



REVIEW ESSAY

Chinese religion(s): a survey of textbooks

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ABSTRACT

This paper surveys five introductory textbooks on Chinese religion(s) published over the past 25 years. For instructors choosing a textbook, we provide a comparison of each work's format and content, remark on their suitability for meeting various pedagogical objectives, and reconsider the purpose of university textbooks in the context of new developments in knowledge production and accessibility. Moreover, we argue that these surveyed works reflect a change in scholarly consensus within the field. The trend has shifted from describing Chinese religion(s) as a unified whole to that of a conglomerate: discrete traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, and popular-folk religion. Although specialists complicate hard distinctions between these traditions through highlighting shared influences and developments, the general presentation of Chinese religion(s) has shifted from a synthetic whole to analytic parts.

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Books Surveyed

Chinese Religion: An Introduction. 5th ed.

Laurence G. Thompson. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1996. (1st edition 1969, 2nd 1975, 3rd 1979, 4th 1989). US\$122.95 paper.

Chinese Religions

Julia Ching. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993. US\$28.00 paper.

Chinese Religious Traditions

Joseph A. Adler. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002. US\$38.20 paper.

Chinese Religions: Beliefs and Practices

Jeanene Fowler and Merv Fowler. Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2008. US\$32.50 paper.

Introducing Chinese Religions

Mario Poceski. New York & London: Routledge, 2009. US\$36.95 paper.

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to survey five books available for use in introductory courses on Chinese religions. This will be of interest to instructors selecting a textbook,

as well as to those interested in how textbooks in the field have changed over time. The works surveyed here were published within the past 25 years and represent currently available options. We focus on introductory textbooks that aim to give a comprehensive overview of Chinese religions and have thus excluded works that are mainly collections of primary sources ('readers' or 'sourcebooks' such as Donald Lopez Jr.'s *Religions of China in Practice* and Deborah Sommer's *Chinese Religion: An Anthology of Sources*), or that treat single periods or traditions.¹

We have excluded in our consideration textbooks that were published more than 25 years ago (for example Christian Jochim's *Chinese Religions: A Cultural Perspective* and Daniel Overmyer's *Religions of China: The World as a Living System*) because we were curious to know if introductory works would include recent developments of Chinese religions such as Falun Gong in the 1990s.² If price is not an issue, then Randall Nadeau's volume *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Chinese Religions* and John Lagerwey's *Religion and Chinese Society* are quality options for class adoption.³ Please see our bibliography and notes for suggestions of other available works and their appropriate uses.

Currently, the most frequently used paradigm for presenting Chinese religions for teaching is the 'Three Plus One' approach: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, plus a discussion of Chinese 'Popular' or 'Folk' Religion (*minjian zongjiao* 民間宗教). 'Three Plus One' has the advantage of allowing for the emic concept of the 'three teachings' (*sanjiao* 三教), while satisfying the modern desire to identify as religious a number of other practices and beliefs which cannot easily be categorized in the context of the three teachings.

To clearly distinguish the three teachings as entities independent from each other as well as from popular religion is not a given.⁴ However, neither is the use of the plural 'religions' in four of the five works under discussion. In the history of the field, there have always been those who preferred to use a more synthetic approach, attempting to describe a more or less unified 'religious system.'⁵ 'The religion of the Chinese' is in this approach seen as an integrated whole, to which one might even have a 'key,' an overarching explanatory model, for example 'universalism.'⁶ In one of the most influential twentieth-century studies of the role of religion in China, C. K. Yang felt little need to treat Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism separately.⁷ The fact that recent textbooks prefer a more analytic approach is due to two developments.

First, both Buddhist and Daoist institutions have reasserted themselves and expanded immensely in recent years. In 1961, when Yang assessed the role of Buddhist and Daoist institutions, he found them in a 'weak position.'⁸ From Yang's perspective, the social influence of Buddhism and Daoism was greatly limited due to the 'small numerical size' of their priesthood and the lack of an 'organized laity,' of 'participation in community charity,' and 'secular education.'⁹ The times have changed: both Buddhism and, to a lesser degree, Daoism are flourishing in China – as they have been for a long time in Taiwan – and an end to this trend is not in sight.¹⁰ Confucianism, too, is being revived, with the Chinese government choosing to call its new representative offices 'Confucius Institutes,' rather than, say, 'Chinese Culture Academies.' In stark contrast to the anti-Confucius campaign in the 1970s,

Confucianism and its compatibility with a modern China is (again) widely discussed in Chinese academia.¹¹

Second, next to the fact that the three teachings are reasserting their distinct identities on the ground, research about them has grown in leaps and bounds in the past 50 years. This is especially the case with Daoism, where much more is known now in Western academia than 40 years ago. Research on Chinese Buddhism, Confucianism, and folk-religious movements of all kinds has also increased. These developments are reflected in the categories employed in introductory textbooks on Chinese religions.¹²

From Chinese religion to Chinese religions

The history of Laurence G. Thompson's *Chinese Religion: an Introduction*,¹³ perhaps the longest-serving textbook in the field, now in its fifth edition, shows the trend from treating Chinese religion as a unified whole towards describing it as a conglomerate of discrete traditions. The first edition of *Chinese Religion: An Introduction* was published in 1969,¹⁴ and while successive editions (1975 and 1979) added chapters on what Thompson perceived as a singular Chinese religion, only in the fourth edition (1989) did Thompson introduce separate chapters on Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.¹⁵ In his preface, Thompson explicitly cites C. K. Yang's *Religion in Chinese Society* as the 'original (and continuing) inspiration for the approach taken;¹⁶ that is to say, a synthetic, largely unhistorical, sociological view of Chinese religion. Here, a singular Chinese religion is discussed in terms of a world view and social practices that, according to Thompson, 'have not changed in any great measure since ancient times. That is why in this book we have been able to describe Chinese religion without specifying the historical tense.'¹⁷

Thompson, in line with previous proponents of this approach such as De Groot, Granet, and of course C. K. Yang, does not intend to give a synchronic sociological view of contemporary Chinese religion, but assumes his description of social practices depicts 'Chinese religion' – and here the singular becomes indeed programmatic¹⁸ – as it allegedly was throughout the ages and still is today.

By 1995, Thompson's use of 'Chinese religion' in the singular is mentioned as debatable in a state-of-the-field article that, however, still cites his text (then in its fourth edition) as a 'standard of the field.'¹⁹ The authors of the article themselves feel justified to use categories such as Daoism, Buddhism, or popular religion freely, but point out that 'it should be understood that the categories employed in this article [i.e. Daoism, popular religion, etc.] are in part an artifact of the way in which the field has developed.'²⁰

If Thompson's synthetic, unifying perspective of Chinese Religion is on one end of the spectrum, Poceski's *Introducing Chinese Religions*²¹ and Fowler and Fowler's *Chinese Religions: Beliefs and Practices*²² are on the other. Poceski's text presents each of the 'Three Plus One' traditions in self-contained chapters, in which he constructs a cohesive historical narrative of each tradition. Fowler and Fowler have structured their book in the same manner, devoting two chapters to each of the 'Three Plus One.' Adler's *Chinese Religious Traditions*,²³ on the other hand, opts for a strictly chronological progression, subdividing most chapters into sections dealing with individual traditions.

All three present Chinese religions in the plural and emphasize a diachronic view, with separate chapters for early pre-Confucian religion and religious developments in the People's Republic. The emphasis on historical development and context will not leave readers in doubt that Chinese religious tradition did indeed change considerably over time. On the other hand, the analytic-historical approach allows limited space for common themes, mutual influences, and the social embeddedness of religious practices that so fascinated Thompson and his predecessors.

On the synthetic-analytic spectrum, Ching's *Chinese Religions*²⁴ assumes something of a middle position. While she does address the three teachings separately, within her comparative approach they stand as a unified group when compared to Christianity. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the text appeared in the early 1990s, when the general academic consensus on how to depict Chinese religious traditions shifted.

Coverage

Below are two tables that allow for quick comparison of the books under review.

Table 1 compares the formal characteristics, such as the presence of maps and images and the use of diacritics and Chinese characters.

It is somewhat surprising that Poceski's volume is the only textbook dealing with Chinese religion(s) that includes Chinese characters (although only in its appendix and glossary). This lack is probably due more to decisions made by the marketing departments of the publishers than by the authors. Still, one can only hope for a less provincial approach in the future, when we may dare to expose our students to Asian writing systems. Often in our classes, at least some students do know a few Chinese characters, and for the majority of students who do not, the inclusion of Chinese in introductory textbooks can be a motivation for further study and a reminder of the range of human expression. Whether characters are included or not, the abundance of homonyms and unfamiliar names in Chinese will inevitably cause some confusion for the uninitiated reader who tries to tell *li* from *li* ('principle' 理 and 'ritual' 禮). Regarding transliteration, the textbooks follow the field in general. While Thompson (1996–1996) and Ching (1993) still use Wade-Giles, Adler (2002) and Poceski (2009) use Pinyin. Fowler and Fowler (2008) opt for giving two transcriptions in most instances of a Chinese word, a practice that is as well intentioned as it is unnerving and confusing.

Table 2 compares the selected textbooks in terms of content. The amount of space devoted to an assortment of subjects is displayed in both the approximate number of pages and percentage of the book dedicated to these subjects. Topics of interest that fall outside the 'Three Plus One,' such as Falun Gong, Christianity in China, and the Chinese diaspora, are highlighted.

Approach, intended audience, and the use of primary sources

Thompson's presentation of Chinese religion starts from two assumptions: (1) Chinese religious traditions can be viewed as a unified whole, and (2) users of the textbook would be challenged by the 'strangeness of traditional religious life of the Chinese masses.'²⁵ Addressing a 'Western' audience, Thompson emphasizes the uniqueness of Chinese religious concepts, warning against equating *tian* 天 or *dao* 道 with 'God.' His

Table 1. Format, front and back matter.

	Thompson* 1996 (5th Edition)	Ching (1993)	Adler (2002)	Fowler & Fowler (2008)	Poceski (2009)
Pages	xxiv + 182	xv + 275	144	ix + 320	xvi + 288
Images (number)	17	0	8	0	55
Map	No	No	Yes	No	No
Romanization	Wade-Giles	Wade-Gilest	Pinyin	Wade-Giles and Pinyin†	Pinyin
Diacritics for Indian and Japanese terms	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Chinese characters	No	No	No	No	In glossary with Pinyin and appendix
Appendices	Appendix I: Descriptions of major works in the Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist canon. Suggestions for translations and further reading. Appendix II and III: Thompson's translation of the Heart Sutra and a selection from a Daoist liturgical text	Chinese 'liturgical year'	Dates and description of Chinese festivals and important birthdays and Pinyin	None	Dates of Chinese festival and anniversary celebrations, and important birthdays
Footnotes or Endnotes	Footnotes and endnotes	Endnotes	Endnotes	Endnotes	Endnotes
Bibliography					
– approximate percentage of sources from 1990 and onward	10%	10%	70% (also references to online resources)	70%	80%
– approximate percentage of sources from before 1990	90%	90%	30%	30%	20%
Online component	None	None	None	None	Sample syllabus, slideshows, test and study questions, more images

*Textbooks are presented in order of first edition publication date. Thompson precedes the other surveyed textbooks, having first been published in 1969.

†Pinyin is provided at first occurrence.

‡There are a few exceptions, where only Wade-Giles is used, such as in Tao 道.

Table 2. Content.*

	Thompson 1996 (5th Edition)†	Ching 1993	Adler 2002	Fowler & Fowler 2008	Poceski 2009
Approximate number of pages (and percentage) concerning:					
-Pre-Han religion	52 (29%)	36 (13%)	10 (7%)	15 (5%)	26 (9%)
-Confucianism	12 (7%)	51 (19%)	23 (16%)	55 (17%)	51 (18%)
-Daoism	15 (8%)	36 (13%)	33 (23%)	48 (15%)	52 (18%)
-Buddhism	14 (8%)	32 (12%)	21 (15%)	56 (18%)	51 (18%)
-Popular religion / Pan-Chinese religious practices	79 (43%)	16 (6%)	17 (12%)	52 (16%)	25 (9%)
-Chinese religions in the twentieth century	10 (5%)	10 (4%)	16 (11%)	16 (5%)	33 (11%)
Number of pages concerning:					
-Falun Gong	0	0	2	0	5
-Christianity and Islam in China	0	34	3	0	26
-Chinese diaspora	0	0	0	0	4

* Missing from this table is information related to specific foci within each tradition – e.g. Fowler and Fowler devote over 50% of their discussion of Buddhism to Chan 禪.

†Thompson's focus is on pan-Chinese religious practices, having only added individual chapters on the three traditions starting in his fourth edition (1989).

discussion sets 'modern people in the West' and the 'Western mind' in contradistinction to 'traditional Chinese feeling,' a 'Chinese sense,' and the 'Chinese mind.'²⁶ For all the warning against a projection of 'Western' categories onto Chinese religion, Thompson's approach itself makes frequent use of Western sociological concepts in its portrayal. One wonders also how much traction a book written for a homogeneous 'Western' audience can have today. The student body in North America, Australia, and Europe has become much more diverse than it was in the late 1960s when the first edition of Thompson appeared and today our universities welcome a large contingent of students from Asia or of Asian heritage who are often drawn to courses on Asian religion.

Like Thompson, Ching assumes a Western audience, with the additional qualification, however, that the students are Christians. Contrary to Thompson, her attention is drawn to commonalities rather than differences: '[W]hile China never produced a Western-type religion, one can find in the Chinese tradition what is functionally equivalent to religion or religions in the West.'²⁷ Though acknowledging the many differences between Chinese religions and the Abrahamic traditions, difference itself is not emphasized. Ching seems to believe that Chinese religions can be illumined best through comparisons with the seemingly more familiar tradition of Christianity.²⁸ While this may work for Christian readers, Ching's approach often imposes these comparisons in a sweeping manner. Consequently, in her definition of what is religious in China, great effort is spent on looking for theistic expressions:

The other [response to the claim that Chinese religions are solely concerned with the immanent] is to offer evidence for the presence of a strong religiosity in China's antiquity, and then to argue that this religiosity never completely disappeared, even if it was transformed and subsumed by the early development of humanistic culture. ... We shall also demonstrate that, even as this has moved intellectually from a more personal understanding to a more transpersonal one, a practical and devotional theism has persisted in popular [Chinese] religious consciousness. ... We shall also maintain that the idea of God, however different that is from the Hebrew Creator, was present from the beginning of Chinese civilization until our own times. ...²⁹

It is no coincidence that Ching seems to address a Christian audience. *Chinese Religions* appeared in the imprint Orbis Books, published by the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America (Maryknoll, NY), which aims to foster ‘the international dialogue that is essential to mission.’³⁰ This missionary context is an undercurrent that appears at times in details such as the use of BC and AD instead of the BCE /CE standard.

The comparative perspective leads to interesting chapters on Christianity and Islam in China, which are often neglected in other textbooks but are important for an understanding of the often volatile religious situation in the People’s Republic. Of the other books under review, only Poceski offers similar coverage, with a chapter on Islam and Christianity.

In different ways, both Ching and Thompson try to explain Chinese concepts from an assumed outsider perspective. The texts published after the turn of the twenty-first century do not take up either Ching’s comparative approach or Thompson’s awareness of ‘strangeness,’ but rather approach the subject matter in a more encyclopedic fashion. Adler, Fowler and Fowler, and Poceski do not subscribe to any unifying approach or perspective, but address each tradition in a factual, generally historical manner with little commentary or interpretation by the authors.

Adler’s *Chinese Religious Traditions* is by far the most concise of the five works under review. It is perhaps included unfairly here as it does not aim to serve as a college-level textbook. It is published in the Prentice Hall series, *Religions of the World*, in the familiar format of a short introduction for the ‘informed citizen or student.’³¹ According to the series statement, it ‘provides succinct and balanced overviews of the religions of the world,’ is ‘written in an accessible and informative style,’ assumes ‘little or no prior knowledge on the part of the reader,’ and ‘emphasizes modern developments and the role and impact of the religion in today’s world.’³² Adler realizes all these aims well except the last – his overview is clearly not geared toward the present, as ‘Modern China’ takes up a mere 15 of its 125 pages. Due to the shortness of the volume, Adler generally focuses on bare doctrine, often discussing it as a series of keywords illustrated by a number of selections from primary sources in translation, such as the *Analects*, *Mengzi*, *Daodejing*, *Zhuangzi*, *Daxue*, and even passages by Mazu Daoyi and Zhang Zai. Although ordered chronologically and concerned with the history of Chinese religion, there is little room for historical context or even historical events that were crucial for the development of the tradition.³³ Though Adler is not a textbook *per se*, it is well produced, affordable, and a good candidate for an introductory class when used together with other readings.

Fowler and Fowler’s work is published as part of the Sussex Library of Religious Beliefs and Practices and is a combination of chapters from previous publications from Merv Fowler³⁴ and Jeanene Fowler.³⁵ The rather careless reuse of previous material with only minimal further editing explains why the chapter on Chinese Chan Buddhism often uses the Japanese pronunciation of Chinese terms and after some pages decides to use Zen instead of Chan altogether.³⁶ The picture of Chan and many of the other traditions discussed is far removed from the research on these topics in the last 40 years. One would be hard pressed, for instance, to find a Chan/Zen scholar today who considers Dumoulin’s *Zen Buddhism: A History* to be the ‘definitive word on the history of Zen Buddhism.’³⁷ But then, as Fowler and Fowler assure us, ‘most Zen masters had no interest in history,’ anyway.³⁸

Contrary to Adler and Poceski, Fowler and Fowler do freely share their more idiosyncratic interpretations of events throughout the text. The arrival of Buddhism, for example, is said to have ‘initially heralded the release from spiritual imprisonment of a Chinese people long (four centuries) suffocated by the confines of Confucianism,’³⁹ or ‘by the end of the Heian period (794–1192) a decadent court has not only polluted the populace, but the Buddhist monasteries themselves.’⁴⁰ At times the lack of editing leaves the reader bemused, as in the definition of deities: ‘Deities are specialists in power, and providing the credibility of the deity is maintained by a belief in its power, then that deity is recognized through ritual practice’ [sic].⁴¹ Although more than double the size of Alder, Fowler and Fowler present only a marginal increase in the number of primary sources. Instead, they often quote from secondary literature.

Poceski’s *Introducing Chinese Religions* appeared in the Routledge World Religions Series, edited by Damien Keown and Charles S. Prebish. The series affords its authors generous space for illustrations and careful editing support. Of all works under review, *Introducing Chinese Religions* pays the most attention to textbook layout. It provides abstracts and main bullet points at the beginning, and key point summaries, discussion questions, and a bibliography for further reading at the end of each chapter. The work is explicitly organized to be used as a ‘primary textbook for semester-long courses on Chinese religions at the college level. Each chapter should cover about a week of instruction.’⁴²

Poceski provides a sophisticated introduction to the subject in his preface and compares different possible forms of presenting Chinese religion. He is aware of the dangers of describing different traditions as discrete entities, but feels that ‘doing away with distinct traditions such as Daoism and Confucianism is not historically warranted.’⁴³ The presentation of Chinese religious traditions in the main text is methodologically sensitive, well rounded, and includes important topics such as gender, Christianity and Islam in China, as well as contemporary developments. Poceski is up to date with North American scholarship in the various subfields and his ‘further reading’ at the end of each chapter is well chosen.

Are textbooks still necessary?

Textbooks by definition do not emphasize original research, but are bought by readers who expect to be informed about what counts as common knowledge in a given field. There will obviously be room for debate on some issues, but it is difficult to imagine a textbook that is not ‘mainstream’ in the sense that its contents do not reflect an academic consensus. To be sure, textbooks tend to be more conservative and slow to change.⁴⁴ Textbooks share this trait with encyclopedias, which in both China and Europe have played a prominent role in the organization of knowledge.

In the field of Chinese religions, a number of important new encyclopedias in English on Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism have appeared.⁴⁵ Next to that, Eliade’s *Encyclopedia of Religion*, the standard in the field since 1987, has been revised and expanded.⁴⁶ Most college libraries in North America make these works available online or in print.

Alongside these traditional, for-profit edition projects, one of the most unexpected events for the organization of knowledge has been the rise of free, digital-born

encyclopedias that have been made possible by advances in content management software, especially wiki-type Web applications that allow users to edit version-controlled Web pages collaboratively via a browser. The largest online encyclopedia is Wikipedia, which as of October 2016 has more than 5.2 million articles in English, 1.9 million in German, and 1.7 million in French.^{47,48} There are more specialized online encyclopedias and clearing houses, such as the Hong Kong-based ‘Buddhist door,’ or the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, which includes carefully edited articles on Chinese thought. Factual knowledge was never so easily and cheaply available as it is today.

Does the availability of online information either via the World Wide Web or through the library services at our institutions compromise the need for textbooks? We believe it does shift the emphasis from presenting ‘simple’ facts to presenting these facts as part of the academic debates that surround them. If textbooks can add something over and beyond what can be found in the ever-growing encyclopedias, it is a reflection on how this knowledge is created and on what evidence it is founded. In this regard, the trend away from a single, clearly defined perspective as found, for example, in Thompson and Ching, is a disadvantage. As more recent textbooks strive to present the material in a more neutral fashion, they make themselves less relevant since the bare information can nowadays be easily found elsewhere. To counter this, textbooks have to be designed explicitly for classroom use, with summaries, study questions, ‘boxed’ layout, and plenty of meaningful, documented illustrations that are discussed in the text.

Conclusion

When selecting a textbook for classroom use, considerations include audience, pedagogical objectives, and teaching style. The authors of this article felt that Poceski was currently the most viable textbook for an undergraduate course or introductory graduate course on Chinese religions. Its measured and balanced presentation of current scholarship, coupled with a well-designed organization and layout, make it an attractive choice. Adler’s text is suitable for an undergraduate course on Chinese religions if supplemented by other readings or even as the sole Chinese religions text as part of a course covering multiple Asian religions. Ching’s work, presented critically in context, can be suitable for audiences or instructors who prefer a comparative approach. Thompson’s text can still be used, but both the changing classroom demographics and the development of research in the field have rendered its ahistorical approach less attractive. We felt that Fowler and Fowler had least to offer compared to the other options and that its choices with regard to presentation, layout, editing, and content were problematic.

Since textbooks tend to reflect a mainstream consensus of how the field should be presented, it is not surprising to see ‘Chinese religion’ changing to ‘religions of China’ over the last few decades. The shift to the plural as embodied in the ‘Three Plus One’ model allows for an awareness and appreciation of the plurality of Chinese religious practices, doctrines, and institutions. On the other hand, renouncing an overarching methodological approach runs the risk of presenting a mere collection of facts without a hermeneutic perspective to make sense of them. If the textbook wants to stay viable as a genre in the face of growing competition from online sources, it must be tailored to

classroom use and present Chinese religious traditions as a field of academic inquiry – i.e. making transparent how the field has become concerned with the issues that are debated. A truly compelling textbook would serve as an introduction to the *study* of Chinese religions rather than merely presenting an overview of known facts, and by weaving a cohesive narrative of why and how to study Chinese religions, leave the Web behind. Such a textbook remains to be written.

Notes

1. Lopez, *Religions of China in Practice*; Sommer, *Chinese Religion*; Jordan Paper's *The Spirits are Drunk* provides alternative non-historical approaches and is admittedly 'not intended to be an introduction to nor a comprehensive study of Chinese religion' (1995, xvi). Xinzhong Yao and Yanxia Zhao's *Chinese Religion* could have been included here. The work, however, strongly privileges the modern period and it would be better compared with the numerous titles on religion in contemporary China, which have come out in recent years. The edited volumes of James Miller's *Chinese Religions in Contemporary Societies* M. M. Yang's *Religion in Chinese Society*, Y. Ashiwa and D. Wank's *Making Religion, Making the State*, and similar works attest to a rise in interest in the question of religion in modern and contemporary China, a trend that parallels the revival of religious activities in China over the last three decades.
2. Jochim, *Chinese Religions*; Overmyer, *Religions of China*.
3. Nadeau, *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Chinese Religions*. Lagerwey, *Religion and Chinese Society*. Their respective list prices are US\$220 and US\$80. Though Thompson's fifth edition retails at the price of US\$123, there are plenty of used copies available for under US\$30, which is not the case for the Nadeau and Lagerwey texts.
4. For a recent overview of Western scholarship on Chinese popular religion, see Berezkin, 'From Imperial Metaphor to Rebellious Deities.'
5. See De Groot, *The Religious System of China*.
6. See De Groot, *The Religion of the Chinese*; De Groot, *Religion in China – Universism*; Granet, *La Religion des Chinois*. Against this, different traditions have always been identified and treated as such. Legge's *The Religions of China* treats Confucianism and Daoism separately, and Max Weber, too, felt compelled to add a chapter on Daoism in his study of Confucianism in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*. Krause writes explicitly in the plural when introducing the 'religious and philosophical systems' of China in *Ju-Tao-Fo*.
7. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*.
8. Yang, 301–340.
9. Yang, 301–340.
10. Since 2008, the Academy of Social Sciences in China issues its annual report on religion in China, the 'Blue Book on Religion in China' (*Zongjiao lanpishu* 宗教藍皮書), which, finally, makes better data on these trends available. Jin and Qiu's 2010 *Zhongguo zongjiao baogao* report speaks of a 'Golden Age for the development of Buddhism in China'; Jin, Ze 金泽, and Yonghui Qiu 邱永辉, *Zhongguo zongjiao baogao* 中国宗教报告 2, 36 ff.
11. Jin, Ze 金泽, and Yonghui Qiu 邱永辉, *Zhongguo zongjiao baogao* 中国宗教报告, 144–60.
12. One could argue that Xinzhong Yao and Yanxia Zhao's *Chinese Religion* is an exception to the shift from 'Chinese religion' to 'Chinese religions' via the 'Three Plus One' paradigm. Yet, despite Yao and Zhao's seeming concern with the problem of using the *sanjiao* paradigm, they regularly employ it. They refer to Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism interchangeably as three doctrines and three religions, moving between discussions of the three as if they are a singular cohesive unit. Though they provide historical background, their focus and treatment in the text renders Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism as

- monoliths. In a 226-page text, the terms ‘Confucian,’ ‘Confucianism,’ ‘Daoist,’ ‘Daoism,’ ‘Buddhist,’ and ‘Buddhism’ each make more than 50 appearances.
13. Thompson, *Chinese Religion: An Introduction* (Encino, CA: Dickenson 1969); Thompson, *Chinese Religion: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. (Encino, CA: Dickenson, 1975); Thompson, *Chinese Religion: An Introduction*. 3rd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1979); Thompson, *Chinese Religion: An Introduction*. 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1989); Thompson, *Chinese Religion: An Introduction*. 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1996).
 14. Thompson’s first four editions were published in the Religious Life of Man Series. The fifth edition appeared after the name change of the series to Religious Life in History. There is a companion reader – *The Chinese Way in Religion* – but the main textbook may stand on its own, as translations are provided throughout and in two appendices (Thompson, *The Chinese Way in Religion*; Paper and Thompson, *The Chinese Way in Religion*).
 15. Thompson, in his fourth and fifth editions, replaces his earlier use of the terms ‘Confucius,’ ‘Confucianism,’ and ‘Neo-Confucianism’ with the use of ‘Master Kong’ (or ‘Kongzi’), ‘Literati,’ and ‘Renascent Literati tradition.’ He explains in the preface to his fourth edition that the former terms are ‘incongruous’ and ‘bastard latinizations’ (Thompson 1989). However, this explanation is not mentioned in the fifth edition, leaving the reader of the most recent edition (which does not include previous edition prefaces) to guess at the motivations for his choice of terminology, especially the eccentric ‘Renascent Literati.’
 16. Thompson 1996, xiii.
 17. Thompson 1996, 134.
 18. Regarding the use of ‘Chinese religion’ rather than ‘Chinese religions’ in the title, Thompson explains: ‘Our use of the word *religion* in the singular is intended, then, to convey our interpretation that the character of religious expression in China is above all a *manifestation of the Chinese culture*. To attempt to understand religion in China as several systems of doctrine is to read Western experience into a quite different set of circumstances’ (Thompson 1996, xiii; italics present in the original).
 19. Overmyer, Arbuckle, Gladney, McRae, Taylor, Teiser, and Verellen, ‘Introduction: Chinese Religions – The State of the Field Part II,’ 316.
 20. Overmyer et al., 316.
 21. Poceski, *Introducing Chinese Religions*.
 22. Fowler and Fowler, *Chinese Religions*.
 23. Adler, *Chinese Religious Traditions*.
 24. Ching, *Chinese Religions*.
 25. Thompson 1996, 14.
 26. Thompson 1996, 6–8.
 27. Ching, 2.
 28. Ching’s textbook has more than double the number of academic reviews than that of all other works surveyed here, receiving mixed opinions of (at times both) approval and lament. In her review, Nyitray characterizes the work as ‘at once irksome and admirable’ (Nytaray, ‘Review of *Chinese Religions*, by Julia Ching,’ 178). Kirkland’s review concludes, ‘This text will not satisfy all needs or tastes, but it has much to commend it, and it belongs in all collections’ (Kirkland, ‘Review of *Chinese Religions*, by Julia Ching,’ 63). Ji summarizes in his review, ‘Obviously, readers may have different opinions, or even strong disagreements with Ching, which is natural and expected’ (Ji, ‘Review of *Chinese Religions*, by Julia Ching,’ 215). For other reviews of Ching’s textbook, see Lai, ‘Review of *Chinese Religions*, by Julia Ching,’ 411–12; Raguin, ‘Review of *Chinese Religions*, by Julia Ching,’ 524; Van Baak, ‘Review of *Chinese Religions*, by Julia Ching,’ 575–76. For reviews of Thompson’s textbook, see Girardot, “‘Very Small Books About Very Large Subjects’”; Welch, ‘Review of *Chinese Religion: An Introduction*, by Laurence G. Thompson.’ For a review of Poceski’s textbook, see Kirkland, ‘Review of *Introducing Chinese Religions*, by Mario Poceski,’ 245.
 29. Ching, 22.
 30. Ching, iv.

31. Smart, 'Series Foreword,' 5.
32. Smart, 5.
33. For the development of Daoism, the foundation of an independent state in Sichuan under Zhang Daoling's heirs, for instance, or the theocratic rule of Kou Qianzhi, seems to be indispensable for a historical understanding.
34. See Fowler, *Buddhism: Beliefs and Practices*; Fowler, *Zen Buddhism*.
35. See Fowler, *An Introduction to the Philosophy and Religion of Taoism*.
36. The use of *mondo*, *satori*, *dokusan*, *koan* (without diacritics), etc. substitutes for Chinese terms. There are other instances of faulty editing – e.g. repeated references to Mohism without the school ever being introduced; the proposed use of five perspectives on 'stages of Confucian evolution,' which are not clearly explained in what follows (Fowler & Fowler 2008, 84).
37. Fowler & Fowler, 308.
38. Fowler & Fowler, 208.
39. Fowler & Fowler, 114.
40. Fowler & Fowler, 220.
41. Fowler & Fowler, 154.
42. Poceski, 7.
43. Poceski, 5.
44. Our gratitude goes to an anonymous reviewer who suggested making this more explicit, and for referring us to Goossaert's *Critical Readings on Chinese Religions* for a collection of field-shaping works that textbooks follow after.
45. See Kohn, *Daoism Handbook*; Pregadio, *Encyclopedia of Daoism*; Buswell, *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*; Yao, *Routledgecurzon Encyclopedia of Confucianism*. Buswell's volume is a general encyclopedia of Buddhism, but perhaps due to the interests of the editor, East Asian Buddhism is comparatively strongly represented.
46. See Jones, Eliade, and Adams, *Encyclopedia of Religion*.
47. All numbers are provided by Wikipedia.
48. The Chinese Wikipedia is relatively small with only about 890,000 entries, mainly because of the strong competition by Baidu 百度 (13 million articles) and Hudong Baike 互动百科 (14.7 million articles), Chinese-only online encyclopedias that are closely monitored by the Chinese government.

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