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**THE CONCEPT OF “POPULAR RELIGION” IN THE STUDY OF CHINESE RELIGIONS:
RETROSPECT AND PROSPECTS**

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Introduction

Every now and then, students of Chinese religion(s) take time out to think about the conceptual glasses through which they view their data. Key to our endeavour clearly is the concept of “religion.” Much ink has been spilled about the question whether we should think about China as possessing several religions (such as the Three Teachings, *sanjiao* 三教) or whether diverse religious traditions within China are best understood as variations on and elaborations of a dominant theme, that of Chinese Religion in the singular. Related to this debate about unity and diversity, we find discussions of whether religion is a suitable concept at all in the Chinese context, seeing that prior to the turn of the twentieth century the Chinese language had no exact equivalent for “religion”. The modern *zongjiao* 宗教 is a Japanese-derived neologism designed specifically to translate the English/German/French word

“religion.”¹ If there is no clear pre-modern notion of “religion”, does the term’s application to Chinese culture then not distort the picture we gain of it?² Can we gain true knowledge by describing something in our terms that indigenously would be represented in a different conceptual framework? While seemingly very sinological in nature, such debates in fact dovetail with larger methodological issues in Religious Studies, where reflection on the concept of religion itself plays a large role, with much attention given to the constructed and historically conditioned meaning of the term. Some scholars even advocate the abandonment of the term altogether, and instead regard “Religious Studies” as the study of culture, i.e., of the processes by which humans make sense of their world, without artificially carving out one cultural sector and labelling it “religion”. From this wider methodological perspective, the question is not whether there exists a Chinese equivalent of “religion”, but whether it is useful to approach Chinese data in conceptual terms of religion at all. Even if we can identify Chinese concepts that overlap with the semantic field of “religion”, this will not provide us with any positive reality corresponding to religion, but merely with a discursive field in which “religion”, “*jiao* 教”, “*dao* 道”, etc. are tools in a process of meaning-making rather than possessing any essential content. In this perspective, the scholar is to study primarily the process, not the tools employed in it.³

Given the hot contestation surrounding the very notion of “religion”, we can expect the subcategory of “popular religion” to exhibit similar problems—possibly worse problems, in fact, because in addition to reifying religion, it adds to it by stipulating internal divisions, dichotomies, and dynamics within “religion”. Now we have not just religion, but we have the “religion of the people” juxtaposed to that of the “elite”, or “unofficial” in competition with “official religion”. Such dichotomies

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¹ On the history of the modern Chinese terminology of religion see Vincent Goossaert, “1898: The Beginning of the End for Chinese Religion,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 65.2 (2006): 307-336.

² But see Robert Ford Campany on possible ways to adapt Chinese and Western vocabularies to each other. “On the Very Idea of Religions (in the Modern West and in Early Medieval China),” *History of Religions* 42.4 (2003): 287-319.

³ Having problematized the “religion” component of “Chinese religion”, one could go on and do the same for the “Chinese” component. What qualifies as “Chinese”? Geographic location? Cultural identity? Are Muslim Hui part of Chinese religion? Are Taiwanese worshippers of Mazu part of it? What about Malaysian Chinese worshipping at shrines to Malay local spirits or participating in Satya Sai Baba’s neo-Hindu movement? This question opens up a whole new can of worms that I only want to mention here.

seem to create new essentialisms, the usefulness of which in analyzing and/or understanding the Chinese data is in doubt.

Despite the deep suspicions harboured by some scholars vis-à-vis the term *religion* as such, and by extension *popular religion*, the field of Religious Studies as a whole has not abandoned this conceptual framework. For better or for worse, most of us continue to use the language of religion in our research, some out of an unwillingness to address its inherent problems, others on the basis of a counter-critique of attempts to dissolve “religion” into an undifferentiated process called “culture”. Such a counter-critique might, for example, question whether the abandonment of analytical categories such as “religion” does not rob of us a valuable tool to understand an increasingly mystified concept of culture. In fact, from such a counter-critical perspective, the religion critique may be seen to serve the political purpose of promoting that mystification, and in the process to simply relocate the problematique of reification and essentialism from the notion of “religion” to that of “culture”.

Against the backdrop of these larger issues, the present paper will pursue two more limited concerns: First, I would like to review how “popular religion” and related notions such “folk religion” and “local religion” have hitherto been utilized in the study of Chinese culture. Second, I would like to make some suggestions as to the relative merits of these approaches and provide an outlook on possible future directions of research in this field of enquiry. Limited as it is, perhaps this study may, as a by-product, yield some insights that may be applied to the broader methodological debate outlined above.

My discussion will focus on Western-language scholarship, because the conceptual language used in Chinese- and Japanese-language research, even while interacting with Western terminologies, really represents a separate semantic field with its own characteristics. Terms such as *minjian xinyang* 民間信仰 or *minsu zongjiao* 民俗宗教 cannot be easily equated with “popular” or “folk religion,” since they carry quite different connotations in their cultural, linguistic, and scholarly contexts—contexts that frequently shift between the academic worlds of Taiwan, the People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong, Japan, and Chinese-speaking scholars in Southeast Asia. We need a separate investigation of that field before we can study its interactions with the Western conceptual nomenclatures.⁴

⁴ When I presented the first version of this paper at the 4th Sinological Symposium at Fu Jen University in Taipei in November of 2006, my failure to clearly separate the discussion of Western- and Chinese-language concepts was a cause of some confusion for the discussants and the audience.

Catherine Bell's analysis

Fortunately, I do not have to start this project from scratch as Catherine Bell has already provided a foundation with her 1989 review article, "Religion and Chinese Culture: Toward an Assessment of 'Popular Religion.'"⁵ Within the framework of a retrospect on five (then) recent publications,⁶ Bell sketches an overview of conceptual approaches in the study of Chinese religions. She perceives a succession of three models or stages, as she calls them. In the first stage we see a stress on the basic discontinuity between the religions of the elite (the *sanjiao*) and the benighted superstitions of the common people, often labelled *folk religion*. This elite-folk dichotomy might also be expressed in terms of "great" and "little traditions", or of "rational religion" vs. "irrational supernaturalism," and according to Bell "constituted much of the framework of the first generation of scholarship on Chinese religion."⁷ In the second stage this view was challenged by proponents of a holistic view of Chinese culture, which sought to overcome such supposedly artificial bifurcations by stressing the existence of unifying elements that at some level bridge social and cultural divisions. C.K. Yang and Maurice Freedman are cited as representatives of this perspective. Freedman, building on Yang as well as on two mavericks of the first generation of scholars, J.J.M. de Groot and Marcel Granet, emphasized the existence of basic elements of cultural unity across all strata of Chinese society. Obvious differences could be encompassed as locally or socially specific renderings of common cultural themes.⁸ In this switch of perspectives, then, "an initial bifurcation of society into distinct social levels (a first-stage position) is challenged by a focus on underlying unities variously transformed by different subgroups (a second-stage position)."⁹ It is in this second stage that the term "popular religion" is beginning to get used more widely:

⁵ *History of Religions* 29.1 (1989): 35-57. Bell's perspective was also adopted by Stephen Teiser in his state-of-the-field article on Chinese popular religion. See Stephen F. Teiser, "Popular Religion," *Journal of Asian Studies* 54.2 (1995): 378-395.

⁶ Hubert Seiwert, *Volksreligion und nationale Tradition in Taiwan: Studien zur regionalen Religionsgeschichte einer chinesischen Provinz* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1985); David K. Jordan & Daniel L. Overmyer, *The Flying Phoenix: Aspects of Chinese Sectarianism in Taiwan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, and Evelyn S. Rawski, ed., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985); Robert P. Weller, *Unities and Diversities in Chinese Religion* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1987); P. Steven Sangren, *History and Magical Power in a Chinese Community* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987).

⁷ Bell, "Religion and Chinese Culture," 40.

⁸ Maurice Freedman, "On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion," in *The Study of Chinese Society: Essays by Maurice Freedman*, selected and introduced by G. William Skinner (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1979), 351-369.

⁹ Bell, "Religion and Chinese Culture," 41.

In a typical second-stage position, that is, one emphasizing cultural unity, the term “popular religion” is used to indicate the very basis of this unity. Popular religion may be variously characterized as a set of fundamental values, traditional practices, and attitudes that span all classes or regions, or a set of distinct social organizations that have come to mediate elite and peasant worldviews. In both characterizations, however, popular religion functions as the medium for the diffusion of common values to a variety of subgroups, each of which may appropriate them in distinctive ways.¹⁰

The clash of the respective emphases on cultural unity or diversity is resolved in what Bell terms “third-stage approaches,” which are said to “reject both a priori bifurcations as well as synthetic entities that mediate them (i.e., the reification of popular religion as a set of institutions, practices, or values).”¹¹ What third stage approaches offer instead is an open-ended investigation of the dynamic interplay of unity and difference. Religion becomes part and parcel of this cultural dynamic, a “fully embedded cultural system.” Culture in turn

.... comes to be described as the relationship of the parts to the whole, the ‘production’ of meanings, or the ‘construction’ of history and community. Unity and diversity become intrinsic to the dynamics of cultural holism. Third-stage approaches do not isolate religious institutions—or religion per se—as the data of analysis; rather, they focus on symbols and rituals in which they see the dynamics of culture played out.¹²

Accordingly, in such a perspective, the term “popular religion” loses its referent and should perhaps be replaced by “religious cultures,” as suggested by Natalie Z. Davis for the study of early modern Europe—a shift in perspective that is clearly linked with the Cultural Studies approach then gaining strength in the field of Religious Studies at large.¹³

Bell is careful to point out that the sequencing of these stages reflects a historical development of paradigms, showing how “terminological rearrangements and arguments naturally differentiate themselves from preceding paradigms while retaining many basic assumptions.” No “teleological significance” supposedly attaches to the sequence, and Bell emphasizes that “the debate of culture, society, and history evidenced in these three positions is a longstanding one and not likely to be

¹⁰ Bell, “Religion and Chinese Culture,” 42.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Bell, “Religion and Chinese Culture,” 43.

¹³ “From ‘Popular Religion’ to Religious Cultures,” in *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research*, ed. Steven Ozment (St. Louis, MO: Center for Reformation Research, 1982), 321-343, Discussed in Bell, “Religion and Chinese Culture,” 38.

‘resolved’ through the hegemony of any one position or set of terms.”¹⁴ However, her reader gets a clear sense that the “third-stage approach” is where the field is and should be headed, a position Bell would share with Natalie Z. Davis, whom she quotes prominently in her article. In spite of her proviso that none of these three positions will likely gain hegemony, the picture she presented in her analysis in fact does not show three positions vying for hegemony, but two positions, namely, the first and second stage approaches. These are presented in a neatly dialectical manner as thesis and antithesis, with the third-stage approach serving as the synthesis that does in fact “resolve” their contradictions by providing space for both unity and diversity without committing to a particular overarching model of Chinese culture. The researcher’s focus moves instead to areas of symbolic praxis where unity and diversity are negotiated, constructed, and communicated. The term “popular religion” would have a place in such an approach only as a translation of some indigenous notion and thus as an element in the communicative process that is the object of study. As an analytical concept it would have to be abandoned along with the higher-order notion of “religion” as a reified category imposed from the outside that may actually block or distort our view of the indigenous cultural dynamic.

I would like to address the merits of Bell’s model as a way of developing my (different) understanding of the history of this field of study. Let me clarify here that while I disagree with Bell’s reconstruction of the history of the study of Chinese popular religion, I do agree with the general drift of her teleological argument. While (in my view) the field did not develop historically in the neatly dialectical manner outlined by Bell, her conclusion as to where the field is and should be headed by and large agrees with my own views. In the following two sections I will therefore present, first, an overview of the historical development of the conceptual apparatus in the study of Chinese popular religion, and then, second, a tentative outlook on the new directions our conceptualisations may be and should be taking in the future.

Concepts of popular religion in the history of the field

Bell follows Freedman in taking as the starting point of her review of research on popular religion a “first generation of scholarship” that seems to consist of a group of scholars operating with a well-formed and fairly rigid elite/folk distinction. Freedman describes this group as English-speaking social scientists between the 1930s and 1950s.¹⁵ According to him, these social scientists discovered “that behind the Confucian smoke-screen there lay hidden a different way of life and a different set of

¹⁴ Bell, “Religion and Chinese Culture,” 54.

¹⁵ Maurice Freedman, “On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion,” 355.

values: roughly, the culture of the peasants.”¹⁶ Freedman/Bell are justified in narrowing their focus to such a group, insofar as it is here that we first see the elite/folk dichotomy clearly expressed and theoretically justified. However, popular religion was discussed long before this “first generation,” albeit without a developed conceptual vocabulary. An accurate picture of the field’s history needs to reach back much farther, namely, to the missionary writers and sinologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who in turn were building on the work produced by Jesuit missionaries since the sixteenth century. Timothy Barrett recently emphasized again the formative influence of the Ming and Qing period Catholic scholars on modern sinology.¹⁷ For popular religion the main effect of that influence was for a long time not (as in Bell’s first stage) to separate it from elite religion, but to render it invisible. The seminal texts declared the religion of China to consist of the “three teachings,” which operated in mutual complementarity, even if not equality, given the strong Jesuit preference for Confucianism. Popular religious practice did not enter the conceptual picture of Chinese religious life, even though missionaries were of course quite aware of the theological problems it posed (e.g., in the Chinese rites controversy). When popular practice was apperceived it was understood as a degenerate version of elite practice (e.g., popular ancestor worship vs. elite ancestor veneration; or popular religion as a low form of Daoism). Underlying the Jesuit construction of Chinese religion thus was a holistic vision that ultimately saw a single religious system, with popular practice appearing at best as a degenerate and syncretic version of the *sanjiao*, if it was mentioned at all.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ T.H. Barrett, “Chinese Religion in English Guise: The History of an Illusion,” *Modern Asian Studies* 39.3 (2005): 509-533.

¹⁸ The *sanjiao* in turn were regarded as degenerations from the original faith of the human race, which is best preserved in the Biblical tradition. Jesuit holism was much more radical than any social-science approach of the twentieth century, in that it viewed all religions of China as distorted echoes of the knowledge of God that Adam and Eve had possessed in paradise. Of the *sanjiao*, Matteo Ricci regarded Confucianism as closest to that authentic tradition, which it could fully rediscover in the Christian gospel offered by the Roman Church. On the role of Christian holism in Renaissance and Reformation period Europe, see Jacques Solé, *Les Mythes chrétiens de la Renaissance aux Lumières* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1979), 115-173. However, missionaries working in rural communities could not ignore popular practice beyond the *sanjiao*, even if their conceptual framework did not provide a separate category for it. In the recently rediscovered *Opusculum de Sectis apud Sinenses et Tunkinenses* of Adriano di St. Thecla, OAD, the author, an eighteenth century missionary in northern Vietnam, provides the standard overview of the “three sects” (“Sect of the Literati”, “Sect of the Magicians”, and “Sect of the Worshipers [of Buddha]”), but clearly feels that religious practice on the ground is not sufficiently explained by this model. So he adds two chapters “On Spirits and Their Cults” and “On Fortune-Tellers and Diviners”. Thus, at least in practical terms we see here an awareness of “popular practice” as not completely encompassed by the *sanjiao*, even though in these chapters the author still tries to identify elements of practice with *sanjiao* ideas. Adriano di St. Thecla, *Opusculum de Sectis apud Sinenses et Tunkinenses (A Small Treatise on the Sects among the Chinese and Tonkinese): A Study of Religion in China and North Vietnam in the Eighteenth Century*, transl. and annot. by Olga Dror, with the collaboration of Mariya Berezovska (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2002).

This holistic approach continued in much of the missionary literature of the nineteenth century. The dominant view of Chinese religion was that of a unitary system encompassing three complementary traditions. If a distinction between folk and elite religion was made, it usually did not follow the class-based bifurcation of Chinese religious culture claimed by Bell. Instead missionary scholars applied one (or both) of two perspectives:

First, some regarded all of Chinese religion as a mass of heathen superstition with little distinction between elites and masses. In this case, Chinese religion as a whole served as an Other to the missionary's modern and rational Christianity. Joseph Edkins may serve as an example of this attitude. After pointing out that the Chinese practise three religions simultaneously and harmoniously, he offers his view of how such a thing is possible:

What is the cause of this indifference? Why do they care so little about finding out what is the truth and holding to it? Several answers may be given to this inquiry. They are superstitious, but wanting in conscientiousness. They accept legends as true without examining whether there is any good evidence for them or not. They care more to have divinities that seem to meet their wants and can do for them what they wish to be done, than to have truth and certainty to rest upon.¹⁹

In other words, Chinese religion as viewed by missionaries was an incoherent mixture of superstitions, lacking in Christianity's theological rigour. Here the modern, rational faith of Christianity is juxtaposed with an irrational Chinese religion that as a whole functions as "folk" to Christianity's elite status (though the terms as such are not employed).

Second, if Victorian missionary writers did make distinctions within Chinese religion, it usually was between what Norman Girardot phrased as "pure philosophy" and "corrupt religion".²⁰ Again, the terms of elite and folk are not yet employed; lived religious practice is again seen as a phenomenon involving all classes. The dichotomy is placed here between the high-minded scriptural traditions and their actual practice. In this perspective, what we might call popular religion today is usually treated as a degenerate version of the *sanjiao*, and in particular of Daoism.²¹

¹⁹ Joseph Edkins. *Religion in China: Containing a Brief Account of the Three Religions of the Chinese, with Observations on the Prospects of Christian Conversion Amongst that People*, 2nd ed. (Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1878), 58-59.

²⁰ Norman Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 316.

²¹ So, for example, James Legge, *The Religions of China: Confucianism and Tâoism Described and*

Thus the dominant view of Chinese religion in the nineteenth century continued to be a holistic one that saw a basic unity in religious practice and belief across all classes, with disjunctions between textual and practical religion explained by degenerative processes resulting in rampant superstition.

An elite-folk distinction was thus not a dominant characteristic of nineteenth century missionary writings; conceptual differentiations of elite and folk religions are more prevalent in the writings of early secular scholars. Following Maurice Freedman, Bell claims that J.J.M. de Groot and Marcel Granet were the first ones to challenge “the dichotomies of ‘elite/folk,’ ‘great/little,’ or ‘rational religion/religious supernaturalism’ which constituted much of the framework of the first generation of scholarship on Chinese religion.”²² However, if I am right in my interpretation that nineteenth century missionary literature did not evince these dichotomies (with the exception of the one juxtaposing “rational religion” with “religious supernaturalism”), how should Granet’s and de Groot’s contributions then be regarded? In my view, they certainly did do what Freedman credited them with, namely, to present systematic models of how the seeming multiplicity of Chinese religious practices can be integrated into a single religious system. They did so, however, by focussing their predecessors’ fuzzy theological holism into one that takes account of structural differences in Chinese society. The earlier of the two scholars, de Groot (1854-1921), combines an ambitious enthusiasm for the discovery of a “religious system of China” (the title of his best-known work) with an awareness that this religious system does not apply equally to all classes. He emphasizes the lived religion of China (mostly in the vicinity of Amoy, Fujian province), but ties it into a system by reference to classical canonical sources, thus establishing historical continuity between religion as practice and religion as encoded in canonical texts. He clarifies that the resulting fusion of diachronicity and synchronicity provides a picture of religious life that is valid primarily for “the well-to-do classes and families of fashionable standing, amongst whom, in China, we chiefly moved, and these may be said best to maintain the whole system of the rites and ceremonies prescribed by the laws of custom.”²³ His descriptions of the elements of China’s religious system are replete with distinctions between “the orthodox and notable among the citizens” on the one hand,²⁴ and the “lower classes” on the other,²⁵ but the difference between their religious observances generally is one of style and elaboration rather than content and

Compared with Christianity (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1880).

²² Bell, “Religion and Chinese Culture,” 40.

²³ J.J.M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China* (1892; reprint, Taipei: Southern Materials Center, 1989), 1: 2.

²⁴ De Groot, *The Religious System of China*, 1: 9.

²⁵ De Groot, *The Religious System of China*, 1: 192.

substance. Thus, even though de Groot operates with an implicit folk and elite distinction, the picture he paints is a holistic one of a unified system of practice across class boundaries, which is firmly rooted in the classical textual traditions. He even comes up with a name for this system: “universism.”²⁶

Marcel Granet (1884-1940) also offered a holistic view of Chinese religion, as evinced by the singular mode of his book’s title, *La Religion des Chinois*.²⁷ The basic unity of Chinese religion is rooted in the ancient peasant religion whose ritual and festive occasions of collective effervescence are the wellspring of religious thought and are echoed in the great texts. This agrarian basis is elaborated into, first, feudal religion and then, into the official religion of imperial times. Despite external differences in the observances of “nobles and peasants,” they both stay rooted in the agrarian religion of antiquity and its continuing ethos.²⁸ Bell is certainly right in regarding Granet as a pioneer of cultural holism, but just as in the case of de Groot, his holism is one that is aware of difference and seeks to explain unity in the face of obvious social and cultural diversity. Neither shirks social “bifurcations” into elite and folk, but tries to show how unity operates within that division.²⁹ Which goes to show that a dichotomy of elite and popular cultures in terms of their social basis (class) and cultural style does not necessarily imply an assumption of cultural discontinuity.

A similar criticism applies to Freedman’s (and Bell’s) treatment of the Great and Little Tradition paradigm introduced by Robert Redfield. Freedman was concerned to distinguish his holistic model of Chinese culture from “the tired intellectual world of the Great and Little Traditions.”³⁰ Yes, Redfield’s model was based on reified notions of elite and folk levels of society, but then the facts of social hierarchy, differential distribution of power between urban centres and the countryside, limited social mobility, and cultural (and ethnic!) diversity were hard to ignore in the Mexico of the 1920s and 1930s, specifically on the Yucatan peninsula where Redfield did his fieldwork. However, his acute sense of social inequality and hierarchy did not cause Redfield to posit radical cultural discontinuities. Quite the opposite: the Great and Little Tradition model should actually be a “second-stage” approach in Bell’s scheme

²⁶ J.J.M. de Groot, *Universismus: die Grundlage der Religion und Ethik, des Staatswesens und der Wissenschaften Chinas* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1918).

²⁷ Marcel Granet, *La Religion des Chinois* (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1922).

²⁸ See Maurice Freedman’s summary in his “On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion,” 361-364.

²⁹ Granet may even claim to have anticipated Bell’s third-stage approach in a later publication, where he reflects critically on the usefulness of “religion” as a category in the study of Chinese culture: “La vérité est qu’en Chine la *religion* n’est, pas plus que le *droit*, une *fonction différenciée* de l’activité sociale. Quand on traite de la civilisation chinoise sans vouloir jeter les faits dans des cadres qui, pour telle autre civilisation, peuvent paraître valables, on ne doit point réserver à la religion un chapitre.” *La Pensée chinoise* (1934; Paris: Albin Michel, 1968), 476. (Emphasis in original)

³⁰ Freedman, “On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion,” 366.

as it conceptualises peasant societies as fundamentally parts of greater social and cultural wholes. At least in its mature formulation as presented in his 1956 book, *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization*, Redfield defines Great and Little Tradition as two cultural levels that are interdependent and engaged in a continuous exchange of cultural elements.³¹ By incorporating McKim Marriott's notions of "universalization" (the flow of Little Tradition elements "up" into the Great Tradition) and "parochialization" (the flow of Great Tradition elements "down" into the Little Tradition), Redfield presents a model that still has its shortcomings—but a simplistic elite/folk "bifurcation" is not one of them.³² In fact, in his 1956 book he calls for particular attention to be given to the channels of communication that negotiate Great and Little Traditions, e.g., the role of theatre in translating the great epics into the vernacular and bringing them to the illiterate masses of India. Such a research orientation is not dissimilar to the one espoused by several articles in the volume *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, which is reviewed positively by Bell.

The purpose of the previous paragraph is not to rehabilitate Redfield, but to point out that Bell's neat dialectic of diversity vs. unity, resolved by the "religion as culture" perspective, does not represent "a sequence of arguments that emerged historically."³³ Unity and diversity positions have been held variously since the Jesuits' first reports on Chinese religion and have little direct correlation with the use or non-use of terms such as folk religion. Redfield's mature Great/Little Tradition model may in fact be seen as a first attempt to deal with the unity/diversity issue synthetically, through the introduction of the "universalization/parochialization" cycle. If we look at the study of Chinese popular religion in historical sequence, what we find, rather than Bell's model, is at first a theologically based holism that lumped all of Chinese religion together in the *sanjiao* model. There was little awareness of popular religion as an autonomous sphere of religious belief and practice. If distinctions were made, it was between the "high philosophy" of the ancients and the corrupt present-day practice, without however inserting the kind of elite/folk dichotomy that Bell regards as characteristic of the first generation of scholars. De Groot and Granet, who in Bell's (and Freedman's) estimation first resisted facile elite-folk bifurcations, quite to the contrary were among the first to introduce such a viewpoint, though their models of Chinese religion (in the singular) ultimately remain holistic. Of the two, Granet seems

³¹ Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 71.

³² Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture*, 95-96. Marriott developed these notions in his study, "Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization," in *Anthropology of Folk Religion*, ed. Charles Leslie (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), 169-218. This essay was first published in 1955.

³³ Bell, "Religion and Chinese Culture," 54.

more aware of the impact of cultural difference (agrarian vs. urban, peasants vs. feudal and imperial elites) on the formation of that single Chinese religion, while de Groot regards the religion of the “lower classes” as simply a reduced version of that of the “well-to-do classes”.

It is my contention that the kind of bifurcation that Bell worries about is a more recent phenomenon and goes back to the development of ethnographic field research, primarily after World War II. The ethnographer seeking to construct a culture out of local beliefs and practices almost inevitably makes these into a system. Once local religion is described as a system, there arises the question of how this system links up with the larger system of Chinese religion presented in the scholarly literature. It is at this point that elite-folk models enter the picture. To repeat: for much of the earlier missionary or text-based scholarship an elite-folk distinction was not relevant, as it was not aware that local religious practices may possess any kind of logic of their own. While the facts of local religion were meticulously catalogued, they were regarded as unsystematic fragments of the *sanjiao*, or perhaps survivals of ancient animistic beliefs. Only systematic village studies could provide a context in which an elite-folk distinction made sense.

This does not mean that we do not have forerunners in pre-WWII scholarship, and even among textual scholars; Henri Maspero insisted already in 1928 that

The three religions, as defined systems, have had no more than a historical interest for the past several centuries. The people practise neither the three together nor each of the three separately. A popular religion has taken shape in the course of the ages, and this has borrowed various ideas from all three; but it is clearly distinct from them and must be considered a separate system.³⁴

In a series of lectures composed around 1941, Maspero further develops this idea of popular religion (*religion populaire*) by insisting that the “masses populaires” separated themselves from the *sanjiao* and created a syncretic system, into which Buddhist and Daoist clergy are integrated as ritual specialists. Even for purely Buddhist, Daoist, or state cult rituals, the interpretation of the faithful does not conform to that religion, but to the separate system that is modern popular religion (*la religion populaire moderne*). The autonomy of this system has rarely been recognized

³⁴ Henri Maspero, “The Mythology of Modern China,” in *Taoism and Chinese Religion* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), 78. (Engl. translation of *Le Taoïsme et les religions chinoises*, Gallimard, 1971). This essay was first published in 1928.

by Western observers trying to dissect it into Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian elements. In Maspero's view, this is like trying to describe modern Christianity by dividing it into elements drawn from Judaism, Greek philosophy, ancient oriental religions, and ancient local cults. In this mode, a Chinese might declare that the French practise 3 religions: Christianity (exemplified in the mass), Judaism (Easter/Passover), and the mystery cults of the Goddess (baptism). Even if it is interesting historically to study the origins of these items, the present day whole is more than the assemblage of the parts. The parts get their meaning not from their historic origins, but from their place in that modern whole. Beyond the *sanjiao*, this modern popular religion also draws on elements of the ancient agrarian religion, but again they derive their meaning not from their historical origin, but from their place and role in the modern context.³⁵ He summarizes:

En fait, pour comprendre la religion populaire moderne, ce ne sont ni les Rituels confucéens, ni les livres saints du Bouddhisme ou du Taoïsme qu'il faut interroger. Ce sont les paysans eux-mêmes. Par l'étude des livres, on peut établir l'origine historique d'une cérémonie ou d'une croyance, mais on n'a aucunement le droit d'en tirer une explication de sa valeur ou de son interprétation actuelles.³⁶

Post-WWII field research in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and among overseas Chinese took this charge seriously and went out to discover the "système à part" of popular religion. It is in this context that terms such as "folk religion" or "popular religion" found wider application. One of the post-war ethnographic pioneers was Alan J. A. Elliott, whose 1955 study of Chinese spirit-medium cults in Singapore is predicated on the notion of a popular religion for which he crafted the name "Shenism," derived from the Chinese word for deity *shen* 神 and from informants' frequent summary description of their religious activities as *baishen* 拜神, "worshipping the gods". While Elliott states that the "dominant themes" of Shenism "are drawn from popular and corrupt Taoism, with influences from Confucianism and Buddhism and, perhaps, more importantly, from ancient folk religion," he analyses this newly-found Fourth Teaching not as a ragbag of doctrinal odds and ends, but as a system by itself.³⁷ While Elliott's moniker of "Shenism" has not caught on, his concern with treating popular religion as a system became paradigmatic for his successors.³⁸

³⁵ Henri Maspero. "La religion chinoise dans son développement historique," in *Mélanges posthumes sur les religions et l'histoire de la Chine. Vol. I: Les religions chinoises* (Paris: Circulations du Sud, 1950), 111-114.

³⁶ Henri Maspero. "La religion chinoise dans son développement historique," 115.

³⁷ Alan J. A. Elliott, *Chinese Spirit-Medium Cults in Singapore* (London: Department of Anthropology, The London School of Economics and Political Science, 1955), 29.

³⁸ Be it noted, however, that Shenism was resurrected in a recent publication on religion in Singapore.

The bulk of ethnographic research was produced from the 1960s to the 1980s in Taiwan, supplemented by a significant number of studies in the New Territories of Hong Kong. A random sampling of studies finds different nomenclatures: folk religion,³⁹ folk belief,⁴⁰ popular religion,⁴¹ popular belief,⁴² Chinese religion,⁴³ and sometimes simply “religion,” as in the religion of the community studied. There is no clear progression to be perceived from the use of “folk” to that of “popular religion,” as Bell would claim. Instead, these various terms are employed as mere labels for the religious systems discovered or construed by the ethnographer. These labels would only take on the meanings Bell attributes to them once scholars tried to integrate the local religion discovered in field studies with the larger picture of Chinese religion involving the *sanjiao* and the state cult. After the early grand effort by C. K. Yang with his distinction of institutional and diffused religion,⁴⁴ such reflection began to pick up speed in the 1970s, with Maurice Freedman’s article “On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion,” and David K. Jordan’s “The Jiaw of Shigaang (Taiwan): An Essay in Folk Interpretation”⁴⁵ as the pioneers. Both try to balance unity and diversity, Freedman by stipulating a cultural process in which different beliefs and ideas are seen as

... reflections, perhaps misshapen reflections, or idiomatic translations of one another, as in their transmission back and forth between social strata, between sect and “church,” between “church” and “church,” between text and living language, between the cultivated and the popular. Their Chineseness lies in a basic stock upon which

See Kuah-Pearce Khun Eng, *State, Society, and Religious Engineering: Towards a Reformist Buddhism in Singapore* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2003).

³⁹ David K. Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors: Folk Religion in a Taiwanese Village* (1972; reprinted, Taipei: Caves Books, 1985); C. Stevan Harrell, “The Concept of Soul in Chinese Folk Religion,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 38.3 (1979): 519-528; John R. Clammer, ed., *Studies in Chinese Folk Religion in Singapore and Malaysia*, Contributions to Southeast Asian Ethnography 2 (Singapore: Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore, 1983); Stevan Harrell, “Men, Women, and Ghosts in Taiwanese Folk Religion,” in *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*, ed. Caroline Walker Bynum et al. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 97-116; P. Steven Sangren, *History and Power in a Chinese Community* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987);

⁴⁰ C. Stevan Harrell, “When a Ghost Becomes a God,” in *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, ed. Arthur P. Wolf (Stanford, CA: Stanford California Press, 1974), 193-206.

⁴¹ Stephan Feuchtwang, “City Temples in Taipei Under Three Regimes,” in *The Chinese City Between Two Worlds*, ed. Mark Elvin & G. William Skinner (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), 263-301.

⁴² Harrell, “When a Ghost Becomes a God.”

⁴³ Arthur P. Wolf, “Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors,” in *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, ed. Arthur P. Wolf (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), 131-182.

⁴⁴ C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors* (1961; reprinted, Taipei: SMC Publishing, 1994).

⁴⁵ David K. Jordan, “The Jiaw of Shigaang (Taiwan): An Essay in Folk Interpretation,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 35(1976): 81-107.

complex social and intellectual life works and elaborates variety.⁴⁶

Jordan, by contrast, locates unity in shared practice while allowing for an interpretive diversity that may not be resolvable in terms of “idiomatic translation.” The *jiao* 醮 of Xigang 西港 shows how participants with very different understandings of its meaning may cooperate in the same activity:

As each man focuses his attention on his own sphere of participation, the theology of the other man in another sphere becomes irrelevant. Though sufficient cooperation is maintained for the Jiaw to continue on its three-year cycle, differences in exegesis continue undetected or ignored by participants.⁴⁷

Through the 1980s we find more attempts to correlate elite and popular versions of Chinese religion. Robert P. Weller devoted a whole monograph to that question, which he approached in a way similar to Jordan’s study ten years earlier. Weller’s *Unities and Diversities in Chinese Religion* again takes a unified ritual context (the Universal Salvation festival 普渡), but arrives at a more sophisticated classification of interpretive “styles” as based on social experience and applied in an ongoing social construction of culture. Different social context support different styles of interpretation, which Weller classifies by means of two polarities: “ideologized” / “pragmatic;” “active” / “passive.”⁴⁸

Another notable effort to work with elite/folk notions of Chinese religion was made by Christian Jochim, who for this purpose went back to the Great/Little Tradition model of Redfield.⁴⁹ He presented another version of this synthetic approach, this time combining it with Mary Douglas’ model of “grid” and “group,” in a 1988 article in the *Journal of Chinese Religions*.⁵⁰

In conclusion of this section, it should be emphasized that it was the anthropological field research from the 1950s onwards that brought the issue of a folk/elite clearly within scholarly purview. Far from opposing a supposedly entrenched bifurcated vision of Chinese religion, ethnographic research served to establish it as an object of analysis in the first place. Ethnographers used the terms

⁴⁶ Freedman, “On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion,” 352-353.

⁴⁷ Jordan, “The Jiaw of Shigaang,” 105.

⁴⁸ Weller, *Unities and Diversities in Chinese Religion*.

⁴⁹ Christian Jochim, *Chinese Religions: A Cultural Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986), 15.

⁵⁰ Christian Jochim. “‘Great’ and ‘Little’, ‘Grid’ and ‘Group’: Defining the Poles of the Elite-Popular Continuum in Chinese Religion.” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 16(1988): 18-42.

“folk” and “popular” without clear semantic distinctions, certainly not with the distinction perceived by Bell as indicating a bifurcated vs. a holistic view of culture.

The future of popular religion

While Bell’s review article is to be treated with caution as a historical account of the concept of folk or popular religion in the study of Chinese religion, this criticism does not invalidate her argument *qua* argument: The question of whether to emphasize socio-cultural stratification (marked with the term “folk religion”) or unification (indicated by Bell’s definition of “popular religion”) is a fundamental one for the study of any complex civilization. Common sense supports Bell’s contention that this is not a matter of deciding between the two options, but treating them as poles that create a dynamic tension which is the true locus of the production of culture. A highly stratified and geographically diverse society such as, for example, late Imperial China can be expected to show both region- and class-based variation in its religious culture(s), while at the same time maintaining a degree of cultural cohesion that produces a sense of “Chineseness” among all inhabitants. Therefore, Bell’s description of her “third-stage approach” would seem to offer a useful outlook for future studies:

A third-stage approach to Chinese religion can be said to reject both a priori bifurcations as well as synthetic entities that mediate them (i.e., the reification of popular religion in a set of institutions, practices, or values). This third position wants to suggest that the holism of culture is not a shared level of social interaction nor a diffused set of normative ideas. Culture, it implies, is neither a single ideology nor a single social group identity disseminated across the society to unite diverse communities. Rather, culture is presumed to involve the internal generation of both distinctions and unities, and its holism is described as a function of either underlying structures of some sort or the imposed limits of geography as they moderate the degrees of similarity and difference. From this perspective, culture comes to be described as the relationship of the parts to the whole, the “production” of meanings, or the “construction” of history and community. Unity and diversity become intrinsic to the dynamics of cultural holism.⁵¹

This would call for a research approach that does not establish artificial cultural and religious boundaries a priori by deciding to study, say, only the “popular religion” of a Taiwanese village excluding thereby the religious experiences of religious specialists such as Daoist priests or Buddhist nuns who are part of or interact with that

⁵¹ Bell, “Religion and Chinese Culture,” 42-43.

community. Conversely, one would also not aim to study “Buddhism” as a religion by concentrating solely on the local sangha or on Buddhist texts. “Religion” instead would be viewed as the ongoing process of meaning-making involving all the actors in their particular social and cultural contexts. The object of study would be this process which operates in the lived experience of all participants.

Outside the Chinese religions field, we find such an approach described and advocated as the study of “lived religion” in U.S. history. One of its best-known proponents is Robert A. Orsi of Harvard University. He launched an important critique of the notion of popular religion in the second edition of his *The Madonna of 115th Street*, a study of the Italian-American worship of a Madonna figure in Little Harlem, New York.⁵² While employing the category of popular religion in the first edition of the book, by the second edition Orsi had abandoned it and opted instead for the notion of “lived religion.” To him, the term popular religion is “unclear, misleading, and tendentious.” It served “to seal off certain expressions of religious life from an unspecified but obviously normative ‘religion’ (without the qualifier *popular*).... The term instituted unnecessary and confusing boundaries.”⁵³ While Bell saw *popular religion* as a holistic term, designed to describe unity rather than diversity, Orsi regards it as a variant of *folk religion* that carries with it the same kind of ideological baggage. His alternative, the study of “lived religion,” by contrast,

... situates all religious creativity within culture and approaches all religion as lived experience, theology no less than lighting a candle for a troubled loved one; spirituality as well as other, less culturally sanctioned forms of religious expression (such as licking the stones of a church floor). Rethinking religion as a form of cultural work, the study of lived religion directs attention to institutions *and* persons, texts *and* rituals, practice *and* theology, things *and* ideas—all as media of making and unmaking worlds.⁵⁴

This “lived religion” approach harmonizes with Bell’s vision of a “religious cultures” perspective by embedding religious ideas and practices in a wide, open-ended cultural framework. In his study of the Madonna of 115th Street, this approach allowed Orsi to discover (construe?) the primary source of the Madonna’s meaning not in any Catholic notions of sainthood, but in Italian-American family and kinship values, which Orsi brings into focus in the notion of “domus.” Orsi’s lived religion perspective does not offer startlingly novel theoretical or methodological insights.

⁵² New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

⁵³ Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, xiv.

⁵⁴ Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, xix. Emphases in the original.

Theoretically, its notion of religion as a form of cultural work creating meaningful worlds stands in the time-honoured tradition of the sociology of knowledge of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, which in turn continues and further develops the works of Max Weber and Alfred Schütz.⁵⁵ *Methodologically*, it is indebted to Clifford Geertz's "thick description" approach to ethnography, as well as Continental European micro-historiography exemplified in the works of, say, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Carlo Ginzburg.⁵⁶ Orsi's contribution lay in bringing these strands together to stimulate a change of approach in a field of study (religion in the United States) that was largely focused on texts and church-historical perspectives by calling on students of religion to locate their object of study not in reified spheres such as "churches", "sacred texts", "sects", and, yes, "popular religion," but in the lived experience and continuously negotiated cultural work of communities and individuals. To repeat Orsi's statement quoted above: "Rethinking religion as a form of cultural work, the study of lived religion directs attention to institutions *and* persons, texts *and* rituals, practice *and* theology, things *and* ideas—all as media of making and unmaking worlds." This is a salutary reminder not to compartmentalize our research or to reify as religion specific discourses and institutions to the exclusion of others, salutary in particular for historians, sinologists, and Religious Studies scholars who have a tendency to privilege texts over rituals, institutions over persons, theology over practice, ideas over things—a tendency prevalent not just among historians of American religions, but also in the China field.

What consequences might such a methodology have in the study of Chinese religions? Let us use an example: Any survey of the field of Buddhist studies will reveal its strong emphasis on sacred texts, major representatives of the sangha, and Buddhist philosophy. The typical Buddhism textbook presents the core of Buddhism as consisting essentially of the Three Jewels: Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, and its history as the successive emergence of new ideas concerning them in the shape of new schools and movements. Schools, ideas, texts—without doubt important elements of Buddhism, but what role do they play in Buddhism as an ongoing venture of world-construction?⁵⁷ Ultimately, Buddhism exists only insofar as people live

⁵⁵ For the classical formulations see Alfred Schütz, *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt: Eine Einleitung in die verstehende Soziologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974; first published 1934); Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966); Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990; first published 1967).

⁵⁶ See, for example, Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3-30; Ladurie, *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975); Ginzburg, *Il formaggio e i vermi: Il cosmo di un mugnaio del '500* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1976).

⁵⁷ The majority of scholars of religion tend toward the study of canonical texts and the ideas and

it—and schools, ideas, and texts are just some of the factors that go into the construction of lived Buddhism(s) in different historical, social, and geographic contexts. A shift in perspective to Buddhism as construed in concrete social and cultural contexts would help undermine the reified notion of Buddhism as primarily (and normatively) represented by monastic institutions and personnel as well as their authoritative interpretation of sacred texts. The challenge here would be not just to add sections on “popular” or “folk” Buddhism to the textbook (which nowadays many of them already have), but to radically change the way we approach Buddhism—for example, not as encased in canonical texts, but as arising out of the interaction of texts with other factors in people’s lives (worship, sacrifice, illness, kinship, death, work, etc.). In Orsi’s terms:

Religion is always religion-in-action, religion-in-relationships between people, between the way the world is and the way people imagine or want it to be. The interpretive challenge of the study of lived religion is to develop the practice of disciplined attention to people’s signs and practices as they describe, understand, and use them, in the circumstances of their experiences, and to the structures and conditions within which these signs and practices emerge. [...]

It is pointless to study particular beliefs and practices—the Catholic teaching on the Virgin Mary, for example, or the Pentecostal theology of sanctification—apart from the people who use these ideas in the definite circumstances of their lives.⁵⁸

Applied to the study of Chinese popular religion, Orsi’s “radical empirical approach”⁵⁹ would imply first of all that we abandon the notion of popular religion as a way of delimiting our field of study, of including some religious phenomena (e.g., the cult of Mazu and the possession trance of mediums), while excluding others (e.g., the meditation practices of Daoist priests or a learned monk’s exegesis of the Lotus Sutra). We would be studying “religion” unqualified by any adjective, be it “popular” or “Buddhist,” religion as it is constructed and negotiated in the lives of the individuals, groups, and communities we are studying. It seems to me that such an approach would be very fruitful in its ability to cross and transcend the inflexible

practices of religious specialists. A case in point is the recent publication *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, edited by Donald S. Lopez (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005). It contains fifteen essays by fifteen authors on terms such as Buddha, death, art, power etc. The predominant (and in some cases, exclusive) focus of the essays is on canonical texts, art history, monastic institutions, and the celibate sangha. While lay perspectives are addressed (for example in Carl Bielefeldt’s essay on “practice”), they never move to the centre.

⁵⁸ Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, xx, xxi.

⁵⁹ Orsi, “Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live in? Special Presidential Plenary Address, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Salt Lake City, November 2, 2002,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42.2 (2003): 169-174.

categories (*sanjiao* etc.) into which scholars tend to divide up the world of Chinese religions.

Does this mean, though, that we should abandon the concept of “popular religion” completely? No, and here I beg to differ from both Bell and Orsi. Allow me to elaborate.

Orsi insists on throwing the notion of popular religion overboard, because it skews his vision of the networks of social relationships and cultural meanings, and injects a normative factor that divides this web of meaning according to a criterion external to it (popular religion as not quite proper, official, real religion). Bell seeks to abandon both “folk” and “popular” religion, because these terms predetermine a bias towards cultural diversity or unity respectively. For both scholars, the decision is a methodological one, and as such I would agree with it in the sense outlined in the preceding paragraphs. I do, however, consider that the notion of “popular religion” still is useful for at least two other purposes: (1) as a concept that may help analyze the data collected using a lived religion approach, and (2) as a label or indicator for a particular subfield of study. I will discuss these two areas one after the other.

Concerning the first area, even if we do not employ the notion of “popular religion” to define what we study and what not, it may still be useful in ordering and analyzing the data caught in the wide net of lived religion. Specifically, popular religion might be an appropriate descriptor when we find that the religious life of, say, village A has a systematic consistency and limited autonomy that separates it to some extent from other locally present religious systems such as monasteries, sectarian groups, or priestly confraternities—even while it is intertwined and interactive with these. We could, of course, simply choose to call it the religion of village A, which would include all the above-named religious elements without abstracting subsystems from the interconnected network of village A. However, such an approach would come at two kinds of costs: First, it would ignore the dynamic tension in the village’s religious network and would thus obstruct a correct understanding of diversity and conflict within local society. This applies in particular if informants articulate these subsystems themselves and thus operate with an awareness of their autonomous functions in the construction of their own religious experience.⁶⁰ However, even in

⁶⁰ In a 1992 article, anthropologist John Leavitt launched a criticism of the prevailing assumption of cultural holism in the sociological and anthropological study of Indian society by pointing out that it ignores indigenous perceptions of religious and cultural difference that are articulated by informants in terms ironically reminiscent of the supposedly outmoded elite/folk distinctions. During his field research in the Northern Indian Kumaon region, Leavitt “kept finding people acting and making definitions in ways that did not fit holistic models, but in fact looked suspiciously like great- and

the absence of explicit informant recognition, the scholar may be justified to use a term such as *popular religion* to describe an important aspect of local religious life that clearly operates according to a cultural logic of its own. The systematic and partly autonomous character of, say, local temple cults as distinct (even if not separate) from other religious groups and expressions has been discovered in historical and ethnographic studies of Chinese communities from the Song dynasty to the present. “Popular religion” seems a useful term to refer to such a religious system in distinction from others such as Buddhist monastic communities or the state cult—if the understanding is preserved that such labels serve a heuristic function in identifying stable components within integrated cultural networks, but that they are not designed to isolate these from the web of lived experience.

Second, the avoidance of concepts such as “popular religion” makes it difficult to generalize beyond the case-example. If we identify a popular religion of village A, we can then compare it with the popular religion of villages B and C. However, if we insist on regarding the religion of village A only in its own unique context, we have no generalizing language to arrive at insights about Chinese (or Taiwanese, or Cantonese, or Nanyang-Chinese) popular religion as a general cultural phenomenon. Robert L. Orsi is very much aware that his radical empiricism comes at a price: the more we contextualize, the less transferable beyond the immediate context will our knowledge be. In a lecture delivered in November of 2002, he addressed the question “whether the work of those of us who study religious practice or ‘lived religion’ is irrelevant for understanding religion in broader social and political contexts than the intimate, local, and closely-grained ones that generally occupy us.”⁶¹ He raised the question in the context of post-9/11 expectations that religion scholars such as Orsi could help the public (and the government) better understand the “real” Islam. His answer was that there was no such thing as Islam in the singular:

References to something called “Islam,” I said to my friend, explained nothing, and the political violence in the region (however one interpreted it) was a necessary but not sufficient cause of suicide bombings. It seemed to me simply from reading accounts in the papers that what immediately mattered in the lives of suicide bombers was not commitment to an unspecific “Islam” but the circles of friends and kin among whom they lived, the memories they held (their own or those they borrowed or inherited from others), their sense of their place in their immediate world (meaning work and school,

little-traditional dichotomies. [...] Thus, one place where clear differences appear between something like great and little traditions is precisely where it is not supposed to exist, that is, in the ideas of the people themselves.” See his “Cultural Holism in the Anthropology of South Asia: The Challenge of Regional Traditions,” *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, N.S., 26.1 (1992): 20, 21. I would like to thank Dan Cohen for bringing this article to my attention.

⁶¹ “Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant ...,” 169.

friends and clubs), the stories they were told by relatives they loved, bonds of commitment and loyalty to particular friends and kin. “Islam” mattered too, of course, not as a set of authoritative texts or doctrines, but rather as it was discussed and practiced, inflected and constituted within these bonds of friendship, family, and memory, within the worlds of work and school—“Islam” as it was imagined and reimagined in relation to all the other things that people imagine, a thoroughly local Islam, immersed in and responsive to local condition and circumstances.⁶²

Of course, Orsi was criticized that as his style of scholarship was “too grounded in the local, too focused on intimate contexts, it did not lead to knowledge that could be generalized.”⁶³ To which Orsi’s reply is: so much the better. It is not the scholar’s duty to abstract; rather it is his or her duty to study religion in its cultural setting. Removed from the setting it becomes meaningless at best and an ideological tool for policy-makers at worst:

It was said that the Qur’an did not endorse violence; later others insisted that the Qur’an indeed endorsed violence—in either case, however, the assumption was that the text itself, apart from experience and interpretation, could tell us something. All this talk about “Islam” proceeding at such remove from history and practice served only to obscure (and so also to protect Americans from) a clear view of lived experience in Islamic countries, from the complexity of political and religious realities there, and most of all from any understanding of the role of the United States (or, more broadly, the Cold War) in that region. It is precisely against this that a lived religion approach sets itself.⁶⁴

Intellectual integrity would then demand that we resist the siren call of generalization and relevance and stick to what we can really know: the specific, the local, the concrete. However, while Orsi’s warning against the dangers of scholarly generalization and abstraction being instrumentalized for political purposes is well taken, in my view the answer cannot be to withdraw into a radically empirical ivory tower and limit ourselves to telling the stories of our case-examples. Scholarship quintessentially involves the production of knowledge of a more general order derived from the study of specific cases. To achieve this we need to employ abstract concepts such as *Buddhism* and *popular religion* for the analysis of specific data in their specific contexts. Yes, we will always violate some of that context by abstracting from it, but by not doing so we forgo the metalanguage needed to go beyond case-studies

⁶² *ibidem*.

⁶³ *op. cit.*, 169-170.

⁶⁴ *op. cit.*, 171.

and arrive at communicable and transferable knowledge of human meaning-making—an endeavour that is central to my understanding of scholarship, i.e., to a scholar’s way of creating a meaningful world.⁶⁵ I would envision generalization as the kind of careful stepping out from the case-context and engagement with other case-examples that allows circumspect theorizing without losing its roots in the thick description of the concrete. In fact, as Clifford Geertz has pointed out, the purpose of such theorizing is not the building of a general theory of culture, but the interpretation of the specific case: “the essential task of theory building here is not to codify abstract regularities but to make thick description possible, not to generalize across cases but to generalize within them.”⁶⁶ For this purpose, “popular religion” can still be useful concept in the study of Chinese religious cultures past and present.

The second area where the notion of popular religion may continue to be usefully employed is as a label or indicator of a particular sub-field of study. We need a term to designate religious life beyond the institutional confines of the sangha, Daoist monastic orders and ordination lineages, Christian churches, the imperial state cult, or the canonical texts of all these traditions. I am aware that such a usage runs the danger of reinserting the kind of normative reification that the lived religion approach is supposed to overcome. Therefore let me emphasize that here I am merely discussing the use of “popular religion” to indicate a general field of study for classificatory purposes. It would help circumscribe a particular body of scholarship in distinction from other such bodies, but would not make any predeterminations concerning the empirical nature of the Chinese religious landscape. In this sense, *popular religion* is used not as an analytical, but as an indicative concept that helps delineate a field of study without imposing a priori dichotomies.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ There is, of course, also the question where the concrete context ends and abstraction begins. If we take Orsi’s radical empiricism to its conclusion, then even institutions (such as churches and parishes) and ethnic groups (Italian-Americans) are reified abstractions; religion can only ever be “lived” by individuals. Hence even Orsi’s sweeping generalizations about the Italian-American domus complex are in a sense illegitimate, as they go beyond the individual’s lived experience. And indeed, folklorist Leonard Primiano has consequently sought to locate religion primarily in the individual; it is the individual’s “vernacular religion” that should be the scholar’s object of study. Anything beyond the individual’s “uniculture” is abstraction and hence inauthentic. Leonard Norman Primiano, “Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife,” *Western Folklore* 54 (1995): 37-56.

⁶⁶ Geertz, “Thick Description,” 26.

⁶⁷ My use of the term is somewhat similar to Franz-Xaver Kaufmann’s utilization of the term “religion” as a “problem-indicative concept” (*problemanzeigender Begriff*) without a defined substance of its own. See his “Auf der Suche nach den Erben der Christenheit,” in *Religion und Gesellschaft: Texte zur Religionssoziologie*, ed. Karl Gabriel & Hans-Richard Reuter (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004), 216. Jonathan Z. Smith makes a similar point for “religion” as being a “second-order, generic concept” that precisely because of its inherent ambiguity can function to establish a “disciplinary horizon” for Religious Studies, much as the similarly vague concepts of “language” and “culture” do for linguistics and anthropology respectively. See his “Religion, Religions, Religious,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 281-282.

There do exist alternatives to the term *popular religion* that we could consider. In his article on “Popular Religion” in the second edition of *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vincent Goossaert effectively equates popular religion with local religion:

Therefore, the large majority of communities that are not Confucian, Buddhist, or Daoist can be labeled as Chinese popular religion, but this term does not necessarily imply any social class, lack of intellectual sophistication, or heterodoxy. On the other hand, while the three religions have nationwide institutions, cult communities are fundamentally local in nature, and they have been therefore aptly described as “local religion.”⁶⁸

In an encyclopaedia article that is supposed to mirror the state of the field, such an equation of “popular” with “local” is appropriate, because “local religion” is indeed in widespread use as a seemingly more exact substitute for “popular religion.” Now, “local religion” has the advantage of fairly clearly delimiting its subject matter: we are looking at the religious practices and beliefs that obtain in local communities. No judgment is made on whether this religion is practised by an elite or by commoners, or in what relation it stands to the *sanjiao*. Thus by its use we could obviate some of the conceptual pitfalls of folk or popular religion. However, a second look shows that this term carries its own limitations. One is that religion will get limited to that local stage, leaving out its trans-local elements. Given my scholarly interests, for example, it would be hard to encompass popular sects as “local religion” since most of them are characterized by voluntary, rather than community-ascribed membership, and they maintain networks that transcend local communities.⁶⁹ This is a serious limitation of perspective in both historical and ethnographic studies, but it is especially so for the inquiry into modern-day religion. In this age of the Internet and of globalization, lived religion in Chinese societies is not limited to local communities. People participate in religious organizations on a national or even international scale (e.g., Ven. Zhengyan’s Tzu Chi Foundation); they draw ideas and even participate in rituals on the Internet; community temples maintain websites and draw faithful from outside the community, sometimes becoming hubs of commercialized pilgrimages; new religious movements

⁶⁸ Vincent Goossaert, “Chinese Popular Religion,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), 3: 1614.

⁶⁹ Which does not exclude the fact that they may also become a significant, or even dominant, force in local religion. See, for example, Thomas DuBois’ study of northern Chinese villages where community temples are controlled by sectarian groups. Thomas David DuBois, *The Sacred Village: Social Change and Religious Life in Rural North China* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005).

draw on spiritual resources outside the precincts of Chinese tradition (e.g., Tibetan Buddhism, Hinduism, Western esotericism). In a society where local identity becomes more fluid and subject to frequent shifts, to privilege a perspective on local religion makes little sense. Religion is becoming less easily “localizable,” and more and more of it is happening in arenas not covered by the label “local religion.”

Another alternative is “folk religion,” but this term seems too closely tied to its origins in folklore studies, where it is applied primarily to peasant cultures or analogous organic, face-to-face communities;⁷⁰ as such it is too narrow to describe religious life in late Imperial China and certainly too limited to address the modern religious experience.

The term “popular religion,” on the other hand, is usefully vague to fit a large research area. In an encyclopaedia article, Charles Long provides a magisterial overview of the semantic ambiguity that attaches to this term: *Popular religion* has been used to describe the religion of the lay people in distinction from the clerics, of the peasants in distinction from city-dwellers, of ethnic and religious subgroups, but also as the national, common, or civil religion of a society.⁷¹ In my view, “popular religion” can therefore serve the heuristic function of indicating *potential* difference without thereby dichotomizing Chinese religion into folk/elite or lay/clerical sectors. As it has been used both as a marker of unity and of diversity, it can keep both perspectives open. By embodying the dialectic tension of unity and diversity, it may help set a research agenda without limiting its field of application or prejudging its outcome. Popular religion may encompass the folk religion of a traditional village in a historical case-study, the local religion of a modern town (with all its trans-local elements), as well as the religiosity constructed by new, globalized religious movements such as Falungong. In other words, popular religion would encompass the variety of ways religion is constructed or “done” beyond the institutional and textual contexts of the “Great Traditions,” even while considering these contexts as factors in the religious life-world(s) under study. Thus understood, popular religion serves as a lens to gather perspectives on Chinese religion beyond the traditional study of canonical texts and ideas.

The adjective “popular” has the added benefit of opening linkages with the study of popular culture in the sense of non-localized, market- and media-driven cultural production, which has a major impact on the process of meaning-making in modern and modernizing societies. Sociologist Hubert Knoblauch has proposed “popular

⁷⁰ Don Yoder, “Toward a Definition of Folk Religion,” *Western Folklore* 33.1 (1974): 2-15.

⁷¹ Charles Long, “Popular Religion,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 11: 442-452.

religion” (*populäre Religion*) as a conceptual lens through which to study religion in media and market-dominated modern societies.⁷² In his definition, *populäre Religion* is a form of religion “that employs the forms of expression as well as the communicative and economic distribution media of popular culture.”⁷³ For Knoblauch, this concept provides a tool to access some of the ways individuals go about constructing their religious identity in a modern setting, and thus of making Luckmann’s notion of the “invisible religion” amenable to sociological enquiry.⁷⁴

To sum up: the term “popular religion” (or some equivalent thereof) has been in use in the study of Chinese religions since the early twentieth century, though it only moved to the centre of scholarly discourse with the flourishing of ethnographic field research after the Second World War. Along with its cognate “folk religion,” it has been used variously to present Chinese religious culture as continuous or discontinuous across class and regional boundaries. Catherine Bell has offered a critique of the concept as a conceptual predetermination of diversity and unity and has called for a thoroughly contextualized study of religious cultures that centres on the dynamics of unity and diversity in the process of the creation of culture. I introduced Orsi’s notion of “lived religion” as an influential variant of Bell’s approach in the field of Religious Studies and argued that the *method* of lived religion is promising in all areas of the study of Chinese religions. Different from Orsi, however, I do not see a need to abandon “popular religion” as a concept for the *analysis* of data collected in a lived religion study. It may usefully describe aspects of local and trans-local religious culture and thus make them comparable beyond the narrow case-context. Furthermore, we may want to retain this term as a *label* for a sub-field in the study of Chinese religions, encompassing the variety of ways religion is constructed or “done” beyond the institutional and textual contexts of the “Great Traditions.”

⁷² Hubert Knoblauch, “Populäre Religion: Markt, Medien und die Popularisierung der Religion,” *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 8(2000): 143-161.

⁷³ “Populäre Religion ist die Form der Religion, die sowohl die Ausdrucksformen wie die medialen und ökonomischen Verbreitungsmedien der populären Kultur verwendet.” Knoblauch, “Populäre Religion,” 146.

⁷⁴ Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion: the Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1967). Rev. ed.: *Die unsichtbare Religion* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991).

中國宗教研究中「民間宗教」的概念：回顧和展望*

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前言

研究中國宗教的學生時常要花點時間思索他們藉以觀照眼前資料的觀念之鏡。顯然的，我們的研究事業關鍵所在是「宗教」的觀念。這個問題已耗盡我們太多墨水。我們是否應該認為中國擁有數種宗教(比如三教之類的)，或是將中國境內的多歧宗教傳統視為一個主流宗教的變異與增衍，視中國宗教為單一宗教。就此整合與多歧的論辯，我們找到一些資料，探討在中國背景下宗教是否為一合宜的觀念。要知，在時序轉入二十世紀之前，中國語彙中無一字詞可以精確對應 *religion*。目前的「宗教」一詞是源自日文的語彙，目的是特別用來翻譯英、德、法文的 *religion* 一詞。⁷⁵如果前現代中國沒有清楚的「宗教」觀念，眼前將此字詞用於中國文化之上，是否扭曲了我們從此字詞拼湊得來的圖像？⁷⁶我們是否能

*本論文的早些版本提供給輔大第四屆國際研討會「中國宗教研究：現況與展望」(2006年11月24-25日)以及在台灣大學與清華大學的人類系，於2006年11月底及12月初。從中所得到的批評，幫助我寫作此次的版本。在此筆者特地要感謝一下的人：范純武、康豹、顧坤惠、林瑋嬪、馬雷凱、田海、石亦龍、魏思齊及張先清。筆者也要謝謝 Chip Callahan，他也對北美「lived religion」(生活宗教)學術研究提出很多非常寶貴的意見。

⁷⁵ 有關現代中國宗教命名學的歷史，參見 Vincent Goossaert (文森·古撒爾特)，“1898: The Beginning of the End for Chinese Religion (一八九八：中國宗教結束之初)”，*Journal of Asian Studies* (亞洲研究期刊) 65.2 (2006): 307-336.

⁷⁶ 參見 Robert Ford Campany 之將中國和西方語彙互相挪用的可能方式：“On the Very Idea of Religions (in the Modern West and in Early Medieval China)” (論 (在現代西方及早期中世紀中國)

用我們的詞彙來描述某個事物，藉以獲取真正的知識，而這個事物原本卻是呈現在一個不同的觀念架構中？

本質上，此類論辯看來頗具漢學研究的性質，然事實上卻契合宗教研究上較大的方法論議題；就方法論而言，思索宗教概念本身扮演一個大角色，更加關注宗教一詞被建構出、被歷史制約的意義。有些學者甚至呼籲完全放棄這個語彙，而視「宗教研究」為文化研究。此即是，視之為人類為己身的世界賦與意義的過程，而非刻意雕鑿出一個文化元素，然後貼上「宗教」的標籤。從這個較為寬廣的方法論觀點而言，問題所在並非是：中文是否有 *religion* 之對應存在，而是：用宗教的概念來研究中國資料是否有用。甚至，即或我們能夠指認和「宗教」語意學領域重疊的中國概念，如此也不能提供我們任何對應於宗教的正面事實，而只見一個漫無組織的領域；在其間，「教」、「道」皆是意義型塑過程中的工具，而非擁有任何實質內容。以此觀點，學者研究的主要是過程，而非施用於其中的工具。⁷⁷

Religion 的一詞定義如何，吾等激辯不休。我們也可想見，「民間宗教」的次分類仍會出現類似的問題，或許更棘手的問題。事實上，除了將宗教觀念具體化的議題之外，還得制定其內在的分派、二元分法、以及「宗教」內的動能機轉。於此，我們有的不只是宗教，而且亦有和「精英」宗教並置的「民間宗教」，或是和「正式宗教」競爭的「非正式」宗教。此類二元分法似乎增衍了新的本質主義；而新的本質主義是否有益於分析、以及/或者了解中國資料，此點尚有疑問。

姑不論某些學者對此語彙「宗教」兩兩相對並置、以及增衍的「民間宗教」的深層疑惑。整體而言，宗教研究的領域並沒放棄這個概念架構。不管是好、是壞，我們大多數人在研究中依然繼續使用宗教的語言，有些人不情不願討論它內在既有的問題，另有些人則立基於交互批評，嚐試把 *religion* 「宗教」消融於所謂「文化」的無可分化變異的過程。例如，此種交互批評或許質疑：放棄如「宗教」一詞等分析範疇是否使我們棄兵卸甲，放棄了可貴的工具，而這個工具有助於了解日益神祕化的文化概念。事實上，從此等交互批評的觀點而言，宗教批評或許被視同為政治目的服務，促進那種神祕化傾向，而在過程中只是重置了抽象觀念具體化和本質主義的問題，將之從「宗教」的意涵轉移到「文化」的意涵。

我以這些較大的議題為背景，在本篇論文中探討兩個較為縮限的課題。其一，我要研究「民間宗教」(*popular religion*)及相關的概念如「民俗宗教」(*folk religion*)、「地方宗教」(*local religion*)等如何在中國文化研究中被分析、套用。其二，我有些提議，比如提出這些研究法的相對優點，為此研究領域提出未來可行的方向。而此有限的研究或許將生衍出副產品，激發某些識見，或可應用於上

的宗教觀念), *History of Religions* (諸宗教的歷史) 42.4 (2003): 287-319.

⁷⁷ 提出「中國宗教」中的「宗教」元素這個問題後，我們亦可同樣詰問中國宗教中的「中國」元素，什麼才有資格定義為「中國」的？是地理位置？文化認同？穆斯林的回紇/回鶻是中國宗教的部份嗎？台灣的媽祖信徒是中國宗教的一部份嗎？在馬來西亞當地神明的神壇前祭拜的馬來華人又如何？或是在 *Sathya Sai Baba* 參與新印度教派的馬來華人又如何？這個問題打開了一整罐蠕動的符號，我擬在此提及，然不擬在此深入討論。

文所述較寬廣的方法論辯中。

我的論述將聚焦於西方語言的學術研究；就中文和日文研究中所使用之觀念語彙而言，即便是它們和西方術語交互運作時，真正代表的是一個分離的語意範疇，表徵其自我的屬性。「民間信仰」和「民俗宗教」等語彙不能輕易等同於「民間宗教」或「民俗宗教」。它們含括的是在個別文化、語言、及學術背景下相當不同的意涵；而此些背景意經常移轉變異於台灣、中國大陸、香港、日本以及東南亞的華文學者間。在我們研究其與西方觀念專用術語的交互運作之前，需要就此領域做一獨立的研究。⁷⁸

凱撒琳·貝爾 (Catherine Bell) 的分析

幸運的是，我不必從零開始建構這個論題。之前，貝爾已打下基礎，於 1989 年寫作評論 “Religion and Chinese Culture: Toward and Assessment of Popular Religion” (宗教和中國文化：評估「民間宗教」)。⁷⁹貝爾此文回顧當時最新出版的五份作品，⁸⁰勾勒中國宗教研究觀念手法的整體樣貌。她觀察出三種模式或階段的延續，所謂「模式」(models: 模型)或「階段」(stages) 是貝爾的說法。在第一階段中，我們看到的是強調精英階級的宗教(三教)、和民俗大眾盲目迷信(通常被標識為民俗宗教 [folk religion]) 間的基本扞格斷裂。這種精英宗教和民俗宗教的二元分法亦可用「大傳統」和「小傳統」表述，或可用「理性宗教」相對於「非理性超自然主義」表述；而根據貝爾的說法，此種種「形構了第一代中國宗教學術的大部分架構」。⁸¹在第二階段中，對中國文化抱持統整觀點的人則挑戰二元分法論點，他們強調既存的統合元素，這些元素在某種層面上已彌補、銜接社會和文化的歧異，試圖超越這種想當然耳的刻意分歧。楊慶堃 (C.K. Yang, 1911-1999) 和 Maurice Freedman (毛瑞斯·佛瑞德曼)的論述被援引為此種觀點的代表。佛瑞德曼以楊傳廣的論述為基礎，亦根據兩位所謂自立門戶的第一代學者 J.J.M. de Groot (德格儒特, 1854-1921) 及 Marcel Granet (馬修耳·格蘭奈特, 中國名字：葛蘭言, 1884 - 1940) 的見解，強調遍佈中國社會各階層早已存在的

⁷⁸ 當筆者在此次研討會第一次演講此論文時，就沒有明確分開西方、中文及日文相關用語，及其不同的概念，所以此種缺欠使當天的討論有一點紛亂。

⁷⁹ *History of Religions* (宗教歷史) 29.1 (1989): 35-57. Stephen Teiser (斯蒂芬·泰瑟)在其論中國民間宗教的文章中亦採用貝爾的觀點。參見 Stephen F. Teiser, “Popular Religion” (民間宗教), *Journal of Asian Studies* 54.2 (1995): 378-395.

⁸⁰ Hubert Seiwert (修伯特·塞偉特), *Volksreligion und nationale Tradition in Taiwan: Studien zur regionalen Religionsgeschichte einer chinesischen Provinz* (台灣的民俗宗教和國家傳統)(Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1985); David K. Jordan (大衛·喬丹) & Daniel L. Overmyer (丹尼爾·歐維麥爾), *The Flying Phoenix: Aspects of Chinese Sectarianism in Taiwan* (飛翔的鳳凰：台灣中國教派面面觀)(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, and Evelyn S. Rawski, ed., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (晚期帝制中國的民間文化)(Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985); Robert P. Weller, *Unities and Diversities in Chinese Religion* (中國宗教中的統一和分歧)(Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1987); P. Steven Sangren, *History and Magical Power in a Chinese Community* (中國社區內的歷史和魔力) (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987).

⁸¹ Bell, “Religion and Chinese Culture” (宗教和中國文化), 40 頁。

文化融合之基本元素。當然，一些顯而易見的差異可被解釋為：地方上或社會上對某些共通文化主題之特別詮釋。⁸²因之，在此不同觀點的轉換中，「初始將社會分成不同社會階級(第一階段)的二元分歧觀點面臨挑戰，眼前的焦點為不同的社會次團體各自轉化出的內隱融合(第二階段)。⁸³也就在第二階段，「民間宗教」(popular religion)一詞開始更廣為使用：

在典型的第二階段中，亦即是，強調整體文化融合的階段，「民間宗教」一詞才用來指稱這個融合的根本基礎。民間宗教特徵多元變異，可能是一套根本的價值體系、傳統的修行實踐、橫跨所有階級和地區的態度；或一套特有的社會組織，用來溝通、媒介精英和農民的世界觀。可是，在這兩個分類中，民間宗教的功能皆是作為媒介，將普遍價值融入各種社會次團體，而各次團或將以其特殊方式挪用這些普遍的價值。⁸⁴

不管是強調文化整體或是文化差異，二者的衝突在貝爾的「第三階段研究法」中得以解決。第三階段的研究手法「一者拒斥先驗的二元觀點，二者拒斥先驗調和二元觀點的綜合實體（此即是：將民間宗教安放在一套組織、禮儀實踐和價值觀中）。」⁸⁵第三階段的研究法提供的是開放式的調查；是合與異的交互連動運作。宗教變成這個文化動力體的部份和群組，是一個「完全生根著床的文化體系」。接著文化

...被描述為部份對應於整體的關係，是意義的「生成」，或歷史及社團的「建構」。融合與差異變成文化整體動力運作的本質。第三階段的研究法並不將宗教組織—或宗教自身—孤立成分析的資料；而是聚焦於象徵和儀典，於其中見證文化的動能運作漸漸展現。

⁸⁶

因之，依此觀點，「民間宗教」一詞失去其指涉的對象，且或將被「宗教的文化」(religious cultures) 取而代之。正如那塔力 Natalie Z. Davis (戴維思) 在研究早期現代歐洲所提出者，此類觀點轉移與文化研究法清楚連接，在整體宗教研究領域中頗有斬獲。⁸⁷

貝爾小心翼翼地提出，這些階段的先後連貫反映諸多典範的歷史發展，顯示出

⁸² Maurice Freedman, "On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion" (中國宗教的社會學研究), 見 *The Study of Chinese Society: Essays by Maurice Freedman* (中國社會研究：毛瑞斯·佛瑞德曼論文集), selected and introduced 編選導讀 by G. William Skinner (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1979), 351-369.

⁸³ Bell, "Religion and Chinese Culture," 41 頁。

⁸⁴ 同上, 42 頁。

⁸⁵ 同上。

⁸⁶ 同上, 43 頁。

⁸⁷ "From 'Popular Religion' to Religious Cultures" (從『民間宗教』到宗教的文化), 見 *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research* (重塑歐洲：宗教改革研究手冊), ed. Steven Ozment (St. Louis, MO: Center for Reformation Research, 1982), 321-343, 論述於 Bell, "Religion and Chinese Culture" (宗教和中國文化) 38 頁。

依何種方式，「語彙的重組和論證自然而然地將它們從先前的典範中區別而出，同時保留許多基本的假設。」此中，並無任何「目的論的意義」被認為附屬於這類傳承連續，而且貝爾強調「見證於這三種立場中的文化、社會和歷史論辯是經年累月、無時或止的、不易透過任何一種立場或任何一套語彙的支配權得以解決」。⁸⁸然而，貝爾的讀者清楚認知，知道「第三階段研究法」正是此研究範疇之所在，亦是此研究領域之所向；此種立場正是貝爾欲與 Natalie Z. Davis 共享者，而 Natalie Z. Davis 的見解正是貝爾在文章中公然引用者。姑不論貝爾提出的先決條件，曰這三種立場皆不可能獲致霸權。

事實上，貝爾在分析中展現的圖像並看不出三種立場爭奪支配權；而是兩種立場，亦即是第一階段和第二階段的競爭。這兩種研究皆以巧妙的論證手法提論，一方為正命題，一方為反命題，而第三階段的手法則是「綜合」，事實上乃藉由提供統一和變異的空間來「解決」它們當中的矛盾，卻又不涉入中國文化的特定拱形模式中。反之，研究者的焦點轉移到象徵的軸心領域，統一和變異在此領域中協商、建構和溝通。「民間宗教」一詞將在此研究法中可能佔有一席之地。惟一的條件是作為某種固有認知的**迭譯**，用之作為研究目標的溝通過程中的一個元素。作為一個分析概念，它勢將伴隨較高層級的「宗教」認知而為人所棄；此「宗教」認知作為一個外界所強加的具體化的範疇，實際上或可能阻礙、或扭曲我們對固有文化動能體的觀點。

我將視貝爾模式的優點為一種方法，用以發展我對這個研究領域歷史發展的(不同)解讀。首先，我要在此釐清，我雖不同意貝爾之重新建構中國民間宗教研究史，我的確同意貝爾在方法論論述中大致的自然趨勢發展。(就我個人之見)，這個領域的歷史發展進程並非如貝爾描繪般推論明確、辯證清晰。然而，貝爾的結論諸如此領域何所在、此領域何所之，大抵皆吻合我的看法。因之，在後文二大部份中，首先我將綜觀中國民間宗教研究中概念結構的歷史發展，其二則試圖盱衡未來吾等建構概念可能前進、以及該當前行之新方向。

民間宗教諸概念在研究領域中的歷史

貝爾循佛瑞德曼之見，引「第一代的學者」作為她研究民間宗教的出發點。此輩中人似乎由一群學者組成，立論所在架構完備，嚴格釐清精英/庶民的分際。佛瑞德曼形容這群人為一九三〇年代到一九五〇年代英語世界的社會科學家。⁸⁹根據佛瑞德曼之見，這些社會科學家發現「在儒教的煙幕之後，隱藏著一種不同的生活方式、和一套不同的價值觀：概略言之，即是庶民/鄉下人的文化」。⁹⁰佛瑞德曼/貝爾言之有理，將論述焦點拘限在此一群體；此為吾等首次看到精英/庶民的二元分野明確表述，據理論證。然而，遠在「第一代的學者」之前，民間宗教即是討論的議題，即便尚未發展出一套完備的觀念語彙。若要精確描繪此一領域的

⁸⁸ Bell, "Religion and Chinese Culture," 54 頁。

⁸⁹ Maurice Freedman, "On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion" (中國宗教的社會學研究), 355 頁。

⁹⁰ 同上。

歷史，勢必將時程追溯甚早，此即是，十九世紀晚期及二十世紀早期的傳教士作家和漢學家，他們輪流建構研究，論證之所據是十六世紀以來耶穌會傳教士的作品。

最近，Timothy Barrett (提摩思·巴瑞特)再次強調明清時期天主教學者對現代漢學的結構性影響。⁹¹就民間宗教而言，影響的主要效果是久來非(如在貝爾的第一階段)般，將民間宗教與精英宗教分離，而是使之隱而不顯。早期的經本聲稱中國的宗教含括「三教」；三教彼此互補，交相運作；即或因耶穌會對儒教的強烈偏好，三教並非份量等同。民間的宗教實踐並未進入中國人宗教生活的概念圖像中，即使傳教士想當然耳，相當清楚它(在中國的宗教儀式論辯)中所提出的神學問題亦然。一旦觀照、明覺民間的宗教實踐，皆視之為精英階級宗教實踐的墮落版(比如，民俗的祭祖對比精英階段的敬祖，或民間宗教作為道教的低等形式)。隱於耶穌會的中國宗教的建構下，如此為一整體論觀點，最終見證一個單一的宗教體系，若果提及三教，民間宗教實踐出現的最佳風貌則是三教的低劣版及綜合版。⁹²

十九世紀大多數的傳教文學延續這個整體論研究法。當時對中國宗教的主流觀點認為：中國宗教為單一宗教，含括三個互補的傳統。如果要在民俗宗教和精英宗教間作一區分，通常皆不循貝爾為這時期所提的、以階級為本的中國宗教文化二分法。反之，傳教士學者採用其一(或二者)觀點：

首先，有些人視所有的中國宗教為異教迷信的結合體，在精英階級和普羅大眾間少有區分。就此例而言，相對於傳教士現代和理性的基督教，中國宗教整體乃是一個「他者」。Joseph Edkins (約瑟夫·愛德金斯，中國名字：艾約瑟，1823-1905)。或可作為此種態度的例子。在指出中國人同時和諧地實踐和信仰三個宗教後，他提出個人觀點，說明此事如何可能：

⁹¹ T.H. Barrett, "Chinese Religion in English Guise: The History of an Illusion" (中國宗教英國表相：一個幻相的歷史), *Modern Asian Studies* (現代亞洲研究) 39.3 (2005): 509-533。

⁹² 三教依序被認為是人類原始信仰的層層墮落，而人類原始信仰在聖經傳統中保存最佳。較之於二十世紀的任何社會科學研究手法，耶穌會的一神主義遠為激進，視中國所有的宗教為天堂中亞當和夏娃擁有的神的知識之扭曲回音。關乎三教，利瑪竇認為儒教最接近原真的傳統，此原真傳統可在羅馬教會社會提供的基督徒福音中完全重新發現。就文藝復興和宗教改革時期基督教一神主義的角色，參見 Jaques Sole, *Les Mythes chretiens de la Renaissance aux Lumieres* (文藝復興和啓蒙時期的基督教神話； Paris 巴黎：Albin Michel, 1979), 115-173。然而，在鄉間社區的傳教工作並不能忽視三教之外的民間宗教實踐，即或其概念架構並未為宗教實踐提供一個分別的範疇。在最近重現 Adriano di St. Thela, OAD 的 *Opusculum de Sectis apud Sinenses et Tunkinenses* (中國人和越南人諸教派小冊)中，作者為十八世紀在越南北部的一個傳教士，他提出「三教」(three sects) 的典型看法(知識分子的教派，道人術士的教派，和信「佛」的教派)；然他亦明顯覺得，據此模式，並不能充分解釋宗教實踐的基礎。因之他增加兩章論述，分別為〈論神靈及教派〉以及〈論算命術士和先知聖者〉。因之，至少在實踐的層次上，我們在此見證一種認知，知道教並非完全能含括「民間實踐」，即或在這些篇章中，作者仍嘗試將實踐的元素與三教的理念互相指認，辨證。Adriano di St. Thecla, *Opusculum de Sectis apud Sinenses et Tunkinenses* (中國人和越南人諸教派小冊：十八世紀中國和北越宗教研究； *A small Treatise on the Sects among the Chinese and Tonkinese*): *A Study of religion in China and North Vietnam in the Eighteenth Century*), Olga Dror 譯註, Mariya Berezovska 協同合作(綺色佳，紐約：Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University 康乃爾大學, 2002)。

此種不在乎及不關心的態度之緣由何在；為何他們這麼不在乎，無視於發現真理、持守真理？就此疑問，或有數答·他們是迷信的，然而欠缺自我意識。他們視傳奇軼聞為真，而不檢視其中是否有些好證據。他們更在乎有些好神祇，能符合他們的需求，為他們完成他們想望中之事，而非有可以依循寄託的真理和確切性。⁹³

換言之，傳教士眼中的中國宗教是迷信的混雜體，缺少基督宗教的神學能量。在此，基督宗教的理性信仰和非理性的中國宗教並置；相對於基督宗教和精英階層（雖然並未有人使用此類用語），中國宗教整體的功能即是「民俗」宗教。

其次，如果維多利亞時代的傳教士作家的確對中國宗教有所區分，通常的二分法是 Norman Girardot (諾曼·吉阿多特) 所謂的「純粹的哲學」(pure philosophy) 和「腐化的宗教」(corrupt religion)。⁹⁴ 再次，精英和民俗的語彙並未見使用，常民的宗教修行實踐再次被視為各個階層的現象。此處的二分法在於：智慧高深的經本傳統、和經本之實際奉行。從此觀點而言，我們今日所謂的民間宗教通常被視為偽劣版 (a degenerate version) 的三教，尤其是道教的旁門外道。⁹⁵ 因之，十九世紀中國宗教的主流觀點仍然是宗教整體論，認為所有社會階層的宗教實踐和信仰間有著根本的一般特質，伴隨的是在經文宗教和實踐宗教間的脫節，此惟有藉宗教退化過程導致的猖獗迷信方能解釋。

因之，精英/庶民的分野並非是十九世紀傳教士寫作的主要特色；精英宗教和民俗宗教的觀念歧異更常見於早期世俗學者的著作中。貝爾循毛瑞斯·佛瑞德曼之見，聲稱 de Groot 及 Granet 允為一代前鋒，挑戰「精英/庶民」、「大/小」、或「理性的宗教/宗教的超自然論」等二分法，此諸二元論正是形構了第一代中國宗教學術的大端架構。⁹⁶ 然而，如果我所言無誤，曰十九世紀的傳教士文學並無證明諸二元論述(惟一的例外是將「理性宗教」及「宗教的超自然論」並置)，那又要如何評斷 Granet 和 de Groot 的見解？就我所見，他們的確行 Freedman 認為他們所行之事，此即是，他們提出了系統化的模式，呈現中國宗教實踐的表象複雜元素如何融入一個單一的宗教體系中。然而，他們如此作法，用的是將他們前輩模糊的神學整體論聚焦於思考中國社會結構差異的宗教論述中。

⁹³ Joseph Edkins. *Religion in China: Containing a Brief Account of the Three Religions of the Chinese, with Observations on the Prospects of Christian Conversion Amongst that People* (中國的宗教：含括中國三教之簡述，兼及中國人改宗信奉基督教遠景面面觀)，2nd ed. (Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1878), 58-59。

⁹⁴ Norman Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage* (維多利亞時代之譯寫中國：詹姆斯·雷格之東方朝聖之旅)(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 316。

⁹⁵ 例如，James Legge, *The Religions of China: Confucianism and Tâoism Described and Compared with Christianity* (中國的宗教：比較、陳述基督教和儒教道教) (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1880)。

⁹⁶ Bell, "Religion and Chinese Culture," 40 頁。

二人中先行者為 de Groot，他結合了發現「中國宗教系統」(他最爲人所知的著作名)的蓬勃熱情以及深刻的認知，明確認定此宗教體系非平等適用於各階層。他強調中國的生活宗教(大多數在福建省廈門地區)，然而藉由指涉古典經本資料而將之繫連成一個體系，因之在宗教作為一種實踐、以及在古典內解碼後的宗教間建立了歷史的連貫延展。他清楚說明，曰二元和綜合的最終結合提供了一種宗教生活的圖像，這圖像主要行之於「富有的階層和望族之間。在中國，我們主要在這群人間活動，而這群人也可說是最能維持習俗律法所賦與的整體儀式和禮儀系統」。⁹⁷他對中國宗教系統元素的說法充滿二元分野，一爲「百姓間正統和名流之士」⁹⁸和二爲「低層階級」，⁹⁹然而名流與民俗之間宗教信仰的差異通常是屬於風格和增衍，而非與內容和本質相關。因之，即使 de Groot 根據隱含的民俗和精英分野來論述，他所描繪的仍是一個統整的圖像，跨越諸多階級疆界的統一實踐體系，而且牢牢生根於古典的經文傳統中。他甚至爲此體系命名：「合一教」(universism)。¹⁰⁰

Granet 亦認爲中國宗教爲統合宗教，此見之於他以單數名詞題名自己的著作《中國的宗教》(*La religion des Chinois*)。¹⁰¹中國宗教的根本整合著根於古老的俗農宗教，其集體勃發的儀典節慶場合是宗教思想的源泉，亦迴響於偉大的經本中。農業社會的宗教基礎漸漸生衍，首先增衍爲封建社會的宗教，再者滋藩爲帝王專利時代的官方宗教。姑不論「達官貴人和庶民俗農」宗教實踐和修行上的外在差異，他們皆穩穩紮根於古時代的農村宗教及其後續的民族精神中。¹⁰²貝爾的確無誤，認爲 Granet 是文化整體論的先驅；然，就如同 Granet 的例子一般，Granet 的整體論深知個中差異所在，嘗試面對明顯的社會和文化多元歧異，試圖闡釋何謂統一。二者皆無意規避閃躲精英和庶民的社會「二元分歧」，而是嘗試說明統一融合如何在彼分歧內運作。¹⁰³這種觀點說明，就社會基礎(階級)和文化風俗衍生的精英和民俗文化的二元分法而言，其中並不盡然意味必然存在著文化斷層。

類似的批評亦見於 Freedman 和貝爾之處理由 Robert Redfield (羅勒特·瑞特菲爾德)提出的大小傳統的範例中。Freedman 處心積慮要將他對中國文化的整體論模式和「大小傳統的繁瑣知性世界」區別而出。¹⁰⁴沒錯，Redfield 的模式乃是奠基於社會精英和庶民階級的具體認知；然而，諸多事實如社會階級、都市中心

⁹⁷ J.J.M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China* (中國的宗教體系；1892; reprint, Taipei: Southern Materials Center, 1989), 1: 2。

⁹⁸ 同上， 1: 9。

⁹⁹ 同上， 1: 192。

¹⁰⁰ J.J.M. de Groot, *Universismus: die Grundlage der Religion und Ethik, des Staatswesens und der Wissenschaften Chinas* (合一教：中國宗教、倫理、國度及學術工作的基礎；Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1918)。

¹⁰¹ Marcel Granet, *La Religion des Chinois* (中國人的宗教；Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1922)。

¹⁰² 參見 Maurice Freedman's summary in his "On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion" (中國宗教的社會學研究)，361-364。

¹⁰³ Granet 甚或聲稱，在後來出版的一本著作中，期待貝爾的第三階段研究法。他在此著作中，批判反思在中國文化研究領域上，視「宗教」爲一研究範疇之功能。參見 *La Pensée chinoise* (中國思想 1934; Paris: Albin Michel, 1968), 476 頁。

¹⁰⁴ Freedman, "On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion," 366 頁。

和鄉村不同的權力分配、有限的社會穩定程度、以及文化(及倫理!)的多元差異等等,皆是一九二〇年代和一九三〇年代墨西哥不容忽視的現象,尤其在 Redfield 進行田野調查的猶加敦 (Yucatan) 半島更為如此。然而, Redfield 對社會不公和階級存在的敏銳感受並不造成他斷然提出激進的文化斷層論。截然相反的是,大小傳統的模式其實應是貝爾論述中的「第二階段」手法,緣於其將農業社會概念化為較大的、較完整的社會和文化整體中的根本部分。至少,在 1956 年著作 *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization* (農民社會和文化:從人類學角度看文明) 已然成熟的論述中,瑞德菲爾德定義大小傳統為兩個文化階層,彼此互相歸屬倚賴,參與文化要素不斷演化變異的過程。¹⁰⁵ Redfield 結合了 McKim Marriott (麥克金·馬利歐特)「普世化」(universalization) 的看法(小傳統「向上」演進為大傳統),以及「地方觀念化」(parochialization; 大傳統的元素「向下」流入小傳統中),提出了一個尚有瑕疵的宗教模態;然而,精英和民俗的簡單「二元分歧」已不復現。¹⁰⁶事實上,他在 1956 年的著作中,提醒吾等特別注意調和大、小傳統的溝通管道,亦即是劇場在將偉大史詩迭譯成方言文字、並將它們傳播給印度文盲大眾時所扮演的角色。如此的研究出發點並非異於 *Popular Culture of Late Imperial China* (晚期帝制中國的民俗文化)中數篇文章所辯論者。貝爾亦為此書正面立論作評。

前段書寫的目的並非在於重建瑞德菲爾德的論述—而在於提出貝爾藉「宗教作為文化」觀點而闡解的、對於歧異/統一之精妙論述並不能代表「歷史上先後出現的一連貫論述」。¹⁰⁷從耶穌會會士論述中國宗教的首批報告中,就分別採取統一與歧異的立場;而這兩種立場和是否使用民俗宗教這類語彙少有直接的關連。事實上,Redfield 成熟的大/小傳統之模式或可視為初步嚐試—透過引進「普世化/地方觀念化」循環,綜合式地處理統一/歧異議題。如果我們檢視中國民間宗教研究的歷史脈絡,我們所將發現者並非是貝爾的模式,而是初始奠基於神學的整體論思想,將所有的中國宗教混入三教模式中。此時對民間宗教少有認知,很少將之視為自主的宗教信仰和實踐領域。若果真要在其中畫出區野,又是古人的「高調哲學」和當代的墮落實踐間的區別,根本不會插入貝爾觀點中作為第一代學者特質的精英/庶民二元分法。在貝爾(和 Freedman) 的估想中,de Groot 和 Granet 應是首先反對概括行事的精英/庶民二元分法;截然相反的是,雖然二者眼中中國宗教(單數)的建構模式最終仍屬整體論,他們恰是第一批引進此類二元論觀點的學者。彼等二者,Granet 似乎更清楚文化差異(農村相對於都市、農民相對於封建和帝制精英)對單一中國宗教形塑過程中的衝擊,而 de Groot 則認為「低層階段」的宗教單純是「富裕階級」宗教的減縮版。

¹⁰⁵ Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization* (農業社會和文化:從人類學研究法看文明; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 71 頁。

¹⁰⁶ Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture* (農業社會和文化), 95-96. Marriott 在他的研究中延展其中觀念“Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization”(原生文明中的小團體),載於 *Anthropology of Folk Religion* (民俗宗教的人類學), ed. Charles Leslie (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), 169-218。此文首先出版於 1955 年。

¹⁰⁷ 貝爾〈宗教和中國文化〉, 54。

我認爲，貝爾所憂心的二元分法是較爲近代的現象，可以追溯到主要是第二次世界大戰後民族誌研究領域的發展。彼時，民族誌學家亟欲從地方信仰和實踐中建構一套文化體系，幾乎無可避免地將地方信仰和實踐建造成一個系統。一旦地方宗教被當做一個體系來評述描繪，問題馬上出現－這個系統如何與出現在學術研究中的較大的中國宗教系統連結？就在此時，精英－庶民的模式走入此圖像。重覆言之：就甚多較早期的傳教士書寫或奠基於經本的學術而言，因其無知於地方的宗教實踐或許擁有任何屬於地方庶民自我的邏輯，因之精英/庶民的分野是不相關的。然而，當地方宗教的諸多事實鉅細靡遺收錄成列後，它們也被視爲「三教」零散無組織的片段，或許亦可能是某些古代萬物有神信仰的餘緒。就此，只有系統化的村鎮鄉里研究能夠提供一個背景，在其間，精英和庶民的分野方有意義。

如此並不意味在二次世界大戰前的學術研究中，甚至在經本研究的學者中，我們沒有先驅者；早在 1928 年，Henri Maspéro (亨利·馬斯佩若，中國名字：馬伯樂，1883-1945)堅持道：

作爲定義下的系統，三教對過往諸世紀有的只是歷史的意義。中國民眾既非同時奉行三教，亦非分別奉行一教。在時代的進程中，一種民間宗教已然成型，這個民間宗教從這三種中借用不同觀念，然它顯然有別於它們，而且必須被視爲一個分開的體系。¹⁰⁸

在 1941 年左右完成的一系列講座中，馬斯佩若更進一步發展這種民間宗教的概念 (*religion populaire*)。他堅持認爲，「老百姓」將他們自身和「三教」分離，自創一個融合的宗教系統，佛教僧侶和道家法師融入其中成爲禮儀專家。即使對純佛教徒、道教徒、或國家儀典人員而言，信徒的闡解信仰並非順應「三教」，而是順應已成爲當代民間宗教的單獨系統。西方觀察家若企圖將此體系分解爲佛教、道教、或儒教元素，就罕能辨認這個體系的運作機轉。依 Maspéro 之見，此一如嚐試用分解的方法解釋現代的基督宗教，將其分解爲取自猶太教、希臘哲學、古代東方宗教、以及古代地方儀式等諸多元素。依此模式而言，中國人可說法國人奉行三種宗教，分別是基督宗教(但限於彌撒中)，猶太教(復活節/逾越節)，以及聖母女神的神祕教(受洗)。即使歷史上研究這些項目的源起爲趣事一樁，今日整體仍非只是部份之集合耳。諸部份並非從其歷史源起產生意義，而是因其在現代整體中的地位。除了三教之外，這個現代民間宗教亦汲取了古代農民宗教的元素；然而同樣的，他們並非從歷史根源中獲取意義，而是從他們在現在宗教情境中的地位和角色得之。¹⁰⁹ 他結論道：

¹⁰⁸ Henri Maspéro, "The Mythology of Modern China" (現代中國的神話)，載於 *Taoism and Chinese Religion* (道教和中國宗教；Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), 78 頁，此文首先出版於 1928 年。英譯本譯自 *Le Taoïsme et les religions chinoises*, Gallimard, 1971。

¹⁰⁹ Henri Maspéro. "La religion chinoise dans son développement historique", (歷史發展下的中國宗教) in *Mélanges posthumes sur les religions et l'histoire de la Chine* (死後才出版的有關中國宗教和歷史論文). Vol. I: *Les religions chinoises* (中國的宗教) (Paris: Circulations du Sud, 1950),

「事實上，爲了要了解現代的民間宗教，要知其既非儒教儀禮、非佛教聖人行誼、亦非道教施法行禮者。民間宗教即是農民本身。透過對這些人群生活的研究，吾等可得知一種儀禮或一種信念的歷史淵源，但是吾等毫無權力固執於某種價值觀之說明、或某種實際的闡解。」¹¹⁰

第二次世界大戰後，台灣、香港和海外中國人認真看待此類指控，著手探討民間宗教「從部份成爲一個系統」(système à part) 的議題。在這樣背景下，「民俗宗教」、「民間宗教」等語彙更被廣爲運用。戰後民族學研究的先驅之一是 Alan J.A. Elliott (亞蘭艾略特)。1955 年，他發表新加坡中國人靈媒儀式的研究，即是根據民間宗教的意涵，爲此宗教創造一名 *Shenism* (「拜神教」)，源自中國話神字字音爲 *shen*，亦且源自求見靈媒者屢屢將他們的宗教活動綜合敘述爲「拜神」。艾略特說明拜神教的「主要元素」是「汲取自民間的、頹敗的道教，加上儒教和佛教的影響；而且，或許更重要的是，源自古老庶民宗教」。他分析此新創的第四教，非視之爲支離破碎的教義大雜燴，而是本身自成體系。¹¹¹在大家對艾略特的「拜神教」新名尚未熟悉上口之際，他視民間宗教自成系統的看法已成爲後世接續者的研究典範。¹¹²

一九六〇年代到一九八〇年代，台灣民族學研究蓬勃發展，香港新界亦發表相當數量的研究。從這些研究中隨機取樣，即可發現不同的專有名詞：民俗宗教、¹¹³民俗信仰¹¹⁴、民間宗教¹¹⁵ (民間信仰¹¹⁶、中國宗教¹¹⁷，有時則是簡單的「宗教」

111-114。

¹¹⁰ Henri Maspero. "La religion chinoise dans son développement historique," 115。

¹¹¹ Alan J. A. Elliott, *Chinese Spirit-Medium Cults in Singapore* (中國乩童儀式), London: Department of Anthropology, The London School of Economics and Political Science, 1955), 29 頁。

¹¹² 即使如是，*Shenism*「拜神教」重現於最近新加坡論宗教的一份出版物中。見 Kuah-Pearce Khun Eng, *State, Society, and Religious Engineering: Towards a Reformist Buddhism in Singapore* (國家、社會和宗教工程：新加坡的一個改革派佛教；Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2003)。

¹¹³ David K. Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors: Folk Religion in a Taiwanese Village* (神祇、鬼魂和祖先：一個台灣農村中的民俗宗教；1972; reprinted, Taipei: Caves Books, 1985); C. Stevan Harrell, "The Concept of Soul in Chinese Folk Religion" (中國民俗宗教中的靈魂觀), *Journal of Asian Studies* (亞洲研究期刊) 38.3 (1979): 519-528; John R. Clammer, ed., *Studies in Chinese Folk Religion in Singapore and Malaysia* (新加坡和馬來西亞的中國民俗宗教研究), *Contributions to Southeast Asian Ethnography 2* (Singapore: Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore, 1983); Stevan Harrell, "Men, Women, and Ghosts in Taiwanese Folk Religion," in *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols* (台灣民俗宗教中的男、女和鬼魂), ed. Caroline Walker Bynum et al. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 97-116; P. Steven Sangren, *History and Power in a Chinese Community* (一個中國社區中的歷史和權力；Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987)。

¹¹⁴ C. Stevan Harrell, "When a Ghost Becomes a God" (當鬼變神時), in *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (中國社會中的宗教和儀式), ed. Arthur P. Wolf (Stanford, CA: Stanford California Press, 1974), 193-206。

¹¹⁵ Stephan Feuchtwang, "City Temples in Taipei Under Three Regimes" (台北三界中的寺廟), in *The Chinese City Between Two Worlds* (兩個世界間的中國城市), ed. Mark Elvin & G. William Skinner (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), 263-301。

¹¹⁶ Harrell, "When a Ghost Becomes a God."

一詞，如同研究的是團體的宗教。其間，從使用「民俗」一詞到使用「民間宗教」間，並看不到一如貝爾所言的發展歷程。反之，這些不同的術語只是單純的標籤，用來稱呼民族學者所發現或建構的宗教系統。一旦學者嚐試為之，將在領域研究中發現的地方宗教融入和三教及官方儀典相關的中國宗教的較大圖像中時，這些標籤才具備貝爾所附加於它們的意義。早期在 C.K. Yang 的大力研究下，區別組織化和融合式的宗教¹¹⁸後，此種省視觀照在一九七〇年代加速前進，分別有 Maurice Freedman 的文章 “On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion”（中國宗教社會學研究），以及 David K. Jordan (大衛·喬丹)的 “The Jiaw of Shigaang [Taiwan]: An Essay in Folk Interpretation” (西港(台灣)建醮：民俗信仰論)¹¹⁹。這兩篇文章皆試圖平衡統一和分歧，佛瑞德曼用的是明確定義一種文化過程，其中不同的是信仰和理念被視為

……省思和觀照，或許是畸形的省思觀照，或許是彼此慣用成習的譯解；如同他們在一來一往的互動相融中，於社會階層間、於宗派和「教會」間、於「教會」和「教會」間、於經文和生活的語言間、於文明教育階級和普羅大眾間。這種中國特質 (Chineseness: 中國特徵) 依存於一個根本的骨幹，據此，複雜的社會和知性元素交互運作，生衍諸般異同。¹²⁰

相照之下，喬丹將「一致/統一」(unity) 定位於共享的修行實踐，同時又接受一個或許以「慣用成習的譯解」(idiomatic translation) 亦無法解決的闡釋體系。西港建醮說明參與諸眾如何對建醮 意義解讀各異，然又在同一活動中通力合作。

每個人將注意力集中在個人參與的範圍，他者在他域的神學變得不相關。雖然維持充分的通力合作，好讓建醮活動持續三年一輪，參與者仍然持續無感或忽視解經解義之不同。¹²¹

在整個一九八〇年代，我們發現有更多努力，試圖連結精英版和民俗版的中國宗教。Robert. P. Weller (羅勃特·魏勒) 踵繼喬丹十年前的研究手法，為此問題寫作一本著作。魏勒著作 *Unities and Diversities in Chinese Religion* (中國宗教中的統一和分歧)再度採用統合的儀式背景(普渡節；the Universal Salvation

¹¹⁷ Arthur P. Wolf, “Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors”(神、鬼和祖先), in *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (中國社會中的宗教和儀式), ed. Arthur P. Wolf (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), 131-182。

¹¹⁸ C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors* (中國社會中的宗教：宗教的現代社會功能研究及其中的歷史因素；1961; reprinted, Taipei: SMC Publishing, 1994)。

¹¹⁹ David K. Jordan, “The Jiaw of Shigaang (Taiwan): An Essay in Folk Interpretation,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 35(1976): 81-107。

¹²⁰ Freedman, “On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion,” 352-353。

¹²¹ Jordan, “The Jiaw of Shigaang,” 105。

Festival)，然根據社會經驗，亦且將之應用於一個持續發展的社會文化建構，獲致較為複雜的闡釋風格之分類。不同的社會背景支撐不同的詮釋風格，魏勒用兩極分法將此分類：「意識形態化/實證性質」、「主動/被動」(active/passive: 動態/靜態)。¹²²

就研究中國宗教的精英/民俗論而言，另一頗值注意的研究者為 Christian Jochim (克里絲汀·喬金)。喬金為此研究而追溯瑞德菲爾德的大/小傳統模式。¹²³他提出新版的綜合式研究手法，將之和 Mary Douglas (瑪利·道格拉斯)的「方格」(grid) 及「群體」(group) 模式結合，發表在 1988 年在 *Journal of Chinese Religions* (中國宗教期刊) 刊載的研究中。¹²⁴

本階段論述即將在此做結。該當強調的是，一九五〇年代以來的人類學研究將民俗/精英的議題清楚地帶入學術的視野中。民族誌研究絕非反對視中國宗教為想當然耳壁壘分明的二元分歧觀點，初始即立意視之為研究分析的標的。民族學家使用「民俗」和「民間」等語彙，其間無清晰的語意差別，顯然並無貝爾眼中所見的分歧，亦非如貝爾指涉文化的二元觀點 (bifurcated) 對應於統合觀點 (holistic)。

「民間宗教」的未來

貝爾的評論該當小心對待，視為研究中國宗教中民俗宗教或民間宗教概念的歷史紀錄，我的評述並非用一種論證來推翻貝爾的論證。到底是否要強調社會與文化的層理 (socio-cultural stratification, 指標為「民俗宗教」一詞)，或是強調融合 (unification, 指標為貝爾對「民間宗教」的定義)，此乃為研究任何複雜文明的根本議題。一般常識會支持貝爾的論述，認為此非在兩個選項間擇一的問題，而是將此二選項視為創造動能張力的兩個極點，而動能張力正是文化生產的正果。例如，像晚期帝制中國如是高度分化、地理風貌如是多元變異的社會，我們或可期待其宗教文化中地域及階層兼具的變異，同時又能維持某種程度的文化融合，在所有居民間產生一種「中國質素」(Chineseness) 的共識。因之，貝爾描述的「第三階段研究法」似乎能為未來的研究提供可行的觀照：

中國宗教第三階段研究手法可說是一者拒斥先驗的二元觀點，二者拒斥調和二元觀點的綜合實體 (此即是：將民間宗教安放在一套組織、禮儀實踐和價值觀中，即把之加以具體化：reification)。第三階段研究法意欲提示的是：文化整體論並非是社會互動的共享層面，亦非是一套混融的規範概念。它暗指：文化既非是散播於社會各層面，以結合多元變異的團體的單一的意識型態，或是單一的社群認同。反之，文化被設定為含括歧異

¹²² Weller, *Unities and Diversities in Chinese Religion* (中國宗教中的統一和分歧)。

¹²³ Christian Jochim, *Chinese Religions: A Cultural Perspective* (文化觀點論中國宗教；Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986), 15 頁。

¹²⁴ Christian Jochim. "'Great' and 'Little', 'Grid' and 'Group': Defining the Poles of the Elite-Popular Continuum in Chinese Religion (「大」和「小」,「方格」和「群體」: 定義中國宗教中的精英—民間兩極延展)。” *Journal of Chinese Religions* (中國宗教期刊) 16(1988): 18-42。

和統合的內在生成，而其整體論被形容為一種功能，在它們調和相似和差異間的程度時，或者是作為某種優先結構，或是作為外加的地理限制。從此觀點而言，文化被形容為諸部分對應於整體的關係、意義的「生成」、或歷史和社群的「建構」。統一和歧異變成文化整體論動能機轉的本質。¹²⁵

如此就責成一個研究法，此研究法不會先驗設定一個人為的文化或宗教軀域，比如：決定單獨研究一個台灣農村的「民間宗教」，然卻排除屬於社群部份或和社群互動的宗教專家比如道家道士或佛教尼姑等人的宗教經驗。相反地，個人的研究標的將非視「佛教」為一種宗教，惟獨專注研究僧侶或佛教經本。反之，「宗教」將被視為意義生成的持續進程，含括特定的社會和文化背景中的所有因素。研究對象將是這種過程，在所有參與者的生活經驗中運作。

在中國宗教的領域外，我們發現此研究手法在美國歷史上被描述、被宣稱為 *lived religion* (「生活宗教」) 研究。此中最出名的倡導者之一集是哈佛大學的 Robert A. Orsi (羅勃特·歐喜)。他曾對民間宗教的議題發動重要的批評，見諸他的著作 *The Madonna of 115th Street* (第一一五街的聖母像) 第二版，研究紐約的小哈林區義裔美人對一座聖母雕像的崇拜。¹²⁶ 歐喜在本書第一版採用民間宗教的範疇；然在第二版中則棄而不用，而以「生活宗教」取而代之。對他而言，民間宗教一詞「模糊、誤導、傾向支持某種立場」。它的功能是「從一個非特定的、但顯然具規範性質的「宗教」(不見限定詞「民間」)，封阻某種宗教生活的見解表述。... 這個用語衍劃出沒有必要的、混淆的軀界。」¹²⁷ 貝爾視 *民間宗教* 為一個整合性的語彙，精心用來描述統一而非歧異；歐喜則視之為 *民俗宗教* 的變體，自身扛負著同樣種類的意識形態包袱。相對之下，他的另類語彙，「生活宗教」研究

...將所有宗教創意安置在文化中，視所有宗教為生活的經驗，視神學不下於為所愛受苦的人點燃一根燭火，視精神性靈以及其他等等，不下於文化上眾人認可的宗教表達形式(比如舔吻教堂地板石)。重新思考宗教，視之為文化工作的一種形式，將注意力導向一組織「*和*」個人，經文「*和*」儀典，實踐「*和*」神學，事物「*和*」理念—視所有一切為創建世界和解創世界的媒介。¹²⁸

這種「生活宗教」的研究手法巧為和貝爾的觀點和諧共鳴。貝爾的「宗教文化」觀將宗教理念和實踐紮根著床於實廣的、沒有設限的文化架構中。在 Orsi 研究第一一十五街的聖母像著作中，此種手法允讓他發現(建構/解釋?) 聖母像意義的真正溯源，知其並非是任何天主教的聖人意涵，而是義裔美人家庭和親族的價值觀，歐喜以 (拉丁概念) *domus* (「家庭」) 意涵將此帶入焦點中。Orsi 的生活宗教之觀點並非提供驚人的嶄新的理論上或方法學上的洞見。**理論上**，它將

¹²⁵ Bell, "Religion and Chinese Culture," 42-43。

¹²⁶ New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002。

¹²⁷ Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, xiv。

¹²⁸ 同上，xix。

宗教視為一種文化工作的形式以創造出有意義的世界；此種認知正是立足於當今時代所禮敬的 Peter L. Berger (彼得·柏格)和 Thomas Luckmann.(湯瑪斯·魯克曼)的社會學傳統中，此二者輪流建構、發展成韋柏 (Max Weber) 和 Alfred Schütz (亞佛瑞·德舒茲)的著作。¹²⁹方法論上，他則要歸功於 Clifford Geertz (克力福德·吉耳茲)研究民族人類學的「厚實描述」(thick description) 手法，以及歐陸展現於 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (艾瑪努耳·若一·拉都瑞)和 Carlo Ginzburg (卡洛·金柏格)著作中的微歷史研究法。¹³⁰ Orsi 的貢獻揉合這些研究索脈，誘發此領域(美國宗教)研究手法的改變，先前的研究法主要集中在經本和教會的歷史觀點，要求研究的學生將他們的研究標的勿置於「教會」、「聖經」、「教派」以及「民間宗教」等具體化範疇，而是置於社會和個人活生生的生命經驗和持續互動協調的文化工作。再重複上文援引 Orsi 的說法：「重新思考宗教，視之為文化工作的一種形式，將注意力導向一組織「和」個人，經文「和」儀典，實踐「和」神學，事物「和」理念—視所有一切為創建世界和解創世界的媒介。」此誠為針砭良方，勿切割我們的研究，勿將宗教具體化於特定的對話或排斥他者的組織；此良方對於史學家、漢學家和宗教研究學者尤其有益，彼等傾向於著重經本而非儀典，偏好組織而非個人，神學於非實踐，觀念而非事物，這種傾向不但是盛行於美國宗教歷史學家間，亦且盛行於中國領域內。

此類方法論上態度在研究中國宗教時可能有何結果？且舉一例：隨意檢視佛教研究的領域，即可發現此領域特別強調於經本、僧伽主要代表人物、以及佛教哲學。典型的佛教經典代表佛教的核心思想，本質率皆由佛、法、僧三寶組成；宗派、概念和經本無疑皆是佛教的中心元素，然而在建構世界的不斷過程中，他們在佛教中扮演何種角色？¹³¹終極而言，佛教唯有生存於信奉佛教的眾生心中，而宗派、概念和經本只是在不同的歷史、社會和地理背景下，建構生活佛教的某些元素。依照 Orsi 的說法：

宗教總是行動中的宗教，在人際關係中互動的宗教，在世界現況中和在人們想像的世界

¹²⁹ 欲知此更多意涵，參見 Alfred Schütz, *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt: Eine Einleitung in die verstehende Soziologie* (社會世界的意義建構；Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974; 首出版於 1934); Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (實在性的社會重建：論知識社會學；Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966); Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (神聖的華蓋：宗教社會理論基本原理；New York: Anchor Books, 1990; 首出版於 1967)。

¹³⁰ 請參閱 Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" (厚實描述：往文化詮釋理論走)，載於 *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (諸文化詮釋著作精選；New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3-30; Ladurie, *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975); Ginzburg, *Il formaggio e i vermi: Il cosmo di un mugnaio del '500* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1976)。

¹³¹ 大部分的宗教學者趨向相關宗教中宗教家之經典及觀念與實踐的研究，如最近的 *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism* (佛教研究中關鍵性術語)，編輯為 Donald S. Lopez (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005)，其中有 15 篇論文，都討論基本概念，如「佛」、「死亡」、「藝術」、「權力」等，不過只有一篇討論在俗佛教的修行實踐 (Carl Bielefeldt) 然俗眾居士的觀點從來不是中心議題。鑑於大多數的佛教徒並非隸屬出家僧伽，吾等不禁懷疑，何以諸多學者鏗而不捨、存心忽視佇立在佛教研究領域中央的在家佛教之龐然圖象。

或與慾念間的世界的宗教。生活宗教研究詮釋上的挑戰是發展出訓練有素的觀照，照應在人們經驗的環境中所描繪、所理解、所使用的符號和實踐，照應這些符號和實踐所現身的結構和環境。……

抽離在特定的生活情境中對概念的運用：例如，天主教童貞瑪利亞的教義，或五旬節神聖化的神學--而研究特定的信仰和實踐是沒有意義的。¹³²

應用於中國民間宗教研究上，歐喜的「激進經驗手法」(radical empirical approach)¹³³ 暗喻數點。首先，我們放棄將民間宗教的觀念做為界定我們研究領域的方式（如媽祖儀式或靈媒之陷於忘神恍惚），同時又排除某些其他元素（比如，道家道士或佛法高僧之解讀法《華經》）。我們將研究不為任何形容所拘限的「宗教」，不管是「民間」的或是「佛教徒」的。我們研究的是在個人、團體和社會生活的構建所協調之宗教。對我而言，此研究手法看來將頗有收穫，有能力跨過、超越諸種學者傾向用來區隔中國宗教世界的不容通融的範疇（三教等等）。

然而，此是否意味著我們應該全然放棄「民間宗教」的概念？事實非然。我傾向有別於貝爾和 Orsi 之道。且容我細述。

Orsi 堅持全然棄置民間宗教的概念。原因在於此觀念扭曲了他對社會關係和文化意義網脈的觀照，而且根據一個外緣準則注入一個分界此意義網脈的基準因素（民間宗教做為並非十足適合、正式、真實的宗教）。貝爾試圖兩兩放棄「民俗」與「民間」宗教，緣於此二語彙分別對文化歧異及文化聯合預存偏見。對此二學者而言，所做決定皆屬於方法學上的考量。因之，於此我意見相同，理由已在前述段落中闡明。然而，我的確認為「民間宗教」一詞尚有其用途，至少可用於二種目的：（一）作為一種觀念，有助於分析使用生活宗教手法收集而來的資料；（二）作為一種標籤或指標，界定某個特定的研究次領域。我將循序探討此二領域。

就前者而言，即連我們未使用「民間宗教」的概念來定義何者為吾等的研究對象、何者為非，我們仍可運用此概念來整理、分析生活宗教廣大網絡內收集得來的資料。「民間宗教」或許是一個合適的描繪用語，尤其是當我們發現甲村的宗教生活具備系統性的連貫特質以及有限的獨立自治，在某種程度上和其他現存的宗教體系如僧院、教團、或神職團體區分出來，甚或其和這些團體交相連動時亦然。當然，我們可以單純稱呼它為甲村的宗教，彼將含括以上所指稱的宗教元素，而不從甲村相連互動的宗教網脈中抽離出次級體系。然而，這種手法會有兩種代價：其一，它將忽視村莊宗教網脈中的動能張力，因之將妨礙地區社會中對歧異和衝突的正確認知。此將尤其彰顯，如果資料提供者自身宣告這些次級

¹³² 請參閱 Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, xx, xxi。

¹³³ 請參閱 Orsi, "Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live in? (是否生活宗教的研究與我們所處的世界無關?) Special Presidential Plenary Address, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Salt Lake City, November 2, 2002," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42.2 (2003): 169-174。

體系，因之在建構他們自己的宗教經驗時，意識到他們的獨特功能¹³⁴。然而，即使缺乏明顯的資料提供者的認知，學者或許能行之有據，使用「民間宗教」一詞來描述地方宗教生活根據自我的文化邏輯清晰運作的重要層面。打從宋朝以迄於今，在中國社區團體的歷史學和民族誌研究上，已經發現地方寺廟儀典組織化和半自治自律的特質和其他宗教團體及表述用語有別（即或並非分屬）。於此，「民間宗教」似乎管用，能指涉一種宗教系統，此系統區別於其他如佛教僧院組織者或團體儀式者。若果我們保留此看法，曰這些標誌具有功能，用來指認交流的文化網絡內的穩定元素，然而它們並非被設計來將它們從生活經驗的網絡內分離出來。

其二，避免使用「民間宗教」的概念使得根據範例歸類、論理成爲難事。若果我們指認甲村的一種民間宗教，我們可將之和乙村或丙村的民間宗教比較。然而，若果我們堅持認爲甲村的宗教只存在於其特有的背景中，我們即沒有歸類的語言以獲致洞識，以認知中國（或台灣、廣東、南洋中國人）的民間宗教是一種普通、共通的文化現象。歐喜知之甚明，他的激進經驗手法有其代價：我們愈加講究分析來龍去脈，我們在當下情境中的知識就更加不易轉移。在 2002 年十一月發表的一場演講中，歐喜提出這個問題：我們之中研究宗教實踐或「生活宗教」的作品是否不相干，不能用來瞭解在較大的社會和政治背景中的宗教、遜於那些通常佔據我們的那些親密的、地域的、仔細鑽研的作品？¹³⁵歐喜提出這問題的情境是在九一一事件後，彼時眾人期於歐喜等宗教學者能幫助群眾（以及政府）瞭解「真正」的伊斯蘭教。他回答說，沒有單獨的伊斯蘭教這回事：

我對朋友說，參照所謂的「伊斯蘭教」沒有什麼意義。這個區域（不管任何個人如何解釋）的政治暴力是自殺炸彈客必要的，然而不是充分的原因。單純從文件的敘述看來，對我而言，和自殺炸彈客的生命有立即關聯的並非是一個獻身於籠統的「伊斯蘭教」，而是他們的朋友圈，他們生活其中的親屬圈，他們抱存的回憶（他們自己的回憶或他們轉借自別人，傳承自他人的回憶），他們在當下設身處地的地域感（有意義的工作和學校、朋友和社團），他們摯愛的親人講述的故事，他們對特定朋友與家人的認同感和忠實聯結。當然，「伊斯蘭教」有其意義，然而它並非作爲一套權威的經本或訓義，而是在朋友、家人、記憶的約束下，在工作和學校知識中被討論、被實踐、被演變、被建構。這樣的「伊斯蘭教」是被想像又和人們想像的所有其他事物相聯繫、再次被想像。這樣的「伊斯蘭」是完全在地的伊斯蘭，沉浸吸潤於在地的條件和環境，也和在地條件和環境互動反映¹³⁶。

¹³⁴ 1992 年人類學家 John Leavitt 以其論文（“Cultural Holism in the Anthropology of South Asia: The Challenge of Regional Traditions” [南亞人類學中的文化整體論：地方傳統的挑戰] *Contributions to Indian Sociology* [對印度社會學的貢獻], N.S., 26.1 (1992): 20, 21) 開始批評印度社會學與人類學研究中的文化整體論，如此的手法忽略地方性的差異性等。在此，我非常謝謝 Dan Cohen，因爲他使我知道此論文。

¹³⁵ “Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant ...,” 169 頁。

¹³⁶ 同上。

當然，歐喜也遭受批評，緣於他的學術風格太「著根於在地」，太強調貼身的環境，無法導向能被綜合的知識¹³⁷。就此，歐喜的回答是：本來即如此。學者的事情不是將事物抽象化；反之，學者的責任是將宗教置於文化場景中研究。若將宗教搬離出場景，宗教最佳的處境是變得渺無意義，最差則是淪為政策操作者的意識型態工具：

有人說可蘭經不為暴力背書，後來又有其他人堅持說可蘭經的確為暴力背書。可是，在任一情況下，都是假設經本本身，在經驗和闡解之外，能告訴我們一些訊息。所有這種關於「伊斯蘭」的論述在如此逸離歷史和實踐後，只有更模糊了（因之也使得美國人免於）對伊斯蘭國家的生活經驗的清楚認知，蒙蔽了彼地政治和宗教現實的複雜層面，而更重要的是，遮掩了彼地區對美國（或更廣義的，冷戰）角色的了解。正是針對此點，生活宗教研究手法將自己定位¹³⁸。

知識份子的良知會要求我們拒絕概念化和相關的魔聲呼喚，堅持我們真正能夠知曉洞澈的、個別的、在地的、具體的一切。然而，歐喜警告學術一旦概念化和抽象化時，就有流於為政治目的而工具化的危險。若鄭重看待此事，就我個人之見，吾等亦不能退縮遁入激進經驗主義的象牙塔中，而將自身侷限於述說案例的故事。學術研究的精髓所在往往是從個案研究衍生出較為概念化、整合化的知識。為達此目的，我們需要運用比如「佛教」、「民間宗教」等抽象的概念，分析在特定情境下的特定資料。沒錯，藉由抽象分析情境，我們將不斷去觸犯情境；然若非如是，我們勢必要放棄超越這些個案研究以獲致人類意義生成過程中可溝通、可轉換的知識。要知，此份努力是我解讀學術志業的核心；此即是，一個學者創造意義世界的核心¹³⁹。我將視概念化等同小心翼翼跨出個案情境研究，和其他範例交融，允讓多方觀照論理析事，而不在具體的厚實描述中失去其根底。事實上，如同 Clifford Geertz 曾提出者，如是理論建構的目的並非是建構文化的概括理論，而是闡解個別案例：「在此，理論建構的核心工作不是解碼抽象的規

¹³⁷ 同上，169-170 頁。

¹³⁸ 同上，171 頁。

¹³⁹ 當然我們有一個基本問題：一個具體脈絡/情況何在結束，而在哪裡開始抽象化過程？假如我們以 Orsi 的幾近經驗主義為例，就連機構（如教堂和堂區）及 種族團體（義裔美國人 (Italian-Americans)）也為具體化的抽象結果 (reified abstractions)，宗教只能夠由個人而「生活出來」。如此，Orsi 的有關義裔美國人 *domus*/家庭之全面的、廣泛的概括化不合乎他的方法論的標準，因為其超越個人之生活出來的經驗。民俗學者 Leonard Primiano 努力追求把宗教首先放在個人中間，做為個人的“vernacular religion”（當地專有的宗教），其該為學者的研究對象。所有超越個人的“uniculture”（統一文化）只不過為抽象，即是偽造的。請參閱 Leonard Norman Primiano, “Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife”（當地專有的宗教與為宗教民俗生活而尋找研究方法），*Western Folklore*（西方民俗學）54 (1995): 37-56 頁。

範，而是使厚實敘述可行，並非逐例以得概括，而是在眾例中概括。」¹⁴⁰為此目的，「民間宗教」在研究中國宗教文化的過去與現在時，仍是有用的觀念。

民間宗教的概念仍可持續在第二類領域中發揮其功能，此即是作為某個別研究次領域的標籤或指標。我們需要一個語彙來界定、書寫宗教生活；此語彙超乎任何組織的侷限，無論是屬於僧伽、道教寺院組織、神職承傳譜系、基督宗教教會、帝制官方/國家儀典或所有這些傳統的經典經本。我很清楚如此用法冒著重新置入標準式具體化的風險，而此正是生活宗教研究手法有意要克服者。因之，且讓我強調，我在此只是討論「民間宗教」一詞為了分類目的用來指稱一個綜合的研究領域。它有助於圈繪出一個特定的學術實體，區別於其他此類的學術實體；然而就關乎中國宗教景況的經驗本質而言，不會造成任何先入為主的成見。依此方式，民間宗教則非是一個分析的概念，而是一個指示性的概念，有助於釐清研究的範疇，而不施加一個先導的二元法。¹⁴¹

就民間宗教一詞而言，的確存在可供我們考慮的其他選項。Vincent Goossaert (文森·古撒爾特) 在二版 *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (宗教百科全書) 論「民間宗教」的文章中，就曾擲地有聲地將民間宗教和地方宗教劃上等號。

因之，非屬儒教徒、佛教徒、道教徒的大多數社區民眾可被標示為中國民間宗教，但是此語彙不必然暗示任何社會階層、欠缺知性深度、或異端邪說。另一方面，因為三教有其遍佈全國的組織，教團團體本質上仍是根源於地方，因之被巧妙形容為「地方宗教」。

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在一篇意欲反應學界研究現況的百科式文章中，如此將「民間」及「地方」劃上等號允為合適；實際上，「地方宗教」在大多數情況下被當作「民間宗教」，此似乎是較為精確的替代說法。目前「地方宗教」有其較為客觀、清楚定義其研究主題的優點：我們檢視的正是在地方社群獲致的宗教實踐和信仰。在此，這個宗教是否由菁英份子、或由民俗百姓修行實踐，這個宗教對應於三教的關係，皆無多置一詞。因之，取用此說法，我們可以避開民俗宗教或民間宗教的某些觀念陷阱。然而，再度檢視之下，將可發現此新詞自有其侷限：其一，宗教將侷限於地方層

¹⁴⁰ Geertz, "Thick Description," 26 頁。

¹⁴¹ 我使用此語彙，幾分類以 Fraz-Xaven Kaufmann 使用「宗教」一詞作為「問題指標的觀念」(pzolemanzeryende Begriff)，而不具備本身的定義質素。見其著作 "Auf der Suche nach den Erben der Christenheit" (尋找基督宗教的精神遺產)，in *Religion und Gesellschaft: Texte zur Religionssoziologie* (宗教與社會：宗教社會學論著)，ed. Karl Gabriel & Hans-Richard Reuter (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004), 216 頁。Jonathan Z. Smith 有一類似的觀點，視「宗教」為「第二層次的總稱的概念」，此種觀念因其內在的矛盾特質，有助於在宗教研究中建立一個「領域橫向面/領域性視域」(disciplinary horizon)，亦如類似的模糊觀念，如「語言」之於語言學，以及「文化」之於人類學。見 Jonathan Z. Smith 文 "Religion, Religions, Religious" (宗教、諸宗教、宗教的)，載於 *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (宗教研究關鍵術語)，ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 281-282。

¹⁴² Vincent Goossaert, "Chinese Popular Religion" (中國民間宗教)，載於 *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), 3: 1614。

級，流失其超越地域的元素。例如，就我的學術興趣而言，很難將民間教派含括為「地方宗教」；原因在於，諸民間教派的特色是志願的、而非區域屬性的成員，他們支撐的網路超越地方社區團體。¹⁴³在歷史學和民族誌研究中，此為嚴重的觀點束縛；就探索當代宗教而言，更是如是。在此網際網路和全球化的世代，中國社會中的生活宗教並不限於地區團體。人們參與國家規模、甚至國際規模的宗教組織(例如，鄭嚴法師的慈濟功德會)；他們從網路中汲取觀念，甚至參與儀式；社區廟宇建構網站，並從社區之外招募信徒，有時也變成企業化朝聖之旅的活動主軸，新興宗教教從中國傳統的領域之外汲取精神資源(比如：藏佛、印度教、西方的奧秘主義)。在一個地方認同變得更加流動、更常變易移轉的社會中，一直強調地方宗教的觀點就變得無意義。宗教變得更不容易「在地化/地方化」，更多的宗教發生在未被「地方宗教」標籤覆蓋的場域中。

另一個選項是「民俗宗教」(folk religion)，然此語彙過分聯結於民俗傳統研究的源起，在此，它主要被應用在農民文化或類同的、有機生轉的面對面團體；¹⁴⁴就此，它太過狹隘，不足析述描繪晚期帝制中國的宗教生活；而且也的確太過侷限，不足以言傳現代宗教經驗。

另者，「民間宗教」一詞廣被模糊應用，以適應較大的研究範疇。在一篇大作中，Charles Long 即曾宏論牽涉此語彙的語意分歧和矛盾曖昧：「民間宗教」被用來形容在俗/平信徒的宗教，以區別於僧院僧侶；形容鄉野農夫的宗教，以區別於城市居民；形容民族的、宗教的次團體，亦形容全國的、普遍的、或一個社會中的常民宗教。¹⁴⁵依我之見，「民間宗教」因之可善盡其啟發式 (heuristic) 的功用，指稱「潛在的」差異，而不因之將中國宗教二元分類為精英/民俗、或俗眾/僧院僧侶。就如同此詞曾被用來標示統合(統一)和歧異，它或有助於設定一個研究過程，既不限定它的應用範疇，亦不預先判斷其結果。「民間宗教」可能含括歷史學個案研究中傳統農村的民俗宗教，現代城鎮(備齊所有超地域元素)的地方宗教，也可能是由嶄新的、全球化的宗教運動如法輪功者所建構的宗教生活。換句話說，「民間宗教」將含括各式各樣宗教被建構、被「成就」的方式，超越任何「大傳統」的組織和經本背景，甚至將這些經本視同研究中宗教生活世界的元素。有此認知，「民間宗教」即可發揮鏡片聚焦的功能，超越傳統對宗教經本和觀念的研究，聚集解析中國宗教的諸方觀點。

形容詞「民間的」(popular) 有附加的好處，它打開了非地方化的、市場和媒體驅動的文化產品等和民俗文化研究的聯結。在現代和現代化的社會中，其對意義形塑的過程有主要的影響。社會學家 Hubert Knoblauch (修伯特·諾佈勞其)

¹⁴³ 此種情況不排斥其在地方宗教中可已變成重要的，甚至支配的勢力。請參閱 Thomas David DuBois, *The Sacred Village: Social Change and Religious Life in Rural North China* (神聖的村莊：鄉下華北中社會變遷與宗教生活；Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005).

¹⁴⁴ 請參閱 Don Yoder, "Toward a Definition of Folk Religion" (對民俗宗教下定義的趨向) *Western Folklore* 33.1 (1974): 2-15 頁。

¹⁴⁵ Charles Long, "Popular Religion" (民間宗教) in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 11: 442-452。

就曾提出「民間宗教」(德文: populäre Religion), 視其為觀念的聚焦鏡片, 透過此鏡片研究在媒體和市場導向的現代化社會中的宗教。¹⁴⁶依其定義, 民間宗教 (popular religion) 是一種宗教形式, 「運用的是表達的方式、以及通俗文化中傳播和經濟分配媒介。」¹⁴⁷對諾佈勞其而言, 這種觀念提供一種工具, 藉以企及個人在現代情境中建構自我宗教認同的某些方式, 同時也讓 Luckmann 觀念中的「隱形宗教」(invisible religion)見諸於社會學的探索中。¹⁴⁸

總而言之, 「民間宗教」(或某種對用語)一詞自從二十世紀初即施用於中國宗教研究中; 誠然, 在第二次世界大戰戰後隨著民族人類學研究的興起, 此詞才邁入學術對話的核心。隨同其同意語「民俗宗教」, 它分別被用來代表跨越階級和地區界限持續或不持續的中國宗教文化。貝爾已為這個觀念提出批評, 視其在觀念上預設為歧異和融合(統一、總和), 並呼籲進行一個徹底的宗教和文化研究, 注重在文化創造進程中融合和歧異的動能機轉。我引介歐喜「生活宗教」的觀念, 作為在宗教研究領域上貝爾的重要變異選項, 認為生活宗教的方法學在所有中國宗教研究的領域上有其可為之處。然而, 所不同於歐喜者, 我不認為有必要放棄「民間宗教」一詞, 亦欲將此觀念施用於分析從生活宗教研究收集得來的資料。它或將有效描繪在地和跨地域宗教文化的層面, 因之促使他們跨越狹窄的個案背景, 能夠互為比較。再者, 我們或可保留此用語, 作為一個標籤, 施用於中國宗教研究的次領域, 在「大傳統」的組織和經本背景下, 含括宗教界以解釋或「成就」的多元方式。

¹⁴⁶ Hubert Knoblauch, "Populäre Religion: Markt, Medien und die Popularisierung der Religion" (民間宗教市場: 媒介以及宗教的大眾化), *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 8(2000): 143-161.

¹⁴⁷ 德文為: "Populäre Religion ist die Form der Religion, die sowohl die Ausdrucksformen wie die medialen und ökonomischen Verbreitungsmedien der populären Kultur verwendet." Knoblauch, "Populäre Religion," 146 頁。

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion: the Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (隱形的宗教: 現代社會中的宗教問題; New York: Macmillan, 1967). 德文修訂版本: *Die unsichtbare Religion* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991)。