Chinese Dualism Revisited

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In an earlier essay on Chinese dualism,¹ I suggested that: 1) dualism is a universal phenomenon; 2) Platonic dualism, inherited by Latin Christian theology via Augustine, is a particularly radical form thereof; 3) Chinese dualism is more readily approached by means of Hebraic as opposed to Greek dualism; but 4) similarities notwithstanding, the contrast between God-the-Father and Dao-the-Mother embodies and entails fundamental differences between Hebraic and Chinese dualisms. I also sought to explain certain differences in Derridean manner, by referring to alphabetic as opposed to iconographic forms of writing and the related contrast between an auditive and a visual epistemology. Finally, in a third section entitled “Chinese dualism in history”, I took up briefly what will be the heart of the present essay—an undertaking made possible by the Brill publication of eight massive volumes on Chinese religious history. Without the unstinting support of Albert Hoffstädt these volumes would never have seen the light of day.

1 Pre-Buddhist China²

We could also refer to the first, royal phase of Chinese history as pre-Dao China, for the introduction of the concept Dao in the fourth century BCE constitutes a major turning point in Chinese intellectual and religious history. Before the Dao, Heaven was the supreme source of authority, as may be seen in two parallel concepts, the Mandate of Heaven 天命 and the Son of Heaven 天子, that appear in the early Western Zhou. The first reference to the former occurs in a bronze inscription dated ca. 998:

1 “Dieu-Père/Dao-Mère: Dualismes occidentaux et chinois,” *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident*, special issue «The Father in Question» (2012): 137–57.

2 There is now an excellent introduction to this subject in Edward Slingerland, *Mind and Body in Early China: Beyond Orientalism and the Myth of Holism* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2018). Using both close reading of selected early texts and “distant”, digital reading statistics for a much wider range of texts, Slingerland definitively lays to rest the myth of Chinese monism, at least as regards the human person.

Brilliant King Wen received the great Mandate from Tian. When King Wu succeeded King Wen, he created a state, opening hidden lands, possessing all the four quarters, and setting right their peoples. In ceremonial affairs involving wine, oh! he permitted no excess; at sacrificial rites, he permitted no drunkenness. Hence Heaven in its greatness watched closely over its sons and protected the former Kings in their possession of the four quarters. I have heard that the Yin (Shang) lost the Mandate because the greater and lesser lords and the many officials assisting the Yin sank into drunkenness and so were bereft of their capital.³

Thus even if, in Martin Kern's words, "the memory of the founding rulers, the claim that they had received their right to rule directly from Heaven, and the very notion of the ruler being the 'Son of Heaven' take on particular urgency only toward the end of the Western Zhou,"⁴ Robert Eno is clearly right in commenting as follows on the above citation:

Tian has taken on the role of ethical guardian, rewarding and punishing rulers according to the quality of their stewardship of the state. The relationship of the ruler to the High Power has now added to worship the fulfillment of an imperative to govern according to moral standards.⁵

Although the later complementary pair of Heaven/Earth is not yet visible in the transcendence of Heaven, it is clear that to refer to the sovereign as "Son of Heaven" refers to the fact that his exercise of authority in human society here on earth derives from a "divine" heavenly sanction.

As Jean Levi has shown,⁶ nowhere is heavenly transcendence clearer than in the Zhou sacrifice to Heaven. For this sacrifice, two bullocks were raised, one for Heaven itself, the other for Houji, Lord of Cereals, the legendary ancestor of the Zhou. When it came time to sacrifice, the king himself killed the bullock for Heaven with bow and arrow. The bullock was then placed on a pyre and burned totally. The second bullock, by contrast, was divided into raw and cooked parts, with the former being burned as an offering, the second being distributed by what Levi calls a "cascade of leftovers" from the top to the bottom of the governing aristocracy: those lower in rank ate what those higher

3 Robert Eno, "Shang State Religion and the Pantheon of the Oracle Texts," in *Early Chinese Religion 1: Shang through Han (1250 BC–220 AD)*, ed. John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 101.

4 Martin Kern, "Bronze Inscriptions, the *Shijing*, and the *Shangshu*: The Evolution of the Ancestral Sacrifice during the Western Zhou," in *Early Chinese Religion I*, 149.

5 Eno, "Shang State Religion," 101.

6 Levi, "The Rite, the Norm and the Dao: Philosophy of Sacrifice and Transcendence of Power in Ancient China," in *Early Chinese Religion I*, 645–92.

had left and owed them, in return, a debt (*bao* 報) of loyalty. Together, these two bullocks thus illustrate the absolute transcendence of Heaven, the relative transcendence of the “divine” ancestor (and his descendants, sons of Heaven), and the political hierarchy formed by the “meat-eaters” who participated in the sacrifice. The people, of course, had no part in these rites of the powerful.

In the same essay, Levi shows how the Dao comes to replace Heaven as the source of transcendence. The Dao is, in the first place, “absolute extensiveness.” But while it thus englobes all, its unity encompassing multiplicity, it is itself empty of any specificity and, as such, most obviously linked to the fictitious fifth season and direction, the Center. Put in other terms, this Dao is a spatio-temporal entity in which space takes precedence over time and bureaucratically administered territory over temporally defined ancestry. In both royal dynasties, the Shang and then the Zhou, the kings traced their descent back, via close to distant ancestors and, finally, to mythical ancestors who were closest to celestial transcendence. In the new bureaucratic empire that was forming at the same time as its ideological foundations, the ultimate ancestor was Huangdi 黃帝, the Yellow Lord, one of the Five Lords 五帝 who represented the five directions and phases 五行.

Di 帝 originally referred to a high god, probably the High God, who alone in the Shang pantheon could give orders (*ling* 令) and who controlled weather, harvest, and warfare. This clearly anthropomorphic imagination of divine power gave way first to the Zhou Heaven, at once anthropomorphic (ethical) and cosmic, and now to the Dao, purely cosmic. The Son of Heaven does not pray or sacrifice to the Dao but models himself on it, notably in the Mingtang 明堂 or Hall of Light.⁷ Central institution of the bureaucratic empire, this Hall of the Gods reveals clearly that the gods now simply embody the cosmic order manifest in the spatially ventilated cycle of seasons: its four sides represent the four seasons, its center the fifth season, sandwiched between summer and fall, the Yang and Yin halves of the year. The Son of Heaven now illustrates his transcendence by performing rites in each month that correspond to the celestial events determining the seasons, that is, by modeling himself on the cosmic order. His divine authority has become inseparable from the Dao, that is, from the cosmic order—an order he must not only illustrate in the Hall of Light but incorporate by engaging in self-cultivation so that he himself embodies the Dao. It is by means of this Daoist “monism” that political and religious power were “collapsed” into one in a way that continues to over-determine the exercise of power in China today.

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7 Luminosity being inseparable from the “gods,” referred to as both *mingshen* 明神 and *shen-ming* 神明, Mingtang might also be translated as Hall of the Gods.

One of the most useful passages for understanding Daoist monism is the famous first chapter of the *Daodejing*:

A dao that may be spoken is not the enduring Dao. A name that may be named is not an enduring name. No names—this is the beginning of heaven and earth. Having names—this is the mother of the things of the world. Make freedom from desire your constant norm; thereby you will see what is subtle. Make having desires your constant norm; thereby you will see what is manifest. These two arise from the same source but have different names. Together they may be termed “the mysterious.” Mystery and more mystery: the gate of all that is subtle.⁸

It will be noticed, to begin with, that this Dao is silent, i.e., defined in terms of speech—one of the two reasons I gave in my earlier essay for the universality of dualism, namely, the gap between words and things. It is precisely that duality that this initial paragraph addresses, in a way that would make Lacan proud, since in it naming = desiring:

enduring	常	not enduring	非常
no-name	無名	have-name	有名
no-desire	無欲	have-desire	有欲
subtle	妙	manifest	徼

In suggesting a strategy of alternating between “no-desire” and “have-desire,” Laozi prepares for his concluding affirmations that they “arise from the same source” and “together may be termed ‘the mysterious.’” We will see below how this idea of alternation, modelled on that of the seasons and ideologically compatible with the Hall of Light was re-used by Zhu Xi centuries later.

2 **The Buddhist “Conquest”**

It is a well-known fact that Buddhism represented until modern times the most powerful challenge to Chinese political/religious monism. This took the form of debates over whether monks should bow down before the Son of Heaven, clearly a question that made no sense whatsoever in pre-Buddhist China. In South China—the China of the “Chinese,” where the debate was carried on

8 For this translation by Robert Eno see <<https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/handle/2022/23426>>. Last checked 26 April 2020.

by elite intellectuals—the consensus was that monks, as representatives of a higher order, should not bow down before emperors: religious power was superior to political power, and the role of the latter was to protect the former (*hufa* 護法, literally, protect the Dharma). But in North China, occupied by dynasties of non-Chinese origin, the debate took a much more traditional turn when the monk Faguo 法果 (fl. 396–409) announced that the reigning emperor Daowu 道武 was “the living Tathāgata [Thus-come-one].”⁹ This was confirmed not long after by the great Yungang cave projected initiated in the year 460 by the monk Tanyao 曇曜: “By modeling the images of the buddhas on the Northern Wei emperor, he announced that the emperor was the buddha of that age.”¹⁰ Thus with regard to the key question of the nature of power, Buddhism was more “conquered” than “conquering.”

In the larger picture of religion, society, and psychology, however, Buddhism very much comes across as the conqueror, with profound implications for Chinese dualism. We may begin with the basic institution of the *samgha*: hitherto, China had known only eremitism, not monasticism. The fact that monasticism was in contradiction with truly fundamental social tenets is obvious from the name given monastics: *chujia* 出家, people who leave the family. Centuries later, when China will have come to be dominated by the Confucian ideology and practice of the lineage, sons who thus “left the family” were often erased from the family “genealogy” (*zupu* 族譜): excommunicated. Even more in contradiction with Confucian tenets was the creation of communities of “family-leaving” women and, even though women were clearly discriminated against in Buddhism too, the opening up of a space where they were no longer just an instrument of physical reproduction for a male-dominated society but could also apply themselves to “spiritual” goals is reflected in the creation of a literary genre of “Lives of nuns” (*Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳). Here, in François Martin’s translation, is an example of a woman “saint” from the late-fifth, early-sixth century:

Miaowei 妙禪, whose original surname was Liu 劉, was from Jiankang 建康. From the tenderest age, she showed a keen intelligence. She left her family young to live in the Xiqingyuan nunnery 西青苑寺. Her practice of the rules was impeccable and she was spiritually highly awakened. Everybody loved her for her earnestness and kindness. She was a superb

9 Li Gang, “State Religious Policy,” *Early Chinese Religion 11: The Period of Division (220–589 AD)*, ed. John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 274.

10 Li Yuqun, “Classification, Layout, and Iconography of Buddhist Cave Temples and Monasteries,” *Early Chinese Religion 11*, 585.

conversationalist and excelled at talking and joking. She lectured more than 30 times on the *Da niepan jing* 大涅槃經 (*Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*), the *Lotus sūtra*, and the *Shidi (jing)* 十地經 (*Sūtra of the ten stages*), and she taught about each of the texts of discipline for nuns in the *Shisong* 十誦 [Sarvāstivāda Vinaya tradition]. She was often a great help to others by leading them in every way. She died in the 12th year of Tianjian (513), aged 69.¹¹

Buddhism is without any question the religion that, before the arrival of Christianity, did the most for paving the way to a gender equality that still remains far out of reach, in China as elsewhere.

Meditation and ritual are two other areas in which the impact of Buddhism was deeply felt. Concerning the first, Martin, inspired by studies of Tian Xiaofei concerning the influence of meditation on poetic practice, translates Wang Wei's poem "The Deer barrier" and suggests:

Tonal harmony, brevity of form, absence of the self, the seizure of the fugitive instant through echoes and the play of light and shadow, all the ingredients which collaborate to make of these four lines a chef d'oeuvre, can be traced back to the Six Dynasties and assigned in one way or another to the influence of Buddhism. In other words, without Buddhism, they would likely never have been written.¹²

As to ritual, it is on Daoism that Buddhism's mark is deepest. Before Buddhism, Daoism was a salvation religion, but only for the "seed people" 種民. Above all, perhaps, it was a religion of the written, taking over from the imperial bureaucracy both its petitions and talismans. Under the conjoined influence of *chenwei* 讖緯 speculations on the cosmic nature and power of *wen* 文 (writing, pattern) and of Buddhist scriptures "spoken" by the Buddha 佛說, the new Lingbao rituals of the early fifth century represent a massive shift toward orality—and thereby universality.¹³

"Talismans" are particularly important for understanding this shift. First, the corresponding Chinese word, *fu* 符, has the same origins as the Greek *sumbolon*: a sign which, divided in two, serves as a "passport" when the two halves are reunited. Early talismans are simply exaggerated forms of identifiable Chinese characters. But by the time of the *Taishang lingbao wufuxu* 太上靈寶五符

11 François Martin, "Buddhism and Literature," in *Early Chinese Religion II*, 922.

12 Ibid., 951.

13 Cf. my *Paradigm Shifts in Early and Modern Chinese Religion: A History* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 87–88.

序 in the late third century CE, five complex “configurations of energy” representing the divine lords of the five directions/phases have become the basis of Daoist self-cultivation. The third chapter of this text describes a pitiable Yellow Lord begging the Sovereign, “a man of unknown epoch, whose body is nine feet long and covered with black fur” (3.18a4–5), to explain to him the five true writs. At long last, this is what the Sovereign tells him:

The true writ of which you have spoken, whose words you do not understand, are the energies of higher Heaven in your body. It suffices to know your own body well in order to live forever. Humans are the most spiritual of all living creatures, but people do not understand themselves and do not know how to keep their spirits so as to master all ills. Those who have understood do not seek the help of gods in Heaven: for them, focusing on the body is sufficient. That is why it is said, “The human body is like a country. The trunk is comparable to the buildings of the Court, while the four members constitute the suburbs. The articulations are like the hundred functionaries. The spirit is like the sovereign, the blood like the ministers, and the energies like the people. That is why the person who knows how to regulate his body also knows how to govern a country. (3.20a6–b3)

Chapter 1 of the same text provides the oral formulae that describe the energies of each of the five writs, identifying them by name with the Five Lords 五帝. By ingesting these energies in accord with a cosmo-liturgical calendar, the adept achieves immortality. The core Daoist ritual of the Offering (*jiao* 醮) is made on a regular basis to these Five Lords as represented by their talismans.¹⁴

To summarize: these five “true writs” 真文 represent the creative energies of the Five Lords and, as such, are the source of space-time in every way comparable to the uttered word of the Creator in the Book of Genesis.

This “theology of the celestial writs of Lingbao”¹⁵ is considerably developed in the Lingbao scriptures revealed in the early fifth century:

Born prior to primordial commencement within the vacuous cave, when heaven and earth had not yet taken root nor the sun and moon lit up, all was abysmal darkness: they are without ancestor and without progenitor.

14 For a complete account, see my “Deux écrits taoïstes anciens,” *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 14 (2004): 139–71.

15 Wang Chengwen, “The Revelation and Classification of Daoist Scriptures,” in *Early Chinese Religion II*, 775–890, and my summary in *Paradigm Shifts*, 84–88.

The numinous script was obscure, flickering between visibility and invisibility. The two principles [the Yin and the Yang] relied on them for their separation, the great *yang* [the sun] relied on them in order to illuminate.... The *Jade chapters in red script of the five elders of primordial commencement* emerged spontaneously in the vacuous cavern, produced heaven, established earth, and produced through transformation the radiant spirits.¹⁶

The Tang commentator Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (fl. 631–55) states that “the body of the perfect writs ... transformed with the dharma-body of the great Dao.”¹⁷ That is, whereas the Buddhist dharma body was composed of the sermons of the Buddha, the Lingbao dharma body was composed of perfect writs.

These writs were the origin of all the “radiant spirits”, even the highest, the Celestial Worthy of Primordial Commencement 元始天尊, who “replace[d] the Great Thearch and celestial sovereign that symbolized heaven in the Confucian tradition.”¹⁸ But, on the model of the Buddha, he was temporalized by giving him “his own previous lives and innumerable rebirths, thus forming in actuality the model of a sincere practitioner who finally accomplishes the Dao.”¹⁹ This “temporalization” occurs together with the oralization of the process of transmission: like the Buddhist scriptures that begin “Thus did I hear” 如是我聞, during heavenly audiences with myriad disciples gathered round, the new Lingbao scriptures are “revealed through recitation by the Celestial Worthy of Primordial Commencement.”²⁰

This oralization is even clearer in another early fifth century revelation, the *Shenzhou jing* 神咒經 (*Scripture of divine incantations*), where paragraph after paragraph is said simply to be “uttered by the Dao” 道言. Thus did the religion of the privately transmitted writ become a universal salvation religion of public rituals based on scripture recitation by priests on Buddhism-derived “high seats” 高座. At the same time, the talisman, now invariably accompanied by an oral formula, remained one of Daoism’s central instruments of healing and salvation.

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But what has this to do with dualism? This: the cosmological monism of the Dao had become, over the course of the Han, inseparable from the “theology of

¹⁶ Wang, 791.

¹⁷ Ibid., 792.

¹⁸ Ibid., 796.

¹⁹ Ibid., 795.

²⁰ Ibid., 873.

celestial writs," its worship an individual form of the imperial Hall of Light rituals. We might even speculate that the *Lingbao wufuxu* mode of self-cultivation was precisely what the emperor had to practice in order to "incorporate the Dao," and that this is being hinted at in the story of the Yellow Lord begging the Sovereign for access to the five true writs and immortality. But in thus becoming the ritual expression of the cosmological monism on which the imperial bureaucracy was built, it became as well the expression of the sociological and gender dualism embedded in a system of writing to which only a very small portion of the male elite belonged: the meat-eaters had become writ-eaters. This explains why Daoism, from the beginning, is one of the most ferocious combatants of the anthropomorphic spirit-medium cults of the illiterate people. It is the religion of self-sovereignty, of self-possession, as opposed to possession by the gods. Its true writs stand over against the "inspired" speech of the spirit mediums.

Buddhism, by legitimizing orality in a written canon, created the new social model of a *sangha* supported by and working for lay society and, in so doing, turned Daoism into a religion of universal salvation. This is perhaps the most important consequence of the Buddhist "conquest."

3 Song Dualism

In the Song, Buddhist dualism continues to worm its way ever deeper into elite Chinese thought and practice. In Daoism, this is visible in the Quanzhen 全真 founder's call for radical asceticism: "Recalling the vanity of mundane affairs, he promoted humility and the contemplation of skulls," a "fight against the vices," and "mortification".²¹ Assiduous practice of inner or symbolic alchemy was the way to escape "the carcass of the body 軀殼, which is just a 'hut of bones' 骸屋."²² As in many religious traditions, harsh treatment of the body was the path to inner, spiritual authenticity: "This life that everyone can give rise to through ascesis is not an 'energy.' It is a presence, an inner master everyone can find."²³

In ritual Daoism, too, the ever more radical focus on the inner person was in evidence:

21 Pierre Marsone, "Daoism under the Jurchen Jin Dynasty," in *Modern Chinese Religion I: Song-Liao-Jin-Yuan*, ed. John Lagerwey and Pierre Marsone (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1136–38.

22 Ibid., 1135.

23 Ibid., 1158.

The clearest sign of interiorization is the universal penetration of esoteric Buddhism, in water-land and yellow register rituals not only but also in literature and iconography. Daoist murals of going in audience before the Origin—which echo an identical practice in symbolic alchemy—are a striking example of Tantric-inspired interiorized and synthetic rationality, as are of course the mandala and its impact on Buddhist architecture and self-cultivation. It is perhaps in the *Inner method of the great ultimate for oblatory refinement* 太極祭煉內法 by Zheng Sixiao that Tantric-influenced interiorization reaches its fullest expression in Daoist ritual.²⁴

In the *Inner method* of Zheng Sixiao 鄭思肖 (1241–1318), the entire ritual process of saving the souls of the dead takes place inside the body of the priest:

When I silently go in audience in the muddy pellet (the upper cinnabar field), then all the myriad souls follow me and rise to Heaven. When I thoroughly awaken to the great Dao, then all the myriad souls through me attain the realized state 證果. My own mind is the ruler of the ten thousand transformations in heaven and on earth. My own body is the ruler of the oblatory refinement of the souls in the netherworld.²⁵

A purer idealism would be hard to formulate.

As for the “new” Confucians, Curie Virág begins her account with a survey of the anti-emotion dualism characteristic of Confucianism from the late royal period through the Tang. A stark version of this dualism may be seen in Li Ao 李翱 (772–841):

That by which a person becomes a sage is his [moral] nature. That by which one’s nature becomes deluded is the feelings. Joy, anger, fear, sadness, love, hate, and desire are all brought about by the feelings. When the feelings obscure it, the nature becomes hidden.... Feelings are the corruption of the nature. If one understands how this corruption comes about, this corruption would have no basis. If the mind is still and unmoving, corrupt thoughts would cease by themselves.²⁶

24 Lagerwey, “Introduction,” in *Modern Chinese Religion I*, 66.

25 Ibid., 42–43.

26 Curie Virág, “Self-Cultivation as Praxis in Song Neo-Confucianism,” in *Modern Chinese Religion I*, 1207–8.

Like Li Ao, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) begins with the distinction first found in the *Zhongyong* 中庸 between the mind “before” 未動 and “after movement” 已動, but he believes the latter need not be the corruption of the former: “The nature is the state before movement, and the feelings are the state after movement. The mind encompasses both the states before and after movement.”²⁷ It is only if feelings derive from the “human mind” 人心 that they will be bad, expressions of “the selfishness of the physical body” 形氣之私; if they derive from the “Dao mind” 道心, they will be good, expressions of the “correctness of the innate nature and destiny” 性命之正.²⁸ The agonistic duality of the human mind is thus replaced by a Yin-Yang alternation reminiscent of the monad-like Dao.

But if Zhu Xi thus overcomes the ontological dualism of the human person, he perpetuates Confucian sociological and gender dualism: it is only a male elite that studies the Classics and engages in the serious self-cultivation that alone can preserve “correctness”.

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More important, however, than these dualisms is a distinction between moral (*daotong* 道統) and political legitimacy (*zhengtong* 政統) that recalls the early Buddhist challenge to the state. Chang Ouei Ong notes that the use of the term *daotong* by the Song-dynasty prime minister Qin Gui is what “prompted Zhu Xi to rework the concept to stress the authority of the literati over the interpretation of morality and culture at the expense of the rulers.”²⁹ Versus Qin Gui, who promoted peace negotiations with the Jurchen Jin, the Daoxue 道學 people were a “war party”, rejecting the unequal treaties concluded first with the Liao and then with the Jin. According to Hoyt Tillman, Zhu Xi first began to use the term *daotong* in the year 1189, when working on his commentaries on the *Zhongyong* and the *Daxue* 大學.³⁰ But once Daoxue (neo-Confucianism) had become state orthodoxy, in 1241, it left the opposition and supported emperors like the Ming founder, who “claimed for himself the status of sage-king, combining both political and moral authority.”³¹ To justify this, the founding Ming emperor Zhu Yuanzhang invoked the same vision of the self as Zheng Sixiao: “This is because the body of the ruler is the empire, the dynasty, and the myri-

27 Ibid., 1211.

28 Ibid., 1205–6.

29 Chang Ouei Ong, “Confucian Thoughts,” in *Modern Chinese Religion I*, 1407.

30 Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, *Confucian Discourse and Chu Hsi's Ascendancy* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1992), 138.

31 Lagerwey, “Introduction,” in *Modern Chinese Religion I*, 70.

ad creatures, and because the spirit and the breath of the ruler are the prince of the realm.”³² That is, the ontological monism of the Dao once again aborted any challenge to the divine status of the Son of Heaven and the church-state over which he presided.

4 Contemporary Monism

In the final set of the Brill volumes, covering the period 1850–2015, we suggest that, “while secularization” was traditionally defined as the elimination of religion from the public sphere, its use here is more about the diffusion of comparable values into various autonomous realms (religion, politics, the economy, science).³³ In other words, if in previous periods of paradigm shift what are clearly new religions attack the religions of the past and, in appearance at least, replace them, contemporary secularization takes a very different form. In the first period of radical change, during the Warring States, the intellectuals promoting a new religion of the Dao systematically attacked and ridiculed the spirit medium religion that had prevailed throughout the royal Shang and Zhou periods. After the collapse of the Han, transformations led by the Buddhists produced a united front of the Three Teachings—Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, each with its own imperially approved scriptural canon—against spirit mediumism. In the Song, processes of radical rationalization and interiorization transformed each of the Three Teachings, leading not only to “unification of the Three Teachings” but even to a degree of unification with spirit medium religion and, above all, to ever more important lay versions of the Three Teachings.

It is this unified “Chinese religion” that was driven out of the public space in the contemporary paradigm shift, to be replaced by the religions of scientism, nationalism, and the market economy. Having defined religion itself as “the practice of structuring values,” we suggest that, in the “reform and opening period,”

the new structuring value system is nationalism, practiced in the form of state-owned enterprises and the banking system of state capitalism.³⁴

32 John D. Langlois, Jr., and Sun K'o-k'uan, “Three Teachings Syncretism and the Thought of Ming T'ai-tsu,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 43 (1983): 133.

33 Vincent Goossaert, Jan Kiely, John Lagerwey, “Introduction,” in *Modern Chinese Religion II: 1850–Present*, ed. Goossaert, Kiely, and Lagerwey (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1, n.2.

34 *Ibid.*, 20.

It is clear in retrospect that it was the potent mix of scientism and nationalism that fuelled the Qigong fever and enabled Falungong's deep penetration into both the party and the army.³⁵

As I write these words in early 2020, a resurgent nationalism seems to be the religion of the entire world, of Trump's America as much as of Xi Jinping's China or Narendra Modi's India, replacing—or at least challenging—the neo-liberalism that, while it lingers on in fragmented form here and there, is no longer “believed in” by anyone serious. Scientism, too, is alive and well, both in the inverse mode of science rejectionism in America and in the renewed attention to Marxism and its “scientific theory of history” in China. The implosion and near collapse of neo-liberal capitalism in 2008, combined with the CCP's survival of both the Soviet and the neo-liberal collapse, feeds the conviction that tomorrow it will be their turn to play hegemon.

It is precisely this conjuncture that makes it imperative to understand the continuities of both the current Western and Chinese systems of government, with regard, notably, to the question of monism and dualism. To do this, one of the most telling issues is precisely that of the relationship between the market economy and national governments. As I have written elsewhere, “Consistently, over the last 150 years, it has proven hard in China to accept market autonomy and relinquish administrative control of the economy.”³⁶ From “Yan Fu's translation of Adam Smith [that] was skewed toward greater government involvement in the market than the original text would warrant,”³⁷ to the current campaign in China to reinforce the role of state-owned enterprises there is a common theme: the state must control the economy. But the word “state” in China refers—and with increasing insistence—to the party-state, that is, the “secularized” version of the church-state. In other words, it is the contemporary expression of the Dao-monism of the “sage-king”—made concrete in the promotion of “Xi Jinping thought”—that cannot countenance a separation of powers that enters history in the form of two dualistic religions of universal salvation:

In both cases [Rome and China] conquerors increasingly merged with local elites, and transcendent religions that claimed autonomy from the state—Christianity and Buddhism—made considerable progress.³⁸

35 Ibid., 41.

36 *Paradigm Shifts*, 212.

37 Ibid., 213, citing David Faure, “The Introduction of Economics in China, 1850–2010,” in *Modern Chinese Religion II*, 79.

38 Walter Scheidel, “From the ‘Great Convergence’ to the ‘First Great Divergence’: Roman and Qin-Han State Formation and its Aftermath,” in *Rome and China: Comparative Perspectives on Ancient World Empires* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 14.

In China, as we saw, Buddhism was “subjugated” by the Chinese church-state; in the West, the Augustinian dualism of the City of God and the City of Man predominated:

As Sturzo reminds us, a fundamental dualism of political and religious powers was the novelty introduced with Christianity, and this diarchy—Sturzo’s term—has characterized every Christian civilization for two thousand years. Indeed, one could argue it was precisely this dualism that allowed political power to dissociate itself from religious authority over the course of the centuries and claim for itself not only autonomy, but also *absolute* autonomy over its subjects through the appropriation of its own personality. In any event, Sturzo concedes the modern State remained the central arbiter of power in the International Community up to his day.³⁹

It is thus Christian Platonism that eventually paved the way for Western modernity, with its constitution-based rule of law and its recognition of the autonomy of not just the market and the state, but of the ultimate institution of modernity, the university with its disciplinary specialization. Chinese Dao-based monism admits only of a “mitigated dualism,” alternating between the “enduring” and the “non-enduring,” between “before” and “after movement,” that is, a world of sovereign, self-possessed subjects with no place for the Wholly Other.

39 Matthew Bagot, “The Development of the International Community, Human Personality, and the Question of Universal History in the Thought of Luigi Sturzo,” *Telos* (February 26, 2016). Accessed online at <<http://www.telospress.com/the-development-of-the-international-community-human-personality-and-the-question-of-universal-history-in-the-thought-of-luigi-sturzo/>>. This quote obviously implies a reading very different from mine of the contemporary dominance of the political as opposed to the religious—a subject for another essay.