

## Book Reviews

**Cora Alexa Døving and Siv Ellen Kraft:** *Religion i pressen*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2013, 235 pp.

The claim that ‘God is back’, for better or worse, alludes to the way in which religion as a phenomenon is currently attracting more attention than it did a few decades ago. This applies as much to the media as elsewhere. The material on which Døving and Kraft’s book *Religion i pressen* (Religion in the Press) is based consists mostly of newspaper stories published in recent years, read now in the light of social, cultural, and political contexts. Some of the analytical tools used are taken from critical discourse analysis. On this basis the study analyses media coverage (including feature and debate articles) of such diverse topics as: religion and the royal family and the significance of Christianity for the Norwegian national identity and cultural heritage, especially after the disestablishment of the church in 2012; the Snåsa Man (an exemplar of folk religiosity); and the phenomenon of Hanne Nabintu Herland (an exemplar of conservative Christianity). The second part of the book discusses media coverage of minority religions, and devotes two chapters to Islam and one to Judaism. The final chapter is titled ‘After 22 July: Religious pluralism as moral imperative’, and concerns itself with Anders Behring Breivik’s murder of seventy-seven people. Both authors contributed equally to the book.

Døving and Kraft’s starting point is that ‘the Norwegian news media are founded on a hegemonic understanding of public life as a secular ground and that journalists (and others) monitor communication and question violations’. This assertion of a hegemonic discourse seems reasonable and – naturally enough – is related to the fundamental cultural change processes which Norwegian society has undergone, especially during the last century, and which can be described using terms such as ‘secularisation’ and ‘pluralisation’. The degree to which religion can be said to play a significant role in contemporary Norwegian public life must be on (post)modern terms.

An interesting assertion made in this connection is that Hanne Nabintu Herland has understood this, and for tactical purposes translates her allegedly Christian conservative message with the help of a secularised language. An entire chapter of the book is devoted to media coverage of Nabintu Herland, who is a historian of religion and a controversial public debater in Norway. This suggests that it was not without reason that Espen Ottosen, the information officer of Norway’s largest Low Church Lutheran organisation, the Norwegian Lutheran Mission, offered words of caution in the Christian daily *Vårt Land* about ‘Christian lone wolves’, his term for Christian individuals who speak solely on their own behalf. The fact

that individuals who represent neither organised faith communities nor authoritative bodies, and whose opinions based on their own research, are given such free rein in the media and elsewhere in the public domain also says much about today's media coverage of religion.

Other individuals mentioned in *Religion i pressen* include the Norwegian Princess Märtha Louise and the farmer Joralf Gerstad, better known as the Snåsa Man. Anyone following the Norwegian media in recent years will be familiar with these individuals, who represent the detachment from organised religion that has marked an important religious trend in post-war society. In some ways, Princess Märtha and Joralf Gjerstad are both religious individualists, concerned not so much with religious doctrine or dogma as with religious experience and with helping others. Nonetheless, Kraft's treatment of their respective relationships with the press is as objective as it is when dealing with the other phenomena analysed in the first half of the book.

The second half of the book, which was written by Døving and in which two chapters are devoted to Islam and one to Judaism, deals with what can collectively be referred to as minority religions. 'Why is media representation of Islam such a potent force?' asks Døving. The answer to this question alone deserves a whole book, for there is no doubt that a connection does exist between the renewed media interest in religion and the fact that Islam, for

better or worse, is making increasingly significant inroads in Western society. A dramatic increase in the media's coverage of Islam and of events pertaining to it – a 'renewed visibility of public religion' – has taken place. Muslims constitute approximately two to three per cent of the Norwegian population, yet Islam is sometimes presented as a major concern in the media; problem areas related to this religion are particularly highlighted.

Some corrections to Døving and Kraft's book are warranted. The presentation of Linda Woodhead as an English historian of religion is incorrect. Granted, she is English, but her academic background is in theology and her main interest today lies in the sociology of religion. The late Inge Lønning is presented as a member of parliament for the Christian Democrats when he was, in fact, a member of the Conservative Party.

All in all, *Religion i pressen* can be recommended to anyone interested in the relationship between religion and the media or, in a broader context, between religion and public life. Today many people's first encounter with religion and religiosity occurs via the media and in the public domain, and this makes research in the field of religion and media important. However, the enormous scale of the field and the number of phenomena included in the book are not conducive to a truly in-depth analysis of the material. Nevertheless, Døving and Kraft's book is of value for those who can read Norwegian. For them, it might

serve as an important supplement to the book *Media Portrayals of Religion and the Secular Sacred* (Ashgate 2013) by Kim Knott, Elizabeth Poole, and Teemu Taira, which deals with the complexity surrounding cases involving religion in the press and public life. Although these authors deal mainly with the British media and British public life, the issues raised are easily recognisable on both sides of the Atlantic. The two publications, *Religion i pressen* and *Media Portrayals of Religion and the Secular Sacred*, could therefore be read as supplements to each other.

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**Lisbeth Bredholt Christensen, Olav Hammer and David A. Warburton (eds):** *The Handbook of Religions in Ancient Europe*. Durham: Acumen, 2013, 456 pp.

Religion as a concept connects diverse disciplines with their slightly differing definitions and uses for it. Archaeology is a field of study with a long tradition of employing the term in interpreting ancient artefacts and ways of life. Since the 1990s, however, with the increasing awareness of the importance of conceptual and theoretical assumptions, archaeologists have started to criticise the ways in which the concept of religion has been used, and have called for stronger collaboration with scholars of religious studies. Both the traditional and critical attitudes are present in this handbook of religions in ancient Europe.

The compilation covers the diversity of religions from the arrival of the first humans during the Upper Palaeolithic to the advent of Christianity. In addition to the introduction the compilation consists of twenty-seven articles divided into two sections. The first ten articles discuss religions in prehistoric societies, while the last seventeen deal with religions that can be studied with the help of written accounts. The authors were instructed to use the best available sources and critically assess their value for interpreting ancient religions. The majority of the articles, however, are more or less straightforward overviews of

a particular geographical region or chronological period. There are, however, a few chapters addressing the development of the archaeological approach to the religions of the past. Among them are sketches of the work of Francesco d'Errico and Ian Hodder.

The first set of articles, focusing on prehistoric religions, is the most interesting part of the book theoretically. The primary point at issue concerning the human past is when and why religions emerged. Are they specific to the human as a species, or did the earlier hominids also have something resembling religion? The earliest cases of visual representation and symbolic expression date to the Palaeolithic, but the question remains as to whether they also indicate the existence of religions. Should the mere non-functional use of material culture be interpreted as evidence of religious thought? D'Errico argues that the human use of symbols emerged only gradually. Emmanuel Anati, in contrast, supports the view that religion is among the human-specific capacities, and thus a single prehistoric religion lies at the origin of later religions. Another set of problems is related to the transition from Palaeolithic hunter-gathering groups into Neolithic agricultural societies. How did the new mind-set, forms of subsistence, and increasing social complexity affect religions, or what was the role of religions in bringing about the changes?

In his contribution Jarl Nordbladh discusses the social changes

of the late 1960s and 1970s and their effect on theoretical thinking in archaeology and the subsequent study of religions. Using rock art as his case study, Nordbladh argues that there is a risk of constructing interpretations which exist only as the product of the scholarly traditions of organising knowledge. One may wonder, however, whether it is ever possible to make such a clear-cut division between knowledge and its discursive framework if we are to assess interpretations in their 'fullness'.

The book's most thought-provoking chapter discusses Hodder's work on the Neolithic site of Çatal Höyük. He has consistently avoided the conventional, religiously loaded vocabulary of archaeology, and created new ways of analysing ancient human communities. Hodder approaches past phenomena as bound by material and practice. Indeed, he argues that we should not conceptualise religion in any modern sense when speaking about the Neolithic, since it was integrated into every interaction between humans, animals, and objects: religion was an aspect of all material entanglements.

In the following chapters Flemming Kaul writes about the iconography of the Sun God in the Nordic Bronze Age, and Kristan Kristiansen analyses the cyclical changes between rationalism and romanticism in archaeological interpretation. He points out that both Kaul and Nordbladh emphasise local archaeological evidence, dismissing the wider European context, which includes

the Near Eastern written sources. They are, Kristiansen argues, examples of how certain theoretical assumptions lead to the exclusion of certain types of evidence. The last chapter of the first section is written by two of the editors, and it is a welcome commentary on the preceding articles. It contextualises the contributions clearly, and points out their weaknesses and strengths.

The second section examines ancient religions after the advent of literacy. The first chapter by David A. Warburton discusses the Minoan and Mycenaean religion. It includes a lengthy epilogue that introduces the main characteristics of religions in Greek and Roman Antiquity: architecture, iconography, the pantheon, myths, and attributes. Warburton concludes that the study of religions in the early historical periods, in cases where there is an abundance of written material, tends to be more structural, whereas the lack of texts may lead scholars to concentrate on identifying objects and gods at the expense of a broader view. The situation, however, is more complicated. The key is not so much the availability of written sources, but the scholarly framework within which the author builds their argument. For example, some scholars writing about religions in Antiquity, where there are plenty of written sources, assume that when catalogues of gods, places of worship, iconography, and myths have been listed, the religions have been satisfactorily described, while other scholars attempt to deal with more

structural issues, even if the sources are sparse.

In Antiquity the most important process affecting religions appears to have been Romanisation, the spread and transformation of Roman culture in Europe. The role of the process of hybridisation is further emphasised by research in which the Greek and Roman religions are represented as unified systems with matching myths and ritual practices. However, as Lars Albinus points out, the Greek religion was rather a conglomerate of various traditions, and Susanne William Rasmussen argues that even though there was some interaction between myth and ritual in the Roman religion, myth played a somewhat marginal role in religious practices. Nevertheless, from the perspective of religious studies, the chapters on the Graeco-Roman cult of Isis and the cult of Mithras are more interesting, as they are not burdened by the classical tradition and its firm belief in the homogeneity of ancient religions.

The remaining articles discuss ancient religions outside the Roman world. Again, the quality of contributions varies. One of the most problematic articles is Karen Bek-Pedersen's piece on the insular Celtic religion. She does not discuss the Romanticist Celtic Revival at all, although it has had a major effect on the study of Celtic religions; indeed, she seems herself to be affected by the revivalist discourse in the rather striking statements she makes about the Celts. For example,

Bek-Pedersen writes that 'they were never empire builders,' instead, 'the Celts appear to have had a passion for showing off fine clothing, beautifully decorated weapons and jewellery, and all sorts of fine ornaments' (p. 280). She also argues that the Celtic worldview had 'an intellectual emphasis' because the Celts transmitted their traditions orally (p. 289). Such vague and romantically biased statements might be made of any pre-modern, non-literate human populations.

As with the Greek and Roman traditions, the treatment of non-classical religions as clearly definable units casts aside the intricacy of ancient beliefs and practices. For example, in her contribution on the Old Norse religion Britt-Mari Näsström mentions that the Roman worldview had some influence in the North on the form of the runic alphabet and the composition of the Norse pantheon. However, in recent scholarship it has been stressed that the effects were actually much more fundamental. Only in the hybridising encounter with Roman culture did the Norse worldview become systematised (c.f., Anders Andréén, Kristina Jennbert and Catharina Raudevere, *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes, and Interactions*, Nordic Academic Press, 2006).

Each article in the compilation is followed by a list of suggested reading, but all references have been collected into one list placed at the end of the book. This is not a functional approach for a handbook, where

a separate list of references would allow the reader to glance at the sources of individual chapters. Another problem is the sparseness of illustrations. For example, the chapter on d'Errico takes as its focus the stone human figure from Berekhat Ram, but there are no photographs or drawings of the artefact.

The compilation provokes mixed feelings. It is valuable, as the editors argue, because many articles address topics that are inaccessible to an international readership. Some contributions, however, are problematic because of their catalogue-like approach. This is largely evidenced by the research traditions that do not acknowledge the more conceptual or structural aspects of religions, whereas the chapters in the first section of the book, the articles by Veikko Anttonen on prehistoric Finnish religions, and Håkan Rydving on the Sámi religion, are well thought through. This reflects the fact that many archaeologists are unfamiliar with religious studies, yet are the only ones who understand the sources.

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**James L. Cox (ed.):** *Critical Reflections on Indigenous Religions*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013, 202 pp.

*Critical Reflections on Indigenous Religions* is the apt title of this book edited by James L. Cox. Much like his monographs, *From Primitive to Indigenous: The Academic Study of Indigenous Religions* (2007) and the recent *The Invention of God in Indigenous Societies* (2014), this anthology opens new ground and new paths for students of religions. I can think of only two other anthologies that can in some way match this in the field that it at once addresses and describes. These are *Beyond Primitivism* (2004), edited by Jacob K. Olupona, and *Indigenous Diasporas and Dislocations* (2005), edited by Graham Harvey and Charles D. Thompson Jr. Scholarship was significantly advanced by these publications because the contributors and the editors cast and framed their questions, approaches, and perspectives in unexpected ways. Now, almost ten years later, Cox and his team further develop the subject.

As a whole, the book pushes boundaries in challenging stereotypes, conveys a critical yet open attitude, and oozes inquisitiveness. Its multiplicity of approaches and perspectives is among its major strengths, as is its thorough treatment of a wide range of empirical cases that warrants grounded and contextualised discussion. By allowing methodological, theoretical, and empirical diversities to thrive,

the editor has encouraged the different contributors to stimulate and challenge each other discreetly and effectively. The tensions and complexities within and between the articles are wonderfully enriching.

The book's focal category, 'indigenous religions', is used in contrasting ways by its authors. Graham Harvey's pleas (p. 19) that they should not be 'box[ed]... up' and that there is a need to 'be clear that "indigenous religions" are not just one thing' have been realised. I have identified at least three different uses of the category 'indigenous religions' in the book: (1) as a *class of religions*; (2) as a *relational category*; and (3) as an *ethno-political marker*. Each of these uses has its own internal variations, and in most of the essays there are significant overlaps between two or even all three. Let me offer some examples of each, which will also allow me to comment on the contributions I found most striking.

The definition of 'indigenous religions' as a *class of religions* is most clearly and ambitiously undertaken by Cox himself in the opening chapter. Building on the monumental work he did in *From Primitive to Indigenous*, where he defines indigenous religions as kinship-oriented and related to a specific geographical location, he here moves on to discuss his definition in light of competing theories of indigeneity. Using the Shona of Zimbabwe and Australian debates as examples, he identifies critical problems with the anthropologists Alan Barnard's

and Justin Kendrick's use of the term 'indigenous' as primarily denoting those who are the original inhabitants of a particular location. Self-designation is another much used criterion, fronted for example in many legal frameworks, but Cox maintains that this is too vague and prone to much modern manipulation. A third delineation he considers is those 'who have been the subject of colonization and who as a result have become marginalized in society' (p. 15). Against this, he argues that many African practices, which he counts as indigenous because they are kinship-oriented and restricted to specific geographical locations, never succumbed to colonisation but have instead continued to be widespread and powerful in society. He concludes that each of these approaches to the question of indigeneity 'makes the study of what is meant by indigenous religions unclear, vague and difficult to test empirically' (p. 16).

Cox maintains that his own definition, by contrast, is universally applicable, empirically based, and fruitful, therefore, as a heuristic apparatus for studies of religions. 'On my analysis,' he states, 'in accordance with a scientific method, no matter which cases are being considered, the religious belief and practices of any community can be designated as indigenous only if their central belief focuses on ancestors and their primary identity is defined by its relation to a specific geographical location' (p. 13). Cox also offers a refreshingly reflexive history of institutional develop-

ments in the study of religions and, as part of this, a history of his own professional thinking and acting. He gives an account of the development of his thinking over the years, and of the institutional processes of establishing 'indigenous religions' as a field in its own right within the study of religions. He succeeds in paying tribute to his forerunners and teachers, while also questioning their thoughts and actions through sophisticated methodological and theoretical reflections grounded in his own empirical studies.

It is quite clear that there is a double edge to much of Cox's work, and this is also the case here. On one hand, this is about critical scholarship that aims to break new intellectual ground. On the other, it is about disciplinary and institutional politics. There are certainly tight bonds between these two fronts and activities, and Cox has been extraordinarily proficient both in innovating scholarship and in making space for particular kinds of religious studies. Nevertheless, it is tempting to ask whether these two enterprises are always fully compatible when a maximum outcome is pursued in both fields. Is it not the case that playing on recognisable and somewhat clear-cut schemas is often a great advantage, if not a prerequisite, for success in politics? To operate with a class of religions like 'indigenous religions' while maintaining for the most part a comfortable distinction with Christianity, for example, may do wonders in winning over theologians. But

does it always fare as well in critical research that aims both to break boundaries and study boundary making?

Towards the end of his essay Cox speaks about pragmatics – an unavoidable matter that always comes with a cost. His diplomatic skills and pragmatic approach have doubtless been crucial for his achievement in establishing and promoting ‘indigenous religions’ as a field in its own right within the study of religions, not only at the University of Edinburgh but also internationally. In any case, when addressing such a huge, complex, diverse, and dynamic empirical field it is essential to draw some lines to create a stable platform from which to theorise. With his astute insights Cox has opened new heuristic starting points for further critical research and the still necessary battle for disciplinary accommodation.

In several of the essays that follow Cox’s opening chapter the authors use approaches and perspectives that go beyond, or provide alternatives to, his methodological framework. The contributors have been allowed to let their various critical reflections arise more from their struggles with their cases than from some preconceived or enforced theoretical agenda.

Some, like Ulrich Berner, struggle with several empirical cases. This explains his unease with dominant models of types of religion. He questions models that operate with a rigid divide between kinship-based and universal religious traditions.

Having examined examples from a variety of times, places, and traditions, Berner concludes (p. 60) that ‘it appears that a total break with the indigenous religious tradition as, for instance, ancestor veneration, is quite a normal condition for conversion to a universal religion’, although in some cases ‘it appears that there are strategies of avoiding such a break by shifting the boundaries of the religious field and/or abolishing boundaries within the religious field’. He ends his essay with a proposal and a remark concerning methodology:

‘Classifying types of religiosity, as an alternative or at least a complement to the classification of religions, would have the advantage of not being derived from the mainstream version of the various religious traditions. Kinship-based religiosity, for instance, may be found also in a universal religious tradition, though not very likely at the centre or in a dominating position [...] In any case, it is not the task of the history of religions to follow the mainstream version of the respective religious tradition, nor to subscribe to its concept of universality.’ (p. 62)

Uses of ‘indigenous religion’ as a *relational category* are found, for example, in Suzanne Owen’s and Sabine Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz’s articles. I find Owen’s reflections about whether and how contemporary Druidry might count as an indigenous religion especially excit-

ing. Inspired by the thinking of Vine Deloria Jr., Owen writes:

'If an indigenous religion can be defined as that which relates to the land, the people and that which has gone before, as I propose, and if many who identify with Druidry are consciously making these connections, then Druidry could be regarded as an indigenous religion.' (p. 92)

The intentions of the practitioners are central for Owen. She also shows how her informants go about making connections in different places. When in Britain they try to relate to the land, the people, and what has gone before; when somewhere else, in America, for example, they may also try to relate to the land, the people, and what has gone before there. Owen's open and experimental approach certainly teases out some new questions: if Druids, why not also Anglicans? After all, the Anglican Church also has many members who consciously and sometimes eagerly claim that their religion and its practices relate to the land, the people, and what has gone before.

In her study of the *Huarochiri* manuscript, a Quechua text from the Andes from about 1608, Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz evinces a more classical, contextually contingent concept of 'indigenous religions': in this case, one emerging out of historical encounters in the Americas between violent, colonising, and missionizing Europeans and the oppressed members of peoples

who had long lived on American soils. "'Indigenous" religion, ' she writes (p. 106) – using inverted commas only for the adjective – 'is that of the people in the country which is affected by the expansion [of the imperialist Spaniards], "common" peasants as well as Christian-trained "intellectuals".' In other words, she uses it in a historically, spatially, and perspectively contingent sense: the indigenous versus the foreigners as the generalizable relational equation, Andeans versus Spaniards as the particular empirical example.

It is also interesting that Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz notes (p. 106) 'that any indigenous religion will always be in the process of and/or the result of ideological influences, if not oppression, and thereby a kind of fusion or at least convergence with another religion', and that she states the obvious but often ignored point: 'Of course, Christianity was an indigenous religion in ancient Palestine.' Finally, her case study demonstrates how specific instances of Christian religion were indigenised and transformed as they met and merged with the transforming beliefs and practices of individuals and groups who were framed as more or less indigenous in those same encounters. As a student of the Americas I am somewhat biased, but I must confess that this text tickles me in all the right places.

Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz's empirical case is also a good example of *ethno-politics* in action. Cox also touches on this issue, but in a different contemporary context, when

towards the end of his article he offers a perceptive discussion of how his scholarly uses of the category 'indigenous religions' may both affect and reflect how the same category is used by actors in the field that he studies and about which he theorises. I would also like to draw attention to Bettina E. Schmidt's chapter, which I think provides a brilliant example of the complexities that are sometimes at play in ethno-politics, that is, in people's diverse, dynamic, and multifaceted relating to particular places, practices, and people, in this case, to *caboclos* or indigenous spirits in Brazilian Candomblé and Umbanda. As her essay concludes, Schmidt says that, today, 'white Brazilians claim to belong to an African lineage and Afro-Brazilians can even stress their indigenous ancestry, if they choose to do so. As soon as we step away from an essentialist definition of identity, the diversity of human expression with regard to ethnic as well as religious identity becomes breathtaking.' (p. 141.)

Although far from absent (see, for example, Graham Harvey's chapter), scholarly uses of the category 'indigenous religions' as an ethno-political marker are perhaps less salient in this volume than one might expect. Or, rather, such uses are present differently than one might anticipate given today's ethno-political climate concerning indigenous peoples, and especially given that academia in many places has become one of the principal arenas for articulations of indigenisms.

I cannot help but wonder whether this is partly due to the book's predominantly European outlook (most contributors are Europeans, based in Europe, or educated in Europe), and even to a kind of European introspection and retrospection that I think may be identified in several of the texts. This aspect of the book is daring and critically invigorating, and it bears witness to conscious reflections about the authors' own embeddedness, their positionings, and their inheritances.

It is nonetheless striking that among the four cases from Europe – Jens Peter Schjødt on pre-Christian Scandinavian religion; Carole M. Cusack on medieval encounters between Christians and Pagans; Owen on Druidry; Emily Lyle on Indo-European religion – none deals with religions among the indigenous peoples in the far north. It is also puzzling that neither of the South American cases – the already mentioned contributions of Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz and Schmidt – is primarily about the contemporary situation of any of the many communities of indigenous peoples who claim to have lived there since time immemorial. Only the African case studies – Gemechu Jemal Geda on the Waaqeffannaa of the Oromo of Ethiopia, and Elijah Obinna on rituals and symbols among the Amasiri of Nigeria – are more or less in line with what we have come to expect from that continent in the context of this book's topic, as they focus on interaction and crossing between local or ethnic traditions and localised

versions of Christianity and Islam.

An abstraction of the sum of the book's case studies also reveals an implicit structure of temporal and geographical representation. Despite their already praised diversity, the cases may be divided, very roughly, into two groups: the first may be called the 'here then', and consists of cases drawn from within Europe with a historical focus; the second may be termed the 'there now', and consists of cases drawn from places outside Europe with a near contemporary focus. There are exceptions. Indeed, Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz provides a thought provoking case of indigenous religions in Peru in the past, an example of indigenous religions 'there then', a case that even involves Christianity. And Owen writes about Europeans in the present, about indigenous religion 'here now', although what her practitioners mainly engage in is the revival of traditions from very long ago. However, 'here then' versus 'there now' comes through as the book's grander scheme. This might have a not entirely unproblematic effect upon how readers at a more general level reflect on and locate its topic.

That said, the uses of the category of 'indigenous religions' to shed light on a variety of unusual cases produce challenging food for thought and stir up a field that has long suffered from analytical and typological uniformity. Nowhere does the book present itself as covering all or even most perspectives. Its modest tone in this respect adds

to its credibility and gravity. It goes without saying that a contemporary volume with the same title from, say, predominantly North American authors, or a group of authors studying cases mainly from Asia and Oceania, would be quite different.

I believe this book is among the most challenging of its kind. It brings the scholarly debate on what indigenous religions may usefully mean a long way forward. It is therefore a critical contribution to the study of religions at large and should be widely read.

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**Anna Sun:** *Confucianism as a World Religion: Contested Histories and Contemporary Realities*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013, 244 pp.

In the last two or three decades scholars have been increasingly interested in the constructions of 'religion'. Some have explored the scholarly uses of the category of religion, while others have written historical analyses of how a particular tradition or formation came to be understood as 'religious'. One strand in these studies has focused on the category of 'world religion' – how it is constructed, when it was constructed, and with what purpose. Hinduism and Buddhism have been typical examples. Confucianism has been a special case because its status as a 'religion' has never been established beyond early constructions in nineteenth century Western scholarship. For example, the earliest formulations of Confucianism in general date back to 1862, and it was named as the ancient religion of China by James Legge in 1877, but, even today, the Chinese government does not classify it as a religion. Anna Sun has taken on the twofold task of studying both the historical construction of Confucianism as a religion (and a world religion) and recent Chinese attempts to claim its status as a religion.

The initial critical thought concerning the historical task is the question of repetition: Lionel Jensen's *Manufacturing Confucianism* was published in 1997. In his study Jensen argued that Confucianism

was predominantly created on the basis of the Jesuits' encounters with the Chinese people in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Fortunately, Sun clarifies the difference between her study and Jensen's in her preface. She argues that these early constructions were perhaps solidifying teachings of Confucius, but the ways in which Western scholars have viewed Confucianism as a world religion are much later constructions, and their sources of origin are different from the Jesuits' constructions of the teachings of Confucius.

If Jensen's examination deals with earlier times, Sun's study focuses on the latter part of the nineteenth century, particularly on the writings and other work of Friedrich Max Müller and James Legge. This is especially true for the first part of the study, which traces the historical formation of Confucianism as a religion in Western scholarship, especially at Oxford, where both Müller and Legge worked. Legge argued against some scholars that Confucianism was a religion, and it was included in Müller's classification of eight world religions in 1891. This was followed by the convening of the first World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, where Confucianism was represented among other 'world religions'. The historical formation of Confucianism as a religion is therefore deeply connected with the history of comparative religion, whose legitimacy was one of the reasons for the inclusion of Confucianism in the category

of religion. This process was not limited to Europe, but also affected China's discourse on religion.

Confucianism was regarded as a religion in Western scholarship, and later by activists in China, before the Communists took power in 1949 and established the current system in which Buddhism, Daoism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam are considered religions. This is contrary to the situation in Indonesia and Hong Kong, where Confucianism is part of the official classification of religion: but what is the current situation in China? The second part of the book examines this in asking 'Who are the Confucians in China?' This part has a chapter on textbooks, surveys, and conversions, and is less tightly connected with the study's other parts, but it is still interesting reading. Sun offers a brief survey of whether Confucianism is included in American academic curricula today and whether Confucianism is part of the introductory textbooks of world religions. This would have been more relevant if it had been extended beyond the US and American Amazon's ten bestselling world religion books. Furthermore, it does not contribute much to the main question of the book's second part, the second chapter of which, the analysis of the surveys, demonstrates how difficult it is to say anything definitive about Confucians. For example, it is not easy to say how many there are in China. While many people participate in ancestral worship, only twelve people out of a sample of 7021 claimed to be 'Confucians'

in a survey. Furthermore, Confucian practices are not exclusive; people may also participate in 'Buddhist' or 'Christian' practices and see no contradiction. The third chapter of part II, 'To Become a Confucian', was originally written for a book about conversion. It lists various criteria according to which someone might be said to have become a Confucian – from the worshipping of Confucius to somewhat loose criteria such as participation in ritual practices at an ancestral temple or at a grave and practising the Confucian virtues – but the overall point is that the concept of conversion as an analytical tool arises from a very different discursive tradition.

The third and final part pays more attention to present day China and asks 'Is Confucianism a religion in China today?' It charts the most recent struggles of Confucianism in the first years of the twenty-first century. There have been attempts to revitalise Confucianism as an identity by various actors from professors to television personalities, including an attempt to establish it as a state religion in China to provide a backbone for a good and just society against the post-socialist spread of Christianity. The current situation, according to examples given by Sun, is complex and far from a settled issue: on the one hand, claiming Confucianism as a religion might marginalise those who make the claim, but provide protection and recognition at the same time; on the other, not classifying Confucianism as a religion opens opportunities for

stronger integration in state institutions and protection under the label 'national heritage' in a politically relatively antireligious China, but this includes the possibility that it is left unrecognised.

One of the study's missed opportunities is that Sun fails to consistently locate her excellent research on the Western construction of Confucianism as a religion, and the revitalised Chinese claims about Confucianism as a religion, in a wider framework of studies on the category of religion. In other words, she focuses on the question of whether it is legitimate to classify Confucianism as a religion, but does not use it as grounds for questioning the category of religion as such. This could have been done by locating the study more strongly within the critical histories of the category of religion. There are some passing references to the writings of Talal Asad, Russell T. McCutcheon, Jonathan Z. Smith, and especially of Tomoko Masuzawa, but not to the works of Daniel Dubuisson and Timothy Fitzgerald, to name two scholars whose studies would have been helpful in a reflection on whether religion is a primarily Western colonial construct and tool for the formation of nation-states, as well as on how various people and groups promote their interests in classifying Confucianism.

My criticism is exemplified when she writes, for example, about the possibility of Confucianism becoming 'a real religious force' (p. xvi), 'the reality of Confucian religious life

in China' (p. xiv), 'China's ritual-rich religious life' (p. 2), and 'a revival of diverse religious ritual practices' (p. 2). These are all examples of an assumption that there is such a thing as 'religion', which it would have been possible for the study to have framed as a case to demonstrate the ongoing historical constructions of the category of religion, not simply as a study of whether Confucianism is itself a religion. Despite this, the study is highly relevant reading for scholars interested in the formation of comparative religion as an academic discipline and the ongoing struggles concerning the category of 'religion'. As I read it, it demonstrates, in part against the author's intention, that the question of what is done when something is classified either as a religion or a non-religion is more interesting than the question of whether something is a religion or not.

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