



Spiritual Science in Human Evolution, 2, 1-9 (2026)
<https://doi.org/10.29140/sshe.v2.104892>



The question of Chinese religion: designations from within and without

NAOMI C.F. YAMADA  

Center for Foreign Language Education and Research, Rikkyo University, Tokyo, Japan

Abstract

Although most people in China do not identify with a religion, a majority nevertheless observe ritual practices such as sweeping the graves of deceased ancestors and burning joss paper for them. They may concurrently visit Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian temples, as well as patronize local-level deities. Scholars have long debated how to characterize this category of ritual practice, often referred to as “Chinese folk religion” or “Chinese popular religion.” Scholarly discussions on Chinese religion closely follow discourses on the meanings and definitions of religion, spirituality, ritual, and related concepts. This paper provides an overview of some of the older ethnological discussions, as well as a discussion of the ways that the current Chinese state’s demarcation of acceptable religious expression complicates the question.

Keywords: China, popular religion, spirituality, ritual

Introduction

The question of whether there is a Chinese religion (and alternatively, whether Chinese people are religious) is so context-dependent that the answer can be both: *yes, undoubtedly*, and *no, hardly*. On one hand, Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism are often considered to be Chinese religions. On the other hand, Confucianism is not classified by the Chinese state as a religion, and Buddhism is not indigenous to China.¹ More to the point, many Chinese do not strictly identify with only one of these, but rather incorporate aspects from each and additionally patronize local-level deities. Common religious and ritual practices to many who identify as Chinese include keeping family altars to ancestors, burning paper money, hiring religious practitioners

¹I am not arguing in this paper that a religion must have originated in China to be Chinese. There are cogent arguments that other religions, such as Christianity, should be considered as Chinese religions and not characterized as “foreign” (e.g. Chambon, 2020, p. 12).

and specialists at funerals, and sweeping the graves of ancestors and making requests of them. Lacking a proper term to call these practices that are part and parcel of a Chinese *weltanschauung*, many scholars refer to this fourth tradition as “Chinese popular religion.” Is it a religion? Is it an amalgamation of traditions? How does it differentiate regionally or between classes? Are there any requirements to be included in the body of Chinese religion? In this paper, I outline some key issues raised in scholarly debates over whether there is a Chinese religion: the meaning of ritual practices, the constitution and standardization of ritual forms, differences between elite and “peasant” forms, and the imperial (or bureaucratic) metaphor of Chinese religion. I furthermore address why the old ethnological question of whether there is a Chinese religion cannot easily be disentangled from the post-1949 question of whether religion can function as part of Chinese civil society, given the constraints and definitions imposed by the state.

First, it's worth pointing out that within the subdiscipline of anthropology of religion, “religion” is often conceived broadly and is inclusive of concepts of spirituality and magic. Many societies may have everyday practices that involve supernatural concepts which are not regarded as “religious” in the sense of being connected to institutionalized systems with sacred texts and articulated rules. Indeed, the Chinese word for religion (*zongjiao*, 宗教) is used to approximate Western concepts (Yang, 2008, pp. 11–12); the Chinese state, as previously mentioned, accordingly does not recognize Confucianism as a religion, unlike Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestant Christianity, and Catholicism, which are regulated by the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB).² This non-religious designation of Confucianism is in line with sociologist Max Weber's understanding of it as an ethical doctrine (1951). Current definitions of religion by anthropologists are more culturally relativistic; recent introductory texts, for example, define religion as “the extension of human society and culture to include the supernatural” (Henninger, 2020, p. 301), and as “the realm of culture that concerns the sacred supernatural” (McGinty, 2022, para. 6). Some anthropologists might find even these definitions insufficiently broad because “supernatural” implies a distinction from the natural world (Lavenda & Schultz, 2007, p. 53). Anthropologist John Bowen notes that in some societies, “people define the world in different ways, treating as a natural part of everyday life certain actions and ideas that we usually include in a cross-cultural category of religion” (2018, pp. 18–19). Debates on Chinese religion, thus, closely follow debates on the meanings and definitions of religion, spirituality, magic, and superstition.

Chinese popular religion, with its lack of creeds or theological tenets, is often referred to within China as “superstition” (*mixin*, 迷信), or, more pejoratively, “feudal superstition” (*fengjian mixin*, 封建迷信). Despite the disparaging designations and marginalizations that have resulted from this reordering, the popularity of Chinese popular religious forms has not decreased. Both popular forms as well as institutionalized forms have experienced resurgence in recent decades within the greater Chinese sphere (Dean, 2012; Fan, 2003; Madsen, 2008). In the context of Taiwan, which in contrast to the People's Republic of China (PRC) allows for free exercise of religion, folk religion experienced a resurgence from the 1980s to the present, but many adherents have partially demythologized their beliefs, and do not categorize these practices or morals as “religion” (Madsen, 2008, p. 305). Anthropologist Mayfair Yang, in an introduction to the edited volume she organized, noted that the book was titled *Chinese religiosities* instead of “Chinese religions” because of “the destructive effects of the categories of religion and superstition in modern China, and the problems of imposing the Western/Protestant category of ‘religion’ onto the unique features and organizational forms of Chinese

²Other practices outside of the five recognized religions are often referred to as “superstition,” but certain new religious movements, like Falungong, are labeled by the state as “evil cults” (*xiejiao*, 邪教).

religious practices” (2008, p. 18).³ Historian Prasenjit Duara has argued that stark divisions between religious and secular realms, which emanated from ostensibly Western/Christian frameworks, forced redefinitions and redesignations of institutions and practices in Japan and China from “religious” to “secular” and from “secular” to “religious” (2008, p. 43). Duara notes that secular-religious differentiation became salient in China from the late 19th and early 20th centuries (2008, p. 47). Historian Vincent Goossaert characterizes the adoption of a Christian-modeled concept of religion coupled with “the complementary idea of superstition” as “a radical unprecedented break in the religious field” (2005, p. 15).

Eminent sociologist C. K. Yang, who noted that the term “superstition” more often implied subjective disapproval than objective categorization under the rubric of “magic,” pointed out the “difficulty of separating magic from religion” (1961, p. 3). He thus differentiated neither magic nor superstition from religion, but rather separated religion into two modes: institutionalized and diffused. By “diffused religion,” he meant that religious elements were diffused throughout social and organized life. The diffused could not be said to be identifiable as “religion” in the sense of an entity *sui generis* (1961), and this would include many forms of Chinese popular religion. Institutionalized forms, by way of contrast, always had the potential to run into conflict with State authorities. Although Buddhism and Daoism were essentially passive to the State during Yang’s lifetime, he believed that they always held the potential to incite resistance to the government. Institutionalized religion was thus very much controlled by the State and subject to regulation, as it is in today’s China.

Having a recognized status as a religion in China at present invites scrutiny and oversight, and religion is often described as a “sensitive” (*mingan*, 敏感) subject. Over the past decade, President Xi Jinping and representatives in the Religious Affairs Bureau of the PRC have spoken of the “mutual adaptation” of religion and socialist society; policy promoting the Sinicization of religion has in recent years led to greater monitoring of and control over Tibetan Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim religious communities (Feuchtwang, 2020, pp. 4–5).⁴ The willingness of some unregistered Protestant religious bodies to openly meet signals a counterweight to state power and an exercise of civil society (Vala, 2012); however, other churches support the state paradigm. Further, the low percentage of Chinese identifying as religious members do little to displace state authorities as the arbiters of national identity (Vala, 2012).

In my own research on minority education policy in China, I found that religion was often associated with ethnic or nationality (*minzu*, 民族) identity, and completely separate from institutional, state-approved activities or education (Yamada, 2020). Teachers in Qinghai often told me of the importance of being respectful of their students’ beliefs. At the same time, recognized religions, like other unacknowledged religiosities, contradict parts of the philosophical basis of the Chinese Communist Party. In a practicum-training session given on ethnic policy to 169 Tibetan university students that I was permitted to observe in 2009, the instructor stated that religion would, as part of the superstructure, collapse organically over time (Yamada, 2020, p. 126). In that same session, the instructor, using a definition originally proposed by CCP political Li Wei-han, said that religion had five natures or characteristics (*wuxing*, 五行): it endured for a long time (*changqi xing*, 长期性), it had a “mass movement”

³Yang comments that even the term *religiosities* is imperfect because Chinese religiosities “are organized around ritual performance,” but the Christian use of the term is “predicated on a deep mind-body division” (2008, p. 19).

⁴The UN Human Rights Office concluded in 2022 that there were “serious human rights violations” of Uyghur and Muslim communities in Xinjiang, in Northwest China (OHCHR, 2022, p. 43), and that the manner of regulations over religious expression of Islam in order to combat extremism had become “detailed, intrusive and particularly controlling” (p. 25).

quality (*qunzhongxing*, 群性), it was linked to ethnicity or nationalism (*minzuxing*, 民族性), it had international resonance (*guojixing*, 国际性), and it was sufficiently complex (*fuzaxing*, 复杂性).⁵ Under this definition, then, intrinsically Chinese spiritual or ritualistic practices without a transnational reach, are not considered religions by the state.

Despite the fact that many Chinese ritual practices do not meet this “five natures” definition, nor have standardized institutional practices and texts, many social scientists and scholars have nevertheless categorized them under the auspices of religion. Journalist Ian Johnson noted that “an amalgam of these faiths” (Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and local community temple practices) would be what is meant by “Chinese Religion,” which did not require “thinking of oneself as part of a discrete and clearly definable religious system” (2017, p. 20). Sinologist Maurice Freedman took it as a given that there was a Chinese religion. He believed that the Chinese had a language of shared forms, symbols, and rituals (1974), although, lacking creeds, doctrines, and institutions, there were no explicit boundaries. Yang influenced Freedman; other influential scholars that preceded the debate of Chinese popular religion that gained steam in the 1970s included J. J. M. DeGroot and Marcel Granet. DeGroot conceived of Chinese religion as initially having an elite form which was disseminated or distilled to the peasantry and resulted in crude semblances of the former (1910). Granet took the opposite trajectory: religion spread from the peasants and ultimately to the imperium (1922/1975). Granet, very much influenced by Emile Durkheim, took religion to be a fact of society that was connected to the constitution of society. Freedman, in contrast, conceptualized elite and peasant forms as two versions of the same underlying structure. He perceived a unity between them but also felt that they served to perpetuate hierarchical societal structures. Religion could not be divorced from State purposes, as previous dynastic Emperors relied on the integration of the cosmological realm with the earthly realm.

Other scholars have not accepted “Chinese religion” as one entity. Anthropologist Stephan Feuchtwang, for example, characterized Chinese popular religion as a “universal fact of Chinese life,” but also indicated that what he meant by religion was “simply a category, not a singular thing” (2001, p. vi). Anthropologist Arthur Wolf pointed out that the mere fact that there would be “elite” and “peasant” forms with various transformations undermined the idea that there was one unified religion (1974a). To him, speculative and grandiose theories would not suffice; he thought it more worthwhile to research local and regional forms. Wolf, who conducted research in Taiwan, did not claim to represent all Chinese forms, but offered a model of what he saw in his area of *Sanxia*.⁶

The bureaucratic model of religion that Wolf offered is still influential and referenced by scholars today. In households, Wolf observed incense offered in three places: at the back door to the wandering ghosts, at the altar to the ancestors, and in the kitchen to the Stove God, the lowest ranking, though not least important, god in the spiritual hierarchy. From this offering structure, Wolf outlined three classes in a spiritual hierarchy: gods, ghosts, and ancestors (1974b). Each of these classes were metaphorical of earthly structures. Gods could be likened to bureaucrats, and ghosts to drifters and transients. Wolf explained that every locality he had visited had its

⁵At the time, I was researching China’s preferential policy measures in higher education for minority students, and I had an affiliation with Qinghai Normal University, where the sessions were being held. A cohort of Tibetan student-teachers focusing on STEM topics and Tibetan language were preparing for their practicums. The session, held on September 4, 2009, was entitled, “A Survey of Qinghai’s Minority Nationalities and an Explanation of China’s Ethnic Policy” (青海民族概况与中国民族政治课解说).

⁶A generation of Western scholars were unable to enter the People’s Republic of China prior to the end of the Cultural Revolution, and much Western scholarship before 1976 was conducted in Taiwan or Hong Kong.

own *Tudi Gong* (土地公), a local level deity that policed the spiritual realm in the area. *Tudi Gong* could both spy on the humans and protect them from ghosts. *Tudi Gong* reported to *Cheng Huang*, the city god. The levels of bureaucracy in the human realm were clearly present in the spiritual, he put forth.

Many scholars worked off of Wolf's bureaucratic model of religion. Feuchtwang offered a semiotic analysis of Daoist ritual practices and outlined spatial codes of inclusion and exclusion which he believed were applicable to Wolf's metaphor (1974b): bureaucrats, outsiders, and insiders paralleled gods, ghosts and ancestors. Anthropologist Emily M. Ahern, herein after Emily Martin, similarly influenced by Wolf, recast the metaphor as officials, strangers, and kinsmen (1981). Going back to Durkheim, she wanted to know what it said about society that the metaphor was related to politics and not to some other realm. If God to Durkheim could be likened to "society writ large," and if Chinese society were bureaucratic, then perhaps, in a very functional sense, rituals taught people about politics and about being competent citizens.

Whereas anthropologist Francis Hsu had argued that ancestral spirits in Chinese popular religious traditions were benevolent, Freedman attached the caveat that they were benevolent *as long as they were remembered* (Otake, 1980). Feuchtwang made the case that a code of remembering/forgetting influenced the ancestors in the realm beyond in the sense that, if forgotten, the ancestor would be only a ghost. In turn, the ancestral spirits influenced the living: the ancestor could help, but the ghost could cause harm (1974). A death ritual thus was "the means of creating ancestors out of ghosts" (2017, p. 241). Anthropologist C. Fred Blake likewise noted the connection in Chinese religion between the living and the dead; deceased relatives could call out in dreams to their living relatives about their needs, and the living could provide for them by burning paper effigies of money, food, or clothing (2011).

Martin contrastively viewed ancestors not as benevolent, but rather capricious and occasionally malevolent (Ahern, 1973). One was always aware of them; in dealing with other spirits, one had to be aware of inciting jealousies. A daughter who passed away before marriage would be posthumously "married" to avoid the potentiality of being unsettled and causing disturbance to the family, who were proscribed from keeping her tablet in the house with the other ancestors. In ceremonies such as weddings or funerals, a host of symbols had to be used to placate, pacify, or avoid spirits. An umbrella at a wedding might shield a bride from "seeing heaven" (Ahern, 1974, p. 288). The bride was both vulnerable and powerful at this time of liminality, to use Victor Turner's concept.

The question of how Chinese regard gods, ghosts and ancestors—or the question of why Chinese religion mirrors the political structure—remains salient, but some scholars have found it more productive to investigate local and regional forms of religion and spirituality, and to study how local communities have negotiated with the state. Feuchtwang expressed that diffused religion can be found in a particular social context if it is defined "as privileged points of access to shared subjectivity," but that establishing "China" as a "unity of context" is another matter (2010, p. 36). He found it more fruitful to look at the interaction between popular spirit cults and State-sponsored religious ideologies in the late imperial era (2001). Kenneth Dean likewise noted that looking at local and regional forms was of greater value than making generalizations about Chinese religion. Dean found that his subject, the Three in One cult (*Sanyijiao*), which fuses Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist elements and which spread throughout southeast China and beyond, was "constantly undergoing modification due to external circumstances" (1998, p. 38). Religion conceived thus was not a static, singular enterprise, but involved dynamic processes of ritual spheres that would take into consideration ancestry/lineage, market and cultural networks, and the political body (1997).

Other scholars have questioned the accuracy or usefulness of viewing the spiritual hierarchy as a well-maintained, bureaucratic entity that mirrors human organization. Meir Shahar and Robert Weller, in their 1996 edited volume *Unruly Gods*, make the case that when the state is strong, the bureaucratic model seems convincing, but at other times, the “unruly gods” more accurately reflect society. Weller provides an example of the patronage of the Eighteen Lords in Taiwan in the 1980s (1996). The corpses of 17 unknown people were discovered in a mysterious shipwreck, and the eighteenth “lord” was a dog who, though alive following the wreck, supposedly jumped into the grave with the 17 and was buried with them to demonstrate loyalty. It was to these 18 Lords that people involved in speculative investment and gambling would make requests and, rather than offering incense, leave burning cigarettes.

Historically many well-loved deities diffuse throughout China have not fit into the bureaucratic metaphor very convincingly. Some examples of these include *Sun Wukong* (the monkey king) or *Guanyin* (the goddess of mercy). Lang and Ragvald, in their book on the “refugee god” Wong Tai Sin (1993) demonstrate that the success of the god in Hong Kong was dependent on arbitrary factors, such as miracles attested to it in times of disease, monuments that were not destroyed by the Japanese, and the refugees from Mainland China who identified with the god’s “migration” from Southern China to Hong Kong.

If one considers China to be one society and looks for similarities in that society, Weller argues, then one will see unity above diversity (1987). However, if one looks at the group level, one will see diversity foregrounding unity. Weller further noted the gap in China between “fictive corporatist religion” (of five official religions managed by government-registered associations) and “real religion as practiced by the Chinese people” (2014, p. 143). What Weller called “real religion” is what sociologist Anna Sun calls the “Chinese religious ecological system” (2019, para. 7). Goossaert and Palmer likewise note that Chinese religion has no singular canon, but that religious specialists and communities “share common cosmological notions” (2011, p. 20). Sun points out that up to 80% of Chinese do not identify with any religion, but that the same percentage regularly practice rituals and patronize multiple sites and temples (2019). The expectation that religion assumes membership and identifiable beliefs, Sun argues, causes the Chinese religious system, along with its complexity and diversity, to be overlooked and discounted (2019). Sun observes that, given the high percentage of Chinese who do not identify with any religion, the phenomenon cannot “be explained away simply by the political situation” (2019, para. 23) since most religious activities in China are not criminalized; Weller asserts that although “real religion” is not officially acknowledged, the state’s non-designation and tolerance allows for “a vibrant local social world, without any major threat to the political order” (2014, p. 143).

Sun makes the case that, for most Chinese, the rationality of science can co-exist with ritual practices, and that embodied practices from multiple traditions take precedence over religious orthodoxy (2019). Earlier debates separated out ideological and performative domains of Chinese religion. Anthropologist James Watson, who had previously written on ritual standardization during the Qing dynasty (in the context of absorption of local deities by the cult of Tianhou), argued that funerary rites contained the same broad ritual procedures of wailing, wearing white as a mourning color, and so on, and that the aspect of belief (orthodoxy) was not substantial. Rather, observance of standardized ritual practices (orthopraxy) took precedence (1988). Historian Evelyn Rawski countered that anthropologists tended to use the peasant “as the standard of evaluation of cultural information,” but that they were unable to articulate the more complex belief systems of dynastic emperors (1988, p. 21). Anthropologist and historian Angela Zito agreed that meaning could not be divorced from performance, and made the point that even the Emperor, who performed rituals on behalf of citizens, was subject

to the cosmological system. Neither the Emperor nor the State could solely determine religious processes or standardization procedures (1997).

To sum up, in the Chinese context, Western conceptions of religion rendered the question of *whether there was a Chinese religion* legible to begin with, but also ensured the difficulty in arriving at an answer. Because the meaning of religion is contested, there is no consensus on the status of Chinese popular religion. Granted that there are many relevant aspects and bodies of scholarship not addressed in this short paper. Nevertheless, the literature outlined here suggests that the Chinese state's post-1949 regulatory framework for religion has only made the question more complicated to answer, as most religious practices observed by Chinese are not defined by the state as such, but rather considered to be traditions, rituals, or "superstition." While previous scholarship has at times contemplated the question of Chinese religion through ideological-heavy, Eurocentric lens and through bifurcations that are less relevant in Asia, there is also a current tendency to overly focus on ritual practice to the exclusion of belief, or to assume that Chinese religion is so "other" that it requires new terminology. Conceptions of Chinese religion do not map onto monotheistic conceptions of religion, but the common premises and practices observed by many Chinese suggest an implicitly-understood religion with permeable boundaries.

References

- Ahern, E. M. (1973). *The cult of the dead in a Chinese village*. Stanford University Press.
- Ahern, E. M. (1974). Affines and the rituals of kinship. In A. Wolf (Ed.), *Religion and ritual in Chinese society* (pp. 279–307). Stanford University Press.
- Ahern, E. M. (1981). *Chinese ritual and politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Blake, C. F. (2011). *Burning money: The material spirit of the Chinese lifeworld*. University of Hawaii Press. <https://doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824835323.001.0001>
- Bowen, J. (2018). *Religions in practice: An approach to the anthropology of religion* (7th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315411095>
- Chambon, M. (2020). *Making Christ present in China: Actor-network theory & the anthropology of Christianity*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55605-1>
- Dean, K. (1997). Ritual and space: Civil society or popular religion? In T. Brook & B. M. Frolic (Eds.), *Civil society in China* (pp. 172–192). M. E. Sharpe. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315705613>
- Dean, K. (1998). *Lord of the Three in One: The spread of a cult in Southeast China*. Princeton University Press
- Dean, K. (2012). Daoism, local religious movements, and transnational Chinese society: The circulation of Daoist priests, Three-in-One self-cultivators, and spirit mediums between Fujian and Southeast Asia. In D. A. Palmer & X. Liu (Eds.), *Daoism in the twentieth century: Between eternity and modernity* (pp. 251–273). University of California Press. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/13w4k8d4>
- Degroot, J. J. M. (2010). *The religion of the Chinese*. Macmillan.
- Duara, P. (2008). Religion and citizenship in China and the diaspora. In M. M. Yang (Ed.), *Chinese religiosities: Afflictions of modernity and state formation* (pp. 43–64). University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520916203>
- Fan, L. (2003). Popular religion in contemporary China. *Social Compass*, 50(4), 449–457. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0037768603504004>
- Feuchtwang, S. (1974). Domestic and communal worship in Taiwan. In A. Wolf (Ed.), *Religion and ritual in Chinese society* (pp. 105–129). Stanford University Press.
- Feuchtwang, S. (2001). *Popular religion in China: The imperial metaphor*. Curzon Press.
- Feuchtwang, S. (2010). *The anthropology of religion, charisma and ghosts: Chinese lessons for adequate theory*. De Gruyter.
- Feuchtwang, S. (2017). Recombinant analogism and naturalism. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 7(2), 239–242. <https://doi.org/10.14318/hau7.2.024>
- Feuchtwang, S. (2020) Introduction. In S. Feuchtwang (Ed.), *Handbook on religion in China*. Edward Elgar. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781786437969>

- Freedman, M. (1970). Ritual aspects of Chinese kinship and marriage. In M. Freedman (Ed.), *Family and kinship in Chinese society* (pp. 163–187). Stanford University Press.
- Freedman, M. (1974). On the sociological study of Chinese religion. In A. Wolf (Ed.), *Religion and ritual in Chinese society* (pp. 19–41). Stanford University Press.
- Goossaert, V. (2005). The concept of religion in China and the West. *Diogenes*, 52(13), 13–20.
- Goossaert, V. & Palmer, D. A. (2011). *The religious question in modern China*. University of Chicago Press.
- Granet, M. (1975). *The religion of the Chinese people*. Harper & Row (Original work published 1922).
- Henninger, S. (2020). Religion. In N. Brown, T. McIlwraith, L. Tubelle de González (Eds.), *Perspectives: An open introduction to cultural anthropology* (2nd ed., pp. 286–303). <https://perspectives.americananthro.org/>
- Johnson, I. (2017). *The souls of China: The return of religion after Mao*. Pantheon Books.
- Lang, G. & Ragvald, L. (1993). *The rise of a refugee God: Hong Kong's Wong Tai Sin*. Oxford University Press.
- Lavenda, R. H. & Schultz, E. A. (2007). *Core concepts in cultural anthropology*. McGraw Hill.
- Madsen, R. (2008). Religious renaissance and Taiwan's modern middle class. In M. M. Yang (Ed.), *Chinese religiosities: Afflictions of modernity and state formation* (pp. 295–322). University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520916203>
- McGinty, R. H. (2022). What is religion? In A. Palmiotto, L. Homsey-Messer, B. Ford, A. Poole, A. Adams, F. Allard, W. Chadwick. (Eds.), *Introduction to anthropology: Holistic and applied research on being human*. https://rise.articulate.com/share/evmg-uJ5nEjsAzvOHCdDp-uuDgHKJ5ED#/lessons/U_OmrM2e0PhyTRFjrk2jZiWGF7Jfwmw8f
- OHCHR (2022). *OHCHR Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China*. Geneva: The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. August 31. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ohchr-assessment-human-rights-concerns-xinjiang-uyghur-autonomous-region>
- Otake, E. (1980). Two categories of Chinese ancestors as determined by their malevolence. *Asian Folklore Studies*, 39(1), 21–31.
- Rawski, E. S. (1988). A historian's approach to Chinese death ritual. In J. L. Watson & E. S. Rawski (Eds.), *Death ritual in late imperial and modern China* (pp. 20–34). University of California Press.
- Shahar, M. & Weller, R. P. (1996). Introduction: Gods and society in China. In M. Shahar & R. P. Weller (Eds.), *Unruly Gods: Divinity and society in China* (pp. 1–36). University of Hawaii Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824865429>
- Sun, A. (2019). Turning ghosts into ancestors in contemporary urban China. *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 47(1–2). <https://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/turning-ghosts-into-ancestors-in-contemporary-urban-china/>
- Vala, C. T. (2012). Protestant Christianity and civil society in authoritarian China. *China Perspectives*, 3, 43–52.
- Watson, J. (1985). Standardizing the Gods: The promotion of T'ien Hou ("Empress of Heaven") along the South China coast, 960-1960. In D. Johnson, A. J. Nathan, & E. S. Rawski (Eds.), *Popular culture in late imperial China* (pp. 292–324). University of California Press.
- Watson, J. (1988). The structure of Chinese funerary rites: Elementary forms, ritual sequence, and the primacy of performance. In J. L. Watson & E. S. Rawski (Eds.), *Death ritual in late imperial and modern China* (pp. 3–19). University of California Press.
- Weber, M. (1951). *The religion of China*. Macmillan.
- Weller, R. P. (1987). *Unities and diversities in Chinese religion*. University of Washington Press. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-08775-4>
- Weller, R. P. (1996). Matricidal magistrates and gambling gods: Weak states and strong spirits in China. In M. Shahar & R. P. Weller (Eds.), *Unruly Gods: Divinity and society in China* (pp. 250–268). University of Hawaii Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824865429>
- Weller, R. P. (2014). The politics of increasing religious diversity in China. *Daedalus* 143(2), 135–144. https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00278
- Wolf, A. (1970). Chinese kinship and mourning dress. In M. Freedman (Ed.), *Family and kinship in Chinese society* (pp. 189–207). Stanford University Press.

- Wolf, A. (1974a). Introduction. In A. Wolf (Ed.), *Religion and ritual in Chinese society* (pp. 1–36). Stanford University Press.
- Wolf, A. (1974b). Gods, ghosts and ancestors. In A. Wolf (Ed.), *Religion and ritual in Chinese society* (pp. 131–182). Stanford University Press.
- Yamada, N. C. F. (2020) *Preferential education policies in multi-ethnic China: National rhetoric, local realities*. Routledge.
- Yang, C. K. (1961). *Religion in Chinese society*. University of California Press.
- Yang, M. M. (2008). Introduction. In M. M. Yang (Ed.), *Chinese religiosities: Afflictions of modernity and state formation* (pp. 1–40). University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520916203>
- Zito, A. (1997). *Of body & brush: Grand sacrifice as text/performance in eighteenth-century China*. University of Chicago Press.

Naomi C.F. Yamada is a lecturer in the Center for Foreign Language Education and Research at Rikkyo University. She is the author of *Preferential Education Policies in Multi-Ethnic China: National Rhetoric, Local Realities* (2020). She received a PhD in Anthropology from the University of Hawaii at Manoa.