The Emergence and Organization of Chinese Religions[1]

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There has never been a time in recorded history when leadership has not occupied a central place in people's views about politics, war, sport or business. In recent decades, there has been much research-based framework emphasizing sociological, psychological, behavioural and other theories of leadership. However, while there have been many studies on leadership, there has been very little interest on leadership and succession in religious organisations. For example, Weber (1993) has described the nature of bureaucracies but has shown little interest in the internal structure of religion. Likewise, the field of political science has many papers on democratic elections but they usually concentrate on policy outcomes. Economists pay a lot of attention to the internal structure of firms but not of religion.

Religions are organized in a variety of ways. They may resemble an elected autocracy, a parliamentary democracy, or something akin to a monarchy, where heredity plays a primary role. Mao and Zech (2002) show how doctrinal concerns put limits on the organisational forms that a religion may take. Giuriato (2009) in her study of the Catholic Church has written about an elected autocracy. Historians (Reese, 1996, Baumgarten 1998) have written about the struggle for power within a particular religion but their methodologies are not the same. For the most part, their studies are on Christianity and Islam and very little is known about the management structure of Chinese religion.

Archaeological discoveries in China have established that, from the earliest times, the Chinese people have had an awareness of the unseen power, felt it and worshipped it. Despite the fact that they had to endure repeated periods of upheaval, oppression and chaos, there is no questioning the close and pervading relationship of religion to the daily lives of the Chine people. Even when religion was at its ebb during the time of Mao, Mao was called "the red sun in the heart of the people throughout the world" and was praised for "unlimited wisdom, courage and strength" and for "always being with us". He was often the object of devotion in songs and rituals with a strongly religious character. Not surprisingly, since the death of Mao and while the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is avowedly atheist, it has been growing more tolerant of religious activities in the last three decades, not just because of the practical realization that religious impulses are too deeply embedded to be effectively eradicated, but also that the moral teachings of religion might be utilized for the running of the secular state. Hence, various religious forms such as Mazuism in southern China, Huandi worship, Black Dragon worship in Shaanxi and Caishen worship in various parts of China have received support by state officials.

This public resurgence of religious practice in China has encouraged burgeoning studies on post-Mao China: for example, Jing (1996), Lagerwey (2004), Huang and Yang (2005), and Jones (2010, 2011). In particular, Dean (2009), Yang (2000) and Flower (2004) have examined how a revival of traditional religious practices has enabled participants to construct frameworks of morality in their daily lives. Some preliminary work has even been done on the little known healers and shamans, for example, Fan (2003) and Cline (2010). Nevertheless most of this research has been on the history, philosophy, festivities and ritualistic practices of the Chinese religion, and there are still "enormous holes" (Dean 2003, 340), one of which must certainly be on that of temple management, and in

particular leadership and succession, which is the focus of this paper.

Research Methodology

Three research trips each about a month's duration to villages and townships in the vicinity of Tong'an and Zhangzhou, Fujian in 2010; Longnan and Tianshui, Gansu in 2011; and to Baoji and Xi'an, Shaanxi, in 2013 were undertaken by myself. During these periods, I was able to do ethnographic studies of temple festivities. Many interviews were conducted at religious sites and interviews and the interviewees included spirit mediums, temple managers, Taoist priests and priestesses, monks, nuns, lay temple staff and ordinary worshippers. Informal conversation was also undertaken with villagers, intellectuals and provincial cadres in the provincial religious bureaus. Some of these were tape-recorded or videoed for subsequent reflection and analysis. In my travels to rural areas of these provinces, I have found a temple in almost every village. I have witnessed a recycling of discontinued ritual practices and new construction of temples and, last but not least, listened to monks preaching the scriptures to ever-increasing numbers of devotees.

Three modes of research may be discerned: 1) participant observation at temple festivities and interviews with temple keepers; 2) case studies of the lives of spirit-mediums through a one-to-one interview; and 3) home visits to adherents of sectarian organisations. My research questions are concerned with leadership and succession; namely, the nature of the religious leadership such as appointment, tenure, and demise and the relationship between administrative procedures and religious practice.

The total amount of time I have spent on fieldwork is small compared with the amount of time ethnographers typically spend in the field, and I am aware of the limitations of my work. However, instead of waiting for fuller information, I

thought it prudent to share my research quickly in view of the dearth of studies on this topic. As the organizational structure of the Bahá'í Faith is already well known to the reader of the *Lights of 'Irfán,* this paper has placed its main focus on the Chinese religion through a description of its many temples, as a means to give a preliminary insight into its management structure and especially on leadership and succession. Only in the concluding section is there a commentary engaged on the main similarities and differences between the Chinese religion and the Bahá'í Faith, as gleaned from the research.

The "Chinese Religion"

The whole of China may be considered a sacred space, containing a continent of spirits, not all of which are metaphorical. Not surprisingly, Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921) has paid tribute to the Chinese people, describing them as "simple-hearted and truth-seeking". "In China one can teach many souls and train and educate such divine personages that each one of them may become the bright candle of the world of humanity."[2]

The term "Chinese religion" comprises Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and Shenism, each of which reflects on an aspect of Chinese life. Confucianism is associated with the bureaucracy, the traditional educational system, and the collection of political-moral values drawn from Confucius' teachings (Chew 1993). Popular Daoism is essentially concerned with basic issues such as life, death and immortality and pragmatic issues related to health, wealth, business and marriage. Sinitic Mahayana Buddhism aims to teach the Buddhist scriptures as a means of attaining salvation. Finally, Shenism is a collection of ancient folk practices focusing on the worship of numerous gods and spirits, exorcism of demons, and the use of potions and spells for healing and good fortune.

To add to the tapestry, there are also various sects, subsets, and schools within each of these religions. For example, philosophical Taoism is quite different from religious Taoism.

Philosophical Taoism is represented by the philosophies of Lao-tzu (circa 600 B.C.E.) and Chuang-tzu (circa 370–319 B.C.E.), two influential Chinese sages, documented in texts ascribed to them – namely, the *Tao-teching* and the *Chuang-tzu* – as well as later materials such as the *Huainanzi* and the *Liezi*. Religious Taoism can be traced to Chang Tao-ling (circa second century C.E.), who claimed that he had a vision, whereby Lao-tzu gave him the authority to organize religious communities, to forgive faults and sins, to heal, and, more important, to exorcise ghosts, demons, and evil spirits. Over the centuries various schools of religious Taoism arose with different degrees of emphasis on revelations, healing, rituals, oracles, and other shamanistic practices, as evident in the Lushan rite, the Duangong ritual and theatrical traditions of Sichuan and the thunder rites of Hunan etc. (Dean 2009). Chinese Buddhism is predominantly of the Sinitic Mahayana variety and in itself have many subsets, such as the T'ien-t'ai, the Hua-yen, the Ch'an, the Pure Land, and Folk Buddhism, both in mainland China and the Chinese communities in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau and Southeast Asia.

Another layer is added to this complexity through syncretism in almost every possible combination. Often, statues of Confucius, Lao-tzu, and Buddha are set up as objects of veneration alongside those of traditional Chinese immortals. In religious ceremonies, Buddhist and Taoist priests and laymen of various beliefs are seen performing their rites together. Indeed, religious doctrines, symbols, ceremonies, and even deities have been so intermingled that it is difficult for even scholars to tell if they are of Confucian, Buddhist, or Taoist origin. For example, Caishen (财神), the God of Wealth, begun as a Chinese folk hero but today both Daoism and Mahayana Buddhism venerate him as a God. Similarly, while Guanyin (观音) is inspired from the male bodhisattva Avalokite vara, of India, "he" has now become a "she" and is venerated as a Chinese immortal.

In addition to the above variants of the Chinese religion, there are "charity temples" which are lay in character and which

meet in private homes. The religious bureau refer to them as *jihui* (集会) although they may be more aptly called *guohui* (过会) since they are variations on the theme of mutual help associations which have a long history both in and outside China. Their members recognize the validity of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.

In this paper, the management structure of Chinese religion is discussed under five broad categories of "temples", defined here as an edifice or place dedicated to the service or worship of a deity or deities. Under this broad definition, some Chinese homes may be considered temples to themselves since within their vicinity are altar(s) displaying gods such as Caishen (财神), Guanyin (观音), and Maitreya (弥勒佛). In Chinese, Miao (庙) is a word which refers to all kinds of Chinese temples especially non-Buddhist ones while those which are more Buddhist are called *si* (寺). While the subsequent discussion is presented under a typology of "temple structures", namely: 1) home temple; 2) the small built temple; 3) committee temples; 4) the monastic temple; 5) tourist temple; and last but not least, 6) charity temples; in practice, they are often not as discrete as they are made out to be, and their varied physical manifestations could and should be more usefully construed as a continuum of religious practices, oftentimes overlapping.

The Home Temple

The "household idiom" (Chau 2010) of the Chinese religion is essentially a private residence. It happens when a member of the household begins to show gifts of divination, and unusual spiritual powers such as glossolalia or the performance of superhuman feats. Family members will then begin to realize their sibling's "special talents" and begin to consult him or her with regards to their spiritual needs. The news of the divining "gift" of this member of the family soon spreads to the extended family and soon neighbours also begin to knock at the door. Family members may have to help if the initial trickle of

visitors turns into a stream. Eventually, frequent visitors may inconvenience the family and they may then try to "systematize" the visitation by delegating certain times or days of the week for consultation so that their own schedules may not be compromised. With time, a dedicated room may be assigned, an altar may be set up and a table purchased. Other religious paraphernalia such as a statue or picture of the deity(s), censors, joss-sticks, charm papers, candles, may then be added and what first began as a spontaneous "service" becomes a formal "occupation". As seekers and a "clientele" begin to arrive from other villages or towns, family members may be pressed to consider the building of a separate structure near their abode and if none is available, they may look for a building either to rent, purchase or build.

There were two mediums, *shenpo* (神婆), Mdm Liu and Madam Yan, whom I visited in Western Shaanxi respectively. Mdm Liu operated from the upper floor of her home, which had little signs of religiosity from the exterior. However, as we climbed the stairs to the second floor there was an altar on which were heaped daily offerings of food, water, incense and appropriate language. She looked like any other person, was very pleasant but has been maimed since youth. When a small crowd of about 10 to 12 people started to form, she began to go into a trance by kneeling before Jiutian Xuannu (九天玄女 Mysterious Maid of the Highest Heavens) who would graciously descend at her request to do service. During the time of entry and exit of the deity, Mdm Liu shook violently and two male members of the household had to restraint her physically, one on either side, in case she fell. As Jiutian Xuannu and now seated on a heavily-built chair, Mdm Liu began to speak with a distinctly different accent to each person (neatly in queue) who knelt in front of her to ask their respective question(s). As she gave the advice, her two assistants would simultaneously scribble some writings on a talisman, made of either cloth or paper. For example, if the oracle responded to a query on illness, there usually would be a prescription given. The assistant

would then advise the client as to what to do with the prescription – either to bring it to the pharmacy, to burn it at the altar or to dilute part of it with the medicine prescribed.

As for Mdm Yan, she was "initially confused" when the "call" came in the 1990's. She was the third child of five siblings, none of whom were particularly religious, visiting the neighboring temple only occasionally, and mostly during festivals. Before she became a medium at the age of 40, she had had recurring dreams that she was to give her body to Guanyin. These visions interfered with her work as a baker's assistant. She was eventually dismissed from her job and a close friend then advised her on the vocation of mediumship. Her husband and two children were initially afraid and feared that she would be "lost", but eventually she managed to overcome their objections. The family has now accepted her as she is, and even assists her during her trances, which take place twice weekly. Clients appear at her household waiting for advice with regards to problems related to money, education, children, etc.

Both mediums sat on specially designated chairs during the trance and meditated in front of altars replete with visuals and statues of deities. Both had low education, never held a steady job in their lives and could only speak in the vernacular. Although of low social status, their special abilities gave them a chance for "respectability" in the village. They did not appear to profess knowledge about religious scriptures or philosophy since what was important to them was not knowledge per se but a belief in the "spirit", striving to do good, the accumulation of merit and the use of appropriate language. When I enquired about the financial aspect of the enterprise, they were puzzled and explained that money was not the main criteria but that what was important was sincerity, helpfulness and the appeasement of the gods.[3] No fees were charged but clients were free to give a donation to offset the cost of maintaining the altar (food, fruits, candles, incense, etc.) if they felt disposed to do so. Clients could also, on their own volition, attend special intercession rituals on the 1st and 15th day of the lunar month.

Both mediums had assistants (family members, the occasional neighbor) to assist them in a trance state, and their helpful tasks included the handling of ritual objects, the wiping of the altar table, assisting in the translation of the oracle and instructing clients on appropriate behavior in the presence of the medium, etc.

The house temple remains alive as long as the divining power is existent. Its operational cost is low and a small number of local patrons is all that is required to keep it going. The temple is a law unto itself, without prior existing power structures, and there is no management pyramid to climb. Mediumship is not normally "taught" but "caught" and there are no liturgies or canonical precepts to imbibe. The medium's success is based on his or her performance and a skilled medium will attract many, while an ineffective one will soon have to close his/her practice. Some mediums are known to lose their "power" as swiftly as they acquire it and if this be the case, the home ceases to be a temple. Some mediums also relocate and take their temples with them. As a home enterprise, succession is normally passed to a member of the family. However, this is only possible on condition that the predetermined successor has managed to cultivate an affinity with the spirit. If this is not possible, upon the medium's death or retirement, the home temple may once again be return to private residency or left vacant, sold, or rented to another spirit-medium.

While such home temples are regarded as prime examples of 'feudal superstition' by the government, and hence "illegal", many officials choose not to interfere and close one eye to their presence since they are small non-political concerns, especially if they or their family members happen to be clients of the medium as well. Indeed, during the height of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1971) when statues of deities were smashed or discarded, house temples continued their unobtrusive practices and through word-of-mouth, villagers continued to gather within to perform religious ceremonies.

Small Built (Spirit) Temple

When the home temple becomes too small for a growing clientele, a separate dedicated temple structure, the "small built (spirit) temple," may be constructed. These have a humble beginning from mud and thatch and may look more like a shrine. Over time, it will have a concrete floor, or brick wall, built from the occasional largesse from grateful clients, and when this results, the place may no longer look like a nondescript residence but more like a "temple" (Overmyer 2009). For one, an altar will predominate on which are placed many visuals and statues of the deity (or deities). The walls, pillars and roof of the small building may be gifted with a paint of red and gold with carvings of mythological animals such as the *pixiu* and the *qilin*.[4] If the incense burner is free standing, there will usually be a table in front of it with a lamp to light the incense. There may be more than one incense burner, depending on the number of visitors. Holders for stick candles and "wish candles" may also be placed in front of the incense burner.

Such small temples originating from spirit mediumship are owned by a family and may be classified as a small business, in which case they will have to be registered with the authorities. One member is usually chosen as the steward while another may function as the manager, or the two roles may reside in the same member. In Zhangzhou, I met the temple manager, Mr Chu, who informed me that he began his spirit-mediumship as a child of 5, when his grandparents, both of whom were themselves mediums, dreamt that Guangze Zunwang (广泽尊王), the ancestral God of filial piety, had designated him to take over the successorship.[5] Hence, while his other siblings graduated from middle school, he was only educated up to Elementary Grade 3. On festivals, he took his role as a child medium in trance alongside his parents and grandparents and did his fair share as an altar-lad assistant. He is versed in chanting and ritualistic dance, and has some knowledge of herbal medicine. When his

parents died within a week of each other, he stepped into their shoes not just as the resident medium of the temple but also as its manager. He received help from family members especially on the first and fifteenth day of the lunar calendar when many visitors would visit the temple to pray.

Mr. Chu reported that he also had cousins who were mediums in other temples. While these temples may not be exactly identical in ideological practice to his, this is not so important as much as the fact that they are helpful to each other. At times, the clan may get together to hold bigger and more impressive commemorations of holy days for the villagers. On major festivals such as the birthday of the deity(s), they may enact a makeshift stage for a theatrical performance as well as other ritualistic ceremonies in honor of the deit(ies). In this way, a blood and spiritual bond is created and a "brotherhood" of many spirit-mediums in session together from neighboring temples is not uncommon.

These temples are sustained by donations from worshippers. The main act of worship is the lighting of incense or joss sticks, which are generally provided to worshipers in exchange for a small donation. As congregational membership is non-existent and worshippers are not required to have allegiance to any temple — indeed, many do not have allegiance to any temple at all, but visit different temples for different needs — the manager may also find it prudent to incorporate popular bodhisattvas into the temple such as the Milefo (弥勒佛), the future Buddha, and Shakyamuni (释迦牟尼), the historical Buddha, flanked by Jiayefo (迦叶佛) and Guanyin. There are also nature gods, e.g. gods of soil and grain, the dragon god who manage wind and rain, the five emperors of the five directions, the sun god, and the moon lady, the various powers of the planets and the northern dipper. Sometimes their statues are placed in glass-fronted cabinets, and wooden tables are placed in front of them to hold the religious offerings of fruits and food. Padded cushions for kneeling are usually placed in front of the altar. Each altar or hall of the deity has "merit boxes"

(*gongdexiang* 功德箱) where devotees may place a cash offering if they so desire.

With the growth of the temple, a shrine or two may be added and small appendages to the building constructed. A special room may be dedicated for families who wish to put tablets of their families on a dedicated altar. Here, initial or regular donations may be necessary to "maintain" the ancestral tablets through the offerings of food and prayers on special occasions.[6] Indeed, some temples may be "private" ones dedicated only to these functions.

An additional service in many smaller temples, especially when the medium is not in attendance, is *qiuqian* (求签), "seek the deity's answers through fortune poems". Here the worshipper uses a set of fortune poems which is done by shaking a container of numbered bamboo slips until one of the slips falls to the group. The number of the slip corresponds to the number of one of the fortune poems and the poem provides the god's answers to the worshipper's questions or problems. In busy temples, professional explainers provide explanations of the meaning of the poem, in relation to the worshipper's problems, for a fee.

As the temple grows, more branches may be formed, some of which are breakaways rather than 'legal" representative branches. Breakaways result after the passing of the patriarch and when there is a disagreement as to how a temple is to be run. Here, a sibling or partner in the family operation breaks away and builds another temple either in the same or neighbouring village to practice his or her own version of religiosity. This act, of course, engenders the inevitable acrimony between what are now two competing sects of the same temple. The viability of the new operation will depend not just on whether the breakaway will be able to draw adherents but also keep his own operation intact without generating additional breakaways from his own nascent group. In addition,

when the temple owner loses interest in his "business", the temple may be abandoned or sold to other operators.

Larger Committee (Priestly) Temples

While the rural temple may be small family or clan-run concerns, larger temples in townships and counties are highly visible affairs where official registration with the authorities become important. Here, one may find prominently displayed on the temple's noticeboard a certificate of authorization as a place of religious practice (宗教使用场所) alongside a set of regulations banning foreign intervention and control of religious activities and organizations. Such temples are more often run by a committee of unrelated members, most of whom are the elders or respected of the religion. They may run it themselves as a committee (comprising normally a chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary, treasurer and sub-committee members) with the help of a full-time salaried "steward" to run the day-to-day operations. These committees are not to be taken lightly since they provide a growing range of social and cultural services and infrastructural improvement at the local level whenever central government control or intervention declined. They sponsor religious rites, manage popular communal operas and according to Dean (2009) are akin to "China's second government".

Such temples may also employ full or part-time Daoist priest(s). The payment for the priests usually goes to the Head Priest who will then allocate it among his subordinates. Unlike the spirit-mediums who are more concerned with faith, the priest is usually a literate and educated individual who is concerned in performing rituals with some orderliness. Here, priests perform daily rituals before the altar to the principal deity on a schedule that is determined by agreement with the temple managers. The priests are dressed in colorful robes, are involved in coordinated chanting, singing and bowing before the altar with occasional accompaniment by percussion

instruments. Their oratorio-like liturgical performance often provides a solemn and spiritual spectacle for viewers (Chau 2011). Their chanting, often in scriptural language incomprehensible to adherents, creates a calming and spiritual atmosphere which is soothing.

There is another advantage of engaging the clergy as most of them are registered with a branch of the official Daoist association to which they report. This then becomes a way for most temples to gain the necessary legitimacy with the state. Head priests may be expected to meet important visitors and government officials and they are normally appointed by the local Daoist association, which may also get a share of the annual payment paid to the priest. While their presence may be an expensive item in the temple's budget, this is often compensated by the fact that they may be commissioned to perform special "private" ceremonies by devotees. In such cases, the money earned will be split between the priest and the temple's general accounts.

There are a variety of ways to recruit the priests (Yang et al. 2005). One may engage them through a contract arranged through the local Daoist Association which is a sub-branch of the Chinese Daoist Association (CDA) (中国道教协会).[7] Monks here are graduates of the Quanhen sect with their headquarters in Beijing (白云观, White Cloud Temple). CDA has branches all over China and Quanchen graduates work in state-sponsored institutions and government agencies, having been trained not only in Daoism but also Marxism. Another source of hire is from a local lineage which means that the priest in question has been trained under a specific ritual master and adopted into his or her lineage such as Celestial Masters (神仙). Daoist ritual masters transmit their liturgical texts and practices to their sons and disciples in discrete, local lines of transmission. Some ordination certificates make a reference to Longhushan (龙虎山), the hereditary center of the Zhengyi Tianshi Celestial Masters (正一天师). The system is not too regulated yet and some temple managers or entrepreneurs can move between

temples. Some also gain qualifications to serve in a temple with very minimal training (cf. Yang et al. 2005).

With the secularization of religious activities, there are further opportunities for income generation. For example, "temple fair" activities have recently become major fundraising events for temples. Such fairs are a form of both worship and entertainment and are recognized by provincial authorities as 'immaterial cultural heritage' (非物质文化遗产) worthy of preservation. The contents of the temple fairs are different from place to place but generally the following stable features may be discerned: the local opera, shadow-play and story-telling. Additional personages such as guest monks, spirit-mediums, a Chinese orchestra, acrobats and the Lion and Dragon dance troupes are also invited to complement the activities in the temple.

Monastic Temples

While the concept of "priest" is associated with Daoism, the concept of a "monk" is more akin to Buddhism. However, due to the syncretic nature of Chinese religion, it may at times be difficult to differentiate the two and the term may be used interchangeably. For example, some monks may be approached to perform exorcism and dispense charms, in which case he may actually function like a Daoist priest. On the other hand, I have witnessed state-licensed Daoist priests in Baoji performing healing sessions in Buddhist temples and functioning much like a *jitong* (乩童) but without the self-mortification which may accompany such events.

Some monastic temples are on faraway mountain cliffs therefore outside institutional control. However, others which are more accessible are well-known, for example, Mount Tai in the east (1545 m., near Confucius birthplace in Qufu), Hua in the west (2200 m., near Xian), Heng in the north (2017 m.), Nanyue (Hengshan) in the south (1290 m. near Changsha) and Song in the center (1440 m., near Luoyang, south of the Shaolin

monastery). Most of these mountains have multiple peaks and include large scale temples at the bottom as well as numerous hermitage and monasteries perched on mountain tops and built into cliffs. The monks in the mountainous region aim to pursue enlightenment through meditation and learning and in this regard they are different from the monks in the city, whose functions are more ceremonial and consultative.

Monastic temples are those which contain residency and schooling for Buddhist monks. The lowest rank is *shami*（沙弥） or acolyte (an inexperienced monk who has recently entered religion). The next rank is *biqiu* (比丘) (a Buddhist monk as he gains experience). The third is *zhuchi* (主持 or 方丈) or abbot (the superior of an abbey of monks). The administrative staff in a temple include *fangzhang* (方丈) or abbot, *jianyuan* (监院) or monastic manger and *shouzuo* (首座) or chief monk. The abbot runs the temple in a patriarchal and authoritarian manner as would the head of a typical Chinese household with a knowledge learnt through apprenticeship from a master which is in turn imparted to his disciples. He controls both the religious and administrative activities and assigns various tasks to his disciples and temple assistants. He is the spiritual guardian, the model of morality and personal behavior and he may be able to lecture on the dharma.

Monastic temples derived income from the provision of religious service. Substantial financial contributions may also be given by grateful worshippers or merchants who have benefitted from the temples as contractors of various services to the monastery. Generally, the temple's relationship to its adherent is based on mutual benefit – where the worshippers enjoy religious service and who in turn will donate some largesse should their prayers be granted. Income for temple maintenance is also available from the practices of purification, exorcism, healing and blessings (for marriages, houses, cars and businesses), as well as from the sale of talismans, amulets, and charms. Like Daoist priests, Mahayana monks are also hired not just for communal sacrifices (*jisi* 祭祀; *fahui* 法会) at local

temples dedicated to the gods of the local pantheon, but also at private funeral and requiem services and other minor rites for individuals and families from which they may receive a fee.

In the last decade, as part of the process of increasing legalization in China, there has been a gradual trend towards the need for fiscal oversight, legal property rights and a more formalized organization subjected to the rules and regulations spelled out in the Buddhist Association of China (中国佛教协会) which is under the Bureau of Religious Affairs.[8] Hence, larger monastic temples have a part which is administrative and a part which is religious and while monks and nuns may be involved in administration, they are usually confined to the religious sphere. Such temples enjoy the managerial expertise of a lay committee. Here, the chairperson, who is also a Buddhist, is empowered to make decisions after consultations with committee members, subject to the local Buddhist/Daoist association, the first supervising body which is state-controlled and whose administrators include ordained clergy as well as supportive lay followers. In such a scenario, the daily running of the temple (correspondences, records, and coordination) is usually under the purview of the Vice-President and Secretary. The treasurer is concerned with the collection of subscriptions or donations form members. He/she holds the petty cash account and defrays small expenditures incurred by temple, while larger expenditure are approved by the main committee, which are audited. Numerous sub-committees, headed by a sub-leader, help with other tasks such as temple publications, fundraising, and charity work and temple restoration.

Tourist Temples

Tourist temples are managed and controlled by government or business instead of religionists and their religious dimension is overshadowed by other concerns (Chau 2011).[9] Since the 1990's many new temples have been built, reconstructed or restored not just as a means of cultural self-assertion but also as

a means of revenue generation (Yang et al. 2005). The Shaolin temple in Henan is one temple that draws a steady stream of visitors, most arriving on tour buses, because of its historic significance and its uniqueness as a famous center for martial arts training. Other temples in the mountains are also able to attract visitors for similar reasons. Understandably, these temples are supervised not just by the Religious Affairs Bureau but also by the Department of Tourism. Not so much concerned with religious activities or the creation of a spiritual atmosphere, they are manned by a management interested mainly in revenue and the smooth entertainment of large crowds. Part of the profits are channeled towards restoration and expansion, so that many temples now have a revived and energized look, are open to the public, and offer a wide variety of religious resources (books, charms, herbs, teas, martial training). There are also state-run temples such as the Wild Goose Pagoda in Xi'an (西安市), where the government will tacitly choose the religious leaders who are schooled in the doctrine of Marxism and compliant with governmental supervision. While beautiful, without an active oracle and the mediumistic talents which was the beginning of the whole process, the gods remain lifeless, encased in their museum-like tombs.

Not all entrepreneurial ventures such as these are successful. For example the former home of Chinese saint, Huang Daxian, was originally erected in 1995 to draw tourists and overseas pilgrims (Chan and Lang 2007). As this was not successful, the township officials modified their efforts and tried to draw local visitors instead through the contract-responsibility system. Here, the temple is contracted to a head priest who would be required to pay an agreed rental annually to the committee in return for the right to operate the temple (and to keep surplus revenues). It now depends on the charisma and management skills of the head priest to keep the temple going through the organization of festivities and other religious activities. One popular way of generating a revenue stream for temples is

through the installation of light towers. These towers are circular structures, about three to six feet high placed near the main altar so that the deity's benevolence may radiate over them, implying the blessings and protection provided by the divine forces in the temple. The towers comprise ascending rows of electrically illuminated niches, each of which carries a person's name and date of birth and symbolically represents the presence of those who have purchased niches in the towers. The price for each niche in a light tower varies, depending on whether the niche is in a larger band of niches at the bottom, or a smaller band near the top.

In brief, tourist temples, such as Zhongnanshan Guanyin Chanyuan (终南山观音禅院/) at the foot of Qinling Mountain in Chang'an, are built at the expense of private entrepreneurs and therefore are accountable to the local business company. These are run along the guidelines of modern corporations and defer to the chief investor who has close ties with government officials.[10] Indeed, more and more Chinese Buddhist and Taoist temples are passively packaged with tourist products and some are even listed on the stock market.[11]

Charity Temples

Charity temples share features of secularity, sectarianism, benevolence and religiosity and are a traditional distinctive feature of traditional Chinese practice dating to the *shantang* (benevolent halls 善堂) and s*hanhui* (benevolent associations 善会) of the Ming dynasty. They take place in homes or offices, and are relatively democratic as membership is non-hierarchical and without a central authority. Preferring spontaneity and innovation rather than stylized liturgies, they are basically lay gatherings with no professional clergy. They are opportunistic, non-dogmatic, consultative groups of spiritually-minded people. They have a pragmatic "do it because it works" and "seek spiritual guidance because it pays." While some have charismatic leaders, many do not. They are basically grassroots

movements, well-organized with members passing information to one another through an informal network. There is no national umbrella for such organizations as these are centered in homes and therefore do not require any registration with the authorities.[12] While some may be registered, most are not. For example, the Beijing-based *Yidanxuetang* (一耽学堂), a non-profit association, is legal and carries out a number of activities such as rites and ceremonies to honor Confucius, study tours in the countryside, editing word and charitable acts (Billoud 2011).[13]

Charity temples are basically mutual help organizations, philanthropic, and benevolent in nature. They share a set of Confucian ethical standards and moral obligations such as the Hall of Spreading Benevolence (广瑞堂) established by social elites in Tianjin in 1878 (cf. Laliberte 2011). The members are encouraged to follow morality practices such as the "five ethics" and "eight virtues" (from Confucianism), say daily prayer two or three times a day, attend religious classes, and chant scriptures. Their constitution lists objectives such as the promotion of morals and values irrespective of race, color and creed, and the worship and reverence of founders of all major religions. Good deeds are more important than priestly words and some of these temples have contributed to the building of schools, old folks home and the running of free clinics for the poor.

Charity temples are also religious in nature since their dedication to the common good stems basically from religious motives. Palmer (2011) terms them as "salvationist" while Duara (2003) refers to them as "redemptive societies" as they are influenced by an ancient millenarian and syncretistic tradition and advocate the salvation of both the self and the world. Rather than being world-denying or other-worldly, they are affirmative, multiracial and multi-religious. Many practice divination, spirit-writing, healing and ancestor veneration. On special occasions, an entranced medium may write out messages believed to originate from the patron saint of the association.

These messages include commentaries on Confucian and Daoist classics, stories of karmic retribution from Buddhism, descriptions of spirit-journeys to otherworldly realms, moral exhortations, and theoretical treatises on points of religious doctrine and cultivation. These commentaries may be discussed in regular group meetings that resemble a combination of Protestant preaching and Sunday school. Studied by group members, they may be collected and published for distribution to the public as "morality books" (善书).

The porous, essentially inclusive and undogmatic nature of charity temples attracts many adherents. While this may explain its strength in the several home gatherings I have attended, these associations are also highly sectarian in nature. Its open-endedness and flexibility means that certain groups may add new ideas which may not agree well with all members, leading a section to break away, since in the very first instance, there are only very general principles to adhere to. For example, while the Xiantian Dao (先天道) sect claim to represent a Way (*dao* 道) that transcends and unites all other through the unity of the "five religions (Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam), the group is paradoxically divided into various "breakaway" subgroups with variations in liturgy, organizational structure and doctrine. Its deviational offsprings, such as the Tongshan She (同善社 "Society of Goodness"), Tian De (天德教 "Sacred Religion of Celestial Virtue") and Tien Di (天帝教 "Religion of the Lord of Heaven"), Daoyuan (道院 "Sanctuary of the Tao"), and the Ci Hui Tang (慈惠堂 "Compassion Society"), continue to resemble the mother body through their non-ascriptive voluntary path of salvation; and an embodied experience through healing.[14]

Dissension commonly occurs at the passing of the founder or charismatic leader or sub-leader. For example, in the case of the Yiguan Dao (一贯道, "the Pervasive Truth") at the time of its patriarch, Chang T'ien-jen's death in 1947, the nominal leadership passed though the hands of the Matriarch Madam Sun Hui Ming.[15] There were opposition to her leadership and the

group eventually split into a number of separate branches, all of them developing more or less independently with many making their way to Hong Kong, Taiwan, the United States and Southeast Asia establishing their own versions of the Yíguàn Dào. Today, Yíguàn Dào remains a family of closely related but autonomous branch associations.

These associations are not legally registered in China but many continue to exist in private homes and one must be invited to attend its private sessions since there are no public announcements of its meetings. It is not very clear how these associations are organized since ordinary members themselves often do not know how it is run, professing, when asked, that "names are unimportant" – it is only the teachings (and the good deeds) to be passed to others that are important. Indeed, most grassroots members do not know the official names of their groups or the names of the founder-members of the group. However, we may assume that among each active group are informally elected chairperson and secretary, treasurer, and a list of other sub-committee members, much as one may expect of a legally registered society. The owner of the home in which it is held is usually a leader or sub-leader of the group and "a descendant of famous masters." The informal management usually comprises the largest donors and or the most successful teachers of the group.

Some of these groups may on special occasions elect to meet in a neighboring temple to worship. Sometimes, one group or several groups may combine their resources to build their own dedicated committee temple and in this way start life afresh as a legally registered entity.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to unravel the diversity and complexity in the emergence and organization of Chinese temples with particular focus on their leadership and succession procedures. It is clear that religiosity is alive and well in

mainland China and that China is, in reality, a religious state and Chinese society a religious one (cf. Lagerway 2010). While all local religious groups are monitored strictly by national and state organizations under the supervision of the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council, there is a great regional variation in the degree of support and cooperation between these agencies and religious institutions. In some provinces, such as Sichuan and Hubei, Chinese religionists are made very welcome and religious activities are supported with enthusiasm. In other provinces, such as Shaanxi and Hunan, politicians tend to be wary of religious organizations and a relatively restrictive mode prevails.

I will now conclude by drawing comparisons from other religions, not least to add scope to the discussion but also to illuminate the practice of leadership and succession in the field of comparative religion. Here, the Bahá'í Faith is given particular attention not least because it emphasizes the spiritual unity of all humankind, that diversity of race and culture are seen as worthy of appreciation and acceptance, and that all major religions stem from the same spiritual source; but also because this journal is centered on its scholarly study.

Succession is a problem with many religions and the Chinese religion is not an exception to the rule. In our survey, sectarian divisions abound, in various syncretic forms within the Chinese religion. While temples may be sold, restarted, closed down, and expanded, according to changing social-economic circumstances, the greatest test of viability usually comes at the time when the founder or patriarch/matriarch passes away. At such occasions, there is often a power struggle and the temple may be split into two or more factions. This phenomenon is not peculiar to Chinese religion but is common in all major religions. For example, Islam was split after the death of the Prophet Mohammad between the followers of Abu Bakr (Sunni) and those of Ali bin Abu Talib (Shia). Christianity has seen even more fractures even before the well-known split of Martin Luther from the Catholic fold in the 16th century.[16] Chinese

religion has had a long history of factionalisms and disunity. Hence, the establishment of the Buddhist and Daoist associations by the Chinese government should not simply be seen as a measure of social control but also as a means to promote the public image of the Chinese religion. For example, both the Taoist and Buddhist associations aim to banish the superstitious, mystical magical elements of Chinese religion and to standardize and consolidate its teachings so as to allow it to move with the times.[17] Successorship problems are often due to the lack of clearly written succession codes. In contrast, the Bahá'í Faith is predicated upon clear and detailed instructions within its own sacred text. Explicit instructions concerning successorship are also given. Bahá'u'lláh clearly named a successor in the *Book of the Covenant,* which also serves as his *Last Will and Testament*. There is no such authoritative document in the Chinese religion and, as we have already recounted, any individual who feels spiritually endowed can start his own home temple or join a religious order as a means of exercising religious power.

An examination of the management structure of Chinese religion shows it to be run much like a family firm. Hence, despite guidelines laid down by the Daoist and Buddhist Associations and the Bureau of Religious Affairs, Chinese temples are still not quite regarded as civic institutions with activities accountable to the public. Leadership remains basically patriarchal and based on the Confucian "familial" structure where the eldest member, usually male, prevails. In monastic temples, the clergy is organized like a family and promotion within the order depends on the whims and fancies of the chief monk, the patriarch. In committee temples, although the chairperson has to consult his committee before making a decision, more often than not the committee members will defer to his wishes or say what the "head" of the temple wishes to hear. While large temples may theoretically confine the Head monk to the role of religious specialist in line with modern management principles, it must be noted that many

monks continue to assume the status of the administrative chairperson, while nominating religious duties to others under his charge. Even when *de jure* power is held by an appointed lay member chair, it is the head monk who is the *de facto* head of the temple, as he is often regarded, deferentially, as the "grandfather". Similarly, in the small built temple, the temple manager is the "patriarch" (or "matriarch") of decision making whether or not he is the spirit medium or a manager of the spirit medium. It is often the tendency of the leader to elect a successor who will allow him or her to keep their influence and legacy. Even in relatively democratic charity temples, the elections of key "senior" members are done through prayers and planchette divination. The problem is that in most scenarios, these key senior members are themselves planchette mediums or have a relationship to planchette mediums through which they may easily influence nominations. In contrast to the above practice of familial autocratic leadership, the Bahá'í Faith is administered by a unique combination of freely elected councils and a complementary institution of appointed advisers which operates at the local, regional, national, and international levels. There is no class of ecclesiastics or clergy in the Bahá'í Faith.

According to Mao Zedong, "women hold up half the sky" (妇女能顶半边天), but I saw few women in leadership position in temples other than that of the home temple. There appears to be a glass ceiling for women temple leaders, be it in the small built, committee, monastic, tourist and/or charity temples. Yet temple women do a tremendous amount of background work, such as coordination with patrons and worshippers, administrative, secretarial and domestic duties and assisting the monks in ritual service. Bounkenborg (2012) has recounted a scenario where males are openly seen in "frontline roles" in the temple fair of a local dragon deity in Fanzhuang, Hebei, while female spiritual mediums are doing "background" ritualistic duties in the home. This "glass ceiling" amidst the rise of global feminism is not peculiar only to Chinese religion but also a current challenge faced by other major religions such as

Christianity, Islam and Hinduism where the patriarchal culture, social norms, economic marginalization and political inequalities pose barriers that affect women and reduce their access to employment opportunities and religious education (Madimbo 2012). In contrast, Bahá'u'lláh has exalted the status of women and allowed them to hold positions on both the local and national governing councils though a democratic electoral system. There are also women on its advisory arm, namely in their roles as Counselors and Auxiliary Board Members.

Both the Bahá'í and Chinese temples are alike in the sense that both have no pulpits where sermons by clerics can be given. There is no "congregation" such as those found in churches or mosques and no communal recitation of prayers. However, while worshippers who come to a Bahá'í temple may have simply come into the central hall to sit down quietly and reflect on their own thoughts or on the world's sacred scriptures, or on special occasions to listen to the singing of voices on scriptural passages, this is not the practice in Chinese temples. In visiting a Chinese temple, there are many "tasks" that a believer is supposed to perform, such as lighting the joss-sticks, the offering of food and flowers, the burning of talismans, and the worship and recitation of prayers and mantras at various altar tables. There may also be the consulting of Chinese fortune sticks and perhaps a queue to consult the temple medium.

Since there is a tendency of wholeness and a sense to look towards the relativity of particulars within the universal totality, one finds more tolerance than dogmatic determination and ideological opposition where membership criteria are concerned. There is, for example, no central figure as a point of reverence; instead there is an array of gods, deities, ghosts and demons which the believer may adopt according to his individual preference. Hence the individual is relatively free to believe what he or she chooses and is free to move from temple to temple according to his or her needs. In contrast, the Bahá'í community is predicated upon clear and detailed instructions which exist within its sacred text. Bahá'ís define their members

as those who have accepted Bahá'u'lláh as the messenger of God for this age, and this often requires that the member sign a declaration card to the effect for administrative purposes, including also the electoral roll of the annual election of their governing bodies.

The fact that the Chinese religion is generally non-exclusive and temples cannot bind worshippers to a particular temple nor their exclusion of worship at other temples, has led it to lose many of its members to other religions such as Christianity, in recent years in China. This is aggravated by the fact that there is little need to learn complex texts or rituals (or to relearn them when switching to another temple). There is a tendency in the Chinese religion to be ambiguous, ambivalent and indeterminate in the name of social harmony. In contrast, the Bahá'í Faith (like Christianity, Judaism and Islam), finds it important to organize schools and classes for their believers and the children of their believers as a means of familiarizing them with their religious texts and scriptures. Hence, there are a lot more social capital at stake in these religions, making it more difficult for adherents to leave the religion. In contrast, in Chinese temple worship, little or no attempt is made to entrench the adherent and his or her offspring within a particular temple or religious ideology.

I believe that it is inevitable that Chinese religionists will soon have to grapple seriously with problems of internal governance as a result of the increased demand for greater transparency brought about by mass education, modernization and technological advances. To ensure their continued viability, temple management will have to come to terms with managerial challenges that have become obvious in our discussion, namely, the challenge of unity in succession disputes; sectarian divisions in various syncretic forms within the Chinese religion; the limitations of patriarchal autocratic control and public accountability; of issues relating to gender equality; and the continued loss of significant numbers of youthful members to "external religions" such as Christianity.

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NOTES

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[2] Abdu'l Bahá, Star of the West, vol 13, 185.

[3] Laliberte et al. 2011 recalls the story of Lin Dong, a spiritual healer who had a vision of the 12th century deity Jigong (济公), a popular monk with magical powers who has been worshipped for generations in Chinese literature and legend. As a worshipper of Jigong, Lin Dong soon discovered that he had inherited the healing powers of the deity. He managed to cure many and his grateful clients contributed money which he used to help the poor.

[4] The *pixiu* (貔貅) is a guardian animal standing for fair play and right while the Q*ilin* (麒麟) is the Chinese unicorn. Other mythological creatures which decorate temple structures are the dragon and the phoenix.

[5] This deity is traced to one Guo Zhong fun, born to a poor family in 923 CE in Shishan, Na'an, Fujian. Guangze Zunwang's filial piety and ability to do miraculous deeds as a child led to his deification after his death at the tender age of 16.

[6] I have seen temples with altars with about 100 tablets belonging to about 10 families.

[7] In Xian city, I was able to visit and interview temple personages in Ba Xian Au (八仙庵)

[8] It was founded in 1953 at the urging of followers of Taixu,(1890-1947) from the Linji school of Chan Buddhism in Xiao Jiŭhuá Temple (小九華寺/小九华寺) in Suzhou.

[9] This is not to say that my other categories of temple do not attract tourists. Indeed, the Shaolin temple, the Lingyin Temple in Puto and the Buddhist temple Nanputuo and Wudan, Qinchengshan on the Daoist side; as well as some large Mazu committee temples in Fujian also attract tourism

[10] See http://baike.baidu.com/view/2427500.htm#2.

[11] See the following articles on tourist temples which are listed on the Chinese stock exchange: http://360doc.com/content/12/0928/13/8209053_238616381.shtml and http://mzb.com.cn/zgmzb/html/2012-08/14/content_87234.htm

[12] Some examples are The Red Swastika Society (世界红卍字会), founded in China in 1922, as the philanthropic branch of the Daode she ((道德社)) or the Daoyuan Not legally registered in China, it is however thriving in the diasporic communities of Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore.

[13] Their legality may be due to their more subdued call of a "cultural renaissance" rather than that of "salvation for the world".

[14] In brief, the sub-sects are variations on the same theme and one way to enhance their distinctiveness from one another is the use of different names to refer to the supreme mother deity. For example, in the *T'ung-shan She*, it is referred to as the "Venerable Mother of Limitless Heaven" (*Wuji Laomu*), in the *Tz'u-hui Tang* as the "Golden Mother of the Jasper Pool" (*Yao-ch'ih Chin-mu*), and as the "Unborn Sacred Mother" (*Wusheng Shengmu*) (cf. Palmer: 2011).

[15] Yiguan Dao was founded in 1930 by Chang T'ien-jn (1889-1947) in Shantung. It incorporates elements not just from Confucianism, Daosim and Buddhism but also Christianity and Islam. Currently, it is banned in China but this has not kept it from practicing through different names such as The Confucus-Mencius Society, The Morality Society, etc. They have also been called the *Zhenli Tiandao* (眞理天道, The True Celestial Tao).

[16] Even more tightly knit Christian communities such as the Mormons found themselves embroiled in a succession dispute which resulted in several distinct branches of the congregation after the passing of their founder-prophet Joseph smith in 1844.

[17] See http://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/ (the Buddhist Association of China) and http://www.taoist.org.cn/webfront/webfront_frontPage.cgi (Chinese Taoist Association)