

From Dharma Talk to Religious Sentiment: Chinese Buddhist Encounters with the Religious Psychology of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Ludwig Feuerbach, 1912–1949

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Abstract: In Republican China (1912–1949), many Buddhist authors began to use terms and concepts that were previously unknown in Chinese Buddhist texts. In order to explain Buddhist ideas and doctrines, but also religious phenomena in general, they often drew on Western academic sources. A particular field of research that they were interested in was religious psychology. This discipline proposed an inward perspective on religion and aimed to explain religious phenomena by investigating processes of the mind, the consciousness, or the psyche. While the empirical strands of religious psychology did not yet receive any strong response from Chinese Buddhists during that period, they were interested in its basic philosophical assumptions that had been formulated in the nineteenth century. This paper aims to show that they appropriated concepts developed by the German philosophers Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872). Both thinkers had put forward definitions of religion that were critical of a ‘monotheist assumption’ and could easily be applied to Buddhism. As a result, these approaches offered Buddhists new ways to reformulate their own teaching, contextualise it in the general context of religions, and argue against Christianity.

Keywords: religious psychology, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872), Chinese Buddhist journals, Republican China (1912–1949)

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1. Introduction: Religious Psychology Around 1900—A New Approach to Religion in Western Academia

In the nineteenth century, many Western scholars were fascinated by the search for the origin of religion. Where did religion come from? This question led many representatives of academia in Oxford, Paris, and Berlin to investigate religion through the lens of the theory of evolution. It was an approach which was primarily associated with Charles Darwin and his study of organisms and quickly gained popularity among scholars of very much all fields within the humanities. Similar to Darwin's theory, which held that there is a universal rule which results in a development from rather simple to more complex species, scholars of religion started to conceive religious history as a sequence of 'primitive' ('animism' or 'nature religions') to more developed religions ('monotheism'). Many of these approaches also included speculations on what had originally motivated the earliest humans to develop religion. Was it fear, or a general feeling of impotence in the face of the fragility and uncertainty of life? Or were there also emotions connected to the feeling of awe that humans experienced when they admired the vastness and beauty of a starry night that brought them to develop religion? Was religion a way for them to bring order and meaning to a sequence of irritations? These investigations of Western scholars already showed a growing interest directed at the individual and its very subjective emotions and experiences in trying to make sense of religion.

The emergence of religious psychology is mostly understood as having been preceded by the advent of psychology as an autonomous academic discipline in the late nineteenth century. Therefore, most

encyclopedias or introductions to it will start their historical review by highlighting its North American entrepreneurs: William James, E. D. Starbuck (1866–1917), James Leuba (1868–1946) and J. B. Pratt (1875–1944), to name the most prominent ones. While most of these figures might only remain known to historians of the field, it is William James and his seminal *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (1902) that is still widely known as a formative text of the discipline.¹ The only continental pioneers preceding the North American tradition would be Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920) and his enterprise of ‘Völkerpsychologie’, and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), whose criticism of religion was based on his practice of psychoanalysis. While the influence of these figures—especially Wundt, who was the first to conceive psychology as an approach that was to be conducted in a laboratory setting—upon the proponents from North America is generally acknowledged, fewer historians have paid attention to the impact of German philosophy of the first half of the nineteenth century upon it.

What are the typical questions and approaches that are pursued in the psychology of religion? While some branches of religious studies are interested in the articulation of ritual or social patterns of religious organizations, religious psychology aims to investigate ‘psychological meaning and patterns of collective and individual religious contents, ideation, and practice’.² Since it would be beyond the scope of this paper to give an overview of all major trends of that discipline, it will suffice to briefly review what scholars around 1900 were typically considering core questions. E. D. Starbuck, in his *The Psychology of Religion* (1899), defined its goal as follows:

The Psychology of Religion has for its work to carry the well-established methods of science into the analysis and organisation of the facts of the religious consciousness, and to ascertain the laws which determine its growth and character.³

¹ Tastard, ‘Theology and Spirituality’, 603.

² Parsons, ‘Psychology of Religion’, 7473.

³ Starbuck, *Psychology of Religion*, 1.

Among the phenomena Starbuck was interested in were conversion processes: why and how does an individual become involved in a religious community? Do these processes typically happen at a certain age? Are males or females more likely to convert? Is a conversion usually preceded by certain events in life? How do individuals describe their mental state and well-being before and after conversion? To approach these questions, Starbuck primarily interviewed selected individuals or handed out questionnaires. As we can see here, the kind of religious psychology that was emerging in academic institutions around 1900 had a strong empirical profile. As a contrast, the two German thinkers who we will focus on in the following had a different research profile. Instead of proposing an empirical approach and conducting research under the conditions of a laboratory, they were rather moving within the range of religious philosophy. Still, their contributions to the ‘anthropocentric’ study of religion can be recognised as the theoretical basis of religious psychology.

2. Religious Psychology *avant la lettre*: Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872)

What this paper aims to contribute is a stronger focus on what we could call ‘proto-religious psychology’ or ‘religious psychology *avant la lettre*’, meaning the conceptual fundamentals of religious psychology that were laid in German academia in the first half of the nineteenth century. While those North American scholars who are traditionally seen as the pioneers of religious psychology understood their trade as an empirical enterprise, they were still building upon some basic philosophical assumptions that will be followed upon here. The two thinkers whose appropriation by Chinese Buddhists will be at the centre of this paper could hardly appear more different: while Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) was an acknowledged Protestant theologian, Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) was a philosopher whose influence in the academic world of his time was limited and who mostly became renowned for his fierce criticism of Christianity. Yet, their theories concerning the psychological foundations of religion bear similarities and were both met with interest among

Chinese Buddhists during the Republican era (1912–1949).⁴

Friedrich Schleiermacher was socialised into a Pietist environment and received his early education in schools of the Moravian Church. This denomination was renowned for its strong emphasis on the individual experience of Christ. Disappointed and alienated by the strictness of this milieu, he soon became interested in academic trends around the Enlightenment and more specifically German Idealism. These two poles already mark a characteristic feature of Schleiermacher's work: in his academic contributions he pushed for a *mélange* of faith, feeling, and conviction on the one hand, while the skepticism of the Enlightenment, on the other hand, functioned as a source of criticism.⁵ Therefore, Schleiermacher's attempts to redefine religion have to be seen in connection to the philosophical debates of the German enlightenment. While leading thinkers like Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) were proposing a rather cold and dispassionate approach to religion and described it in terms of duty, morals, and metaphysics, Schleiermacher was putting forth a counterprogram much closer to Romanticism. In his terms, religion was a matter deeply intertwined with the heart and one's feelings. Engaging in the study of religion meant delving deep into the worlds of subjectivity and individuality.⁶ This conception is conveyed in the following pas-

⁴ In my attempts to bring Schleiermacher and Feuerbach both together in the context of religious psychology, I am very much indebted to R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and his elaborations on the concept of anthropomorphism in the study of religion. Werblowsky writes: '[A] method of evading the problem of anthropomorphism is the view that holds all religious statements to be statements about one's religious consciousness. The father of this theory, in the history of Western thought, is the nineteenth-century German Protestant theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher. In the last resort, this view, too, represents a shift from theology to anthropology (as Feuerbach was quick to point out), with the difference that for Schleiermacher this shift serves religious understanding, whereas for Feuerbach it serves the radical critique of religion as such'. See Werblowsky, 'Anthropomorphism', 391.

⁵ Arndt, *Schleiermacher*, 46.

⁶ Fischer, *Schleiermacher*, 52.

sage taken from his *On Religion*:

Religion's essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling. It wishes to intuit the universe, wishes devoutly to overhear the universe's own manifestations and actions, longs to be grasped and filled by the universe's immediate influence in childlike passivity.⁷

In addition to his attempts to defend religion against its critics from the ranks of the Enlightenment, he also wanted to argue against clerical hardliners. As a pioneer of a current in German Protestantism that was later referred to as 'liberal theology', he was interested in building bridges to the sciences and other secular research methods. For Schleiermacher—and this is what has caused his influence to reach beyond theology well into religious studies—it is not the Christian personal God that stands at the beginning of religion, but 'feeling'. Although he was a trained theologian, his approach to religion was highly inclusive and not just focused on Christianity. When we read his definition of religion as 'the feeling of absolute dependence', we can easily imagine followers of different religions finding very little to disagree with. Schleiermacher indeed saw the various religions of the world as specific manifestations of this universal feeling. According to this view, aiming to prove the existence of the God of Christianity was a pointless endeavour.⁸

Ludwig Feuerbach's concept of religion bears striking similarities to that of Schleiermacher in focusing on the mind of the individual as the origin of religion. Still, while Schleiermacher saw religious feelings as something very natural and even highlighted the passive role that humans played in it—religious feelings were something that involuntarily 'came' to them—Feuerbach wanted to show that religions were exactly that: they were something 'constructed' and 'invented' in order to reach specific goals. Feuerbach's approach to religion was essentially functionalist.

Feuerbach was born in 1804 and initially studied theology at the

⁷ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 22.

⁸ Schlieter, *Was ist Religion?*, 66.

University of Heidelberg. Soon, however, his study interests shifted to philosophy where he would produce a number of systematic writings. Unlike Schleiermacher, he never managed to find a permanent position at a university. His theory of religion can be found in a variety of his writings but it is his monograph *The Essence of Christianity* (*Das Wesen des Christentums*, 1841) that soon became a bestseller and was quickly held as a classic in the critique of religion. While his philosophical influences were broad, it was indeed Schleiermacher—whose lectures he had attended in Berlin—and his concept of religion that had left a mark on him. As a result, he defines religion primarily as matter of the feelings of the individual.⁹ Still, while Schleiermacher had defined religion in terms that had the potential to be universally applied, Feuerbach's concept of religion and the criticism of it was much more modeled on Christian theism and theology.¹⁰ Schleiermacher's influence can also be seen in the fact that he sees the origin of religion in 'absolute dependence'. However, unlike Schleiermacher, Feuerbach would later elaborate on that in terms of fear: humans are afraid of a nature that they have no control over and it is this fear that causes them to sense this strong feeling of dependency on God.

Feuerbach's theory of religion is typically termed the 'theory of projection': he agrees with Schleiermacher in seeing religion as a feeling of dependence, but that dependence is not connected to God but to nature. Followers of Christianity and representatives of theology claim that God has created humans but according to Feuerbach, it is the exact opposite: God is created from the subjective needs and longings of the people. They sense their own incompleteness and inferiority in the face of nature and therefore project their own wishes for greatness and omnipotence into God. Feuerbach concludes that scholars should therefore shift their interest from theology to anthropology, since religion is the field where essential findings on the self-knowledge of humans can be made.¹¹

⁹ Weckwerth, 'Das Wesen des Christentums', 34.

¹⁰ Arndt, 'Einführung', 34.

¹¹ Görnitz, 'Projektion', 65.

3. Channels of Knowledge Transfer: Religious Psychology and its Way to China

When we investigate how religious psychology—and more specifically the ideas of Schleiermacher and Feuerbach—became available to Chinese Buddhist actors, we cannot avoid retracing a complex of translation practices, publishing endeavours and discursive strategies. Firstly, we need to look at the early Chinese reception of psychology itself. Chinese intellectuals began to engage with Western psychology in the late nineteenth century. Many scholars define Yan Yongjing's 顏永京 (1838–1898) translation of Joseph Haven's *Mental Philosophy* in 1889 as a starting point.¹² This was indeed an important project, as a number of key-terms were translated into Chinese for the first time. This also included the term psychology itself, which was rendered as *xinlingxue* 心靈學. Already in these terminological choices, the connection between Japanese and Chinese translation projects needs to be pointed out: A few years earlier, in 1875, Nishi Amane 西周 (1829–1897) had already translated Haven's book and coined the term *shinrigaku* 心理學, which later became the standard term in Chinese as well.¹³ An important role in popularizing *Xinlixue* as the standard was played by the intellectual and reformer Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929). Through his essays and speeches, it was also him who placed psychological questions in the context of social and political reforms. This gave many of his intellectual peers the impression that psychology was a means of solving urgent problems that contemporary China had to face, from the innovation deficit in technology to the lack of social cohesion. Another significant contribution of Liang was making a connection between psychology and Buddhism. In his *Preliminary Exploration of Buddhist Psychology* from 1922, Liang was trying to demonstrate that what Western psychology was aiming to do had already been explored in Yogācāra Buddhism.¹⁴

¹² Hu, 'Xinlixue mingci', 10.

¹³ Steben, 'Nishi Amane', 66. For Liang Qichao's article, see Liang, 'Fojiao Xinlixue qiance'.

¹⁴ Hsueh and Guo, 'China', 94.

However, this line of arguing has to be seen as a discourse of its own and must be contextualised within what came to be called the ‘Revival of Yogācāra’ in Republican China.¹⁵ Liang was primarily interested in aspects of psychology that were close to philosophical epistemology, i.e., the study of cognition and perception. Employing it in order to explore the nature and origin of religion, or explaining belief and religious feelings were beyond his scope. The development of Buddhist psychology, as well as that of scientific and clinical psychology in Republican China are important to take note of as a background context. Yet, considerable as these new fields of knowledge were, the engagement of Chinese Buddhists with religious psychology in Republican China was only loosely connected to them.

While the history of psychology in China is well documented in research, tracing the genealogy of religious psychology is much more complicated. Three kinds of textual sources are presented here to unravel the ways that religious psychology took to find its Chinese Buddhist readership. The first type are Chinese translations of Western works, while the second are works representing the Japanese scholarship on religion, often dating back to the Meiji era (1868–1912). The third type are introductions to religious studies written by Chinese

¹⁵ Chen, ‘Revival of Yogācāra’, 1074. A major contribution in expounding Buddhist theories of the mind by using the neologism ‘psychology’ was made by the Japanese Buddhologist Kimura Taiken 木村泰賢 (1881–1930). In 1925, the Buddhist journal *Haichaoyin* 海潮音 [Sound of the Sea Tide] published Chinese translations of both his ‘The Psychology of Original Buddhism’ (‘Yuanshi Fojiao zhi Xinlixue’ 原始佛教之心理學) and ‘The View on Development of Buddhist Psychology’ (‘Fojiao xinlilun zhi fadaguan’ 佛教心理學之發達觀). Still, in these essays Taiken makes no explicit reference to religious psychology nor any of the thinkers who are the focus of this article. Instead, he actually makes a strong distinction between Western psychology (*Xiyang zhi Xinlixue* 西洋之心理學) and what he introduces as Buddhist psychology. As Erik Hammerstrom notes, Taiken’s influence on Chinese Buddhist discourse lies primarily in his creative reinterpretation of early Buddhist texts such as the Āgamas and the possible inspiration that led the important reformist thinker Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (1868–1936) to engage more deeply with Yogācāra, see Hammerstrom, ‘Yogācāra and Science’, 193.

scholars during the Republican era that entailed paragraphs or chapters on religious psychology.

The first actual monograph that carried the term religious psychology in its title came only in 1931. In that year, a translation of George Jefferis Jordan's *A Short Psychology of Religion* was published in Chinese. The original, published in 1929, was situated in a specifically Christian context and this is also conveyed in the preface written by the translator Xie Songgao 謝頌羔 (1895–1972):

Religious psychology can help us to develop adequate concepts concerning religious experiences, it can overcome the sins of superstition and self-deceit. In my view, not only church leaders must investigate it, but every Christian must know its basic ideas.¹⁶

As an introduction to religious psychology, this monograph of little more than eighty pages is very straightforward and essay-like. It does not narrate the history of the discipline, nor does it present a description of its methodology. Instead, it draws the reader's attention to religious phenomena such as conversion processes or the act of prayer from a perspective that allows them to look at them from a psychological rather than a theistic point of view:

We Christians of course believe that a prayer is a communication with God, but in its psychological aspects, we also believe that it counts as a spiritual cultivation (*lingxiu* 靈修) that can benefit oneself. If we pray a lot, it is like practicing gymnastics which can let our physical strength develop. Therefore, praying a lot can also strengthen our spiritual power (*lingli* 靈力), and it flows continuously.¹⁷

What we can see in works like this one, is that religious psychology is presented through a confluence of Christian apologetics and an interreligious perspective. This seems at first to be a contradiction, but it must be realised that both work closely together. Religious

¹⁶ Xie, 'Zongjiao Xinlixue xiaoyan', 1.

¹⁷ Jordan, *Zongjiao Xinlixue*, 53.

psychology allows an author like Jordan to situate Christianity within the broader landscape of religions. Therefore, some of the examples he mentions in his book are from Buddhism or Sikhism. In this way, he concentrates on presenting Christianity in a rather phenomenological instead of an essentialist perspective. If he had chosen an essentialist perspective, Christianity's essence as a theistic religion would have been the first thing to mention, but through the approach of religious psychology, universal phenomena like 'feeling', 'experience', and 'faith' become key concepts. Through this way of presenting Christianity, readers who are non-Christians or skeptical of Christianity are less immediately resistant to that kind of a reading.

The second type of textual source that very likely left its imprint on Chinese Buddhists came from Japanese scholarship on religion. While religious studies as an academic discipline only started to develop in China during the Republican era, Japan had already brought forth a number of highly original contributions in that field a few decades earlier during the Meiji era. Apart from theories and methods, Japanese religious studies provided a huge reservoir of terms written in kanji that could conveniently be transferred into Chinese. We can assume that the concept of 'religious feeling' came to be adopted by Chinese Buddhists through their exposure to texts by Japanese authors. For that specific term and concept, we can find an early mentioning of it in a text by Nakanishi Ushirō 中西牛郎 (1859–1930). In 1902, the journal *Xinmin congbao* 新民叢報 [New Citizen], which was run by Liang Qichao, published one of his articles in Chinese in which 'religious feeling' was rendered as *zongjiao ganqing* 宗教感情. In the article 'Dushi sui'ji' 讀史隨記 [Notes from Reading History], there is a paragraph where Nakanishi describes the system of the army in ancient Rome:

They [the Roman soldiers] had to follow the orders of the general. Thus, when the soldiers spotted the aquila (the flag of Rome) shimmering at the front rank, their hearts felt dignified and solemn. All of a sudden, a feeling of devoutness arose in them. It was a kind of religious feeling.¹⁸

¹⁸ Nakanishi, 'Dushi sui'ji', 81.

When we come back to the reception of Western religious psychology and its creative appropriation, we must definitely mention the Buddhist religious philosopher Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863–1909). In 1893, Kiyozawa had published his monograph *The Skeleton of Philosophy of Religion* (Jp. *Shūkyō tetsugaku gaikotsu* 宗教哲学骸骨), which can be considered the first text written by a Buddhist author that engaged with questions of the Western study of religion in a systematic fashion. Kiyozawa wanted to find out why a person develops an interest in religious practice and has something called ‘faith’ (Jp. *shinnen* 信念). This psychological turn in Kiyozawa’s approach to religion is often expressed in a condensed form by his sentence ‘We do not believe in gods and buddhas because they exist; they exist because we believe in them’.¹⁹ In order to find answers to everything to do with religious feelings, he began to study not only the classics of the Pure Land such as Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263), but also the work of Western religious scholars such as Friedrich Schleiermacher and his concepts of ‘absolute dependence’ and ‘sense and taste for the infinite’. The result of this debate was a reformulation of Buddhist teachings in a language rich in neologisms. Kiyozawa’s texts owed much to his reading of Western religious thought, or, as Mark Unno has summarised these efforts, ‘Kiyozawa emphasised the core concepts of Shin Buddhism and their renewed articulation within the larger international context of religious thought’.²⁰ With regard to Schleiermacher, it was less so his insistence on the scope of ‘dependence’, but his way of overcoming the division between perceiver and perceived through religion, which he sees as the ‘sense and taste for the infinite’, which causes subject (religious human being) and object (the divine authority) to merge. Therefore, Pure Land Buddhism became for him a matter of an inner search that could be helped by scriptures, rituals and institutions, but was not reliant on those.²¹ For Chinese Buddhists, the advantage that they might have had when they encountered Kiyozawa’s

¹⁹ Heisig, Kasulis, and Maraldo, ‘The Pure Land Tradition’, 240.

²⁰ Unno, ‘Modern Pure Land Thinkers’, 194.

²¹ Schroeder, *The Revolution of Buddhist Modernism*, 3.

work, was that it was written from a Buddhist perspective. Unlike the introductions to religious psychology, which, as we saw originated from a Christian milieu, Kiyozawa had already provided a blueprint for what we could call a ‘Buddhisised psychology of religion’.

Compared to the scholarly landscape in Japan, religious studies developed as an academic discipline relatively late in China. Japan had already started to establish a large corpus of neologisms that were used to describe religion during the early Meiji. The first chair of religious studies was established in 1905 at Tokyo University.²² Japanese scholars also pioneered the translation and writing of introductions to religious studies, which is the third text genre that Chinese Buddhists could rely on in their appropriation of religious psychology. In the 1920s, a number of such introductory works were published by Chinese scholars. Among such monographs are *Zongjiaoxue ABC* 宗教學 ABC [The ABC of Religious Studies] by Xie Songgao—whom we had already met earlier as a translator—or *Zongjiao zhexue* 宗教哲學 [Philosophy of Religion] by Xie Fuya 謝扶雅, both published in 1928. These authors aimed to write introductions to the field that would give readers an overview of the history and the methods of religious studies. Xie Songgao distinguished three kinds of approaches in religious studies that he highlighted as state of the art: Religious philosophy, religious psychology, and religious history. For religious psychology, he states the following:

Religious psychology is a kind of scientific research of religion. It is a new kind of scholarship that has only developed in the last twenty or thirty years. Before that, there were actually some scholars of religion who held similar opinions on psychological phenomena of religion. However, the application of scientific methods to the study of religious phenomena of humanity, the in-depth analysis of prayer, worship and the psychological roots of all religious rituals and beliefs were only discovered in the last twenty or thirty years.²³

²² Meyer, ‘How the “Science of Religion”’, 308.

²³ Xie, *Zongjiaoxue ABC*, 1.

In this paragraph, the philosophical roots of religious psychology are only being hinted at vaguely and we can just guess which specific scholars of ‘proto-religious psychology’ he aimed to mention here. In Xie Fuya’s book *Zongjiao zhhexue*, these references are made much more explicit. In his short review of the history of religious psychology, Xie Fuya places Schleiermacher and Feuerbach at the very beginning of its genealogy:

Schleiermacher started to understand and uncover religion as a kind of direct perception (*zhiguan* 直觀) and feeling (*qinggan* 情感) related to the universe, and he completely discarded the theological concepts of the Enlightenment thinkers. In his book *On Religion*, he often used the term ‘self-consciousness’ (*ziwo yishi* 自我意識) as the essence of religion [...]. He completely took religion away from theocracy and the sphere of morality and purely interpreted it as a process of the mind (*xin* 心). This was the first page in the history of religious psychology.²⁴

Immediately after this paragraph, in which he emphasises Schleiermacher as the first scholar to provide the foundations of the psychology of religion, he leads over to Feuerbach and his radicalised inward turn of the God-human relationship:

At the extreme, L. Feuerbach concludes that religious consciousness (*zongjiao yishi* 宗教意識) has its root in the two psychological processes of ‘desire’ (*yu* 欲) and ‘will’ (*yi* 意). When they find themselves in the midst of nature, humans cannot help but be afraid, and this is what creates a desire. In order to get away from sorrows and achieve happiness, they imagine a God to exist that they can pray to. If humans did not have this desire and will, then there would be no God and no religion. Therefore, religion is a subjective deluded concept and has no objective essence.²⁵

²⁴ Xie, *Zongjiao zhhexue*, 35.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

The introductory works of Xie Songgao and Xie Fuya are similar in their attempt to summarise the state of the art of religious studies, and this naturally includes the psychology of religion as a relatively new sub-discipline of it. What receives particular attention in their treatment of it is not the empirical strand, but the basic convictions that were held by its theo-philosophical pioneers.

4. Chinese Republican Buddhism and Religious Psychology: Three Cases of Encounter and Creative Appropriation

The issue of the encounter between Chinese Buddhists and religious psychology is most visible in Buddhist journals that were published during the Republican era, but also in a few Buddhist monographs. For that time, we find texts that document how Buddhists were appropriating terms and concepts from that field and made explicit or implicit links to Schleiermacher and Feuerbach. Yet, we must be aware that it is hardly possible to find contributions in which this material is dealt with in a systematic way. Nor can we single out one specific Buddhist writer who we could present as a leading authority on religious psychology. Rather, we must assume that references to early forms of the psychology of religion were incorporated in the context of discursive strategies: Buddhists aimed to reach specific goals by drawing these references. In the following, three cases are analysed which document this encounter and creative appropriation.

Finding instances of the mere mention of Schleiermacher, Feuerbach and their definitions of religion is possible through a fair amount of time reading and browsing through Buddhist journals. In an issue of the renowned journal *Haichaoyin* 海潮音 [Sound of the Sea Tide] from 1931, for example, we can find an article titled ‘Ou mei xuejia duiyu zongjiao zhi dingyi’ 歐美學家對於宗教之定義 [European and American Scholar’s Definition of Religion]. Its author, a certain Mochan 墨禪, presents a list of forty-three definitions of religion by scholars that range from the fields of French sociology (Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim) to Japanese religious scholarship (Katō Genchi 加藤玄智, Hiyane Antei 比屋根安定). Within this eclectic compilation, we also find a large section devoted to contributions

from German philosophy and it is there we see Mochan turning to Schleiermacher and Feuerbach. For Schleiermacher, we read the following paragraph:

Religion is a devoutness that is absolute dependence. It is the longing for an infinite God. But if ignorance (*wuzhi* 無知) and will (*yizhi* 意志) are realised, then feelings (*ganqing* 感情) have no effect. Therefore, if we want to revive our spirit and prolong our life, then we have to fully rely on the realization of feelings.²⁶

While some of Schleiermacher's key concepts—'absolute dependence' and 'feelings'—are reproduced in a concise way, the second part of the definition appears enigmatic. It does not qualify as a direct quote taken from Schleiermacher's work and since Mochan does not add any additional explanation, it remains unclear what kind of spirit (*jingshen* 精神) he means or in which sense 'prolongation of life' (*shenghuo yanchang* 生活延長) is to be understood.

For the definition of religion that is based on Feuerbach, Mochan's rendition seems fairly accurate:

Religion is the essence of humanity. It is a concept that arises from the reflection (*fanxing fanzhao* 反省反照) of themselves. They call it 'God' (*shen* 神), as if it was a thing (*dongxi* 東西) that existed independently outside of themselves.²⁷

To sum up, Mochan's list of forty-three different definitions indeed appears like an exercise demonstrating his erudition. Surprisingly, none of these impulses are developed further. After presenting all these definitions, he rejects them all on the grounds that they were developed by scholars who had monotheistic assumptions. He therefore concludes that none of the definitions—not even those of Schleiermacher and Feuerbach—can be applied to Chinese Buddhism.

²⁶ Mochan, 'Ou mei xuejia duiyu Zongjiao zhi dingyi', 25.

²⁷ Ibid.

Why do these references to Schleiermacher and Feuerbach occur in the text at all? The explanation lies in the sources that he consulted. Mochan's list of forty-three definitions is clearly a mash-up of different lists that he came across in his reading of Japanese religious scholarship. When we see his compilation of German thinkers—Immanuel Kant, G. F. W. Hegel, J. G. Fichte—we can already surmise that this is precisely the canon of Western philosophy that Japanese intellectuals had been particularly fond of since the Meiji Reformation. The source that Mochan is referencing when bringing in Schleiermacher and Feuerbach is *Nihon shūkyōshi* 日本宗教史 [A History of Japanese Religion] by the Japanese Buddhist Tsuchiya Senkyō 土屋詮教 (1872–1956). We can therefore assume that Mochan's references to Schleiermacher and Feuerbach are the outcome of copying-and-pasting and not the result of an intensive engagement with their approach.

In 1947, the Buddhist periodical *Zhengxin* 正信 [Right Faith] published an article bearing the title 'Zongjiao yu rensheng' 宗教與人生 [Religion and Life].²⁸ Its author was a certain Zhou Bangshi 周邦式, about whom we have only scarce biographical information.²⁹ Less an article about Buddhism in particular, Zhou's contribution rather constitutes a rich discussion of the phenomenon of religion itself. At the beginning, he aims to summarise three different approaches to exploring the 'essence of religion' (*zongjiao zhi benzhi* 宗教之本質) that have been offered by scholarship so far. The first approach is epistemology (*zhishishuo* 知識說), which is exemplified by the philosophers Immanuel Kant and Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel. They see religion as a form of knowledge about moral duties (Kant) or 'the

²⁸ The article was published simultaneously in the journal *Dushu tongxun* 讀書通訊 [Reading Newsletter], see Zhou, 'Zongjiao yu rensheng'.

²⁹ Browsing through the Buddhist journals made available through reprints edited by Huang Xianian, we can gather that this author was particularly productive in the 1940s. In 1947 alone, he published three essays in Buddhist magazines. An author bearing the same name also submitted a large number of contributions to the secular journal *Guoli* 國力 [Power of the Nation] on various political issues. Comparing the style of writing, we can assume that it is the same author.

Absolute'. The second approach that Zhou elaborates on is 'theories of emotion' (*qingganshuo* 情感說). Here, scholars define religion primarily as rooted in feelings. Its main proponent—and the only one that Zhou mentions explicitly—is Friedrich Schleiermacher. Zhou does not give a detailed description of that research program, but merely states a sentence of Schleiermacher that can be considered a classic phrase of his: 'The essence of religion is a kind of feeling of dependence on the infinite, a kind of sense and appreciation for the infinite' (宗教本質, 乃一種依賴無限之情感, 一種對無限之認識與領略).³⁰ Marked in this article as a direct quote of Schleiermacher—or at least seeming like a fair summary of his definition of religion—we can easily document two significant editorial interventions by Zhou here. Firstly, it is not a quotation by Schleiermacher but rather a mashup of two of Schleiermacher's definitions of religion that can be found separately in *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* and in his *The Christian Faith*. Secondly, we can detect that Zhou did not refer to Schleiermacher directly but must have consulted a Chinese secondary source instead. The quote is actually from Xie Youwei's *Lunlixue dagang* 倫理學大綱 [Outline of Ethics].³¹

Still, this reference to Schleiermacher is not the only one in his text that makes a connection to religious psychology. Instead, the concept of 'feeling' keeps returning throughout the text in various constellations. The third approach that Western scholarship has come up with to analyze religion is the focus on 'faith' (*xinyang shuo* 信仰說). It is this focus on faith that he finds most convincing while he discards the other two paradigms. However, by elaborating on the dimension of faith in the remaining three pages of his article, Zhou continues to appropriate concepts of religious psychology.

What Zhou aims to answer is the question of which contribution religion can make to the individual and society. In trying to reflect on this, he brings in a perspective of comparative religion in which Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism are placed side by side. Compiling

³⁰ Zhou, 'Zongjiao yu rensheng', 7.

³¹ Xie, *Lunlixue dagang*, 11. Xie's book was republished both in 1946 and 1947 and was very likely available to Zhou.

examples from all of these three religions, Zhou aims to document that faith is the ‘foundation of religion’ (*zongjiao de jichu* 宗教的基礎).³² It is faith that changes people’s inner life into a more harmonious and less competitive state. Through that, the basis for a better functioning of society is provided. In overall eight columns, he gives examples of these beneficial effects of faith.³³ ‘Feelings’ play a central role in the third column, where Zhou expounds on the effect of faith on the ‘strengthening of the will’: Here, he takes the Scottish philosopher John Henry Muirhead (1855–1940) as his reference. According to Zhou, Muirhead had proposed a model in which the ‘will’ (*yizhi* 意志) is the source of all actions of an individual. However, the will is constituted by the four elements of feeling (*ganqing* 感情), desire (*yuwang* 欲望), thinking (*kaolü* 考慮), deciding (*jueduan* 決斷). These four elements must be thought of in a sequential order, which means that ‘feeling’ is conceived as the foundation.³⁴

Throughout his text, Zhou Bangshi retains an eclectic approach to different currents of thought. While he does not return to Schleiermacher’s concept of ‘feeling’ as the constituting element of religion, there are certainly other references to religious psychological approaches in a watered-down form. In the following passage, he recounts the relationship between morality and religion that was put

³² Zhou, ‘Zongjiao yu rensheng’, 8.

³³ The eight columns on the basis of which the benefits of faith can be demonstrated are (1) ‘widening the hearts’ (*kaituo xinxiang* 開拓心胸), (2) ‘expanding one’s perspective’ (*tigao jingjie* 提高境界), (3) ‘strengthening the will’ (*jianding yizhi* 堅定意志), (4) ‘taming the emotions’ (*zhonghe qinggan* 中和情感), (5) ‘cultivating moral character’ (*peiyang pinde* 培養品德), (6) ‘detaching oneself from life and death’ (*liaojué shengsi* 了決死生), (7) ‘to care nothing of fame and profit’ (*bixi mingli* 蔽履名利) and (8) ‘to universally benefit humanity’ (*puli renqun* 普利人羣).

³⁴ The source that Zhou is paraphrasing here is most probably Muirhead’s *Elements of Ethics* (1882), which was made available to Chinese readers through a translation by the renowned scholar and polymath Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877–1922), see Muirhead, ‘Lunlixie gailun’. The translation was published in serialised form over several issues.

forth by the German philosopher Friedrich Paulsen (1846–1908) in his *A System of Ethics*:

There are also some [scholars] who say that that religion has grown out of people's low self-confidence. And [Friedrich] Paulsen says: 'Morality and religion both spring from the same root, the yearning of the will for perfection (*jinshan jinmei zhi kewang* 盡善盡美之渴望). But that which is a demand in morals becomes reality (*shiti* 實體) in religion.' We appreciate Paulsen's formulation [...]. No matter if its Christianity, Islam, Buddhism or any other religion, there is none that does not attempt to fulfil their innermost desires in a world that transcends reality [...].³⁵

What Zhou summarises here as a statement by Paulsen could just as well be a paraphrasing of Feuerbach's theory of projection: People perceive their environment as something that overpowers them and makes them aware of their own powerlessness. For this reason, they project their longing for perfection into a transcendent sphere in which gods operate.

³⁵ Zhou, 'Zongjiao yu rensheng', 8. The translation that is displayed here comes from the English translation provided by Frank Thilly, see Paulsen, *A System of Ethics*, 419. Whether Paulsen was influenced by Feuerbach's theory of projection is not documented. Still, many passages in *A System of Ethics* that surround the quotation that Zhou chose here do suggest that: 'With the advance of civilization it [the will] aims not merely at life, but at a beautiful and good life, at an ideal of humanity. This change in the direction of man's will produces a corresponding change in the form of the transcendent world: the manifold world of gods of polytheism is the creation of the higher will. Permanent, personal, historical beings take the place of the vague, perishable, nameless magic forces of fetichism. In the gods, man's ideals of a beautiful and good life are realized' (ibid., 418). When we continue reading, it becomes apparent that his concept of religion is also visibly anchored in Schleiermacher's emphasis on 'feeling' and 'infinity': 'This feeling of awe in the presence of the Infinite from which our life springs, and into which it flows, forms the root of our religious conception of things' (ibid., 432).

In the Buddhist journals published in the Republican era, Zhou Bangshi's identity remains a mystery to us. It is unclear whether it was the pseudonym of another Buddhist author who was well known, or if a collective of authors stood behind that name. Since the article was published at the same time in a secular journal, some caution is in order. What we do notice about the language of Zhou is that he used Buddhist terms even in non-Buddhist contexts. This is surely one of the characteristics that make it probable that the text was constructed from a Buddhist perspective. Furthermore, the approaches that are drawn here from religious psychology can be interpreted as an element of Buddhist apologetics: it is likely no coincidence that the two other religions that Buddhism is compared to in the text are Christianity and Islam, which are both monotheistic and whose histories are strongly interlinked. In the final conclusion, Zhou summarises his survey of these three religions in a way that suggests that all of them have a positive impact on human life. Yet, he mentions that all of them have their shortcomings which are the 'superstitious elements that they all have and which even the progressive religions of Christianity, Islam and Buddhism cannot remove entirely'. He combines this summary with the encouragement to point out these errors in all religions and to strengthen those elements that provide 'a spiritual support to humanity' (*jingshen yousuo jituo* 精神有所寄託).³⁶ It remains unspecified which 'errors' (*miuwu* 謬誤) or 'superstitions' (*mixin* 迷信) he is directing attention to. Still, we can imagine that following his engagement with religious psychology, there is a phased application of these two concepts. With regard to Buddhism, errors and superstitions might only be something that becomes apparent in surface phenomena in religious practice like in monastics who shut themselves off from society, or rituals that produce no visible effect. The basic doctrines of Buddhism, which put great emphasis on the processes of the mind and human emotions would not be questioned. In the case of Christianity and Islam, these allegations hint at the very core of the doctrine of theism. If human emotions are the primary factor that we can be sure of in the explana-

³⁶ Zhou, 'Zongjiao yu rensheng', 10.

tion of religion, the God of Christianity and Islam might only be an illusion.

The third and final example is from a book by the renowned Buddhist reformer Yinshun 印順 (1906–2005). Bearing the title *Fofa gailun* 佛法概論 [An Outline of the Buddhadharma], it was published after Yinshun had fled from the mainland to Hong Kong and around the time he settled down in Taiwan.³⁷ Although, strictly speaking, this text by Yinshun was published when the Republic of China on the mainland was coming to an end, it nevertheless reflects the ideas he had been working on for several years in that environment. Structured as a coursebook and written in *baihua* 白話 (modern vernacular Chinese), Yinshun acknowledges that the label of ‘religion’ (*zongjiao* 宗教) can indeed be applied to Buddhism. However, there are major differences from the other religions and it is Buddhism that stands out as ‘the religion of reasoned moral conduct’ (*lizhi de dexing de zongjiao* 理智的德行的宗教).³⁸

In the following paragraph, it is rather easy to detect Western concepts of religious psychology. We can find Friedrich Schleiermacher’s notion of religion as a ‘feeling of absolute dependence’. However, Schleiermacher’s dictum is used in reverse as a criticism: According to Yinshun, this ‘absolute dependence’ is the origin of human serfdom. Apart from Schleiermacher, it is the critique of religion that was developed by Ludwig Feuerbach that Yinshun endorses, which posits that gods are nothing but human projections:

[...] Ordinary religions, no matter if they are nature religions, social religions, or religions of the self, all tend towards this feeling of dependence. They objectify their own intentions, they form an illusory unity with what they rely on and turn it into external gods. Therefore, people say: religions have to be theistic. They all think that humans have some qualities that are different from that of the gods, and these are our egos, our heart-mind, or our soul. For example, Christianity says: peoples’ souls come from God [...]. It is

³⁷ Bingenheimer, ‘Der Mönchsgelehrte Yinshun’, 31.

³⁸ Yinshun, *Fofa gailun*, ii.

also said that the only remedy that there is for the people's flaws and sins can come by relying on God, by devout faith, by receiving the gifts of God, and only then there is hope. Ordinary religions fantasise about natural and spiritual gods as a place of their own refuge, and want to rely on them to escape the suffering of reality. These religions are illusionary, they are other-powerly [relying on an external power]. Buddhism is not like that, it is a religion, and yet it is atheism [...]. The difference between the Buddhadharma and ordinary religions, is that it does not postulate external gods, but it values the purification of one's own power. And this is why we can not avoid talking about sentient beings and oneself.

[...] 一般的宗教，無論是自然宗教，社會宗教，自我宗教，都偏於依賴感。自己意向客觀化，與所依賴者為幻想的統一，成為外在的神。因此有人說：宗教是必然有神的。他們每以為人有從神分出的質素，這即是我們的自我，心或靈魂。如基督教說：人的靈是從上帝那裡來的 [...]. 他們又說：人的缺陷罪惡，是無法補救的，惟有依賴神，以虔誠的信仰，接受神的恩賜，才有希望。所以一般宗教，在有情以外，幻想自然的精神的神，作為自己的歸依處，想依賴它而得超脫現實的苦迫。這樣的宗教，是幻想的，他力的。佛教就不然，是宗教，又是無神論 [...]. 佛法與一般宗教的不同，即否定外在的神，重視自力的淨化，這所以非從有情自己說起不可。³⁹

This paragraph of Yinshun brings together the basic assumptions of Schleiermacher and Feuerbach and appropriates them in the context of Buddhist apologetics. Schleiermacher had directed scholarly focus from speculating on the existence of God back to exploring human consciousness. However, while for Schleiermacher this shift was meant to improve our understanding of individual religiosity and raise empathy, Feuerbach believed that he had found the basis for a radical critique of religion and Christianity in particular. Yinshun supports the use of the term 'religion' to label Buddhism and therefore seems to agree that there is a comparability of Buddhism and Christianity. What he means by 'ordinary religions' (*yiban de zongjiao* 一般的宗教) are the theistic religions, which includes Christianity.

³⁹ Yinshun, *Fofa gailun*, 34.

We can well imagine that Feuerbach would have been regarded by Yinshun as the more consistent advocate of religious psychology, since he was radical enough to deny the existence of God completely, whereas Schleiermacher left a decision on this question open.

5. Conclusions

Based on the account that was presented in this paper, we can conclude that religious psychology was an approach that already started to gain impact among Chinese Buddhists of the Republican era. While the empirical strands of religious psychology that were internationally acclaimed at that time were less intensively received by Buddhists, the ideas of Schleiermacher and Feuerbach as the philosophical pioneers were met with great interest. However, as far as the depth of the engagement with it and also the objectives that were involved with it are concerned, we can see significant variation. For instance, the Buddhist author Mochan included both of them in his extensive list of Western definitions of religion. Still, it seems that Mochan barely had an interest in appropriating Schleiermacher's concept of 'religious feelings' or Feuerbach's theory of 'projection' in a creative way and reformulating Buddhist doctrines through that input. We can imagine that Mochan compiled such a long list of Western and Japanese definitions to religion in order to demonstrate his erudition and cosmopolitanism. Compared to that case example, Yinshun's engagement with the same thinkers led to very different results. Yinshun was able to employ Schleiermacher's and Feuerbach's way of psychologizing religion in the context of Buddhist apologetics. Both thinkers had provided powerful approaches to rethink and criticise theism and what Yinshun does is appropriate their arguments to highlight Buddhism as a rational religion.

We can summarise that the engagement of Chinese Buddhists with early religious psychology was largely eclectic and non-systematic. In most cases it is also difficult to discern which specific sources Buddhists had consulted and how they learned about religious psychology. The three genres of text that were introduced here—Chinese translations of Western works, Japanese religious scholarship

and Chinese introductions to religious studies—were very likely among their readings. Still, there remains an uncertainty here since these Buddhist authors rarely disclosed their sources. Further research is needed in the future to reveal more insights into the scope of Buddhist engagement with religious psychology and the long-lasting structural effects this has had on Chinese Buddhist language and the explication of doctrinal content.

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