

Veröffentlichungen der Sektion Religions-
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Sarah Demmrich
Ulrich Riegel *Editors*

Religiosity in East and West

Conceptual and Methodological
Challenges from Global
and Local Perspectives



Springer VS

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Editors

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Preface

The concept of religiosity is a highly individual aspect of religion. The initial examinations of the concept were shaped by Protestant and secular scholars in a culturally Western environment (Belzen 2015; Demmrich, Allolio-Näcke and Wolfradt *in press*) and stimulated a huge amount of research and further development within the social sciences, especially the sociology of religion. In non-Western environments, however, individualization and a self-centered perspective on religiosity seem to be of limited use in terms of adequately describing and assessing religiosity. Moreover, the recognition of Western biases in such studies already raised, some 20 years ago, the question of whether research into religiosity is actually a science of Western Christianity (Hill and Hood 1999; Loewenthal 2000; for a newer contribution see Spickard 2017). Even within the Western environment, the current concepts and instruments are sometimes only partially applicable to highly religious or orthodox individuals (e.g. Vermeer and Scheepers 2017). This observation raises the question of whether the contemporary conceptualizations and operationalization of religiosity are too strongly oriented towards the ideal of an enlightened and individualized belief.

In light of these two observations, we hosted the interdisciplinary and international conference “Religiosity in East and West: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges” at the University of Munster, Germany, from 25 to 27 June 2019. More than 50 scholars from 17 countries, ranging from America and Europe to the Middle and Far East, discussed the established concepts of religiosity with the aim of expanding them and providing appropriate alternatives. On the one hand, the local approaches from non-Western sociological contexts contribute an important perspective to the contemporary discourse of religiosity research (e.g., Buddhist or Hindu religiosity), since their ideas usually start from a collective viewpoint, not from the individual (see Herriot 2009). On the other hand, a

new understanding of highly religious, orthodox to fundamentalist milieus, which are — as counter-movements to secularization and individualization (e.g., Bruce 2008) — growing in modern societies, can also stimulate innovative and non-individualized approaches to the concept of religiosity.

With this volume of conference proceedings¹ *Religiosity in East and West: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges from Global and Local Perspectives* in the series of the Section on Sociology of Religion of the German Sociological Association, we pay special attention to the most significant conference contributions with a sociological focus. It thereby is, to the best of our knowledge, the first presentation of a broader international platform aimed at exchanging scholarly approaches to new understandings of religiosity. The following chapters share both empirical insights in and theoretical reflections on religiosity within and beyond the European context, critically assess the applicability of concepts, measures, and empirical findings as well as presenting and discussing alternative conceptualizations from either a global or a local perspective, including how Eastern religions influence the West and vice versa.

This volume opens with two contributions from a global perspective in which James V. Spickard (Redlands University, USA) takes the lead. In this chapter, Spickard shows how the social scientific approach to religion is deeply shaped by a Western-cultural understanding of religion and how this foundation biases the perception of non-Western faiths. In order to be able to see religions with unaccustomed eyes, he performs a thought experiment with us asking how the understanding of religions would look if social sciences had been invented in other areas of the world, such as in China or among Native Americans. A different but thorough global approach is taken by Carolin Hillenbrand (University Münster, Germany) when she addresses the role of religiosity in social cohesion during times of increasing tension and polarization in many societies around the world. After developing a theoretical framework of social cohesion and religiosity, which claims cross-cultural validity, she proposes multilevel analyses using a combination of several international databases to test her hypotheses. The introduction of Hillenbrand's complex methodological framework inspires much curiosity about her future empirical work on this topic.

¹Two additional conference proceedings exist: a special issue of the *Journal of Empirical Theology* (issues 1, 2020, Brill), and an edited volume with the publisher Waxmann in the series *Research on Religious and Spiritual Education (in press)*, concentrating on theological contributions and those from religious education.

Turning to local perspectives, the second part of the volume addresses the European context and primarily focusses on orthodox religiosities within it. For example, Susanne Tübel (University Oldenburg, Germany) questions the applicability of the Protestant-Western conceptualizations to Jewish religiosity even within the same sociological context. Using qualitative interviews, Tübel empirically demonstrates how the ritual circumcision of Jewish boys is not only independent of their own but also their parents' individual religiosity and proposes concepts of religious obligation and a horizontal transcendence as valid alternatives. From a similar point of view, Hege Kristin Ringnes (MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society, Norway) and Sarah Demmrich (University of Münster, Germany) examine the non-individualized beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) in Norway, a generally highly individualized and secularized country. Based on several qualitative-empirical studies, the authors summarize how JWs cope with the negative emotions caused by this constant conflict with mainstream society and their own eschatological doctrines. By setting specific emotional goals and applying certain emotion-regulation strategies, Ringnes and Demmrich show how members of this fundamentalist, exclusive religious group increase their positive emotions, albeit while possibly endangering a healthy self at the same time. Bridging religiosity between East and West, Antoaneta Nikolova (South-West University "Neofit Rilski", Bulgaria) gives insight into a mixed methods research project on the adaptation of Eastern religious practices among individuals in three Western countries, namely Ireland, Bulgaria, and East Germany. She targets how cognitive, experiential, and behavioral aspects of religiosity change among Western practitioners of Buddhism, yoga, and martial arts. By combining sociological analysis with philosophical consideration, Nikolova concludes that the practitioners' worldview is fundamentally changed by the long-term performance of Eastern practices centered on non-duality and plurality. Finally, Gergely Rosta (Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Hungary) examines whether the religious decline in Hungary witnessed in recent decades is continuing using data from the recent "Religious Change in Hungary" project. According to this data, the portion of denominational membership continues to decline, while the portion of believers in certain Christian and non-Christian doctrines has increased. At the same time, other trends of secularization seem to have stopped: this includes the portion of believers in God, which has declined very little compared to its previous growth, and the proportion of regular churchgoers, which has increased slightly. All in all, Rosta concludes that the socio-political changes that have reshaped Hungary over the past decade may have also affected the development of religiosity.

Two contributions constitute the second part of the volume and address regions which are located between Europe and Asia. Tobias Köllner (University of Witten/Herdecke, Germany) focuses on Orthodox-Christian Religiosity in Russia. Based on data from an ethnographic project in the Vladimir region located 180 kilometers to the East of Moscow, he elucidates the basic structures of both religious beliefs (evil and punishment as consequences of sinful living) and religious practices (including the veneration of icons and pilgrimage). The analysis shows that recent religiosity in Russia involves an interrelated complex of beliefs, practices and notions of belonging to some community. This religiosity turns out to be more than just an effect of ideological manipulation. Rather it seems to be a powerful means of coping with the uncertainties of daily life in contemporary Russia. With her quantitative study, Hannah Ridge (Duke University, USA) addresses the question of how state regulation of religion influences individual religiosity in countries with a Sunni-Muslim majority with the intention of uncovering internal religious diversity. She tests the applicability of the religious market theory to these countries and the proposed negative relationship between regulation and religiosity, which could not be verified by her multilevel analyses. In sum, Ridge raises concerns about the validity of the current measures of religious restrictions, such as indicators that focus on policies which probably do not influence religious life in general or individual experiences of religious freedom in particular.

The third part of the volume covers studies on religiosity in Asian countries. First, Danzan Narantuya (National University of Mongolia) describes Mongolia as a country marked by tremendous political change over the last century, including the shifts from feudalism, via socialism, to today's capitalism, and its accompanying social transitions. With an emphasis on religion and gender roles, she outlines how changing ideological systems altered the fundamental pillars of Mongolian society, which has been notably unstable for the last 30 years as a consequence of modernization processes. She explores how members of the society are seeking a replacement for their all-encompassing ideological system, primarily in Christian churches, that is capable of meeting the organizational and theological needs of today's individuals better than the re-established Buddhist monasteries, even though both religions are contributing to the stabilization of families as one pillar of Mongolian society. Turning to the Indian context, Debabrata Baral (Bennett University, India) examines the understudied topic of religious fundamentalism in Hinduism. After offering insight into Hinduism as a peaceful religion and sketching the political developments of post-colonial India, the author shows us how India became a secular law state, respecting

other religious traditions and practices but nevertheless retaining the prohibition of slaughtering cows. Baral puts forward his argument as to how this law of the Indian constitution gave rise to the domination of Hindus over non-Hindus and thus eventually opened the doors to religious fundamentalism and communal violence, together with Hinduism as mere performance without deeper meaning. The following paper by Koyal Verma (University of Delhi, India) explains the inter-relationship between society and religiosity within Buddhism by outlining the core principles of religiosity in Buddhism, describing the re-emergence of Buddhism in India through Nichiren Daishonin's philosophy, and elaborating on Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a new religious movement that emerged in Japan post World War II. The contribution argues that although religiosity has been deeply tied with ritualistic principles associated with religion, however new religious movements, particularly within Buddhism, demonstrate that religiosity can be philosophically governed in the contemporary era. Humanitarian concerns are influencing religiosity in modern society. Then, Ipshita Soni and Sarita Ghai (University of Delhi, India) analyze the religious practices in a Himalayan Tribal Community of the Jaunsaris region. In this remote region, life seems to be completely dependent on nature's benevolence. As a consequence, natural phenomena like the mountains, rivers and forests are revered and this reverence is echoed in myths, rituals and religious practices followed in everyday life. In this meaning system, the Western distinction between nature and religion is blurred: hills and rivulets denote Gods, temples are surrounded by religious groves providing them sanctity and protection, cedar trees with a temple shaped crown are worshipped as symbols of Shiva. All these natural features become totems, manifestations of the realm of sacredness and Western concepts of religiousness have not entered these meaning systems, yet. In the last paper of this part, Mrinal Pande (University of Münster, Germany) addresses popular Hindu religiosity by focusing upon the practice of *Ramkatha*. With ethnographic data from India, California and Italy she shows how the quest for '*sat*' (truth) and '*sang*' (company) contributes to the adherent's identity within this spiritual movement. Such embodiment of lived religion, at the level of practice, and the implication of religiosity as manifested in material bodies beyond class and caste, proved to be multivalent and to convey different meanings, while simultaneously addressing complex religious and spiritual needs of its listeners and followers.

To conclude this introduction, we would like to thank all the scholars who contributed to the successful formation of this interdisciplinary conference proceeding. We sincerely hope that our proceedings stimulate an international and cross-cultural scientific discourse on concepts and measurements of religiosity

in the social sciences and induce further conceptual developments in this kind of research. Our special thanks goes also to Elske Kelm, Alina Birkmeyer, and Julie Davies who contributed, with greatest care and commitment, to the editing work and formatting of the manuscript.

Sarah Demmrich
Ulrich Riegel

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Contents

Conceptual and methodological challenges from a global perspective	
Thinking Beyond the West: Seeing Religions with Unaccustomed Eyes	3
James V. Spickard	
Religion, a Bridge or Barrier in Society?	19
Carolin Hillenbrand	
Europe	
Ritual Reproduction in Jewish Communities in Germany: The Case of Circumcision	45
Susanne Tübel	
The Case of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Norway and the Emotional Implications of Eschatological Expectations and Membership: Non-individualized Doctrinal Beliefs Within a Highly Individualized Mainstream Society	61
Hege Kristin Ringnes und Sarah Demmrich	
East–West Religiosity: Some Peculiarities of Religiosity of European Followers of Eastern Teachings and Practices	77
Antoaneta Nikolova	
Hungary—Continuing and Changing Trends and Mechanisms of Religious Change	99
Gergely Rosta	

Between Europe and Asia

- Religiosity in Orthodox Christianity: An Anthropological
Perspective on Post-soviet Russia** 121

Tobias Köllner

- Muslims' Religious Freedom and Religiosity: Measurement
and Impact** 141

Hannah M. Ridge

Asia

- An Intersection of Religion and Pillars of the Mongolian Society** 167

Danzan Narantuya

- The Contours of Religiosity in Hinduism: Locating Religious
Doctrines, Interrogating Communal Behavior** 183

Debabrata Baral

- Buddhism in Asia: Mapping the Evolving Principles of Religiosity** 205

Koyal Verma

- Religion and Religiosity in a Himalayan Tribal Community -
a Study of Jaunsaris** 221

Ipshita Soni und Sarita Ghai

- Contextualizing Religiosity Within the *Ramkatha*** 233

Mrinal Pande

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Conceptual and methodological challenges from a global perspective



Thinking Beyond the West: Seeing Religions with Unaccustomed Eyes

James V. Spickard

Abstract

Social science was invented in the West and was shaped by Western culture. This includes its approach to religion. Scholars saw that Christians cared about people's beliefs and about who ran their churches, so they focused on these parts of religious life. They ignored much of the rest. As a result, they had trouble understanding religions for which beliefs and church organization were less important. Had social science arisen in other parts of the world, it would have emphasized different things. This chapter explores two of these. From ancient China we get the Confucian idea of a relational self. *Lǐ*, or the ritual regard for the people who shape us, creates *dé*, or virtue. A Confucian social scientist would ask, 'Who sustains the sacred relationships on which our religious communities depend?' From the traditional Navajo, we learn how rituals shape people's inner experiences to restore their sense of the world's beauty. A Navajo social scientist would ask, 'Do rituals in other religions guide people to a sense of wholeness? If so, how?' These non-Western ideas also have their blind spots. Even so, they let us see religion through unaccustomed eyes.

Keywords

Catholic Worker · Community ties · Confucian sociology · Default view · Healing · Lived experience · Navajo ritual · Non-western · Sociology of religion

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1 Toward a World-Conscious Sociology of Religion

We live in an interesting era. Martin Albrow (1997) tells us that the modern age, typified by self-contained nation-states, is retreating and the West no longer dominates the world economically, culturally, or politically. Suketu Mehta (2019, p. 4) tells us that “mass migration is the defining human phenomenon of the twenty-first century”. Some migration results from climate change, poverty, and war, but much of it is driven by the West’s need for other people’s ideas. Business has long been transnational but so, too, are science, technology, medicine, and intellectual life. Realms that gather insights from around the world prosper. Those that remain parochial now fade.

The social sciences of religion are on the parochial side. Both sociology and psychology were founded in the West, in a culture that was shaped by Christianity. As a result, most Westerners see Christianity as the model for all religions and have trouble understanding those religions that do not fit the model well. We need to widen our intellectual net. We need to explore other traditions for insights that our own culture neglects.

In what follows, I shall speak as a sociologist. I cannot pretend to advise the other social sciences about how to practice their trade. I shall, however, point out the limitations of much sociological work on religion, precisely because it does not venture beyond its Western origins. The founders of my discipline did not have much experience with non-Christian groups. They saw that Christians cared about people’s beliefs and about who ran their churches, so they focused on these parts of religious life. They ignored much of the rest. As a result, sociologists misunderstand religions for which beliefs and church organization are not the main show.

I shall first describe sociology’s default view of religion, which focuses on organizations, leaders, and beliefs. I shall trace the source of this view in the nineteenth century movements that birthed sociology and will show how it has led sociologists to ignore major aspects of religious life.

Then I shall explore two cultural alternatives. The first is Confucian, the second is Navajo. Confucius famously said we should ‘honor the gods but stay as far away from them as possible’. He also emphasized right conduct and the importance of right relationships. He was, however, concerned with neither religious beliefs nor organizations. What would a sociology of religion look like, had it been founded on Confucian principles? I shall show you a few of the principles, then give you an example from U.S. religious life. I realize that European religion

is somewhat different, but I suspect that you can find ways to apply Confucian ideas to religions on this continent as well.

My second alternative comes from a Native American nation living in the southwestern United States. Traditional Navajo religion focuses on ritual, particularly on rituals that heal both individuals and communities. I shall describe how these rituals shape people's inner experiences to restore their sense of *hózhó*—a Navajo term that roughly translates as harmony, health, and beauty. A Navajo sociologist would ask, 'Do rituals in other religions guide people to a sense of wholeness and a sense of rightness with the world? If so, how do they do it?' I shall give you an example of how this works among a Catholic activist group that I know well.

Just like sociology's default view of religion, these non-Western ideas also have their blind spots. Even so, they let us see aspects of religion that our Western view typically ignores.

2 Sociology's Default View

What is sociology's default view of religion? While everyone knows that textbooks do not represent the cutting edge of any science, they are a good indicator of what a discipline thinks is important. I have taught the sociology of religion for most of the last 30 years, and I have had a lot of time to watch textbooks change. We have a dirty secret: they do not. Sociologists emphasize the same things about religion today that they did in the mid-1980s, when I was being trained (Spickard 2017, p. 22 ff.). Yes, there are more women in the texts. There are more ethnic minorities, more attention to Islam and Eastern religions, and more attention to whatever new theories the textbook writers find most interesting. Yet the core elements remain the same:

- Sociologists see religions as embedded in organizations that have official leaders.
- They see beliefs as central to the religious enterprise.
- They think religions are especially concerned with moral rules, both those encouraging good behaviors and those banning the bad.

Why these elements? Simply because they are central to Western Christianity. This is sociologists' model for what all religions are like. Western Christianity

locates 'the sacred' either in the sacraments (which means in church life) or in the inward relationship between the soul and God. Sociology follows suit, centering its understanding of religion on church participation and on individual religiosity. Even sociologists of New Age religions, which are at best informally organized, describe an inward-facing spirituality embedded in individuals (e.g., Heelas 1996).

Sociology's default view of religion stems from the late nineteenth century, as sociologists tried to understand the massive social changes of that era. Industrialization, revolution, colonialism, and poverty transformed the way people thought, acted, and lived. Sociologists wanted to understand these trends. Karl Marx looked to economic transformations, Émile Durkheim looked to changes in the social bond, while Max Weber looked to the growth of instrumental rationalism in all spheres of life (Giddens 1976). Sociologists were not, however, the only intellectuals on the scene. Economists, political theorists, journalists, and theologians all had their own accounts to offer. The early sociologists had to distinguish their new discipline from the mass of competing views.

As Manuel Vásquez (2013) has pointed out, however, sociology's chief intellectual opponents were not other social scientists; they were religious authorities, especially in France. There, the ultramontane Catholic church had spent much of the nineteenth century opposing democracy and trying to reestablish church authority over social and political life. From the 1825 Anti-Sacrilege Act through the 1870 declaration of Papal Infallibility to the 1894–1906 Dreyfus Affair, the Catholic Church allied itself with political reaction. Sociology, on the other hand, saw itself as a progressive science, well-suited to solving social problems. The result, writes Vásquez, was that sociology saw authoritarian religion as its conceptual Other. The opposition, for sociologists, ran as follows:

- Where sociology was scientific, religion was superstitious.
- Where sociology was progressive, religion was reactionary.
- Where sociology was oriented toward the future, religion was oriented toward the past.
- And religion was, above all, embedded in hierarchical organizations that tried to enforce belief in impossible things.

In short, if sociology was the future, then its opposite, religion, must be fading away (Vásquez 2013, p. 24 ff.). This is the source of 'secularization theory', which is alive and well in our discipline. Mainstream sociology still treats religion as a hierarchically organized, belief-oriented institution that will continue

to lose public influence, even if it continues to play a role in individuals' private lives (Bender et al. 2013; Spickard 2017, p. 22 ff.).

Sociologists have, of course, developed other approaches, but for present purposes, I am less interested in these than I am in ideas that arise outside the West. My first example comes from ancient China. What would a sociology of religion based on Confucian principles show us about religion that the Western view does not?

3 A Confucian View

Scholars disagree about whether China has religions of the kind found in the West. On the positive side, textbooks on 'World Religions' always mention China's 'big three' traditions—Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism—and some include 'folk religion' as a fourth. The Chinese government recognizes five 'official' religious groups—Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, Taoist, and Buddhist. On the negative side, these two lists do not match, and four of the five on the government list are imports. Along with similar dynamics in India, this led Chidester (1996), McCutcheon (1997), Masuzawa (2005), and others to argue that 'religion' is a concept that the West imposed on other civilizations, fundamentally misunderstanding them.

Peter Beyer (2006) provided a more nuanced view. He argued that the term 'religion' was not so much imposed as co-constructed. Indian scholars resisted European efforts to treat them as 'heathens' by showing that they, too, had holy books, priests, rituals, and sacred sites: all attributes of 'religions' to their European overlords. Beyer shows that the term 'religion' itself arose from this encounter; previously Europeans had used the term 'Christianity' to describe what they were trying to impose on others.

Beyer describes how late nineteenth century Chinese intellectuals considered copying the Indians, but instead they chose to retain Confucianism as a philosophy, not a *zongjiao*. This invented word meant 'sectarian teaching' and was used by these intellectuals to describe European religions, which they regarded as factional and partisan. "Those who saw [Confucianism] as humanistic, this-worldly, and moral philosophy carried the day because this view asserted both Chinese uniqueness and superiority " (Beyer 2006, p. 237). Nonetheless, Confucian teachings have their sacred elements, which have continued across the centuries (Spickard 2017, p. 93 ff.). My attempt to identify a Confucian sociology of religion begins with these.

Confucianism finds the sacred neither in religious organizations nor in individuals' inwardness; it finds it in social ties. Confucian philosophy is all about groups and group living. For Confucians, the sacred lies in the ties that sustain human communities. Individuals matter, but they do so because the human Self is the spot where social ties come together. Those ties are more sacred than is the individual person who embodies them.

An easy way to see this is to compare how people introduce themselves as Confucians with how they do so in the West. Each introduction shows what its tradition thinks is important. As a Westerner, I introduce myself as follows:

I am Jim Spickard, Professor of Sociology at the University of Redlands, Past-President of the of the International Sociological Association's Research Committee on the Sociology of Religion, and President-Elect of the Association for the Sociology of Religion. I teach and write about social theory, the sociology of religion, and social research design. I have written six books and some 70 journal articles and book chapters. My next book is about what is happening to religion in the contemporary world.

In other words: 'I, I, I, I, I.' We Euro-Americans typically think of ourselves as individuals, separate from other people. Our self-definitions express this. We start with ourselves and move to include others—if we include them at all. This corresponds rather well to the Protestant emphasis on the sacredness of the individual relationship with God.

Now listen to me introduce myself as a Confucian:

I am Jim Spickard, son of Donald Spickard and Mary Alice Adkins, grandson of Vernon and Mildred Spickard and of Russell and Mary Adkins. I am brother to Paul Spickard, husband to Meredith McGuire, father to Janaki and Dmitri Spickard-Keeler. My teachers were George Spindler, Trent Schroyer, Charles McCoy, and James McClendon. My students include Blaine Pope, Javier Espinoza, Erin Wiens-St. John, and Julia Pazzi.

The Confucian way of speaking does not erase my individuality, but it does express it in an unaccustomed way. It points out that I am uniquely shaped by those around me. My parents, grandparents, and family formed my core personality. My marriage made me a different person, as did having the children I do. My teachers shaped me, as did my friends and the students I have had the privilege of teaching. I am simply different as the result of these relationships than I would have been without them.

Both introductions, in fact, display true things about our Selves—specifically what each of these two cultures finds sacred. The individual is sacred to the modern West; just look at our human rights laws and our abhorrence of violating individual integrity (Spickard 2002; Fortman 2011). Classic Confucianism, on the other hand, sees the self as a nest of relationships, and it sees those relationships as sacred. One maintains them through *li*, the practice of ritual propriety. *Li* is the source of *dé* (virtue). Maintaining the sacredness of relationships is our chief religious duty—not just of leaders, but of everyone.

This illuminates some of the key Confucian terms that refer to religion-like things. Take ‘ancestor worship’ and ‘the mandate of heaven’. The former involves maintaining family shrines to one’s departed forebears; the latter involves the blessings that rulers gain from acting properly toward their subjects. Both are relational. They involve maintaining the right relationships between people: within families on the one hand and between rulers and ruled on the other. Both are sacred duties—though the shape of this ‘sacred’ is very different from what we find in the West.

The term ‘ancestor worship’ is, of course, a misnomer (Lakos 2010). Ancient Confucians did not regard the ancestors as ‘gods’ nor were they seen as supernatural. They were not even individualized beings. Instead they were a collective—‘the ancestors’—who reminded people of the importance of family and lineage. The ancestors anchored the individual Self in the past and connected it to the future. ‘Worshipping’ them meant to remember who one was: son or daughter of X, grandson or granddaughter of Y, and so on. To revere one’s ancestors is to acknowledge the sacredness of the relationships from which our Selves are made.

‘The mandate of heaven’ was similarly relational, but on a political, not a familial, level (Spickard 2017, p. 89 ff.). From the Shang period, China was ruled by kings whose authority depended on a traditional but evolving set of relationships with the *min*: their laboring but non-slave subjects. The ruler was to care for the *min*, at least in part because Heaven (*Ti*) holds them in special regard. Virtue (*dé*) involved treating the people well so that they would support the ruler. Everything depended on the practice of *li*: the rules of ritual propriety that governed the relationships between people. Confucius later taught that *li* should extend to all people, not just to the rulers. His follower Mencius stressed the importance of *i* (righteousness) — not, however, as the inevitable result of a set of procedures grounded in individual rights, as in the West, but as the substantive outcome of the ruler’s exercise of virtue (*dé*).

In any event, both ‘ancestor worship’ and ‘the mandate of heaven’ are at root relational. They treat the relationships between people as sacred, which makes possible a beneficial social life. For them, human flourishing is not an individ-

ual matter but a community responsibility. Attention to that community through proper regard for others (*li*) is thus a sacred act. *Dé*, or virtue, results from and also feeds this process.

How might we use these insights to expand the sociology of religion? What kinds of questions would a Confucian sociologist ask? Here's one: 'Who maintains relationships in Western Christianity?' Who practices the *li* that creates the *dé* on which religious life depends? I cannot answer this for European religions, but I can for U.S. ones. American church life, centered on the local congregation, has historically been supported by women.

Now I could demonstrate this by citing Penny Marler's (2008) analysis of church membership statistics going back to before World War One. She shows how women's congregational involvement has been the major factor in maintaining the health of both American and English congregations. Or I could cite Robert Putnam, whose massive book *American Grace* argues that pastors would do better to spend less time preaching and more time at church events, getting to know their congregants (Putnam and Campbell 2010). I shall put these scholars aside, though, to focus on something else: on American church food.

Church suppers are a core part of American congregational religion, and nourishing, home-cooked food is at the heart of every communal celebration. The menus vary by region. Casserole, crispy fried meatloaf, tuna hot-dish, green beans, jello salad, pies, and weak coffee are central to the Northern White American Protestant tradition. Southern Protestants favor hot chicken salad casserole, baked spaghetti, crawfish rice, baked beans, strawberry cake, sock-it-to-me cake, pecan pie muffins, and banana pudding. Add in some fried chicken and—I'm not kidding—some 'Shout Hallelujah Potato Salad' and your church will have a meal.

Those weekly or monthly church meals tie U.S. congregations together. Laurence Stookey (1996, p. 147) tells the story of a backwoods West Virginia Protestant congregation that renamed itself "St. Mary's"—a most un-Protestant name. The men of the church confessed:

During the Depression we were ready to close this place down and join one of the other Methodist congregations in town. It was the women who insisted otherwise; and they kept us alive by bake sales, quilting bees, bazaars, and church suppers.

So, they named their church after the mother of Jesus. This celebrated the women who had kept the congregation alive by tending to the relationships that made them a community.

It's not just White folks. Cheryl Gilkes (2000) describes the central role that women play in African American congregations. From 'kitchen ministry', to

women's choirs, to accompanying the bereaved, to keeping the pastor fed and on track, African American churches are not the pastor-centered patriarchies that most sociologists imagine (Dodson and Gilkes 1995). They are communities. Like most communities in the United States, they depend on women's work.

A Confucian sociologist would see this immediately. The Confucian default position would see religion as embedded in relationships. It would focus less on individual 'morality' and more on communal 'right action'. It would focus on the interplay between *li* and *dé*, ritual propriety and virtue. It would ask who maintains the relationships that make community possible.

I can imagine a society in which men might maintain these relationships, but that is not the society in which I happen to live. Contemporary sociology's default view of religion makes women an afterthought rather than putting them at center stage. Their part in U.S. religious life is much more visible from a Confucian perspective.

4 Navajo Ritual

Now for a second alternate sociology—this one based on key elements of traditional Navajo religion. Navajo healing ceremonies highlight an aspect of religious life that sociology's default view ignores. This is the fact that rituals are more than just symbolic. They are experienced. They unfold in time, and in that unfolding they shift people's moods and their emotional sense of their place in the universe.

The Navajo Nation covers 70,000 square kilometers of desert and mountains in the American Southwest. It has its own government, justice system, and politics, with an economy based largely on minerals and tourism. Poverty is high. About a third of the people live in rural areas. Some herd and farm, though few follow a full traditional life.

The Nation is religiously diverse, with lots of Mormons and Christians plus those who belong to the Native American (Peyote) Church, alongside the traditionalists. These groups are not exclusive, however. Many people take part in more than one of these 'roads', to use a common Navajo idiom. It is not unusual for traditional healing ceremonies to attract people of all sorts (Wyman 1983, p. 536).

These ceremonies last two, five, or nine days and nights and are designed to bring health to those who are ill. They are led by *hataii*, 'singers', who are adept at carrying one or more of the dozens of 'chantways' that constitute the traditional religious system (Wyman 1983).

Families sponsor chants at times of crisis or disorder. A family member may be ill. Someone may be leaving for or returning from a trip among foreigners. That person—the ‘patient’—is the focus of the ceremony. The family will engage a *hatalii* who knows the specific chant deemed proper for the occasion.

Here is a typical Holyway chant, just to give you an idea of what these rituals are like. It begins on the first evening with prayers to bless the hogan (the traditional circular Navajo house) in which it is to take place. The *hatalii* paints the patient’s body with pigments, cornmeal, and pollen. His helpers make ‘unravelers’—bundles of herbs and feathers that they place on the patient, then unravel, to symbolize release from danger. All sing and pray through the night.

At dawn, the helpers built a large fire on the hogan floor, and the *hatalii*, the patient, and family members disrobe and sweat. The patient takes an herbal emetic and is washed, to more singing. After breakfast, the *hatalii* makes offerings to the Holy People, so they will come to the patient’s aid. Then the sand painting begins.

Each sand painting is large and complex, depicting in symbols the mythic journey that resulted in this chant being given to the people. It usually centers on the Holy People encountered by the protagonist. It is made on the floor of the hogan by trickling dry pigments onto a smoothed bed of tan sand. The *hatalii* directs the work; any man who knows how may help. A six-foot painting may take four to six men three to five hours to finish.

After the sand painting is done, the patient sits in its center and the singer applies medicines to various parts of the Holy People depicted in the painting. Then he touches the patient in the same places, intoning ritual prayers and songs. The patient is in this way identified with the Holy People, for his or her protection. The prayers retell the myth by which the world was created, and sand painting was given to the people.

This whole process is repeated for four days (in a five-day chant). Each day has a different painting and a different myth. The last night is spent singing, ending with the dawn songs, which greet the first faint streak of light in the east.

I have left out much, but I think you get the point. There is copious symbolism, but the entire ritual is a performance that unrolls in time. As Sam Gill (1987, p. 110) wrote, when looked at from the point of view of its participants, Navajo rituals.

evoke and structure the images ... in such a way that they create the power that can expel malevolent influences and that can reorder, and hence restore to health and happiness, a person who suffers.