

HEGEMONY, IMPERIALISM, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF RELIGION IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA¹

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ABSTRACT

Edward Said's concept of Orientalism portrays the high tide of nineteenth-century imperialism as the defining moment in the establishment of a global discursive hegemony, in which European attitudes and concepts gained a universal validity. The idea of "religion" was central to the civilizing mission of imperialism, and was shaped by the interests of a number of colonial actors in a way that remains visibly relevant today. In East and Southeast Asia, however, many of the concerns that statecraft, law, scholarship, and conversion had for religion transcended the European impact. Both before and after the period of European imperialism, states used religion to engineer social ethics and legitimate rule, scholars elaborated and enforced state theologies, and the missionary faithful voiced the need for and nature of religious conversion. The real impact of this period was to integrate pre-existing concerns into larger discourses, transforming them in the process. The ideals of national citizenship and of legal and scholarly impartiality recast the state and its institutions with a modernist sacrality, which had the effect of banishing the religious from the public space. At the same time, the missionary discourse of transformative conversion located it in the very personal realm of sincerity and belief. The evolution of colonial-era discourses of religion and society in Asia since the departure of European imperial power demonstrates both their lasting power and the degree of agency that remains implicit in the idea of hegemony.

I. RELIGION AND POSTCOLONIAL CRITIQUE

Of all the administrative, military, and commercial ventures undertaken during the era of European imperialism, perhaps the most significant and lasting construction project was the image the colonial enterprise created of itself. From divine right to settle the frontier, to the benevolent hand of global capitalism, to the need to protect hapless natives from rapacious rivals, discursive themes arose to explain the necessity of a benevolent imperial presence in the colonies. Of these, however, none was so deeply pervasive as the cultural, which cast the European mission in the colonies as a sacred duty to protect, educate, and civilize the native population. Since the late 1970s, and especially with the publica-

1. This article derives from a paper prepared for the "Casting Faiths" workshop held in Singapore in 2005. Other papers from this workshop are being prepared for publication in an edited volume, and will be cited below with the shorthand of "CF, forthcoming." I am indebted to the participants, especially Maitrii Aung-Thwin, Roberta Wollons, Oscar Salemink, and Webb Keane, and to Ryan Bishop and two anonymous reviewers for suggestions made on earlier drafts.

tion of Edward Said's immensely influential *Orientalism*, the focus has turned back on Europe, on how the imperial powers understood and misunderstood the rest of the world, and on how the range of images they created can be made to speak about the fears and desires of the European metropole.

However, was the regime of Orientalist knowledge identified by Said somehow unique to Western imperialism? Said himself is somewhat equivocal on this point. On the one hand, he characterizes the control of knowledge as a universal function of power, acknowledging that "all cultures impose corrections upon raw reality, changing it from free-floating objects into units of knowledge." On the other, he defines Orientalism as a characteristically Western phenomenon, tracing a persistent European obsession from Herodotus to the present day with an imagined (and geographically mobile) "Orient." In addition to this "internal consistency," European Orientalism also had "a highly articulated set of relationships to the dominant culture surrounding it," in other words, it evolved with history. For Said, the key moment came in the late eighteenth century, when the British and French attained their "positional superiority" over the Levant, and more importantly when their images of the Orient had accumulated to such a mass that they could become self-referential. In other words, while the West has always sought to define its oriental other, this period marked both a new will to power and the firm establishment of a global regime of knowledge. To the extent that these two factors did not materialize in other empires—a thesis that Said implies but stops short of saying—the Western experience was a unique one.²

The real significance of Orientalist and other imperial structures of thought lies in the question of hegemony. For Said, the discourses of European imperialism remain significant because many were inherited by the United States after the Second World War, allowing their basic features to continue to shape the structures and concepts of the modern world. Herein lies the fundamental question of imperial power. While the United States continues to exercise unparalleled political and military might, recent events have demonstrated all too clearly the limits to its ability or that of any other power to impose its will on the world. At the same time, the language and symbols of politics, economics, and culture do remain largely American, or at least Western, in origin. This would seem to belie the Gramscian sense of hegemony, in which the ideas, symbols, and categories of the powerful gain a universal currency, and are unknowingly but willingly adopted by the powerless, against whose interests they work. However, despite Gramsci's Marxist heritage, it is important to remember that he did not view the realm of ideas simply as a deterministic function of class domination, but rather as a technique of it, "a willed and a knowing deception" by those with a corresponding economic interest. His call to reclaim the realm of thought assumes the ability of the oppressed classes to do so, and thus that the conceptual control at the center of ideological hegemony is less transformative of consciousness than it is an independent field to be fought over and won.³ Later

2. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 22-24, 67.

3. *An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935*, ed. David Forgacs (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1999), 196.

scholars have not abandoned the idea of a transformative element, hidden in the deeper messages encoded in practice. This idea would be taken up in the context of religious conversion, specifically the notion by John and Jean Comaroff that the transformation of the routines and habits of daily life, rather than discourse, would constitute a “colonization of consciousness.”⁴

Of the ideas thrown open to contestation during the European encounter in Asia, “religion” is one of the most interesting. Certainly, images of religion were central to the colonial encounter, and feature prominently in many portrayals of Orientalism. Talal Asad and others have focused on different aspects of this problem, such as the changing role of European and Christian universalism, the formation of scholarly disciplines of knowledge, and the changing politics of missionary advocacy in creating a set of scholarly and political standards to which other religions, particularly Islam, were held.⁵ Most of these works focus on the period of most dramatic encounter, the long nineteenth century, and it is left to the reader to seek the relevance of imperial-era discourses in more recent political developments.

In this essay I would like to examine just what sort of influence European imperialism might have had on the concept of “religion” in East and Southeast Asia by comparing snapshots of various official, scholarly, and missionary discourses before and after the nineteenth century. Certainly, there is a great deal of continuity throughout this entire period, and many of the concerns these groups had with religion pre- and postdated the colonial experience. Any political entity would be concerned with defining, if not controlling, religion; the great pre-colonial (meaning before the greatest period of Western impact) Asian empires were no exception. Pre- and postcolonial officialdom was equally charged with the administration and legal adjudication of religious institutions and the eradication of various forms of heterodoxy. Scholarly elites investigated the customs of the people and incorporated these images into larger theories of civilizational progress. The faithful approached the religion of others with a much more personal mission to reform or replace it, or to seek an alternate enlightenment through it. In each case, the implied understanding of religion appears to have been shaped largely by the character of the medium itself, the European influence simply adding new variables to old equations.

However, certain concerns and representations were unique to the period of European imperialism, and left a lasting impact on what would follow as well. By the late nineteenth century, the global reach of the British, French, and Dutch empires, joined later by the United States and Japan, was an inescapable reality, making it the first time since the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century that the entire Asian continent was drawn into a single set of military, political, and ideological conflicts. Western influence was pervasive enough that European

4. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Vol. 1: *Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

5. Talal Asad, “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category,” in *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, ed. Talal Asad (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 27-54; Asad, “Religion, Nation-state, Secularism,” in *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*, ed. Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 178-196.

models of society and governance and the Christian missionary experience became points of universal reference that anchored a wide variety of postcolonial discourses of modernity and national liberation, and on questions of religion and its place in society, these were not silent. However, while the period of European imperialism consolidated numerous discourses of religion, the Europeans alone did not dictate their content.⁶ Rather, I would argue that the real impact of nineteenth-century imperialism was to unify the conceptual vocabulary used in the representation of religion, and further that this was not simply a function of naked European power, nor was it necessarily intentional. Rather, it was brought about primarily by organizational changes in states and civil institutions, and actually accelerated after the decline of imperialism itself.⁷

II. POLICY AND THE SOUL OF THE CITIZEN

Although precolonial Asian statecraft demonstrated a range of approaches toward religion, certain broad themes are evident. First, precolonial empires of every stripe exercised a degree of monopoly over religious legitimacy and practice, maintaining both a ritual regimen that legitimized rulership and practical policies that limited the political and fiscal autonomy of ecclesiastical structures. In most cases, ideas one would now generally identify as “religious” were deeply entangled with state legitimacy, whether in terms of validating claims to kingship (as in Buddhist Sri Lanka) or as an embodiment of national ethics (as in Confucian China).⁸ As such, policy consisted generally of maintaining state monopoly over access to and interpretation of this realm, preventing the emergence of heterodoxy, and upholding a national ethical code. Non-state religious groups were clearly subjected to state authority, or else were perceived as dissidents and portrayed as a seditious threat to public morality.⁹ In practice, however, the minimalist administration of most precolonial empires meant that these policies were enforced at some distance from society. While especially dangerous sects might be hunted down with great ferocity, few states had the resources to pursue these policies at the local level. Campaigns such as the anti-Christian purges of early seventeenth-century Tokugawa Japan, which scrutinized individual belief by forcing villagers to renounce Christianity by defiling a picture of Mary and the infant Jesus, and which was buttressed with long-term structures of village surveillance, were thus the exception rather than the rule.¹⁰ Instead, the task of estab-

6. On the mutual creation of Indian and British discourses of religion, see Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

7. Prasenjit Duara has written extensively on the discursive interaction among imperialism, nationalism, civilizational identity, and modernization. See especially his *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

8. Yarina Liston, “The Transformation of Buddhism during British Colonialism,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 14, no. 1 (1999–2000), 189–210.

9. B. J. ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999).

10. One set of village regulations from 1662 begins with a demand that “each and everyone, down to the last person, has been thoroughly examined . . . to make sure that there is not a single Christian

lishing a national ethical standard was aimed more at policing elites than winning over the soul or conscience of the commoners. In late imperial China, these elites were trained and vetted by a Confucian examination system that also provided the route into the ranks of the civil service. Even when they had no official position in the government, these scholarly elites were still expected to act as personal exemplars and proxy guardians of state orthodoxy within local society.¹¹

The imperialism of the nineteenth century presented Asia with new forms and models of governance, and its particular concern for religious life in the colonies in many ways represented a logical extension of earlier European trends. Politically, the long-term evolution of what had become the European nation-state was characterized by the unprecedented centralization of administrative, political, and cultural power, largely at the expense of local identities and actors, and in this the extension of central control over religion had played an important role. Acts such as the standardization of a national calendar of festivals or list of accepted saints had come at the expense of local religious elites and identities and were often met with violent resistance.¹² At the same time, the increasingly direct administrative and cultural integration of the national subject saw the state take on a unique religious significance of its own. The new currency of the nineteenth-century nation-state form was the citizen, and the need to court citizen nationalism changed the nature of the state, recasting it as more than a political body, but rather as a nation, conceived famously in 1882 by Ernest Renan as “a soul, a spiritual principle.”¹³ In a way that would brook no competition from the Church or local religious allegiances, the nation itself was made sacred, as were its symbols, forms, and rituals. At the close of the eighteenth century, the highly scripted festivals of the French Revolution illustrated both this search for transcendence and the need to transfer the sacrality of the former regime and the Church (in particular the local Church) onto the new nation.¹⁴ One hundred years later, such tactics and events had been copied in one form or another by states throughout Europe.

If these new states sought to give their citizens a stake in a quintessential sense of national belonging, the extension of empire during the same period further emphasized this sense of civilizational difference. Parallel to the development of citizen nationalism at home, the cultural dimension inherent in the colonial encounter was enhanced by a growing sense of European exceptionalism. This had the ironic effect of further increasing the distance between colonizers and

in the village.” Later acts stipulate that village surveillance regulations aim to root out “Christians, of course,” later adding murderers and other criminals to the list. Herman Ooms, *Tokugawa Village Practice: Class, Status, Power, Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 356-357.

11. Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

12. This conflict was especially sharp when evidence of the miraculous was involved. David Blackburn, *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (New York: Knopf, 1994); William A. Christian, *Visionaries: The Spanish Republic in the Reign of Christ* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

13. *Becoming National: A Reader*, ed. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 52.

14. Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, transl. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).

colonized, even as the two were physically drawn together in greater numbers. British attitudes to Indian culture changed dramatically during the nineteenth century, and such actions as taking a local bride or joining a local religion that had been informally acceptable at the beginning of the century were all but unthinkable by the end.¹⁵ Certainly much had happened to harden British attitudes toward local culture, but the greater change was in the perception of their own. The transfer of British administrators throughout a global empire must certainly have emphasized a stark dichotomy between Britain and everyone else. At the same time, confidence in the ability of culture to bind or unbind a political unity was seen in the policies pursued at home and abroad, and the striking similarities between the two. What could be called “internal colonization,” such as the forced integration of minority communities at home, accelerated throughout the nineteenth century and was both inspired by and was a model for similar policies pursued in the colonies.¹⁶ However, although this sort of integration may have taken place internally within colonies, it was not a goal for empires as a whole. Colonial natives were ruled as subjects, not as citizens, and this meant allowing and even encouraging cultural and religious difference between metropole and colony. In practice, this dampened official enthusiasm for missionization. While native religious structures were frequently reformed and manipulated, they were less frequently targeted for replacement by the religion of the metropole, and many colonial officials were at best ambivalent toward missionary activities by their own citizens. This was especially pronounced when it was feared that overly aggressive missionization would stir up internecine struggles between ethnic groups or against European colonizers, as in the Dutch East Indies, where missionaries were prohibited from trying to convert the majority Muslim population.¹⁷

At the same time, the strength of European citizen nationalism and the role of religion in creating it was not lost on Asian nationalists, who came to define their own revolutionary movements and the states that grew out of them in comparable terms. At first the lessons were largely negative, revealing the dismaying inability of even very large nations such as China to present a viable military or cultural defense against the better organized imperialist powers. Nationalist ideologues blamed the deficient patriotism of the citizen. As the pace of imperialism reached its peak at the end of the nineteenth century, reformers throughout Asia came to express admiration for the sense of individual responsibility and sacrifice that they perceived in Western nations, and dismay at the lack of such

15. As reflected in British receptivity to ideals of Indian beauty; see Harminder Kaur, “Beautifying the Indian: The Culture of Cosmetics in Colonial Urban India,” M.A. thesis, National University of Singapore, 2005.

16. Edmund Burke III, “The Terror and Religion: Brittany and Algeria,” in *Colonialism and the Modern World: Selected Studies*, ed. Gregory Blue, Martin Bunton, and Ralph Croizier (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 40-50.

17. On the perception of culture in the mutual separation of religious and secular, see Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). This was especially pronounced when it was feared that missionization would stir up unrest or disrupt commerce. In the Dutch East Indies, for example, missionaries were prohibited from attempting to convert Muslims, and thus had to restrict their activities to highland tribes.

virtues among their own people. From Sun Yat-Sen's characterization of the Chinese people as a "loose sheet of sand," individual particles yet unbound by the cement of nationalism, to the largely hollow but portentous declarations of "one country, one nation, and one language" pronounced by Indonesian and Malay nationalists during the late 1920s, new leaders sought to harness the power of Western national forms by replicating their hold on the individual.¹⁸

The fruits of such discourse can be seen in the attempts, successful or not, of the states of postcolonial Asia to replicate sacred and transcendent principles of national unity. These attempts occasionally used religion overtly, as in state cults or religious monarchies, but more frequently involved the pseudo-sacralization of the state. This was most spectacularly pursued through the equation of the national body with cultic figures, such as the Japanese Meiji Emperor, Mao Zedong, or Sukarno, who were themselves the embodiment of transcendent struggles for national wealth and power, Marxist destiny, and anti-imperialist territorial integrity, respectively. In each case the new state created and held fast to a sacred ideology that was meant to galvanize citizens by inspiring them with visions of the national past, present, and future. As it had in Europe, the national essence became the soul of public life, while other beliefs, particularly those defined as "religious," were often cordoned off to an optional and private realm.¹⁹

III. LAW: THE TRIUMPH OF RATIONALITY

In contrast to policy, which addresses immediate concerns with practical solutions, a code of law is more idealistic and foundational, in many ways replicating the role of religious doctrine in society. Law and religion act as parallel sources of authority by virtue of their embodiment of moral absolutes, although the precise relationship between them deserves closer examination. Durkheimian anthropology largely equates the two, portraying law as a crystallization of a society's shared ethical code.²⁰ In contrast, Max Weber separates law from ethics, considering the pursuit of moral goals distinct from practice, in particular from legal procedure. For Weber, it is precisely the primacy of bureaucratic process over substantive ethical concerns that marks the rationalization of legal authority. For historical reasons, he considered this rationalization to have existed only in the modern West, with the subservience of form to the interpretation of ethics

18. Rebecca E. Karl, "Creating Asia: China in the World at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century," *American Historical Review* 103 (October, 1998), 1096-1118. Echoing much of what he had come to admire about Japanese nationalism, Sun characterized the Chinese people as a "single pure race," with a "common blood, common language, common religion, and common customs." Sun Yat-sen, *San min chu i: The Three Principles of the People*, transl. Frank W. Price, ed. Commission for the Compilation of the History of the Kuomintang (Taipei: China Pub. Co., n.d.), 5.

19. Perhaps the best example of how the sacralization of the state necessitated the marginalization of religion is the use of Shintô by the Meiji elite to engineer a new Japan after 1868. In response to opposition, Shintô was officially divided in 1882 into Shrine and Sect Shintô. The former comprised the system of nationally mandated ethics and rituals and was defined as civic ethics, while the small minority of discrete sects that made up the latter were defined as "religion." Sheldon M. Garon, "State and Religion in Imperial Japan, 1912-1945," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 12, no. 2 (Summer, 1986), 273-302. The same type of comparison could easily be made for the place of Marxism in China before the 1990s.

20. Sally Humphreys, "Law as Discourse," *History and Anthropology* 1 (1985), 241-264.

(and thus the irrational exercise of personal power) having been characteristic of theological and Asiatic legal systems.²¹ Judging from their actions, it appears that colonial administrators as well assumed the neutrality and rationality of bureaucratic procedure and its superiority to a system based on substantive ethics. Legal reform in the British colonies often consisted precisely of the imposition of procedural rationalization onto extant systems, which as the debate over extraterritoriality shows, were considered yet incomplete and unreliable.²² Various by administrative reform as in Yemen or by mistranslation as in India, “British colonizers took the embodied, spoken, and interpreted text and made it into a fixed, abstracted, and disembodied one.”²³

However, the assumption that legal procedure can be value-neutral and distinct from ethical substance is a tenuous one for both modern Western and pre-colonial Asian law. When European law was transmitted to the colonies, it carried with it a great deal of ethical (and often religious) baggage. British law in African colonies, for example, regulated the practice of daily life and in doing so “transformed conceptions of time, space, property, work, marriage, and the state,” often according to an overtly Christian mission.²⁴ Beyond this, for the prophets of rationality such as Jeremy Bentham and Adam Smith, order, predictability, and procedure themselves represent an ethical ideal, wherein utility and the common good themselves become the ultimate principle. Moreover, the tension between procedure and substance was also evident in Asian legal codes long before the Western impact. As had those in Europe, codes such as those developed in precolonial China and Japan balanced both procedure and principle.²⁵ In these cases as well, representation was an important concern, although the politics was reversed. In China, the discursively dominant Confucian moral ethic lay in historical contrast with the use of law as a deterrent, and Confucius’s famous maxim that “if you use regulations to lead, and punishments to keep order, the people will evade them and become shameless” demonstrates how the resort to formal law was portrayed as corrosive to the transformative moral mission of the ruler and was symptomatic of social decline.²⁶ Despite this, later dynasties did rule by law, employing detailed legal codes and numerous informal texts to guide magistrates in procedure and precedent, and even coming to employ the instruments of international law when they proved useful. The dif-

21. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, transl. Ephraim Fischhoff (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), 809-815. A similar dichotomy appears between his portrayal of Eastern “virtuoso religions,” based on the inherent charismatic power of ecstasies or mystics, and Western religions in which the priestly class acts as an interchangeable tool of an activist absolute deity. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, transl. and ed. Ephraim Fischhoff (London: Methuen, 1965).

22. On the relationship between civilization and the revocation of extraterritoriality, see Alexis Dudden, *Japan’s Colonization of Korea: Discourse and Power* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005).

23. Sally Engle Merry, “Law and Colonialism,” *Law and Society Review* 25, no. 4 (1991), 917.

24. *Ibid.*, 890-891.

25. For Japan, see the six-volume *Law and Justice in Tokugawa Japan: Materials for the History of Japanese Law and Justice under the Tokugawa Shogunate 1603–1867*, ed. John Wigmore (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1967). For China, see note 27, below.

26. This is followed by the charge, “if you use morality to lead, and rites to keep order, the people will have a sense of shame and correct themselves.” *Analects*, 2:3.

ference between late imperial China and the governments that followed the revolution of 1911 is less one of substance than of representation. While the imperial Chinese state sought to portray itself and its decisions as paternalistically moral, since the early twentieth century the language of choice has shifted to one of procedure, most recently beginning in late 1989, with the call by the newly appointed Secretary General Jiang Zemin to “use law to rule the country” (*yi fa zhi guo*).²⁷

In some cases this type of representation was employed in order to mask deeper interests and ideologies in what might be characterized as a ritual of legitimation. Perhaps the best example of this is the very public adoption of Western legal forms by the socialist world. Despite Marx’s ambivalence toward law, and their own hostility to the capitalist order, legal scholars in the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China spent decades trying to adapt European law to socialism, a task frequently dismissed as simple propaganda. In some cases, such as the show trials in Stalin’s purges, it clearly was. However, both the need for political despotism to seek shelter in legal formalism and the perceived incongruity of socialist ideology and rational jurisprudence by outside observers attest to the durability of Weberian categories of analysis and the universally recognized legitimizing power of procedure.²⁸

This is not to say that the introduction of Western juridical norms during the colonial period did not have an important impact on the substance of extant Asian legal systems. Places under direct European administration, such as much of Malaya, Vietnam, or the Dutch East Indies, incorporated the legal culture of their colonizing power directly, often training a stratum of native lawyers, such as the young Mohandas Gandhi, that moved freely throughout the empire. Many of these places recognized a bifurcated system, either by granting extraterritoriality to European residents, or by leaving private disputes and small crimes to be decided by community leaders according to local custom. This latter process, such as the formation of Indonesian *adat*, required custom to be reshaped and codified to resemble law, often placing judicial authorities in the awkward position of deciding matters of religious doctrine.²⁹ However, even those areas that

27. In 1863, Henry Wheaton’s *Elements of International Law* was translated into Chinese, and was first put to use one year later when three Danish ships were seized by Prussia in Chinese territorial waters. Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1990), 201-202. For the practice of domestic law, see Derk Bodde and Clarence Morris, *Law in Imperial China: Exemplified by 190 Ch’ing Dynasty Cases, Translated from the Hsing-an jui-lan. With Historical, Social, and Juridical commentaries* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967). The tension between the substance and representation theme runs through the “Law, Society, and Culture in China” book series edited by Philip C. C. Huang and Kathryn Bernhardt, especially Philip C. C. Huang, *Civil Justice in China: Representation and Practice in the Qing* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). The use of the current formulation in 1989 was obviously aimed at soothing the fears of the foreign business community following the Tiananmen massacre in June of that year. The phrase itself does not imply that the law is sacrosanct, but rather that it is a tool for governance, making its common mistranslation as “the rule of law” particularly telling.

28. Peirs Bierne, *Revolution in Law: Contributions to the Development of Soviet Legal Theory, 1917–1938* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1990); Andrew J. Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

29. Especially when religious customs were given legal weight, so that secular judges occasionally had to decide questions such as what constituted a correct Hindu wedding. Jothie Rajah, “Negotiating Legal Identities: Hindu Law in Singapore,” unpublished paper, Faculty of Law,

were not under direct rule adopted the forms and discourse of Western law, often as part of a program of national modernization, precisely because of its perceived authority and rationality.³⁰

While clearly flawed, the dual legacies of the myth of procedural rationality and of the privilege of procedure over ideology has clearly exerted a transformative influence over postcolonial Asian legal systems, most notably in the place of religion under law. Realistic or not, the subjection of ideology to law has attained a global legitimacy. As external criticism of attempts from within the Islamic world to reverse this trend demonstrates, the accepted form remains the legal marginalization of anything recognizable as ideology, including religion. Compare the first Japanese constitution, promulgated in 1889, which was granted as a gift from a “inviolably sacred” (*shinsei ni shite okasu be garazu*) imperial house to its subjects, with that composed in 1946 by the American occupation, in which authority is located in the “sacred trust of the people” while the constitution itself is self-referentially held up as the supreme law of the land. What is notable is that while each of these constitutions presumes a condition of absolute authority for the state and its ideology, they also assure freedom of religion, so long as the latter does not contradict the former.³¹

As these two documents demonstrate, the need to officially distance religion from law actually has the effect of masking the dominant ideology in the guise of rationality, while redefining religion as something that is personal, optional, and ultimately a right granted contingent only on its non-interference with inviolable principles of state. The same type of separation, guaranteeing freedom of religion while subjecting it to an ideology of state sacrality, is visible in most Asian constitutions, albeit with some variation. The constitution of Indonesia allows freedom of worship, provided that it does not contradict the principle of monotheism upon which the state is based. Perhaps the most extreme case is that of China, whose constitution unequivocally reaffirms atheistic Marxist-Leninism as the founding principle of the state, and then continues to insist that no government body may coerce the belief or disbelief of the individual.³²

National University of Singapore. Winnifred Fallers Sullivan discusses a similar case in which a court in Florida was charged with determining what sort of graveside piety constituted “religion.” *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

30. Tadashi Aruga, “The Declaration of Independence in Japan: Translation and Transplantation, 1854–1997,” *Journal of American History* 85, no. 4 (1999), 1409–1431.

31. *Constitution of the Japanese Empire*. 1889. Ch. 1, Art. 3, Ch. 2, Art. 28; *Constitution of Japan*. 1946. Preamble, Art. 20. The terms used are worth examining. While the English and Japanese versions of the 1946 document were prepared at the same time, the former uses the word “sacred,” while the Japanese text describes it as merely “solemn” (*genshyū*). Similarly, while the 1889 document refers to subjects having “freedom of religious belief” (*shin kyō no jiyū*), the 1946 version refers specifically to freedom from state interference, more closely resembling the establishment clause of the American Constitution.

32. *Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia*. 1945. Ch. XI, Art. 29. *Constitution of the People’s Republic of China*. 1982. Art. 32.

IV. SCHOLARSHIP: REPRESENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE ACADEMIES

Long before the arrival of the scholars of imperial Europe, the scholarly elites of precolonial Asia had filled libraries with their studies of religion. On the one hand, much of this work was a defense of religious orthodoxy. This is not surprising, given that the scholarly classes were often educated largely within a religious tradition; theological exploration and religious apology defined Buddhism, Confucianism, and Islam in Asia, as much as it had the Catholic Church of medieval Europe.

On the other hand, secular scholars also carved out the religious as a distinct sphere and defined the parameters by which it is understood, a line of inquiry more commonly associated with the comparative study of “world religions” by imperial academicians, such as Max Müller. However, while he and other European scholars of the nineteenth century would construct numerous racial, philological, and theological theories of the origins and evolution of religion, they were hardly unique in doing so.³³ Such comparisons and typologies are unavoidable whenever distinct traditions are juxtaposed, and formed an important field of study in precolonial Asia as well. In late Imperial China, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism were recognized by state authority and popular eschatology alike as the “three teachings” (*san jiao*), and evolved both a degree of structural similarity and a division of ritual labor. The canonization of the three teachings not only painted other belief systems as invalid or immature, it also prompted exploration of the relationship among them according to a variety of ethical and cosmological systems.³⁴ Similarly, the strength of Buddhist institutions in medieval Japan encouraged nativist scholars to fit pre-Buddhist practices into the Buddhist pattern, naming their tradition (*Shintô*, literally the “Way of the Spirits”) in such a way as to imply parity with or superiority to Buddhism, and even going as far as to forge a scriptural tradition that was claimed, not surprisingly, to predate Buddhist sutras.³⁵ Such aims presage those of the early nineteenth-century study of comparative theology in Europe, in which “Christian triumphalists of the first order” used theological proofs to demonstrate the unitary superiority of Christianity. When this study gave way to what was purported to be the dispassionately scientific study of world religions during the middle of the century, it exchanged a Christian bias for a variety of equally burdensome racial and cultural trajectories.³⁶ The idea of spiritual progress distinguished culturally

33. For the full scale and diversity of European perspectives, see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

34. Officially, the three teachings were classified as orthodox (*zheng*), and their activities tolerated or even encouraged. Scholars ranked the three in a graded validity, in which inferior teachings were still useful as stepping-stones to a greater truth. A more popular eschatological tradition traced the three to a single divine source called the Eternal Venerable Mother, of whom the three canonical founders (Confucius, the Buddha Sakyamuni, and Laozi) were children. See Kenneth Dean, *Lord of the Three in One: The Spread of a Cult in Southeast China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

35. *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, ed. William Theodore de Bary et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), I, 336-341.

36. Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 86.

conditioned religious expression (national religions) from superior universal belief systems (such as Buddhism and Christianity), and defined advanced religion in terms of discrete belief systems with canonical founders and texts and a goal of personal dialogue with the divine.³⁷ True to these standards, European philologists of the nineteenth century held up arcane Hindu and Buddhist texts as the crystallization of ancient wisdom, while often denigrating the practice of the modern faithful as superstitious and untrue to the principles of a faith they but vaguely understood.³⁸

However, scholarship is not simply an internal affair of the ivory tower—as Foucault famously expressed in his image of the panopticon, a prison in which all cells were visible from a shielded central point, access to knowledge is a very real power.³⁹ The urge to collect data and monopolize information arguably is natural to any administrative entity, and precolonial Asian powers did keep a close watch on religious institutions, ideas, and customs, largely through the scholarly class.⁴⁰ Returning again to Said, although the relation between knowledge and power is certainly not unique to European high imperialism, what was unique was simultaneous European dominance in both spheres during this period. Imperial European scholars not only had unprecedented physical access to the world, their analysis was also backed up with the prestige of empire, the authority of scholarly societies, and often the force of law.⁴¹ In this sense, the scholarly apparatus of industrialized Europe was substantively different from that which came before, and arguably the larger structure of knowledge that it created remains hegemonic to this very day.

Moreover, imperial power and scholarly authority being the two distinguishing features of European exceptionalism, Said's criticisms are even more relevant in the postcolonial order, particularly with respect to the American academy. Along with the rise of the United States as an economic and military superpower, the years after World War II saw the eclipse of imperial academies by the institutions and methodologies of American social science. Despite the size and diversity of the postwar American academy, the study of religion remains very much, as Jonathan Z. Smith famously called it, a "product of the scholars' study," and academics still work within clear constraints, the most fundamental of which

37. Asad, "The Construction of Religion"; Said, *Orientalism*, 60, 67; Jane Simpson, "Io as Supreme Being: Intellectual Colonization of the Maori?," *History of Religions* 37, no. 1. (August, 1997), 50-85.

38. N. J. Giardot, "Max Müller's *Sacred Books* and the Nineteenth-century Production of the Comparative Science of Religions," *History of Religions* 41, no. 3 (2002), 213-250; *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). See Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, for a reassessment of Müller.

39. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, transl. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

40. In China, for example, the Confucian-trained administrative class was charged with providing information through government channels, and their disgust with heretical practices would occasionally spill out into unofficial publications, such as the 1834 *Detailed Refutation of Heresies* penned and published by the county magistrate Huang Yübian. Sawada Mizuho, *Kôchû haja shôben*, [An annotated "Detailed Refutation of Heresies"] (Tokyo: Kokusho kankokai, 1972).

41. The interaction between colonial legal and scholarly authority is presented in Maitrii Aung-Thwin, "Casting Futures: Rebellion Ethnologies, Archives, and the Law in Colonial Burma," *CF*, forthcoming.

is the need to maintain the language of objectivity.⁴² For Said, such pretense not only masks layers of political and religious ideology; when he remarks on American social science's "singular avoidance of literature," his real criticism is that the rationalist methodology of the social sciences prevents them from taking culture or belief seriously.⁴³ Like legal procedure, the academic study of religion itself is automatically burdened with an implicit ideological stance.

Beyond the dictates of personal or professional conscience, this stance is enforced by the ultimate arbiter: access to grant money through the largest scholarly bodies and funding agencies. The most influential of these bodies, the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), represents the ambivalent role of ideology in the development of American social science as a whole. Founded as a service organization in 1923, the SSRC funded individual research on pressing social issues until 1930, when it was decided that such a tactic was merely "a piecemeal attack on a wide range of problems in society, but no coordinated attack at any point" and that it would be better to concentrate on a few select themes.⁴⁴ Thus began a new role for the SSRC in actively determining research initiatives through multi-year research committees. This more activist stance has allowed the SSRC to have an immense impact on the nature and mission of social-science research, a role that has led critics such as the historian Harry Harootunian to characterize the committees as the "sole custodians and vigilant guard dogs" of an intellectual orthodoxy under the guise of free inquiry.⁴⁵

In the long history of the organization, religion has appeared as a frequent visitor to SSRC projects, particularly in the context of Area Studies, but rarely as a focus. Like its original broad-based commitment to social betterment, the early committees themselves were thematic, and while none addressed religion as a primary concern, many made reference to issues with a moral component, such as juvenile delinquency, or to religious organizations, as in a project on social change in Mormon communities. After World War II, the council took the lead in the formation of Area Studies centers and research, and it was through these committees that the study of religion made its greatest progress. By the 1980s, Area Studies had become the single largest component of the SSRC, and these committees funded a large number of projects concerning religion, producing some of the most influential scholarship on religion in Asia and the Middle East. However, what both periods share is a tendency to treat religion as symptomatic or derivative of other social functions and phenomena.⁴⁶ While prewar scholarship was concerned with religion in a highly abstracted form as a vehicle for

42. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), xi. For one of many examples of how this plays out on university campuses, see "Mideast Tensions Are Getting Personal on Campus at Columbia," *New York Times* (January 18, 2005), B1.

43. Said, *Orientalism*, 290-291.

44. Kenton W. Worcester, *Social Science Research Council, 1923-1998* (New York: SSRC, 1998); *Social Science Research Council: Decennial Report 1923-1933* (New York: SSRC, 1933), 12.

45. Worcester, *Social Science Research Council*, 35. The full list of committees is available at http://www.ssrc.org/inside/about/consolidated_list_of_committees_1924-1997.page (accessed September 13, 2005).

46. Recent work on Islam and the 2001 SSRC committee on Immigration, Religion, and Civic Life suggest that this may be moving in a new direction.

social transformation, and postwar Area Studies initiatives presented it as an integral part of civilizational identity, in both cases the view of religion is de-theologized. Religion is treated largely as a functional lens of social ethics and structures, while scholars assiduously avoid any of the questions that one might associate with theological inquiry. In practice, the limitations of the social-science approach are often balanced with the approach of divinity schools, which can represent distinct entities within private universities (as at the University of Chicago) or enter into a dual orbit with public ones (such as the relationship between the Graduate Theological Union and University of California at Berkeley). Within social science, however, the ideals of value-free empiricism and scholarly impartiality clearly define the ground rules of academic inquiry, and in doing so equally define a scholarly discourse of religion.

How has this affected scholarly inquiry in postcolonial Asia? The pretense of disinterested research is not unique to the American academy; the earlier decline of “comparative theology” as a field of study attests to the broad and lasting legitimizing power of the perception of scholarly impartiality. Of course, in Asia as anywhere, a plurality of institutions and individuals espouse or disdain religion as they please. However, the inverse relationship between religious advocacy and perceived scholarly legitimacy has clearly developed a universal currency, and scholars with a strong religious affiliation must often first overcome the perception that they are engaged in religious apology rather than “real” research before they will be taken seriously.

This alone, however, is a far cry from hegemony. Research oriented toward engaged activism often receives sponsorship from Buddhist, Christian, or Muslim charitable and educational institutions. If the pretense of ideology-free research does hold hegemonic sway, it is among scholars seeking to establish themselves outside these spheres, de-theologized social science being very much the *lingua franca* of the international conferences and journals. Even in this sphere, however, American social science does not constitute the entirety or even the majority of academic research, particularly in Asia, where individual scholarly communities are nationally based and are divided equally by theory and language. Within these smaller communities, local considerations hold sway; certain types of research are encouraged or discouraged, often with global criteria as justification. Social-science research, particularly that conducted for a national rather than international audience, is frequently mobilized toward political ends or for programs of social engineering, the ideology of which is masked or justified by virtue of its being portrayed as objective, or at least progressive.⁴⁷

V. CONVERSION AND THE CONVERTED: MISSIONARIES AND CONVERT COMMUNITIES

Finally, what of those arguably most directly involved with religion during this period, missionaries and their converts? The Christian missionary enterprise,

47. In China, scientific atheism dictates the purpose and parameters of social-science research, while in Japan the legacy of religiously tinged wartime scholarship unofficially marks certain themes as out of bounds.

particularly that of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, lies at the heart of postcolonial critique, touching as it does on issues of civilizational hegemony, the transformation of individual consciousness, and the integration of local societies into global structures. However, the impetus to seek converts is as old as religion itself, and religious mission certainly played an important role in precolonial Asia. There, the political significance of conversion was such that these efforts were often concentrated at high levels. Centuries before the arrival of Europeans, Buddhist and Muslim emissaries had traversed long distances on official missions to win over the political elites of neighboring states. More than individual salvation, conversion offered new routes of access to divine power and the promise of various forms of political and economic co-religionist alliance. Such types of motivation are seen in the mid-sixth-century gift of Buddhist sutras made by the Korean Paekche kingdom to the emperor of Japan, or the Islamic conversion of commercial elites in South and Southeast Asia.⁴⁸ When Jesuit priests arrived in China and Japan in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, bringing with them access to lucrative trade routes and scientific prowess and seeking to win the prize of a Catholic emperor, they were in many ways inheritors of a familiar and well-established conversion strategy.⁴⁹

However, the burst of Christian missionization that followed in the wake of European high imperialism is often understood as a defining moment that was substantively different in scale and ambition from these earlier efforts. One reason was simply the scale of the enterprise. During the late eighteenth and especially nineteenth centuries, Catholic and Protestant missions from throughout Europe and North America brought their faith and civilization to every corner of the globe. This reach was facilitated by the penetration of imperial military power, leading to the frequently evoked image of the missionary arriving with the Bible in one hand and a gun in the other, or as one Chinese critic put it in 1927, Christian missionization was “the most sinister instrument of foreign imperialism,” populated by “the most vicious mischief makers imaginable.”⁵⁰ Other critics see a more subtle, yet far more fundamental, alliance between the two enterprises. In their *Of Revelation and Revolution*, John and Jean Comaroff famously demonstrated how the type of Christianity preached by missionaries in southern Africa demanded more than conversion of faith, but rather the reconstruction of individual consciousness, recreating ideas about gender, clothing,

48. Daigan and Alicia Matsunaga, *Foundation of Japanese Buddhism* (Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1974). Patricia Risso, “Muslim Identity in Maritime Trade: General Observations and Some Evidence from the 18th-Century Persian Gulf/Indian Ocean Region,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 21, no. 3. (1989), 381-392.

49. George Ellison, *Deus Destroyed: The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).

50. Talal Asad contrasts the role of discipline in Augustan Christianity with the ideal of heartfelt conversion in post-Enlightenment Protestantism, a point that should be remembered when trying to understand the Catholic policy of forced conversion in places like the Spanish New World. Asad, “The Construction of Religion.” The criticism in question comes from T’ang Liang-li, “Missions, the Cultural Arm of Western Imperialism,” in *Christian Missions in China: Evangelists of What?*, ed. Jessie G. Lutz (Boston: Heath and Co., 1965), 51-52. A more recent, but still generally unflattering, portrayal of missionaries in China can be seen in Joseph Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), especially 75-76.

hygiene, and the individuated self, all of which served the greater master of a theologically-charged colonialism. Native resistance also turned on these issues, but they assert that the missionary drive was eventually able to enact a truly hegemonic influence, a “colonization of consciousness” that remains active in the “millennial capitalism” that drives the postmodern discourse of globalization.⁵¹

Was the missionization of the nineteenth century truly successful or unique in this regard? Comparing elements of the sixteenth- and nineteenth-century waves of Christian missionization demonstrates the scope of difference. On the one hand, doctrinally and structurally, the two movements were very similar; both drew inspiration largely from the same scriptural charge to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19), and each represented an arm of a larger church at home. They were also facilitated by more general commercial and imperial expansion, which eased numerous logistical problems and greatly enhanced the ability of missionaries to go and remain overseas, while it occasionally pricked the consciences of the missionaries themselves. On the other hand, the two instances did differ in terms of who was sent into the mission field, the relationship these people would develop with imperialism, and ultimately in the type of Christianity they sought to spread. Most obviously, while the earlier Iberian phase was organized and populated by priests of Catholic orders, most notably the Jesuits, the nineteenth-century phase was lay, primarily Protestant, and included men, women, and entire families.⁵² Although many factors motivated individual missionaries, including the practical desire to seek a career abroad or to escape social constraints at home, this second wave of missionization also coincided with an increase in activist lay piety throughout the United States and England, characterized by itinerant preaching and tent revivals. It was not, however, simply an explosion of fervor at home spilling onto the world stage. Studies of revivalism in American religiosity suggest that periods of especially pious intensity are less productive of social transformation than they are reflections of new opportunities for expansion. The success of nineteenth-century imperialism fed missionary enthusiasm not only as manifest proof of the divine approval and necessity of the Christian mission, but also by opening vast new “markets” for missionaries to ply their trade.⁵³

The nature of the movement also shaped the type of conversion that it sought. Appropriate to lay revivalism, nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries condemned the mindless superstition of native practice (which many equated with stereotypes of Catholicism) and idealized the Pauline model of a conscious, willing conversion. To ensure the sincerity of potential converts, many initially sought to distance themselves from the commercial and military benefits of the

51. Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1.

52. The close of the century saw single women become the dominant force in many overseas missions. Roberta Wollons, “Outposts of Culture, Politics, and Gender: The Missionary Experience in Non-Western Settings, 1868–1927,” *CF*, forthcoming.

53. On market dynamics in the study of religion, see Roger Finke and Laurence R. Iannaccone, “Supply-Side Explanations for Religious Change,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 527, Religion in the Nineties (1993), 27-39; more generally, Timothy L. Smith, “Historic Waves of Religious Interest in America,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 332, Religion in American Society (1960), 9-19; John B. Boles, “Turner, the Frontier, and the Study of Religion in America,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 13, no. 2 (1993), 205-216.

very empires that facilitated their presence in the field. However, the increase of anti-imperialist sentiment and violence over the course of the century created a situation into which most missionaries could not but be drawn. Despite earlier misgivings, most became willing to accept the protection of imperialist warships and increasingly associated themselves and their understanding of Christianity with the institutions of the European imperial presence and the larger discourse of civilizational progress—what Ussama Makdisi has termed “evangelical modernity.”⁵⁴

If late nineteenth-century missionaries came to think about conversion in terms of personal transformation, did this amount to a Christian “colonization of consciousness?” Although the conversion process was fundamentally one of education, both religious and civilizational, this concept still raises a number of problems, the most important of which is the complexity of the local response. Christian teachings carried a variety of meanings in local context, and were surprisingly easy to dissociate from European power. The ability of conversion to take on independent meaning is evident in the fear that the authority to evangelize would escape the control of the white missionaries.⁵⁵ Such fears were well founded. Throughout the colonial world, indigenous Christian movements erupted that were either ambivalent or hostile to the Western missionaries, and that usually involved a theologically contrived circumvention of missionary authority. Often the movements were led by charismatic native leaders who asserted more direct ties to Christianity, such as direct revelation from or kinship ties to Jesus Christ, the most spectacular example being the claim of nineteenth-century Chinese rebel Hong Xiuquan to be the younger brother of Jesus Christ. In other cases, such as Korea, Christian churches were able to develop entirely independent of European influence, while in Japan and China, native churches claimed a spiritual heritage superior to that of the West.⁵⁶ The latter were especially important following World War I, when the ideals of the social gospel were held up in contrast to the hypocrisy of imperialism and perceived degradation of Western civilization. As Wu Yaozong, leader of the Chinese state-initiated Three-Self Church put it in 1951, “it was the Communists who really love their enemies,” while “imperialism is really the devil.”⁵⁷

Even when less hyperbolic in their rhetoric, communities of converts were able to develop multivalenced identities, demonstrating the ability of the

54. Ussama Makdisi, “Reclaiming the Land of the Bible: Missionaries, Secularism, and Evangelical Modernity,” *American Historical Review* 102, no. 3 (1997), 680-713. Such considerations are seen at home and abroad in the rise of the Anglo-American Social Gospel and Dutch Ethical Policy toward the end of the nineteenth century.

55. Elizabeth Elbourne, “Word Made Flesh: Christianity, Modernity, and Cultural Colonialism in the Work of Jean and John L. Comaroff,” *American Historical Review* 108 (2003), 435-459; Sally Engle Merry, “Hegemony and Culture in Historical Anthropology: A Review Essay on Jean and John L. Comaroff’s *Of Revelation and Revolution*,” *American Historical Review* 108 (2003), 460-470. The ambivalent role of texts is illustrated in the celebrated essay by Homi K. Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817,” in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 102-122.

56. Duk-Whang Kim, *A History of Religions in Korea* (Seoul: Daeji Moonwha-sa, 1988).

57. Wu Yao-tsung, “Christian Ideals Implemented by Communism,” in Lutz, ed., *Christian Missions in China: Evangelists of What?*, 67-70.

Christian variations to develop independently. Christian conversion was frequently a sign of ethnic identity, particularly among the minority groups targeted by missionaries. It was also a mark of class; in some cases, missionary school systems facilitated the creation of a bilingual, self-consciously modern elite, while in others, sectarian Christian liberation movements provided an outlet for millenarian longings among the poorest of the poor.⁵⁸ The identities afforded by Christian conversion thus coincided and mixed with family, lineage, village, commercial networks, guild associations, generational divides, and gender, and the very specific nature of these identities often led to violent conflict among local Christian communities.⁵⁹

Perhaps the best expression of the mobility of the missionary form is the ability of other religions to employ its techniques and ideas. The established Christian presence in Asia imbued movements to reform native religions with urgency and a new standard of conscious conversion. Moreover, many of the lessons of Christian success were quickly learned by other religious groups, such as the Japanese Buddhist missionaries who began working on the Asian continent in the late nineteenth century.⁶⁰ This is seen in the transfer of specific organizational forms—including Sunday schools, catechisms, hymnals, and organizations such as the YMCA (the first YMBA, Young Men's Buddhist Organization, was founded in Yangon in 1906).⁶¹ More recently, the missionary drive itself has become a hallmark of Asian Christianity. Asian (especially Korean) missionaries are active throughout the globe, and many Asian Christian groups speak specifically in terms of revitalizing a Western Christianity that has grown lax and corrupt.⁶²

Like the pretensions of value-neutrality in law and scholarship, the techniques and tropes of transformative conversion itself have spread not only beyond the confines of missionary Christianity, but beyond religion as well. Of course, the model introduced by the missionaries builds on extant models of conversion, such as that of a sudden Buddhist enlightenment, but as was the case with proselytizing techniques, it has also reshaped these extant ideals as well. More strikingly, it has made its way into political hagiography, particularly that of Marxist systems, the political ideology of which was inculcated through transformative

58. Jennifer Connolly, "Christian Conversion and Pan-Dayak Identity in East Kalimantan," *CF*, forthcoming.

59. In late nineteenth-century China, Christians could access the powerful advocacy of foreign missionaries, a point that leads Esherick to question the motives of village-based conversion. See also Charles A. Litzinger, "Temple Community and Village Cultural Integration in North China: Evidence from 'Sectarian Cases' (Chiao-an) in Chih-li, 1860–1895." Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Davis, 1983.

60. Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Nakano Kyōtoku, *Tennōsei kokka to shokuminchi dendō* [The imperial system and colonial mission] (Tokyo: Nichiren Shuppan, 1976).

61. While Japanese Christian missionaries established 877 Sunday schools in prewar Manchuria, three sects of Buddhism combined to build 1,304. Shimada Michiya, *Manshu kyōikushi* [History of Education in Manchuria] (Dairen: Testudo shuppan, 1935), 544–545.

62. As of 2004, South Korea had 12,000 Christian missionaries in the field, second only to the United States. "Korean Missionaries Carrying Word to Hard-to-Sway Places," *New York Times* (November 1, 2004), A1; many of these groups represent a distinct departure from precolonial missionary roots. See, for example the Back to Jerusalem movement, at <http://www.backtojerusalem.com/> (accessed September 13, 2005).

labor, as well as through chanting, hymns, and study that Yue Daiyun recalls having “had the air of a Bible class,” while the development and maintenance of correct political consciousness was often portrayed in terms that closely resemble religious conversion.⁶³

VI. CONCLUSIONS: HEGEMONY, AGENCY, AND REPRESENTATION

In sum, then, how unique and important was Western imperialism in shaping the concept of religion in East and Southeast Asia? It could be argued that the concerns that statecraft, law, scholarship, and conversion each had for religion predetermined that they would view and implicitly define religion through a particular lens, and further that these concerns largely transcend the colonial experience. The period of Western imperialism thus represented only a difference of scale from precolonial empires. States in both pre- and postcolonial Asia sought to control religion and based their rule and their laws on a premise of unimpeachable ethical or divine authority. Scholars served this apparatus by tracing its internal theology as well as its boundaries. The process of missionization, sometimes connected with the state, sometimes not, articulated the interaction between the individual and this larger system of divine and human authority.

Yet the process of globalization that began with the period of high imperialism did fundamentally alter these processes by incorporating them into larger patterns and discourse. The spread of the nation-state form across Asia was premised on the language, if not content, of humanistic national citizenship and the dual myths of legal and scholarly disinterest. Each had the effect of recasting the state and its institutions with a public and uniquely modernist sacrality, prompting the exile of what would be labeled “religion” into a sphere that was separate, individual, and personal. Rather than countering these trends, religious activism embraced the personal nature of religion with a definition of conversion that emphasized sincere and willing transformation.

This was certainly a substantive change, but was it hegemony? On the one hand, the fact that even fiercely anti-Western states such as North Korea feel the need to enshrine an originally European definition of religious freedom in their constitutions does attest to the universal legitimizing currency of certain forms of representation. On the other hand, it also demonstrates that the global discourse that emerged from imperialism cannot be understood simply as unidirectional domination, at least not along the simple lines of East and West. From the very beginning, Asian actors exposed to European definitions and criticisms of religion became active participants in the discourse, and some, such as D. T. Suzuki, took the lead in shaping originally Western concepts to very different ends.⁶⁴

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63. Yue Daiyun, *To the Storm: The Odyssey of a Revolutionary Chinese Woman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 208.

64. Judith Snodgrass, “Publishing Eastern Buddhism: D. T. Suzuki’s Journey to the West,” *CF*, forthcoming.