present or realized eschatology. Those who are baptized, and who thus are “in” Christ, are *already* participating in the community with God. They look *back* on their (spiritual) death. Baptism to Paul means a new birth, connected with the certainty that nothing can separate them from the kingdom and realm of God (Romans 8: 38).

It is thirdly important to note that Paul does not give a detailed description of the second coming or how it will happen. Opposing the religious culture of his time, which was characterized by widespread myths of heavenly beings descending to earth, he demythologizes the eschatological beliefs. He only writes: “With a loud command and with the shout of the chief angel and a blast of God’s trumpet, the Lord will return from heaven” (1 Thessalonians 4: 16). That is all.

Popular piety in later times, however, went beyond this restraint. In Christian religiosity as it was practiced by ordinary people, and in art—like paintings and sculptures—the Last Judgment was portrayed in great detail. Its artistic representations can be found above the portals of many cathedrals. Their function was to remind the Christians of their sinfulness, right upon entering the church, and to prepare them for the forgiveness of God, symbolized by the Eucharist.

An example of an eschatological fiction of our time is the novel “Left Behind” by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, published in 1995 in the USA. It became a bestseller. The authors take up Paul’s vision of a rapture of the believers at the end of time and turn it into a seemingly realistic story, which plays in the present-day US. The book tells the story of millions of people who suddenly disappear. Their relatives are desperately looking for their loved ones, when a Romanian politician appears and attracts millions of followers—the antichrist who leads humanity into temptation.

Let us return to the biblical references. Not only Paul’s letters but also the gospels allude to Christ’s return. But the reference here remains vague. Mark 13 depicts an apocalyptic vision. We also find it in Matthew 24 and Luke 21, albeit in a modified form. I quote from Mark 13: 24–27:

In those days, right after that time of suffering, the sun will become dark, and the moon will no longer shine. The stars will fall and the

powers in the sky⁴ will be shaken. Then the Son of Man will be seen coming in the clouds with great power and glory. He will send his angels to gather his chosen ones from all over the earth.

The eschatological figure of the Son of Man is mentioned already in the book of Daniel in chapter 7. Verse 13 reads: “As I continued to watch the vision that night, I saw what looked like a Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven, and he was presented to the Eternal God.” Obviously, that vision and verse mark an important point of reference for the belief in the return of Christ in the New Testament—as well as in Paul’s Epistles and in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. The scenery described is similar. The eschatological figure comes from heaven to Earth and collects true believers. But there’s also a big difference: According to Daniel 7, the Son of Man comes to build his kingdom on earth. He will not terminate history or extract the true believers out of it but will consummate history. Verse 14 reads: “He will rule forever, and his kingdom is eternal, never to be destroyed.”

The Gospels of Mark and Matthew follow that vision, while Paul modifies it in two respects: Firstly, he does not speak of the Son of Man but the Lord. And secondly, he speaks not of the kingdom on earth but of a rapture of true believers into heaven.

There is a debate among New Testament scholars on whether Jesus in Mark 13: 26 and other verses in the gospels identifies himself as the “Son of Man,” or if he is pointing at a different figure. There are only some hints that may prompt the conclusion that Jesus could have regarded himself as the “Son of Man.” We find them in the verses that depict the Son of Man as *suffering* (Mark 9: 12; 9: 31; 10: 45; 14: 41). That goes beyond the testimony of Daniel 7. But there is no verse in which Jesus identifies himself explicitly with the “Son of Man.”

The “Son of Man” could be identified as the Messiah, but originally the Messiah was seen as a historical figure, not as an eschatological one. He was believed to be an offspring of King David. The people of Israel hoped that he would come to liberate them from the foreign rule of the Roman Empire. This means that two distinct interpretations were applied to Jesus: the messianic expectation that he could be the political Messiah, and the apocalyptic predication as the eschatological “Son of Man” who will descend from heaven to earth as a divine ruler. The apocalyptic vision could be combined with the notion of Christ coming as a judge.

Let me summarize: The belief that Jesus will come again from heaven to earth is mainly based on Paul’s first letter to the Christian community in

4. “The powers in the sky” refers to belief that the stars are spiritual powers.

Thessaloniki and on the apocalyptic announcement in Mark 13. It is inspired by the vision that is portrayed in Daniel 7. Paul goes beyond this vision in that he speaks of a rapture of true believers. The eschatological kingdom of God is not considered to be on earth but in the heavenly communion with God. In this interpretation, the vision became the basis for the belief in the return of Christ in the Christian tradition.

2. The second coming of Jesus in the Qur'an and the *hadiths*

The main references to the return of Jesus in the Qur'an—as interpreted by the commentators—is *sura* 43 (*Az-Zukhruf*), verse 61.⁵ It reads: “And it shall be a sign of the hour: therefore have no doubt about it, but follow ye Me: this is a straight way.” Neither the name of Jesus is mentioned in that verse,⁶ nor the “coming” of Jesus. But the context of the verse suggests the conclusion that it refers to Jesus: Verse 57 of the *sura* speaks of “the son of Mary,” and verse 63 mentions Jesus explicitly. Accordingly, some translations⁷ interpret the verse as follows: “And he (Jesus) shall be a sign (for the coming of) the hour (of judgment): therefore have no doubt about the (hour), but follow ye Me: this is a straight path.”

The following overview of translations shows how different the interpretations are. Some are translating the verse literally,⁸ leaving it open as to who “he” (or “it”) refers to. Other translations name Jesus, and others attribute the statement to the Holy Qur'an:

5. Relevant is also Qur'an 4: 159. But here the reference to the second coming of Jesus is even more vague.

6. For the qur'anic understanding of Jesus in general see: George C. Anawati, “‘Īsā,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam (Second Edition) Online*, edited by P. Bearman et al. (Brill), doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0378.

7. Referring to: Ibn ‘Abbas, Mujahid, ‘Ikramah, Qatadah, Suddi, Dahhak, Abu al-‘Aliyah and Abu Malik.

8. See also the grammatical analyses at: corpus.quran.com/wordbyword.jsp?chapter=43&verse=61#(43:61:1 (16.01.2022)). Cf: quran.com/43/61 (16.01.2022).

Maulawi Sher Ali	But, verily, he was a sign of the Hour. So entertain no doubt about it, but follow me. This is the right path.
Rashad Khalifa	He is to serve as a marker for knowing the end of the world, so you can no longer harbor any doubt about it. You shall follow Me; this is the right path.
Muhammad Pickthal	And lo! verily there is knowledge of the Hour. So doubt ye not concerning it, but follow Me. This is the right path.
Maulana Muhammad Ali	And this (revelation) is surely knowledge of the Hour, so have no doubt about it and follow me. This is the right path.
Sahih International	And indeed, Jesus will be [a sign for] knowledge of the Hour, so be not in doubt of it, and follow Me. This is a straight path.
Abdullah Yusuf Ali	And (Jesus) shall be a Sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgment): therefore have no doubt about the (Hour), but follow ye Me: this is a Straight Way.
Muhammad Sarwar	(Muhammad), tell them, “Jesus is a sign of the Hour of Doom. Have no doubt about it and follow me; this is the straight path.”
Muhammad Musin Khan	And he [‘Iesa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary)] shall be a known sign for (the coming of) the Hour (Day of Resurrection) [i.e. ‘Iesa’s (Jesus) descent on the earth]. Therefore have no doubt concerning it (i.e. the Day of Resurrection). And follow Me (Allah) (i.e. be obedient to Allah and do what He orders you to do, O mankind)! This is the Straight Path (of Islamic Monotheism, leading to Allah and to His Paradise).
Shabbir Achmed	This (Qur’an) gives knowledge of the oncoming Revolution. So, bear no doubt about it, and follow Me. This alone is the straight path.
Abdul Mannan Omar	And indeed this (Qur’an) gives the knowledge of the (promised) Hour. So have no doubt about it, rather you should follow Me. This is the straight and right path.
Muhammad Asad	AND, BEHOLD, this [divine writ] is indeed a means to know [that] the Last Hour [is bound to come]; hence, have no doubt whatever about it, but follow Me: this [alone] is a straight way.

This means that there is no clear reference to the return of Jesus in the Qur'an. It depends on the interpretation of Qur'an 43: 61.⁹ According to the opinion of the majority of Shiite and Sunni commentators of the Qur'an, however, Qur'an 43: 61 refers to Jesus.

Muwatta, the earliest collection of *hadiths*, compiled by Imam Malik, contains no reference to the return of Jesus. Later collections of *hadith* compiled by Bukhari and Muslim, on the other hand, address it. Sahih al-Bukhari (which is one of the six major collections of *hadiths* and regarded as the most authoritative book in Sunni Islam) states (referring to Ibn Shihab) that Jesus “will descend amongst you shortly as a just ruler and will break the cross¹⁰ and kill the pig¹¹ and abolish the *jizyah*.¹² Wealth will flow (in such abundance that) nobody will accept (any charitable gifts).”¹³ Many *mutawatir hadiths*¹⁴ report that the Messenger of Allah (Mohammad) said that “Isa” (Jesus) will descend before the Day of Resurrection as a just ruler (*imam*) and fair judge.

In Shia Islam, the return of Jesus is tied to the reappearance of the Mahdi. *Tafsir Nemooneh* (which in Shia theology is regarded as an important exegesis and commentary of the Qur'an) refers to Jabir bin Abd Allah, who was a companion of the Prophet Mohammad. According to the text, Jabir bin Abd Allah had heard the Prophet say that Jesus Christ descends and Amir al-Muminin (here: Mahdi, as interpreted by the help of other *hadiths*) says: “Come and let me say prayers with you.” Then Jesus says the prayers while standing behind Mahdi (letting him be the imam in the prayer).¹⁵ A narration attributed to Sa'id ibn Jubayr reports: “Mahdi reappears and Isa bin Maryam descends to the earth and recites prayer behind His Eminence. The earth shall be illuminated from the east to the west.”¹⁶

9. For the following see also: Ahmad Shafaat, “Islamic View of the Coming/Return of Jesus” (islamicperspectives.com/ReturnOfJesus.htm#Notes5) (16.01.2022); Fatih Harpci, *Muhammad Speaking of the Messiah: Jesus in the Hadith Tradition* (Dissertation, Temple University, 2013), 123–193.

10. This means he will reject the Christian understanding of the crucifixion, the salvific significance of his death, and the way Christians worshipped the cross. He will renew his message that all worship must be directed to the one true God.

11. Jesus will prohibit eating pork.

12. The tax that the *Dhimmi*—the non-Muslim “protected persons” living in a Muslim state—had to pay.

13. Sahih al-Buchari 3/425, Muslim 1: 255, quoted from: islamicperspectives.com/ReturnOfJesus.htm#Notes5 (16.01.2022)

14. A Mutawatir Hadith is reported by a large number of narrators of different times, so that it is regarded as undoubtedly true.

15. Vol 21: 100. For other Tafsirs see: altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=74&tSoraNo=43&tAyahNo=61&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2 (16.01.2022).

16. Fara'id al-Simtayn: *Ghayatul Maraam*: 43, quoted from: al-islam.org/es/life-imam-al-mahdi-baqir-shareef-al-qurashi/signs-reappearance-imam-time (17.01.2022). See also Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, *Nuzool Isa Ibn Maryam Akhir al-Zaman*, 56f.

3. Similarities and differences between the Islamic and the Christian tradition:

3.1. Similarities

In some respects, there are similarities between the biblical teaching about the return of Jesus and the Qur'an 43, 61 as interpreted by Muslim commentators on the basis of *hadiths*.

(1) The first similarity is the qur'anic formulation "sign / knowledge of the Hour" (verses 61 and 66), which has parallels mainly in apocalyptic strands of the New Testament.¹⁷ In both cases, "the Hour" means the hour of judgment.

(2) Secondly, no one knows when that hour of judgment is going to come (Qur'an 43: 85). Only God knows. It strikes unexpectedly, so one must at all times be prepared for this eschatological event.

(3) Thirdly, demonic forces will appear, with the intention to lead the righteous people into temptation. The Qur'an speaks of the Satan (Qur'an 43: 62); the Gospels of false Christs and prophets (Mark 13: 22, cf. Matthew 24: 24).

(4) A fourth similarity is the rise of riots between the nations and enmity among friends. Qur'an 43: 67 reads: "Close friends, that Day, will be enemies to each other." In Mark 13: 8 it is announced that "nations and kingdoms will go to war against each other."

3.2. Differences:

(1) The role of Jesus in Qur'an 43 is different: according to the biblical witness, he comes as a judge, fulfilling earlier prophecies (combining Messianic traditions and the expectation that the Son of Man is going to come). According to the Qur'an, he is the *sign* (or reveals the knowledge) of the coming of the hour of judgment. Upon his return people will know that the Last Days are surely imminent. Jesus comes as a Prophet, not as a judge. Some *hadiths*, however, declared him as ruler and judge. When he is depicted as a judge, it means: he is a human judge, not the final judge, who is God himself. God even calls Jesus to account (Qur'an 5: 116–120). The mission he has to accomplish is located within history, not in the hereafter, and not in carrying the true believers to heaven.

(2) In the Shia tradition, he will come after the reappearance of the Mahdi to assist him. He will be standing in prayer behind him,¹⁸ taking part in the wars fought by the Mahdi against Dajjal, the "false Messiah." Al-Mahdi is the war leader, and Jesus merely supports him. Al-Mahdi then will be the ruler of

17. Revelation 14: 7; Matthew 24: 36, cf. Mark 13: 32f, see also: Matthew 25: 13; Acts 1: 7. Especially John, the Baptist, proclaimed that the Last Judgment was imminent.

18. For references see: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadith_of_Jesus_praying_behind_Mahdi (16.01.2022).

the world. Jesus helps him as his vizier to spread the Qur'anic and Islamic values around the globe. Jesus is a Muslim who will prove that the deniers of the belief in Mahdi's reappearance are wrong. According to one *hadith*, Jesus says to Imam Mahdi: "Verily, I have been sent as a minister and not as chief (*amir*) or ruler."¹⁹

(3) If Qur'an 43: 61 is related to Jesus, he knows "the Hour," or his appearance is the sign for that knowledge. According to Mark 13: 32 (cf. Matthew 24: 36), "the Son" does not know it.

4. Tradition and modernity: How can we interpret the belief in the second coming of Christ today?

How can we deal with the two perspectives on the return of Christ in Christianity and Islam? At the conference in Qom, both narrations were understood literally. The Christian version was regarded as partly true, but still as lacking the full truth as revealed in the Qur'an, and as elaborated on in the tradition of the Twelver Shia Islam. Based on that inclusivism, there was nothing to learn from the Christian tradition. It could be well respected as far as it confirmed the Shia point of view.

For me, the main issue was and is not how to deal with the differences between the Christian and the Islamic perspectives, but how to cope with the differences between the two of them on one hand, and modern theology on the other. By modern theology, I mean a theology informed by historical and hermeneutical consciousness.

4.1. *Historical consciousness*

Historical consciousness teaches us that the understanding of the return of Christ as found in the New Testament and early Christianity is closely tied to a specific—namely the *apocalyptic*—worldview and to the context in which that worldview has flourished. This prompts us to ask whether and in what sense we can adopt it today. Apocalyptic worldviews mainly appear in times of crisis. They form a response to the experience of degeneration and decay, to oppression and injustice, to hopelessness and despair.

The apocalyptic interpretation of the world has four underlying tenets:²⁰ the first is dualism, which believes "that there were two fundamental components of reality in our world, the forces of good and the forces of evil." The second is

19. Al_Malahim Syed Ibn Tawus: 83 and Al_Fetan ibn Abbas: 160, quoted from: www.al-islam.org/overview-mahdis-atfs-government-najmuddin-tabasi/government-truth (16.01.2022).

20. Bart D. Ehrman, *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer* (New York: Harper, 2008), 215ff.

pessimism, according to which “we cannot improve our lot in this age, an age of evil, misery, and anguish.” The third is the hope that God “will vindicate his holy name, and the people who call upon his name, in a show of cosmic force.” The fourth consists of the expectation that all this “will happen very soon. It is right around the corner. It is imminent.”

The apocalyptic way of thinking originated in the second century before Christ’s birth. We find it in the later books of the Hebrew Bible, mainly in the book of Daniel (7–12) in the second century BC.

What kinds of groups sustained those traditions and were attracted to them? A socio-historical perspective suggests that Apocalypticism invokes the last desperate vision of hope generated by an oppressed people who can no longer imagine achieving justice for themselves within the realities of this world. Apocalyptic texts express collective despair, felt by a group of people who have lost all hope. The hope for the second coming of Jesus reflects that despair and the longing for liberation, salvation, and justice. It expresses the hope of those who have no hope anymore, who are politically, socially, and religiously marginalized. If the present situation and history no longer offer any hope of improvement, all hope is built on the expectation of an *end* of history. It is set on God’s final action, which abandons the flux of history and installs his rule of eternal peace and justice.

If we interpret the belief in the return of Christ in such a historical and contextual way, then the question occurs if it loses its relevance under different historical conditions, as is the case in modern Western Christianity. Not even apocalyptic scenarios like the pandemic, climate change, the possibility of nuclear wars, or other causes that could lead to the destruction of the world seem to lead to its revival. Only some rather evangelical Christians relate the second coming of Christ to those scenarios and regard Christ as the savior of the faithful.

But can we historically relativize that part of the Apostolic Creed and simply declare it to be invalid for today? Not only many Christians but also Muslims may regard this as abandoning an essential part of the Christian faith. This question leads me to hermeneutical considerations.

4.2 Hermeneutical considerations

The basic hermeneutical question in this regard is: If it is no longer plausible to interpret the belief in the return of Christ in a *literal* way, as the report of a particular event at the end of history, does it have to be conceived *symbolically* (or allegorically) as an expression of meaning from the perspective of the Christian faith? What could be its meaning? My answer is twofold: Firstly, in terms of a future eschatology, it can be understood as a symbolization of ultimate hope;

the hope for ultimate justice, truth, and righteousness. Secondly, in terms of a realized or present eschatology, it expresses the advent of Jesus Christ—who represents God's presence²¹—in every moment of one's life.

(a) The first interpretation remains within a historical paradigm but does not take the return of Christ as a historical event within a series of events at the end of time. No heavenly person is coming down from heaven to earth as the beginning of the Last Days—whether as a ruler or a judge, to build up his kingdom on earth, or to take the believers with him to heaven. The belief in the return of Jesus, rather, ascertains an ultimate hope and trust that God's justice will prevail over the evils of the world. As a “sign,” Jesus's return indicates the fulfilment of the promise that all the injustice that occurred in history will not have the final word. Like other eschatological symbols—for example, the symbol of the “kingdom of God” or the “heavenly banquet”—the expectation of the second coming of Christ proclaims that there will be an eschatological consummation of history in a communion with God, in which all suffering, oppression, and injustice are overcome. The descent of Jesus Christ from heaven is a metaphor, a way of envisioning and strengthening the eschatological hope of the believers. It is a myth that conveys a deep truth. Its truth is not located on the surface of the symbol, but behind it: on the deeper level of the message. The mythical image illustrates that message. It says: Christ's mission to establish the reign of God will be accomplished when all the demonic powers are defeated: all the political, economic, and social powers that oppress people, the powers that create injustice and violence in the world; the powers that dehumanize human beings. Only after those powers are defeated, the kingdom of God will be established.

It is the kingdom of *God!* The belief of Jesus's return has to be interpreted in the light of 1 Corinthians 15: 28, which means in a *theocentric* way: The coming of Christ represents the presence of God, who will be all in all. “Then God will mean everything to everyone.” As the *hadith* says, Jesus is indeed a minister; he is submitted to his mission, and thus to God alone, in the last instance, not to another eschatological figure.

(b) The second interpretation relates the return of Christ not to the future but to the present; not to history as a whole but to the life of the individual believer. It understands the return of Jesus existentially, as his coming, time and again, to those who open their heart to him. It symbolizes the real presence of Christ at all times and in all spaces, meaning in the here and now. This is

21. Reinhold Bernhardt, *Jesus Christus—Repräsentant Gottes: Christologie im Kontext der Religions-theologie* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2021).

what Paul calls “being in Christ and Christ in me.”²² According to Matthew 28: 20, Jesus Christ promises: “I will be with you always, even until the end of the world.” The belief in the return of Jesus can be seen as symbolizing that belief. It says: Christ is physically absent but spiritually present. He comes in every moment into the lives of individual human beings, can transform their lives, can create belief, love, and hope. The present Christ will represent himself—and that means the presence of God—here and now. Where and when that happens, an eschatological moment occurs.

That interpretation does not refer to the figure of Jesus but to the mystical body of Christ. “Coming of Jesus” means becoming part of that “body,” which is the presence of God. We can understand the image of the rapture as being taken into it. The focal term here is not “hope” but “being-in.” According to Paul Knitter, this salvation is to be understood “not as an atoning process that takes place outside of oneself but as a transformative unitive experience.”²³

Both interpretations, (a) and (b), are not mutually exclusive but require each other: being in Christ is the faith that confirms the trust in the fulfillment of God’s promise. Hope is faith-based and faith evokes hope. (b) gives inner certainty, (a) leads to action in the world. (b) gives spiritual strength, while (a) helps to cope with experiences of injustice and motivates to struggle for justice. Both belong to each other like breathing in and out, or like resting in a safe harbor and sailing out to the rough sea. They can also be corrective to each other: By going back to the source of hope, faith can “empty” certain assumptions of what shall be hoped for. Hope can be an expression of individual or collective egocentrism, or part of a religio-political ideology. Then faith can lead to a critique of hope. The correction also works in the other direction: An introverted, unworldly faith primarily concerned about the own salvation can be open to social, economic, and political affairs by a “theology of hope.”

Both interpretations, (a) and (b), are based on a symbolic understanding of the return of Jesus. A symbol has two levels: the imagery on the surface and the deeper meaning that it points to. One needs to go behind the surface and spell out the meaning as I did in my twofold interpretation (a) and (b). On the surface level, there is an unresolvable tension between the specific imageries of the religious traditions. In the Christian faith, the imagery portrays the return of Christ, in Shia-Islam the reappearance of the Mahdi, in Judaism the arrival of the Messiah. These differences on the figurative surface of the symbol cannot be overcome, but they can be transcended by turning from the pictorial

22. Romans 8: 1; 1 Corinthians 12: 27; 2 Corinthians 5: 17; Galatians 2: 20; Philippians 2: 5.

23. Paul Knitter, “My Buddha-nature and my Christ-nature,” *Theology without Walls. The Transreligious Imperative*, edited by Jerry L. Martin (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 67.

level to the deeper sense to which they point, and to the posture they intend to evoke. All those visions express an ultimate hope. But they differ in the mythological images in which they express that hope. A literal understanding of the eschatological symbol neglects the apophatic character of eschatological proclamations. If one could give way for such a shift of perspective and put more emphasis on the truth *behind* the eschatological imagery than on the images themselves, the difference between the Christian and Islamic eschatology could diminish.²⁴

The meaning of eschatological symbols is not to be conceived only in terms of their semantic content but also in terms of the pragmatic function: they firstly intend to evoke certainties and attitudes in the addressees, and secondly give them orientation and motivation for action. The semantic dimension consists in a proclamation, the pragmatic dimension in an evocation. Thus, to understand a symbol one needs not only to ask what it *says* semantically but what it intends to *do*. It wants to exert an influence on the recipient, to transform him/her existentially. Eschatological symbols do not report future events but they want to give solace, create hope and strengthen trust. And they do not only intend to transform the inner attitude of the addressees but lead them to action.

Karl Rahner reflected on how the eschatological statements in the Bible could and should be understood. He distinguished between eschatology and apocalypics, and criticized an apocalyptic understanding of eschatological statements that interprets them “as anticipatory, eyewitness accounts of a future which is still outstanding.”²⁵ Biblical apocalyptic speaks of the future as if the writers were eyewitnesses. Contrary to such an understanding, Rahner insists that eschatological statements are not the plot outline of a drama whose final act we know in advance. They are rather “conclusions from the experience of the Christian present.”²⁶ They strengthen faith and hope *now*. They pledge that

24. For symbolic interpretations of the return of Jesus in Islamic theology, see: Fatih Harpci, *Muhammad Speaking of the Messiah* (footnote 6), 177–193. Fethullah Gülen for example is concerned with the nature of Jesus’ body and regards it as a spiritual body that exerts a God-provided influence. “The coming of the Messiah as a spiritual personality simply means that a spirit of compassion or a phenomenon of mercy will come to the foreground, a breeze of clemency will waft over humanity, and human beings will compromise and agree with each other” (Muhammad Fethullah Gülen: *Questions and Answers about Islam*, vol. 2 [Somerset, NJ: The Light, 2005], 148–149). For Said Nursi, Jesus who represents “the collective personality of Christianity will kill al-Dajjāl, who represents the collective personality of disbelief.” See: Said Nursi, *Risāla-i Nur Collection, The Words* (Somerset, NY: The Light, 2010), 347.

25. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978). (Translation of “Grundkurs des Glaubens: Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums” [Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 1976], 431).

26. *Ibid.*, 432.

the present life of the individual believer, of the community of the believers, and the world as a whole is not a groundless, aimless, and meaningless process but in the good hands of God. Eschatological symbols are statements of *present* meanings, not of future facts. They want to encourage the believers to not lose faith and to not give up hope in the face of all the suffering, injustice, and oppression they are confronted with. They want to assure the believers that God's power is stronger than all the oppressive forces. They want to empower them to live according to that hope, and to practice justice especially towards the needy and the poor.

According to the first interpretation (a), the symbol of Jesus' return evokes the hope that divine justice will prevail over human sinfulness. This attitude leads to acting that strives to *do* justice to everybody. It motivates to struggle for justice and liberation here and now. There is a close connection between eschatology and ethics, as can be seen in Matthew 25–31–46. Following (b), it evokes faith in being embedded in the presence of God as mediated by Jesus, the Christ, and it stimulates to act as a member of the mystical body of Christ.

ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTIONS BY INSTITUTE MEMBERS



April 2021–March 2022

GOTŌ Haruko 後藤晴子

Articles

- 2021 「〈おじひ〉の諸相—中山身語正宗『親仏体験談集』の〈おじひ〉体験に関する一考察」
[“The Aspects of *ojihhi*: A Study of Collected Stories of *oyabutsu* Experiences by Nakayama Shingo Shōshū.”] 『身語正研究』 [Shingoshō kenkyū (*Bulletin of Nakayama Shingo Shōshū Kyōgaku Kenkyūsho*)] 2: 3–24.
- 2022 「大正世代の親仏とそのシャーマニズム性—中山身語正宗『親仏体験談集』にみる信仰の契機を中心に」 [“The Taishō-Generation *oyabutsu* and Their Shamanism: Focusing on the Momentum of Faith in Collected Stories of *oyabutsu* Experiences by Nakayama Shingo Shōshū.”] 『身語正研究』 [Shingoshō kenkyū (*Bulletin of Nakayama Shingo Shōshū Kyōgaku Kenkyūsho*)] 3: 3–24.

Co-authored article

- 2021 (with Fukahori Ayaka), 「地域の教会とコミュニティ—長崎佐世保・北松・平戸・生月を中心に」 [“Local Churches and Communities: Focusing on Sasebo, Hokushō, Hirado, and Ikitsuki in Nagasaki Prefecture.”] 『南山宗教文化研究所研究所報』 [Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture Kenkyū Shohō] 31: 54–73.

Report

- 2022 「高齢女性宗教者の物語と家族—沖縄の事例を中心に」 [“The Story of an Elderly Religion-Female and Family: Focusing on the Case of Okinawa.”] 『日本宗教学会』 [Journal of Religious Studies] 95 (supplement): 298–299.

Bibliographic introduction

- 2021 「富澤公子著『幸福な老いを生きる—長寿と生涯発達を支える奄美の地域力』」 [“Bibliographic Introduction on *Kōfuku na oi o ikiru: Chōju to shōgai hattatsu o sasaeru Amami no chiikiryoku* (Aging Happily: Amami’s Regional Power to Support Longevity and Lifelong Development) by Tomizawa Kimiko.”] 『日本民俗学』 (*Bulletin of the Folklore Society of Japan*) 307: 102.

Conference presentation

- 2021 「高齢女性宗教者の物語と家族—沖縄の事例を中心に」 [“The Stories of Elderly Religious Women and Their Families: Focusing on the Case of Okinawa.”] 日本宗教学会第80回学術大会 [The 80th Annual Convention of Japanese Association for Religious Studies], Kansai University (Osaka), 6–8 September (online).

Academic presentations

- 2021 「沖縄離島で生きる人びとと民俗宗教の関わり」 [“The Inhabitants of Okinawa’s Remote Islands and Their Relationship with Folk Religion.”] 美術文化史研究会 [The Study Group of Art and Cultural History], 名古屋市公会堂 [Nagoya Civic Assembly Hall (Nagoya)], 30 April.
- 「シマと高齢者と宗教」 [“Islands, the Elderly, and Religion”], 上七軒文庫寄付講座 [“Kamishichiken Bunko Endowed Lectures.”] 上七軒文庫 [Kamishichiken Bunko (Kyoto)], 18 December (online).

Comment

- 2021 「「沖縄の女性祭司—村落祭祀における就任と承認」に対するコメント」 [“Comment on the Presentation Female Priests’ Inauguration and Approval at Village Rituals in Okinawa by Sawai Mayo.”] 宗教とジェンダーの最前線IV [The 4th “Forefront of Religion and Gender” workshop], co-sponsored by Ryukoku University (Kyoto) and the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture (Nagoya), 16 October (online).

Tim GRAF*Article*

- 2021 “Japanese Temple Buddhism during COVID-19.” *Bulletin of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture* 45: 21–47.

Ethnographic films

- 2022 Videos on Buddhism and waste; Buddhist household altar restoration; Buddhist responses to COVID-19; urban graves in Japan. [youtube.com/c/timgraf](https://www.youtube.com/c/timgraf)

Book review

- 2021 Review of *Dynamism and the Ageing of a Japanese ‘New’ Religion: Transformations and the Founder* by Erica Baffelli and Ian Reader (London, New York et al.: Bloomsbury, 2019). *Asian Ethnology* 80/2: 445–446.

Conference presentation

- 2021 「いまドキュメンタリーを撮るということ—寺院のCOVID-19対応から考える」 [“Filming a Documentary during COVID-19: Temple Buddhist Responses to the Epidemic.”] 国際研究フォーラム「日本の宗教文化を撮る」 [International Research Forum “Capturing Japan’s Religious Culture,”] Kokugakuin University (Tokyo), 11 December.

Academic presentation

- 2021 “Buddhismus und Gender im gegenwärtigen Japan” [“Buddhism and Gender in Contemporary Japan.”] Ringvorlesung Gender- und Queerstudies als erkenntnistheoretische Herausforderung für die Religionswissenschaft [lecture series

Gender- and Queer Studies as an Epistemological Challenge for Religious Studies], Hamburg University and Heidelberg University (Hamburg and Heidelberg), 30 June (online).

Radio

- 2022 Interview about the disposal of Buddhist household altars for Westdeutscher Rundfunk Köln [West German Broadcasting Cologne; wdr], aired on 20 March 2022.

ISEKI Daisuke 井関大介

Essays

- 2021 「『太平記秘伝理尽鈔』における「道」と三教についての試論」 [“An Essay on the “Way” and the Three Religions in Taiheiki-Hiden-Rijinshō.”] 『南山宗教文化研究所研究報』 [Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture Kenkyū Shohō] 31: 52–73.
- 2021 「井上円了の妖怪学と天皇神話」 [“Inoue Enryō’s Mystery Studies and the Emperor Myth of Japan,”] in 『怪異とナショナリズム』 [Mystery and Nationalism in Japan], ed. by Motegi Kennosuke 茂木謙之介・Komatsu Shōko 小松史生子・Soeda Kenji 副田賢二・Matsushita Hiroyuki 松下浩幸 (Tokyo: Seikyusha).
- 2022 「井上円了的妖怪學與宗教哲學」 [“Inoue Enryō’s Mystery Studies and Philosophy of Religion,”] in 『東洋哲學的創造: 井上円了與近代日本和中國的思想啟蒙』 [Creation of Eastern philosophy: Inoue Enryō and the Ideological Enlightenment of Modern Japan and China], ed. by Satō Masayuki 佐藤將之 (Taipei: National Taiwan University Press) (in press).

Conference presentation

- 2021 「近世前期における「聖人の道」について」 [“The Way of the Sages” in the Early Edo Period.”] 80th Annual Convention of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies, Kansai University (Osaka), 8 September (online).

KIM Seung Chul 金承哲

Book

- 2022 *The Center is Everywhere: Christianity in Dialogue with Religion and Science* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications), 184 pages.

Conference presentations

- 2021 「遠藤周作の文学における否定神学的要素についての考察: 未完の連載小説「黒い揚羽蝶」を手掛かりとして」 [“A Study on the Negative Theology in the Literature of Shūsaku Endō in His Unfinished Work *The Black Butterfly*.”] 日本キリスト教文学会 [The Japan Society for Literature and Christianity], 8 May (online).

「創作としてのアダプテーション: 遠藤周作の場合」 [“Adaptation as Creation in Shusaku Endo.”] 遠藤周作学会 [Society for Shūsaku Endō], 11 September (online).

Academic presentations

2021 「엔도 슈사쿠와 『마보』의 세계」 [“The Wonderful Fool by Shusaku Endo.”] Institute of Christian Humanities, 28 June (online).

「文学的神学の可能性についての試論: 探偵小説を媒介として」 [“Considerations about the Possibilities of a Literary Theology: Detective Stories as a Means of Transmission.”] Mystery and Mysterium: Detective Stories at the Intersection of Literature, Philosophy, and Theology symposium, Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 13 November (online).

LIANG Xiao Hong 梁 晓虹

Articles

2021 “An Exploratory Survey of the Graphic Variants Used in Japan: Part Two.” *Journal of Chinese Writing Systems* 5: 115–124.

「無窮会本『大般若経音義』第四十帙鳥名考」 [“A Note on the Bird Names in the Cloth Slip-Case No. 40 of the Mukyūkai Recension of the Dai Hannyakyō (Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra).”] 金程宇編『域外漢籍研究集刊』 [Collected Papers for the Study of the Chinese Books Abroad] 21: 17–38.

「天理本篇立音義考論」華學誠主編 [“An Examination of the Sounds and Glosses in the Chapters of the Tenri Recension of the Dai Hannyakyō (Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra).”] 『文献語言学』 [Linguistics Based on Philological Texts] 13: 149–162.

「“無窮会本系”『大般若経音義』‘詹’聲俗字考」 [“A Note on the Demotic Characters with the Phonetic 詹 (Sino-Japanese reading sen; Modern Chinese in pīnyīn zhān) in the Sounds and Glosses to the Mukyūkai Recension of the Dai Hannyakyō (Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra).”] 『漢語史研究集刊』 [Collected Papers for the Study of the History of Chinese] 31: 267–281.

Conference presentations

2021 「日本俗譌字考—以“無窮会本系”『大般若経音義』中“弘”字為例」 [“An Examination of the Demotic and Erroneous Characters Seen in Japan: In Particular Reference to the Character ‘kō/hóng 弘’”] 第三回跨文化漢字研討会: 東アジア写本漢字及び文献研究会(オンライン開催)、中山大学(珠海) [Third Cross-Cultural Conference on Chinese Characters: Studies of the Hand-copied Chinese Characters and Manuscripts, Zhongshan University (Zhuhai)], 15–17 October (online).

「無窮会本『大般若経音義』第四十帙鳥名考—兼論其音義特色」 [“A Note on the Bird Names Seen in the Cloth Slip-Case No. 40 of the Mukyūkai Recension

of the Dai Hannnyakyo (Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra): Special Feature on Their Sounds and Meanings.” [第十二回中古漢語國際學術研討會(オンライン開催)、中国北京人民大學 [12th International Conference on the Study of Middle Chinese, Renmin University (Beijing)], 15–17 October (online).

「日本天理本“篇立音義”考論」 [“An Examination of the Sounds and Glosses in the Chapters of the Tenri Recension of the Dai Hannnyakyo (Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra).”] 第一回漢語音義學研究國際學術研討會及び第四回仏經音義學研究國際學術研討會、中国淮北師範大學(オンライン開催) [1st International Conference on the Study of Sounds and Glosses in Chinese held jointly by the 4th International Conference on the Sounds and Glosses to the Buddhist Scriptures, Huabei Normal University (Huabei)], 23–24 October (online).

「佛經音義‘日本化’發展進程考察——以“無窮會本系”『大般若經音義』為例」 [“An Examination of the Japanization Processes of the Sounds and Meanings in the Buddhist Scriptures: In Particular Reference to the Mukyūkai Recension of the Dai Hannnyakyo (Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra).”] 佛教傳播與語言變化、第十四回漢文佛典語言學國際學術研討會、香港教育大學 / 香港中文大學(オンライン開催) [Spread of Buddhism and Language Change: The 14th International Conference on Language Studies of the Chinese Buddhist Literature, Hong Kong Normal University / Chinese University of Hong Kong (Hong Kong)], 10–12 December (online).

Matthew D. McMULLEN

Article

- 2021 “Mandala Hermeneutics and the Source-Trace Theory in Early Medieval Japanese Esoteric Buddhism.” *International Journal of Buddhist Thought & Culture* 31/2: 101–128.

Reports

- 2021 “Annual Update: Japanese Journal of Religious Studies.” *Bulletin of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture* 45: 7–10.
 “Publication Announcement: Nanzan Library for Asian Religion and Culture.” *Bulletin of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture* 45: 11–13.

Review

- 2021 Review of Chinese Esoteric Buddhism: Amoghavajra, the Ruling Elite, and the Emergence of a Tradition by Geoffrey C. Goble (New York: University of Columbia Press, 2019). *Reading Religion*, 15 July. readingreligion.org/books/chinese-esoteric-buddhism.

Conference presentation

- 2021 “Esoteric Buddhist Curricula and Doxography in Ninth-Century Japan.” 「物質、經典與儀式:密教文化流布與多元視野」 [Objects, Texts, and Rituals: Multi-Disciplinary Approaches to the Transmission of Esoteric Buddhism]. 國際研討會 National Cheng Chi University (Taiwan), 18–19 November, (online).

Academic presentations

- 2021 “Esoteric Buddhist Curricula and Doxography in Ninth-Century Japan.” Tokyo Buddhist Discussion Group (Tokyo), 18 September.
- 2022 “Shōshin’s *Essay on the Differences Between the Two Schools of Tendai and Shingon*.” Tokyo Buddhist Discussion Group (Tokyo), 12 February.

MORIYA Tomoe 守屋友江

Essays

- 2021 「鈴木大拙の『新宗教論』と社会批評」 [“Suzuki Daisetsu’s New Interpretation of Religion and His Social Critique.”] 『文明と哲学』 [*Zivilisation und Philosophie*] 13: 21–33.
- “D. T. Suzuki at the World Congress of Faiths in 1936: An Analysis of His Presentation at the Interfaith Conference.” *Journal of Religion in Japan* 10(2–3): 135–160.
- 2022 「アメリカ禅の成立」 [“Early History of Zen in the United States.”] 『国際禅研究』 [*International Zen Studies*] 8: 229–240.

Conference presentation

- 2022 “Soga Ryōjin, Dharmākara Bodhisattva, and the Psychology of Religious Experience.” Association for Asian Studies Annual Conference, 26 March.

Academic presentations

- 2021 「日系移民と仏教のグローバル化」 [“Japanese Immigrants and Globalization of Buddhism.”] Workshop on Migration Studies and Digital Archives, Osaka University Global Japanese Studies Education and Research Incubator and Consortium for Global Japanese Studies (Osaka), 1 August (online).
- 「アメリカ仏教史における「二人のスズキ」—鈴木俊隆と鈴木大拙」 [“The Two Suzukis in History of American Buddhism: Suzuki Shunryū and Suzuki Daisetsu.”] Society for Buddhism and Modernity Symposium “Suzuki Shunryū: Person and Zen,” 21 August (online).
- 「東西を往還する大拙とビアトリスの活動—アーカイヴ資料から見えるネットワーク」 [“East-West Flows of Activities of Daisetz and Beatrice Suzuki: Some Findings from Archival Research.”] Tama Art University Art Archives Symposium, 4 December (hybrid).

SAITŌ Takashi 斎藤 喬

Essay

- 2022 「伊予の八百八狸信仰における宗教文化的背景」[On the religious background of Happyakuya Danuki in Iyo], 『論集』Ronshū 48: 13–32.

Conference presentations

- 2021 「伊予の八百八狸における憑依の表象」[“Representation of Possession in *Happyakuya danuki*.”] The 62th Conference of the Association For Indology and Study of Religion, 20 June (online).
 「柳桜口演『四谷怪談』における怪談噺の粘着性」[“The Voice of Haunting Ghosts in Ryūō’s Yotsuya Kaidan.”]. The 16th annual convention of the Association for Studies of Culture and Representation, 4 July. (online).
 「南龍口演『八百八狸』にみる憑依と守護」[“Possession and Protection of the Animal Spirit in *Happyakuya danuki*.”] The 80th Conference of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies, 7 September (online).
 2022 「伊予の憑依文化からみる八百八狸」[Possession and Culture of Iyo in *Happyakuya danuki*.”] The 12th Conference of the West Japan Association for the Study of Religion, 27 March (online).

Interview

- 2021 “Ghastly Tales from the Yotsuya Kaidan.” New Books Network, 28 December (podcast).

James W. HEISIG [*emeritus*]*Books*

- 2021 (with Ola Feurst), *Att minnas kanji, vol. 1: De japanska skrivteknens skrivning och betydelse* (Nagoya: Nanzan), 534 pages.
 (with Marc Bernabé and Alfredo Soro), *Kanji para recordar III: Curso avanzado de escritura y lectura de caracteres japoneses* (Barcelona: Herder), 362 pages.
 (ed. with Thomas P. Kasulis and John C. Maraldo), 『일본철학사상자료집』 [*Japanese Philosophy: A Sourcebook*] trans. by Kim Seung Chul, Kim Hyo Son, Um In Kyung, et al. (Seoul: Bogosabooks, 2021), 1,062 pages.
In Praise of Civility (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock), 136 pages.

Essays

- 2021 “Nishida’s Philosophy and My Changing Idea of God.” *Bulletin of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture* 45: 48–65.

“Some Remarks on *Philosophising at the Big Fault Line*,” in Nevad Katheran, *Philosophising at the Big Fault Line* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021), 182–184.

Interview

- 2022 Podcast Interview by Takeshi Morisato on *Of Gods and Minds: In Search of a Theological Commons*, New Books in Japanese Studies, podcasts. apple.com/us/podcast/james-heisig-of-gods-and-minds-in-search/id1534347682?i=1000549146429, 27 January.

Paul L. SWANSON [*emeritus*]

Academic Presentations

- 2021 “The English Translation of Tiantai Zhiyi’s *Fahuaxuanyi* (法華玄義).” The first series of the Nanzan Seminar for the Translation of Buddhist Text. Six sessions, on 21 April, 19 May, 16 June, 15 September, 20 October, and 17 November.
- 2022 “Report on the Dual Translations of the *Fahuaxuanyi*.” Online Buddhist Discussion Group, 12 February.

INSTITUTE STAFF

April 2021–March 2022



SENIOR RESEARCH FELLOWS

KIM Seung Chul, *Director*
Matthew D. McMULLEN
MORIYA Tomoe
SAITŌ Takashi
James W. HEISIG (*emeritus*)
Paul L. SWANSON (*emeritus*)

ASSOCIATE RESEARCH FELLOWS

LIANG Xiao Hong
NISHIWAKI Ryō

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Tim GRAF

JUNIOR RESEARCH FELLOWS

GOTŌ Haruko
ISEKI Daisuke

PROJECT RESEARCH FELLOW

Jacynthe TREMBLAY

RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

OKUYAMA Michiaki
FUKAHORI Ayaka
Alena GOVOROUNOVA
HASHIMOTO Hiroaki

HIOKI Naoko
HOSHINO Sō
INUTSUKA Yū
IWAMOTO Akemi
KAWAKAMI Tsuneo
KOBAYASHI Naoko
KURATA Natsuki
KURITA Hidehiko
MURAYAMA Yumi
NAITŌ Rieko
PARK Yeonjoo
ROCHE, Robert, Jr.
SAKAI Yūen
TERAO Kazuyoshi
Tiziano TOSOLINI
Rocco VIVIANO

VISITING RESEARCH FELLOW

KAWAHASHI Noriko

ROCHE CHAIR FOR INTERRELIGIOUS RESEARCH

Paul L. SWANSON