Chinese Religion in Malaysia: A General View

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INTRODUCTION

Chinese Malaysians are followers of different religions, but the majority practice what may be called " Chinese Religion."[1] Unlike Christianity and Islam, Chinese Religion is part and parcel of Chinese ways of life, a Chinese tradition inherited from the ancient past. One of the most widely practiced but least understood religions in the world, Chinese Religion involves the worship of Chinese deities of both Taoist and Buddhist origins, nature spirits, and the ancestors.

This paper will aim at a description of the nature of this religion: What is the Chinese Religion in Malaysia? In the course of my discussion I will point out various misconceptions about the religion. My attempt here is to explain the need to view Chinese Religion in Malaysia as a *whole* system and to put to rest once and for all misleading classifications of Chinese worshipers as Buddhists, Taoists or Confucianists. While various prominent scholars have already pointed out the fallacy of such an approach in writing about Chinese religion in pre-communist modern China, it is still unfortunately very prevalent in studies of Southeast Asia. The perpetuation of this fallacy is partly due to a lack of good studies on Chinese religion in this region, and some writers who follow it do so out of convenience because they have not done proper research. It is unfortunate that these people do not have a sufficient background in Chinese religion in general.

Many writers have described the religion of China, but space considerations prohibit me from dealing with their findings and opinions here.[2] Before going into my discussion of the elements that make up Chinese Religion and their origins, it would perhaps be in order to

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present a brief description of the practice of this religion. It should be noted that in addition to visiting temples, Chinese Religion followers normally also worship deities and ancestors at home, and so it is possible to study Chinese Religion in two spheres, that of domestic worship and that of public worship.

A Chinese household may have a picture of, for example, the Goddess of Mercy at its main altar in the living room, an altar for the Earth God below the main altar, and an altar for ancestors to the right of the main altar.[3] In addition to the main deity, there may be smaller statues of other deities from various traditions at the main altar. In the kitchen there may be an altar for the Kitchen God. In daily worship, the worshipers first worship Tiangong 天公, or the God of Heaven, by standing on the front porch and facing the sky, raising burning joss sticks a few times in suplication. Either one or three joss sticks from those the worshiper is holding are then placed at a plaque which bears the characters *Tianguan Cifu* 天官賜福, or " Heavenly officials grant good fortune and happiness," which is usually fixed at the left front side of the house. The joss sticks here are offered to the God of Heaven and the Heavenly officials.

Then the worshiper will enter the living room to pray at the main altar. After that he or she goes to the kitchen to pray to the Kitchen God, then returns to the living room to pray to the Earth God, and finally to the ancestors. If ghosts (i.e., the deceased who are not being looked after by their descendants) are also to be propitiated, they are offered joss sticks after the worship of one's own ancestors is completed, usually in the back yard.

In normal worship the daily ritual involves only placing a joss stick (or more than one, but in odd numbers) at the altar of the deities, and two joss sticks (or more, but in even numbers) at the ancestral altar. (Odd numbers belong to the *yang* principle while even numbers belong to the *yin* principle, and hence deities are always offered an odd number of joss sticks while ancestors and ghosts are offered an even number).

As we can see, then, the traditional religion of Chinese Malaysians is above all syncretic; it is a loosely unified system which is a product of the intermixing of various religions throughout the centuries of Chinese civilization. Essentially it consists of indigenous Chinese cults and Buddhist beliefs and practices. As we will see, the former includes both Taoist beliefs and rituals as well as other popular cults. Chinese Religion in Malaysia also contains other cults of Malaysian origin, such as the worship of the Nadu Gong 拿督公, which may be considered as

Malaysian earth gods and which are usually though not always associated with Malay (Muslim) elements, and the Xian Si Shiye 仙四師爺, who are a good example of the deification of Chinese heroes in a Malaysian rather than Chinese context.[4]

The syncretic nature of Chinese Religion is seen in its material and social manifestation. For example, Chinese temples generally reflect Taoist, Buddhist and other Chinese religious traditions. Since Chinese Buddhism was originally introduced from India, most Buddhist deities and rituals remain rather distinct from the other components of Chinese Religion. Nevertheless, Buddhist deities are found even in those Chinese temples which are not otherwise Buddhist at all. While few non-Buddhist Chinese deities are found in " pure " Buddhist temples, they are found in great number in the more " marginal " Buddhist temples. Most Chinese temples house a number of deities which can be traced to the various traditions now incorporated in Chinese Religion.

The Chinese Religion

Chinese Malaysians do not have a definite term for their traditional religion, which I have been referring to here as " Chinese Religion." The fact that they do not is not surprising, for the religion is diffused into various aspects of Chinese culture, and is confined to those Malaysians of Chinese descent. It is simply the Chinese religion, just as the religion of the Yao minority in Thailand is the Yao religion. The first fallacy in studying this religion is to expect its practitioners to have a name for it, a specific name that separates it from their ethnic label, as is the case with the Malays, whose religion is Islam.

Chinese Malaysians refer to their religion in their own languages and dialects as the equivalent to the Mandarin Chinese terms *bai shen* 拜神 or *bai fo* 拜佛. The former means " worshiping deities " and is more general, referring to the worship of any kind of deity within the Chinese religious system, including those of Buddhist origin. The latter literally means " worshiping Buddhas or Bodhisattvas," but in practice, when Chinese Malaysians say this, they may be including the worship of all deities, be they of Buddhist or Taoist origins. *Shen* is the general term for any deity, including the Islamic and Christian " God." Since there is no specific name for their " popular " religion, Chinese Malaysians and Singaporeans describe it by referring to their religious behavior of " bai shen," which has prompted Elliott (1955: 29) to suggest the term " shenism."

This however, is not the way the Chinese refer to their religion, and it seems more logical to me to simply call it " Chinese Religion," which I will do throughout this paper. I nevertheless agree with

Elliott's observation (1955: 29) that "few Chinese concur with the tripartite division of their national religion into Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism," and that "they explain that their religion is a mixture of Buddhism, Taoism and the worship of local deities." Chan (1953: 141) has in fact accurately described the religion of China as a "syncretic religion embracing the ancient cult as its basis and Buddhist and Taoist elements as secondary features."

A serious error in classifying Chinese worshipers is to expect them to conform to the stereotype of the three religions that supposedly make up their culture. An investigator who begins by asking "What is your religion?" may be frustrated when an informant answers "don't know," or describes Chinese Religion in too much detail. The investigator may end up asking, "So what is your religion? Buddhism, Taoism, or Confucianism?" at which point the informant usually chooses one. Those who erroneously think that Confucius and his followers introduced ancestor worship and funeral rites may choose the category "Confucianism," but the majority will choose either "Taoism" or "Buddhism," since most Chinese deities and cults today are derived from these two religious traditions, which were originally independent systems of religion in China.

Those who want to portray the image of "not superstitious" may prefer the category "Buddhism," for most shamanistic cults in Chinese Religion are of Taoist or other indigenous Chinese origins. Others will simply choose any category merely for the sake of answering. The investigator, who may be a census taker or a student, is then pleased that he can fill in the proper category. The informant, however, knows very well that his religion cannot be accurately described by any one of these categories. The most common mistake in social science research on the religions of the Chinese Malaysians is to hint or even tell the informants what categories of religion they belong to. It may be due to a recognition of this problem that the 1947 census of Malaya lists "Chinese national religion" as a choice rather than Buddhism, Taoism or Confucianism (Del Tufo 1949: 124). On the other hand, if we do not list Buddhism, there is no way to obtain information on those Buddhists of the Theravada tradition.

The 1970 Malaysian census classifies Chinese Malaysians by religion as follows: Muslim 0.2%, Hindu 0.1%, Christian 3.5%, Buddhist 78.9%, No religion 4.9% and Others 12.4% (Dept. of Statistics 1977: 452). Those who follow the traditional Chinese religion obviously had to choose either "Buddhist" or "Other," which accounts for the rather high percentage of the latter. The category "No religion" no doubt includes both atheists and agnostics, but perhaps also includes

those who did not feel like answering the rather irrelevant question. The category " Buddhist " includes not only those who follow traditional Chinese religion, but also Theravadins and followers of other Buddhist sects.

The categorization in this census could be improved by introducing the category " Chinese Religion," and thus reserving " Buddhism " for the Theravadins and other Buddhists. Overall we could say that 80–90 percent of the Chinese Malaysians are followers of Chinese Religion, since followers of Theravada Buddhism and other Buddhist sects form only a small minority.

The notion that there are three distinct religions in China—Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism—is an old and well known one, and I will not deal with it here. In spite of the fact that three such systems did exist (and the reader will soon note that I object to referring to Confucianism as a " religion "), the movement in China was from a very early period toward syncretism, or a " popular religion," and this tendency is particularly notable in Malaysia, for it was brought in by lower class Chinese immigrants. In order to clarify the misconception of the so-called " three religions " of the Chinese Malaysians, it will be necessary to describe these briefly. The description will also serve to provide a historical perspective to our analysis of the Chinese religion as a whole system.

Confucianism

The treating of Confucianism as a religion is partly due to a wrong perception of the Chinese word *jiao* 教. The Chinese do describe their religion as having the components of *Ru* 儒, *Dao* 道 and *Shi* 釋, which are usually translated into English as Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism respectively and are collectively known as the " san jiao " 三教, or " three teachings." Various " syncretic " religious sects have developed out of these three systems.

The term *san jiao* should not, however, be translated as " three religions," for in Chinese the word *jiao* means " teaching," whether religious or not. As pointed out by Chan (1953: 140), when the word *jiao* is used for Confucianism, " it means culture and moral education and almost never has the sense of religion," and when a person is labelled a Confucianist, " it means that he is a follower of Confucian doctrines, which include religion as an element, but not a follower of an organized, institutional religion." Furthermore, *Dao*, or Taoism, includes both Taoist philosophy and Taoist religion in the context of *san jiao*. Hence the " three teachings " actually refers to Confucian philosophy, Taoist philosophy, Taoist Religion and Buddhism.

The confusion of Confucianism with religion is also due to the failure of most people to read the works of Confucian scholars at first-hand. Those who read the basic Confucian texts known collectively as *Si Shu* 四書 (*The Four Books*) will know that Confucius and his disciples did not create a system of religion, and that Confucianism is rather a system of ethics and philosophy.[5] The references to Heaven and ancestor worship in the texts are merely reflections of the classical religion which Confucius accepted.

The lack of familiarity with Confucian philosophy and Chinese history is a reason some people think that Confucius and his followers created a cult to worship Heaven, ancestor worship and funeral rites, and hence a system of religion. In actual fact, these cults and rituals were already extant at the time of Confucius. Confucius did not challenge the existing religious ideas and practices and in fact endorsed some of them. This is understandable since his philosophy is founded on the idea of unity and harmony of families. Ancestor worship and the observation of funeral rites certainly serve to promote and perpetuate his idea of filial piety and other aspects of social relation.

Furthermore, Confucius was a man very much concerned with the prescribed and proper rules of behavior. In chapter ten of *Confucian Analects*, we are told that Confucius would not eat meat which was not cut properly, nor sit on a mat which was not straight (see Legge 1960a: 232–233). Everything had to be proper. He was preoccupied with upholding *li* 礼 or the existing codes of etiquette, the ways of the sages. Confucius was therefore a rather orthodox person. It is this attitude which accounts for his strong support of the existing system of ancestor worship and funeral rites, for to do otherwise would be a violation of *li* and could only be interpreted as unfilial. When his disciple Zai Wo 宰我 suggested modifying the three-year mourning system because it was too long, Confucius was not happy and told his other disciples that Zai Wo's attitude showed his want of virtue. He said, " It is not till a child is three years old that it is allowed to leave the arms of its parents. And the three years' mourning is universally observed throughout the empire " (*Confucian Analects*, chapter seventeen; Legge 1960a: 327–328).

It was his preoccupation with *li* which led Confucius to accept religious rites and encourage people to observe them. He was more concerned with the proper exhibition of attitudes and performance of rites than with the reality of deities and spirits. Hence, he said, " sacrifice to the dead, as if they were present," and " sacrifice to the spirits, as if the spirits were present " (*Confucian Analects*, chapter three; Legge 1960a: 159). He praised Yu 禹, the founder of the legendary

Xia 夏 dynasty, for offering the best to the spirits, and " displayed the utmost elegance in his sacrificial cap and apron " (*Confucian Analects*, chapter eight; Legge 1960a: 215). Yet Confucius' real attitude towards religion was rather agnostic, as is illustrated in his famous advice: To give one's self earnestly to the duties due to men, and, while respecting spiritual beings, to keep aloof from them, may be called wisdom (*Confucian Analects*, chapter six; Legge 1960a: 191).

The teachings of Confucius and his followers were agreeable to the ruling elite of China and were encouraged, hence the dominant position of Confucianism in Chinese culture. Confucianism was compatible with the classical religion, which included a cult of Heaven. In fact, it was in their interest for the Confucian elite to promote the state cult of Heaven. This cult was the affair of the imperial court, for emperors were regarded as sons of Heaven, whence came their mandate to rule. The cult was linked to the political legitimation of the ruling class and should be differentiated from the present-day cult of the God of Heaven or Tiangong 天公, the heavenly ruler.[6]

Another source of the confusion of Confucianism with religion is the worship of Confucius as a deity. In the Later Han Dynasty, Confucius was made the patron god of scholars by a decree of the emperor, and from the time of the Northern Qi dynasty (北齊 A.D. 550–577), sacrifices were made to Confucius twice a year, in the Spring and the Autumn. By then there were public temples dedicated to the sage. Nevertheless, from the very beginning, there were Confucian scholars who objected to the deification of Confucius (Smith 1968: 145–147). In 1906, the Manchu government even tried, but unsuccessfully, to introduce the worship of Confucius on an equal level with sacrifices to Heaven (cf. Chan 1953: 4).

Today, Confucius is one of the many Chinese deities. In Malaysia, he is worshiped as a minor deity in a number of temples. Confucius as a deity is associated with education. In Guang Fu Gong 廣福宮 of Penang, where the Goddess of Mercy is the main deity, both Confucius (Kongzi *Gong* 孔子公) and Wen Chang (Wen Chang *Gong* 文昌公) are worshiped as minor deities. The latter is also a god of letters. Before children attend school for the first time, some parents bring them to the temple to worship these deities, hoping that they will do well in their studies (Cheng 1982: 88). However, it would be false for one to argue that there is a religion called Confucianism simply because Confucius is worshiped, for this ignores the fact that Chinese Religion is polytheistic. Chinese Malaysians worship many deities, such as Guanyin (Goddess of Mercy), Guandi Ye, Dabogong and so on. It is ridiculous to classify Chinese worshipers according to the name of

these individual deities and call them Guanyinist, Debogongist or Confucianist.

But the attempt to make Confucianism a state religion in China and the formation of Confucian associations, called *Kongjiao Hui* 孔教会, further perpetuated the fallacy that Confucianism is a religion. Toward the end of the Qing dynasty, China was weak and chaotic. The ruling elite and some scholars therefore proposed to return to the teachings of Confucius in order to restore faith and order. Notable among these was Kang Yuowei 康有為 (1858–1927). Kang's attempt at political reforms through Confucianism ended in failure, but his campaigns had considerable influence both in China and in Southeast Asia. In 1907, a Chinese graduate student called Chen Huanzhang 陳煥章 (1881–1931) formed a *Kongjiao Hui* in New York, which Yen Ching-Hwang (1976: 34) has aptly labelled in English as "Association of the cult of Confucius" rather than "Association of Confucian Religion." Subsequently, similar societies were formed in China.

A further attempt was made to turn Confucianism into a state religion, and a Confucian calendar which began at the birth of Confucius was introduced (cf. Chan 1953: 7).[7] The movement to revive Confucianism and to turn it into a national religion ended in failure, for Confucianism was seen as being too closely associated with the imperial system, which the Chinese abolished in 1911. There was also much opposition against treating Confucianism as a religion. Nevertheless, it was not impossible to organize a religious movement which centered on the worship of Confucius by reorganizing the indigenous beliefs in Heaven, the cult of ancestor worship and so on. But any sect established in this way is different from the Confucian system of philosophy and should not be called Confucianism.

The Confucian revival movement in China had considerable impact on the Chinese in Southeast Asia, especially in Singapore, Malaya and Indonesia. In Singapore and Malaya, the Confucian movement began in 1899 and the early campaigns concentrated on establishing Confucian temples and schools (Yen 1976: 37). This was a direct result of Kang Youwei's reform movement in China. The leaders like Khoo Seok-Wan 邱菽園 (Qiu Shuyuan) and Dr. Lim Boon-Keng were supporters of Kang Youwei. They were also reform leaders in Singapore and Malaya, and the latter, who was a Peranakan (Baba) Chinese, was especially active in calling for social and educational reforms among the Straits Chinese.[8] Confucianism was used as an organizing principle for social reforms, modernization and supporting the reform movement and revolution in China.

The movement declined after the 1911 revolution in China and

was dealt a fatal blow by the May Fourth movement in the 1920s. In fact the criticism of Liang Oichao in 1902, a leading figure of the Confucian revival movement in China, against making Confucianism a national religion, also affected the movement in Singapore and Malaya (Yen 1976: 46). As pointed out by Yen (1976: 45), a weakness of the movement was that it was " neither a religious nor a political movement, but a combination of cultural, religious, and social ferments." Nevertheless, the movement succeeded in promoting the worship of Confucius in the early part of the twentieth century.

The Confucian movement in Singapore had some influence on similar movements in Indonesia (cf. Kwee 1969: 4–6), where there has in fact been a great effort to make a religion out of Confucianism. The Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan (Chinese Association) was formed in 1900 " to promote Chinese education and social reforms," and its main objective was " to improve the customs of the Chinese, insofar as possible in keeping with those principles of the prophet Confucius so necessary to civilized conduct, and to broaden the knowledge of the Chinese language and literature " (Kwee 1969: 6). The formation of THHK was closely linked to the movement to make Confucianism a religion.

Later on, Confucian societies called Khong Kauw Hwee (The Hokkien pronunciation of *Kongjiao Hui*) were established in Java. The first Khong Kauw Hwee was founded in Solo in 1918 (Coppel 1981: 180). In 1923, a central body called Khong Kauw Tjong Hwee 孔教總会 (*Kongjiao Zonghui*) was formed in Bandung. This central body was short-lived and in 1938, a new Khong Kauw Tjong Hwee or " Federation of Confucian Religion Societies " was formed at Solo at the initiative of the Khong Kauw Hwee there.

The present MATAKIN (Majelis Tinggi Agama Khonghucu Indonesia) or the " Supreme Council for the Confucian Religion in Indonesia " was formed in 1955, under the name Perserikatan K'ung Chiao Hui Indonesia (Federation of Confucian Religion Societies in Indonesia), also at the initiative of the Khong Kauw Hwee at Solo (Coppel 1981: 179). Now MATAKIN is a federation which comprises MAKIN (Majelis Agama Khonghucu Indonesia or " Councils of Confucian Religion in Indonesia), *kebaktian* (congregations), and *kelenteng* (Chinese temples), but MAKINs form the key units of this federation. In 1971, there were thirty-six member organizations of MATAKIN (Coppel 1979: 744).

From the very beginning, the leaders of the Confucian movement in Indonesia tried to create a religion comparable to Islam and Christianity. There were Chinese in Indonesia who opposed treating Confucianism as a religion. Nevertheless, from the description of Coppel

(1979), there is no doubt that a religion which centers on the worship of Confucius has been created. This religion or religious sect (if it can be viewed as a unit within the larger Chinese religious system in Indonesia) should be distinguished from Confucianism the system of philosophy. It may be called Confucian religion. This " new " religion is in fact a reorganization and modification of the ancient Chinese religious system. Confucius is seen as a prophet (*nabi*) and *Tian* or Heaven is the supreme Ruler, now regarded as the Almighty God comparable to that in Christianity and Islam. *The Four Books* are accepted as the " Holy Books," and Confucian ethics have conveniently become the ethical teaching of the religion, the words of the Divine. Services are held every Sunday in halls of worship called *litang*. The Confucian religion is therefore an " institutional religion," having an independent theology, an independent form of worship and an independent organization of religious personnel (Yang 1961: 294). In 1965, " Confucianism " was stated in an Indonesian regulation as one of the six officially recognized religions, together with Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hindu-Bali and Buddhism, although since then there has been some resistance to the official recognition of " Confucianism " as a religion (Leo 1978: 59–60, Coppel 1979: 742). More research should be done to find out to what extent this Confucian movement and religion has reached the grass roots and been accepted by the majority of the Chinese in Indonesia. While the Confucian movement in China failed to create a " Confucian religion," the movement in Indonesia succeeded. This is due to historical, political and social factors which are unique to Indonesia, and they need deeper investigation. The relationship between Confucian religion and the traditional Chinese religious system should also be examined.

In Singapore today there is still a Kongjiao Hui. It is called Nanyang Kongjiao Hui 南洋孔教会, and known in English as " Nanyang Confucian Association."[9] It was established in 1917 at the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the members were mostly from this important organization of Chinese businessmen.[10] The association has been inactive and has been held together in the last few years by a founding member (Mr. Cai Duohua 蔡多華) who passed away in 1981 at the age of ninety-three.[11] The altar of Confucius is not placed in a building used exclusively for the activities of the association, but rather is in the building now used by another Chinese religious organization called Shengjiao Hui 聖教会 or " Sacred Union." There are at present fewer than 200 members and the annual membership fee is six Singaporean dollars.

Its only significant activity is the celebration of Confucius' birth-

day, which falls on the twenty-seventh day of the eighth Chinese month. In conjunction with this, there is an annual essay competition, and recently calligraphy has also been included. The birthday worship ceremony is a simple one, involving the presentation of joss sticks and flowers at the altar of Confucius by the chairman of the association. The members who attend the ceremony then bow three times to the portrait of Confucius. No ceremonial robes are used although some people may wear Western suits. The worship is followed by some speeches before a dinner begins. According to Leo Juat-Beh (1977: 84), more people attend the dinner.[12] The association as it is today is certainly not a religious sect. The topics for essay competitions are Confucian ethics rather than religion. The publications of the association also deal with Confucian philosophy, not Confucian religion (cf. Showbin W. Chang 1960, 1962).

There is also a Confucian association in Penang called Binglangyu Kongjiao Hui 檳榔嶼孔教会 or The Confucian Association, Penang (Fig. 1). Its predecessor was Kongsheng Miao 孔聖廟 or Confucian Temple, but we do not know when the temple was built. In 1902, the temple built a Chinese primary school called Kongsheng Miao Zhonghua Xiaoxue 孔聖廟中華小学 and in 1927 the Confucian Association added a secondary school.[13] Even though the temple no longer exists, both the primary and the secondary schools continue to bear the name "Confucian Temple" and in English are known as "Chung Hwa Confucian School." The founding of a Confucian Temple and the establishment of the "Chung Hwa" Chinese schools must be the products of the Confucian movement in Penang before the 1911 revolution in China. The movement was led by pro-Qing merchants, the most prominent among them being Zhang Bishi 張弼士, also known as Zhang Zhenxun 張振勳 (cf. Yen 1976: 48).[14]

At "Chung Hwa" primary school today, there is a hall where the altar of Confucius is kept. This is also the conference room and the office of the Confucian Association, Penang. The association was formed in 1922,[15] and as stated in its consititution its aims include the promotion of the teachings of Confucius, the cultivation of morality, wisdom, filial piety, brotherly love and the promotion of the welfare of members.[16] There is no mention of religion. There are now around 180 members but most are not active. The entrance fee is three Malaysian dollars, the annual membership fee two dollars, and the fee for life membership is thirty dollars. There is a steering committee elected every other year on Confucius' birthday. The association is even less active than the one in Singapore and its only important activity is the celebration of Confucius' birthday. As in the case of Nanyang Confucian Associa-

tion in Singapore, the ceremony is simple, without the use of any ceremonial gowns.

From my observation and interviews, it is obvious that the two Confucian associations described above are not associations of any "Confucian religion," nor do they aim to be so. In fact, it is difficult even to classify them as either religious associations or ordinary associations since they are so inactive. In my opinion, these two associations could be reactivated to form dynamic associations concerned with the study of Confucian philosophy. This is especially so in Singapore now that the government is trying to propagate the philosophy of Confucius.

Above I have noted various misconceptions of Confucianism. It remains to be mentioned that there are some people who view Confucianism not in the theistic sense but in the sense of a non-theistic religion, just as some people consider communism a religion. In this sense, Confucianism is a system of ethics which for centuries have had tremendous influence on the thinking and behavior of the Chinese. Confucianism viewed in this way is not within the scope of our study and is beyond our definition of religion. We should note, however, that there is a relationship between Confucianism and Chinese Religion. The striking feature of Chinese Religion is its *relative* lack of a coherent system of ethics as found in the more "organized" religions like Christianity and Islam. The source of Chinese ethical values is mainly derived from Confucianism, not religion. This is because in traditional Chinese society, religion and ethics "belong to two separate aspects of the institutional structure of traditional Chinese society" (Yang 1961: 291). Nevertheless, Chinese Religion is an important institution which sanctions the ethical system.[17]

Taoist Religion

The term "Taoism" is misleading because it does not distinguish Taoism as a school of philosophy from Taoism as a system of religion. Chinese scholars normally refer to the former as *daojia* 道家 and the latter as *daojiao* 道教. The philosophy of Taoism is represented by two early classic works, *Laozi* 老子 and *Zhuangzi* 莊子. The former, also known as *Daode Jing* 道德経 is commonly believed to be the thought of Laozi, said to be the older contemporary of Confucius. The work *Laozi*, however, is actually much later than the time of Confucius, even though some of the sayings may be the thought of Laozi the man (cf. Fung 1966: 93–94).

Dao (or *tao* in the Wade-Giles system) is a crucial concept in Taoism, and is usually translated in English as "Way." While the *dao* of Confucianism refers to the way of righteousness and benevolence,

the *dao* in Taoism is rather abstract. It refers to the attainment of non-differentiation and identification with nature. When one has achieved this *dao*, one is eternal and there is no place in him for death, since *dao* the unnameable is eternal.[18] Taoist philosophy is rather abstract but its metaphysics facilitates religious reinterpretation. Thus the eighty-one chapter *Daode Jing* became the first sacred book of Taoist religion, with of course much reinterpretation.

A main concern of the early Taoist followers was to find ways to avoid death and become immortals called *xian* 仙 (*hsien* in the Wade-Giles system). This goal of physical immortality and craving for life is certainly against Taoist philosophy, which teaches men not to work against nature. In order to distinguish Taoism as a system of religion from that which is philosophy, scholars on Chinese religion usually refer to the former as " religious Taoism," while Creel (1970: 7) prefers to call it " Hsien Taoism " since the aim of the early followers was to become *xian* or immortals. I prefer to use the term " Taoist religion," which obviously cannot be taken to mean the non-theistic Taoist philosophy. It refers to the system of religion which is known as *daojiao* in Chinese. The term Taoism should preferably be used for the system of philosophy but in certain contexts it may refer to either or both depending on the context it is used.

Taoist religion is of ancient origin, growing out of indigenous Chinese beliefs and occult practices which were systematized by the *Yinyang* school of thought. These occult practices included astrology, the art of the almanac and the five elements (*wuxing* 五行), physiognomy, geomancy (*fengshui* 風水) and various forms of divination (cf. Fung 1966: 129–130). The *fangshi* 方士 or " magicians " of the Qin and Han dynasties further fused ancient indigenous beliefs and practices with the beliefs and practices of longevity and immortality as well as the teachings of *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. The result was a religious system which assumed the concept *dao* as its name. Taoist religion became an organized religion of salvation with its own hierarchy of pantheon at the beginning of the Christian era, when the Han Dynasty was disintegrating. The magicians (*fangshi*) began to call themselves *daoshi* or " Taoist priests " (Fu 1937: 54). Since the " Taoist specialists " accepted *Daode Jing* as their basic scripture and even regarded Laozi as a deity and founder of their religion, it is not surprising that the word *dao* was used to refer to the various Taoist movements (cf. Sun 1965: 4–5). Furthermore, the Chinese word *dao* conveys various concepts and can be used in both the philosophical and religious sense. The name *Daojiao* is of later origin.

While the origin of Taoist religion can be traced back to the classical

religion of China, its formation as a system of religion distinct from other popular beliefs and practices is certainly linked to the association with *Laozi* the work and Laozi the man deified. Taoist works such as *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* were important sources from which Taoist practitioners derived their theistic philosophy. The philosophy of Huang Lao 黃老 of the early Han dynasty must have also influenced many followers of " Taoist religion." This was a form of Taoism based on the works *Laozi* and *Huangdi Sijing* 黃帝四経, a work of the Warring States Period, probably around the fourth century B.C. (cf. Ren 1963: 295–301; Wei 1980: 179–191). Huang Lao refers to the legendary Yellow Emperor called Huangdi and Laozi. In Taoist beliefs, Huang Lao was regarded as a deity, with Laozi as one of his avatars, but eventually Hung Lao was simply regarded as Laozi (cf. Welch 1966: 107, 136).

The arts of longevity and immortality practiced by the *fangshi* were important to the development of Taoist beliefs and practices. As each Taoist leader had different patron deities and practiced different magical cults as well as having different interpretations of Taoist texts, early Taoist religion was never a unified religion. Different Taoist leaders introduced different " folk " beliefs and shamanistic cults into Taoist religion, and this also gave rise to a large number of Taoist deities. For example, the Lord of the Stove, one of the earliest Taoist deities, was introduced by a *fangshi* who practiced alchemy. During the reign of Han Wudi 漢武帝 (140–87 B.C.), a *fangshi* called *Li Shaojun* 李少君 proposed that the emperor sacrifice to the stove as a first step in the transmuting of cinnabar (*dansha* 丹沙) into gold so as to make a drinking vessel. It was believed that drinking out of such a vessel would ensure longevity (Fu 1937: 50, Welch 1966: 99). The Lord of the Stove or Kitchen God has remained an important deity in the Chinese pantheon, and is still worshiped in many Chinese Malaysian households today.

In order to attain longevity and immortality, the early Taoists not only practiced alchemy, but also breath and dietary observances, and observed the art of sexual activities.[19] Such practices are important for preserving vital energy and are important to the hygiene school of " Taoism." A branch of this school was what Welch (1966: 105–112) describes as the interior gods hygiene school. According to this school, the human body has three vital centers, one in the head, one in the chest and another one in the abdomen. These centers are called *dantian* 丹田 or " fields of cinnabar." The body is conceived of as a microcosm of the universe, for the deities of the universe also inhabit the body. The deities must be prevented from leaving the body if one wishes to attain longevity and immortality. Gymnastic exercises are performed to insure the circulation of breath while food which the gods detest

must be avoided. As the body is also inhabited by three worms, one in each field of cinnabar, a serious follower should also avoid eating grains, for these worms, which cause disease and death, survive on them. The practitioners also do good deeds such as repairing roads, for these deeds please the gods.

An important art of the hygiene school is called *neidan* 內丹 or "internal cinnabar," in contrast to the *waidan* 外丹 or "external cinnabar" practiced by the alchemists. Both are means to achieve immortality, but in *neidan*, the art involves achieving the union of breath with semen to create a mysterious embryo in the body. This gives rise to a new immortal body which is released when a person dies (cf. Fu 1937: 131–132; Kaltenmark 1969: 132–136).

The formation of the Taoist movements Taiping Dao 太平道 (The Way of Great Peace) and Wudoumi Dao 五斗米道 (The Way of Five-Peck-Rice) marked the beginning of organized Taoist religion. The leader of Taiping Dao in East China was Zhang Jiao 張角, who led a militant Taoist movement and clashed with the Han government. His doctrine was influenced by the work of Yu Ji 于吉, called *Taiping Qing Ling Shu* 太平清領書. In A.D. 184, Zhang Jiao led an unsuccessful rebellion and was finally executed. This rebellion is known as the Yellow Turban Rebellion, for the rebels wore yellow turbans for identification.

The Five-Peck-Rice sect was established by Zhang Ling, also known as Zhang Daoling 張道陵. He practiced health cults and healed the sick in Sichuan 四川. As he collected five pecks (*wudou*) of rice from each of his followers, the movement was known as Wudoumi Dao. The later Taoists called him Tianshi 天師 or "Heavenly Master," a title which his hereditary successors adopted for themselves too. The movement is therefore also known as Tianshi Dao 天師道 or "The Way of the Heavenly Master." This movement turned militant and was very successful under Zhang Lu 張魯, the grandson of Zhang Ling. In fact the movement led a rebellion in A.D. 189 although Zhang Lu finally surrendered his territory to Cao Cao (A.D. 155–220).

Both Taiping Dao and Tianshi Dao were able to form their own theocracies, having their own hierarchy of militant and religious personnel. Both Zhang Ling and Zhang Jiao honored Huang Lao, practiced health cults and cured sickness. Tianshi Dao also required its members to read *Daode Jing* and stressed the importance of redeeming sin through rituals and doing charity. Since Taiping Dao was suppressed while Tianshi Dao yielded peacefully to the civil authority and was allowed to grow, it is not surprising that the latter flourished and has survived to this day, at least in the form of Taoist priests who claim

to follow the sect.[20]

The first few centuries A.D. were an important period in the development of Taoist religion. This was also the period when Buddhism was expanding in China. At first Taoist religion and Buddhism reinforced one another mutually. Buddhist concepts were expressed in Taoist terms while Taoist religion incorported many ideas from Buddhism. The Taoist pantheon was expanded and the idea of hells developed in Taoist religion. We should remember that other than Taoist religion and Buddhism, there existed a diffused system of popular beliefs and practices (continuity of classical religion) which continuously influenced the two more organized religions. As pointed out by Stein (1979: 68), "the Taoists' attitude toward popular cults contained not only the negative element of prohibition but the positive element of adoption."

Taiping Dao and Tianshi Dao are not the only important early Taoist sects. Maoshan Dao 茅山道 and Wudang Dao 武当道, for example, were two other important Taoist movements (cf. Fu 1937: 97–98). During the Northern Dynasties (北朝), Kou Qianzhi 寇謙之 attempted to reform Tianshi Dao. His reforms were aimed at gettng rid of mercenary and sexual irregularities. He stressed the importance of doing good deeds. A form of sexual irregularity was the group sexual orgy called *nannü heqi* 男女合氣 or "union of breaths between men and women" (cf. Welch 1966 120–121). While Kou's reforms were temporary, his contribution to Taoist religion was significant. Scholars like Fukui Kōjun and Mather even consider him as converting primitive Taoism into an established church (Mather 1979: 108, 122). In fact Kou persuaded the Northern Wei emperor to adopt the Taoist title Taiping Zhen Jun 太平真君 or "Perfect Ruler of Great Peace" as the title for the reign-period of 440–451 (Fu 1937: 95–96, Mather 1979: 118).

Both Taoist religion and Buddhism continued to prosper until the Song dynasty, when the rise of so-called Neo-Confucianism of the Song Dynasty was already influenced in many respects by Taoism (philosophy and religion) and Buddhism. During the twelfth century, there were two main schools of Taoist religion, namely the northern school and the southern school. The northern school was founded by Wang Zhe 王嚞 and was known as Quan Zhen 全真 or "Perfect Realization," also called Chun Yang 純陽 or "Pure Yang." The less important southern school was founded by Liu Haichan 劉海蟾. In the Yuan Dynasty (A.D. 13 century), the Zhang Heavenly Master of Jiangxi 江西 was given jurisdiction over the Taoists in Jiangnan 江南, that is, the territory south of Yangtze River. He called himself "Zhengyi

Zhenren" 正一真人, hence his sect was called Zhengyi or "Proper Unity." This sect traced its origin to the Tianshi Dao of Zhang Ling. Quan Zhen and Zhengyi have remained the main divisions of Taoist religion up to the present. The monks of Quan Zhen stayed in monasteries, were vegetarians, abstained from wine and observed celibacy. The priests of "Proper Unity" did not live in monasteries and were *huoju daoshi* 居道士 or "fire dwellers," that is Taoist priests who stayed at home. They did not observe vegetarian rules all the time. They married and handed down their arts hereditarily. They also performed magical rites and sold talismans (Fu 1937: 207–211, Welch 1966: 145–151).

The famous White Cloud Monastery or Baiyun Guan 白雲觀 in Peking was the center of "Perfect Realization," while the center of "Proper Unity" was Longhu Shan 龍虎山 or "Dragon and Tiger Mountain" in Jiangxi. When the communists took over mainland China, the sixty-third hereditary Zhang Heavenly Master, Zhang Enpu 張恩溥, escaped to Taiwan where he continued to claim to be the descendant of Zhang Heavenly Masters (cf. Welch 1958, Kaltenmark 1969: 146). He died in 1970 and was succeeded by his nephew who is now the sixty-fourth "Heavenly Master" (Vinecour 1981).

In the last few centuries Taoist religion has declined, especially in the Qing Dynasty and in modern times.[21] Today, the huge collection of the Taoist Canon draws the attention of scholars of Taoist religion rather than that of Taoist priests.[22] Taoist religion survives in Taiwan although its future is bleak (cf. Kaltenmark 1969: 147–148). In Malaysia, there is no distinct Taoist sect although Taoist beliefs and practices exist in Chinese Religion, while there are various religious specialists who claim to follow the traditions of sects such as Tianshi Dao or Maoshan. Zhang Daoling, also known as Zhang Tianshi or "Heavenly Master Zhang," is worshiped as a deity in many Chinese temples. He is especially known for his power to exorcise evil, and charm papers of the Heavenly Master tradition are popularly distributed by both Taoist priests and spirit mediums. While there are individuals who may say that they are Taoists, what they actually mean is that they are followers of Chinese Religion.

The Taoist priests in Malaysia are religious practitioners within this general system of Chinese Religion, and not practitioners of separate Taoist sects. Chan (1953: 146) argues that the decline of Taoist religion is "tantamount to the collapse of the people's religion as a whole" since, according to him, Taoist religion is at the foundation of the religion of the masses. This is not true in the case of Malaysia, for the traditional religion of Chinese Malaysians is very much alive. We may say that

Taoist religion grew out of the " popular religion " of ancient China, succeeded in forming an independent religious system which, however, was never really independent from the influence of popular religion, and in modern times was merged again into the popular religion, thus losing its independent identity (as in the case of Malaysia) but enriching the popular religion. Yet before its decline, Taoist religion was, in the words of Kaltenmark (1969: 147), " the only truly national religion " of the Chinese.

BUDDHISM

It is not clear exactly when Buddhism was introduced to China, although we know that by the first century A.D., it had already appeared in the country (Ch'en 1968: 136).[23] By then, Taoist religion had already developed in its primitive form, and the worship of Laozi and the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi) was popular. The Chinese probably worshiped Buddha as they did Laozi and other deities, that is, Buddhism was not seen as a very different religion. In fact, Huandi 桓帝 made sacrifices in the palace not only to Huangdi and Laozi but also to Buddha (cf. Huang Chanhua 1980: 89, Nogami et al 1978: 12). During the Later Han period, there were already foreign monks and scholars who had translated Buddhist scriptures into Chinese. The most famous of these foreign translators was a Parthian called An Shigao 安世高 (cf. Huang Chanhua 1980: 6–8, Ch'en 1964: 43–44). The first few centuries A.D. (from the Later Han Dynasty to the establishment of the Sui Dynasty in 589 A.D.) were a crucial period in the history of Buddhism in China. This was the period when many Buddhist texts were translated by foreign and local Buddhist scholars,[24] and also a period when Buddhism really expanded and took root in China.

The first few centuries A.D. were a period of disunity in China, especially after the fall of the Han Dynasty. By the time of the Eastern Jin 東晉 (317–420), Buddhism in China was divided into Buddhism of northern China and Buddhism of southern China. North China was controlled by people of Turkic and Tibetan origins while South China was under the Eastern Jin government, a continuation of the Earlier or Western Jin (265–316). The non-Han Chinese in North China competed among themselves to rule China. They welcomed Buddhist monks as advisors and promoted Buddhism. It was during this period that the famous Indian monk Kumarajiva (344–413) arrived in China and translated many Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhist texts into Chinese. His translations of such Mahayana Buddhist texts as *Amitabhasutra* and *Lotus Scripture* were influential in the development of such famous Chinese Buddhist sects as the Pure Land School and

Tiantai 天台 (cf. Ch'en 1964: 81–83; Nogami et al. 1978: 18–19). In South China, Buddhism was opposed by people of various interests as a foreign religion, especially the Confucian scholars (Ch'en 1968: 142–145). The intellectual aspects of the religion, however, attracted the elite. Various aspects of Buddhist thought are compatible to Chinese thought. For example, the teaching of *sunyata* or " emptiness " in the *Prajna* or " Wisdom Sutras," which is a Mahayana Buddhist text, is easily compared to the Taoist concept *wu* 無 or " non-being " (cf. Ch'en 1968: 140–141).[25]

Buddhism continued to expand until it reached its golden era in the Tang Dynasty, but not without discrimination and persecution. Throughout the first few centuries A.D., it had to compete with Taoist religion which also had influential people in the courts of the rulers. In 446, Buddhism was persecuted under the reign of Tai Wu Di 太武帝 of Northern Wei, who, as we have seen, adopted a Taoist title for his reign period. During this persecution, many monks were killed and temples destroyed (cf. Ch'en 1964: 147–151, Nogami et al. 1978: 32–33).

Buddhism prospered under the atmosphere of religious toleration during the Tang Dynasty (618–907). According to Ch'en (1964: 213), Buddhism finally came of age during the Tang Dynasty and " it was supported by all elements of society—by the imperial household, the nobility, the great and wealthy families, and the common people." It was during this dynasty that the famous monk *Xuan Zhuang* 玄奘 set off for India in 629 and returned in 645. Toward the end of the dynasty, however, Buddhism was suppressed again.[26] This suppression in 845 A.D. was one of the worst in the history of Buddhism in China, and it marked the beginning of the decline of Buddhism in the country (Ch'en 1968: 156). By then, Buddhism in China had already developed into various schools such as Tiantai 天台, Jingtu 浄土, Huayan 華嚴, Chan 禪 (known in Japanese as Zen) and others.[27] Of these Jingtu or the Pure Land School had the greatest impact on the masses.

After the suppression in 845 and with the rise of Neo-Confucianism during the Song Dynasty (960–1279), Buddhism in China began to decline. During the Song dynasty, only Chan and Jingtu continued to be active (Ch'en 1964: 389). This remained largely so during the Yuan Dynasty (1260–1368) when Lamaism flourished (Nogami et al 1978: 142–143). During the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), Buddhism was even more incorporated into the popular religion of the masses. The process of syncretizing the various doctrines of China was also important. In fact, during this dynasty, Lin Zhao'en 林兆恩 (1517–1598) preached the doctrine of " Three Teachings " and the modern

cult of *Sanyi Jiao* 三一教 or " Three-in-One Teaching " can be traced to his doctrine. He tried to syncretize the so-called *san jiao* or " three teachings "—Confucianism, Taoism (philosophy and religion) and Buddhism—into a single system (cf. Berling 1980).

There were more " syncretic " religious sects during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), most of which were seen by the Manchu government as heretical. There were therefore many religious suppressions during the dynasty. In order to contain " heretical " movements, Confucian doctrines rather than Buddhism or Taoist religion were promoted, even though the early Manchu rulers patronized Lamaism. It may be said that by the nineteenth century, Buddhism in China had been largely reduced to folk religion, and both Amitabha and Guanyin 觀音 (better known in English as the Goddess of Mercy) were popularly worshiped by the Chinese, together with other Chinese deities. Both Amitabha and Guanyin are Buddhist deities of the Pure Land School and the latter is considered the chief assistant of the former. Guanyin is the Chinese expression for the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, but is now more known in the female form than the original male form of the bodhisattva. This transformation occurred during the Tang dynasty under the influence of Tantric Buddhism (cf. Ch'en 1964: 340–342).

This was the state of Buddhism in twentieth century China (cf. Welch 1967) when the communists took over the mainland and dealt a serious if not fatal blow to both Taoist religion and Buddhism. There were of course attempts to revive Buddhism (cf. Welch 1968, Chan 1953: 54–92), but as Chan (1953: 62–63) notes, Chinese Buddhism in the last few hundred years has been reduced to the Pure Land School or more specifically " T'ein-t'ai and Huayen in doctrines and Meditation and Pure Land in practice."

In Malaysia today, " Chinese Buddhism " hardly exists as an independent system of religion and its distinctiveness is to be found only in certain Chinese Buddhist temples and associations. Yet Chinese Religion and Chinese ways of life in general are heavily colored by Buddhism. For example, the Buddhist concept *karma* is often expressed by Chinese Malaysians as when they ask, " What have I done to deserve this? " The Buddhism which has become part of Chinese Religion in Malaysia is essentially that derived from the Pure Land School of Mahayana Buddhism. *Namo Emituofo* 南無阿弥陀佛, the important expression of this school, is familiar to most Chinese Malaysians. This may be translated as " I devote myself entirely to Amitabha Buddha." It expresses the love and the salvation spirit of Amitabha Buddha, the most important Buddha in the Pure Land sect of Chinese Buddhism. It is not uncommon to see stone slabs bearing these characters erected at

certain roadsides in Malaysia (Fig. 2). These are places which attract accidents and where people have been killed. Chinese Malaysians erect these slabs to seek the blessing of Amitabha, the Buddha of the Western Paradise.

There are a number of " pure " Chinese Mahayana Buddhist temples in Malaysia and they are largely based on the Pure Land tradition. For example, in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, there is a fairly large temple of this tradition, called Puh Toh Sze 普陀寺 (Putuo Si Fig. 3).[28] It is situated on a hillock at Jalan Tuaran (sixth mile). The main hall of the temple is called Daxiong Baodian 大雄宝殿. At the main altar, there is a big statue of Amitabha Buddha, with a statue of Bodhisattva Guanyin at his left and Bodhisattva Da Shi Zhi 大勢至 or Mahasthama, who represents the Buddha-wisdom of Amitabha, on his right. They are the " three pure ones " of the Western Paradise. In the hall, there are other smaller statues of various bodhisattva and arhats, called " pusa " 菩薩 and " luohan " 羅漢 in Chinese.[29] A big statue of Sakyamuni Buddha is placed in a small room at the back of the main altar, not visible from outside. In Chinese Buddhist temples or in fact Chinese temples in general, statues of Sakyamuni Buddha are normally not placed in prominent places although smaller ones may be placed on the main altar in front of those of the main deities. This is an influence of the Pure Land tradition.[30] In fact since the Tang dynasty, Amitabha and Avalokitesvara had become more popular than Sakyamuni and Maitreya in Chinese Buddhism (Ch'en 1964: 172).

" Pure " Buddhist temples are few in number. There are, however, many temples which house a large number of both Buddhist and non-Buddhist deities, but whose patron deity or deities are of Buddhist origin. These temples have been described by various people as " Buddhist " temples, and the Chinese word *si* 寺, which refers to Buddhist temples, is normally used to describe them. The main (patron) deity in these marginal Buddhist temples is usually Guanyin, and so worshipers often refer to these temples as " Guanyin temples," known in Hokkien as either Koan-Im Bio 觀音廟 or Koan-Im Theng 觀音亭.

Cheng Hoon Teng (Qingyun Ting 青雲亭) in Malacca is a good example of this kind of temple. There are three altars in the main hall of the temple. The main altar in the center is for worshiping Guanyin, the patron deity of the temple. In front of this altar, there are two statues of Sakyamuni Buddha but they are smaller than the statue of Guanyin. The other two altars are at the left and right of the main altar and at these altars the Taoist deities Tianhou Shengmu 天后聖母 (i.e. Mazu 媽祖) and Tai Sui 太歲 are worshiped, while there

are statues of other deities too, such as Shuixian Niangniang 水仙娘娘 and Xietian Dadi 協天大帝 (more popularly known as Guandi Ye 関帝爺), and others. In the side halls, other deities are worshiped. There are ancestral halls too.

A few monks and nuns live in the temple but they are neither preachers of Buddhist doctrines nor do they represent a particular Buddhist school, although their religious practices are derived from certain traditions. They are religious practitioners who can be seen in the temple, at funerals and other Chinese functions. Nevertheless, the presence of these monks and nuns at the temple make it appear Buddhist, at least when they perform their daily rituals and chanting.

Most marginal Buddhist temples in Malaysia do not have resident monks, but it is fairly common to find a temple of this nature managed by a resident nun. Those without any resident monks or nuns are even less distinct from other Chinese temples. Each Chinese temple, be it of Buddhist or non-Buddhist origin, is distinct according to the patron deities it worships. The worshipers have to adjust their religious behavior according to the traditions of these patron deities. Thus meat dishes are not offered to Buddhist deities, just like pork is not offered to deities of Malay origin.[31] Buddhist temples are built by Chinese worshipers as one of their places of worship. By and large, Chinese Buddhism in Malaysia is part of Chinese Religion rather than an independent religious system. While there are some Buddhist monks and nuns at certain " Buddhist " temples, there is no independent body of Chinese Buddhist laity, except some individuals who may claim to be " pure " Chinese Buddhists.

There are many Chinese Buddhist Associations in Malaysia. Their central body, Malaixiya Fojiao Zonghui 馬来西亜佛教總会, was formed in April 1959 at Kek Lok Si in Penang. It has more than 300 institutional members representing more than 100,000 individual members (Huang Yinwen 1982: 197). There are also Young Buddhist Associations, abbreviated in Chinese as Foqing 佛青. Their central body, " The Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia " or Malaixiya Foqing Zonghui 馬来西亜佛青總会 was established in 1970. The central body has 81 institutional members representing 25,000 individual members and comprises various Young Buddhist Associations throughout Malaysia (Huang Yinwen 1982: 198). The parent bodies of both the Chinese Buddhist Associations and the Young Buddhist Associations are in Penang. Both these Buddhist organizations seek to promote Chinese Mahayana Buddhism, especially Buddhist theology. They organize Buddhist classes and invite local and occasionally foreign monks and Buddhist scholars to give lectures. The young Buddhist

Association of Malaysia publishes a very successful journal in Chinese, called " Buddhist Digest," or *Fojiao Wenzhai* 佛教文摘.

The activities of the Buddhist associations and the Young Buddhist Associations as well as those few Chinese Mahayana Buddhist monks who are concerned with Buddhist teachings may be seen as attempts to bring back " real " Buddhism as an independent religion of the Chinese. Chinese Religion has so far met the needs of early immigrants and the present generation of Chinese Malaysians, but with higher education and more modern influences there is a trend for young Chinese Malaysians to seek a religion which has a more coherent system of theology. In the light of this, Chinese Buddhism in Malaysia may have a future. However, Chinese Buddhism is so tied to Chinese Religion that it is still rather difficult for it to get an independent body of followers.

Theravada Buddhism in Malaysia has learned much from Christianity about Church organization and missionary activities, and has successfully attracted many young people, especially high school and college students. Nowadays it is common to find the youth wing of Theravada Buddhist temples singing Buddhist hymns and playing modern musical instruments in the temples, practices which cater to both the spiritual and the social needs of young people. Buddhist classes are also well organized.

The " church " of Nichiren Daishōnin's Buddhism, a school of Mahayana Buddhism introduced from Japan, is even more highly organized at both the local and national levels and its missionary activities are effective. Most of the followers are Chinese, and in Mandarin this school of Buddhism is called Rilian Zhengzong Fojiao 日蓮正宗佛教. It is an independent system of religion in Malaysia and is still expanding.[32]

Those organizations involved in promoting " Chinese Buddhism " as an independent system of religion of Chinese Malaysians certainly have much to learn from both Theravada Buddhism and Nichiren Daishōnin's Buddhism. Up to now these organizations have not been very successful, especially in the propagation of Buddhist teachings. The Chinese Buddhist organization accepts members freely, and any follower of Chinese Religion who pays the membership fee is called a " member," a Buddhist in name. It is therfore not surprising that various leaders of Chinese Buddhist associations regret that " Chinese Buddhism exists only in the form of reciting Buddha's name and conducting funeral and post-funeral rites " (Huang Yinwen 1982: 198). In fact Teo Eng-Soon (1963: 33, 52) even suggests that drastic measures are necessary in order to get rid of " superstitions and the host of other

nonsense" for the survival of Buddhism.

Conclusion

Chinese Religion in Malaysia should be viewed historically as a continuity in the development of the major religions of China. If we view the original religion of the Chinese (classical religion and its developments) as "popular religion," then the three main religious traditions of China were popular religion, Taoist religion and Buddhism.

The rise of Taoist religion and Buddhism did not displace the popular religion of the Chinese. Instead they were continuously influenced by it and pulled in its direction. At the same time Taoist and Buddhist beliefs and practices were absorbed into the folk religion, and this in turn threatened the purity of both Buddhism and Taoist religion.

Although Taoist religion and Buddhism were more "organized," there was not a strong ideology of exclusiveness as in Islam and Christianity, and the continual intermixing of the three main religious traditions of China was thus more favorable to the success of popular religion. With the gradual decline of Taoist religion and Buddhism in the last few centuries, especially their intellectual aspects, popular religion emerged again as the most viable Chinese religion, despite its rather diffused nature. In fact, it is the diffused nature which accounts for the endurance of popular religion because it is so diffused into the social life of the Chinese masses that its existence does not rely on the existence of any church or missionary activities.[33]

While the Communist revolution dealt a serious blow to all religious faiths on mainland China, traditional Chinese religion in the form of "popular religion" continues to be viable in Chinese communities outside mainland China, especially in Taiwan, Hongkong and Southeast Asia. This is certainly so in Malaysia, where it is already irrelevant to distinguish the popular religion of the Chinese from Taoist religion and even Chinese Buddhism; hence I suggest using the term "Chinese Religion."

While I have described this Chinese Religion as a loosely unified system, we should include in it various more organized Chinese religious sects. Dejiao 德教 (Doctrine of Morals), Zheng Kong Jiao 真空教 (Doctrine of the True Void), Tiandao Jiao 天道教 (Doctrine of the Heavenly Way) and other religious sects should be regarded as branches of Chinese Religion because they basically share its system of symbols, and their followers are followers of Chinese Religion. What is different is that they are more organized, both in terms of doctrines and hierarchy, than the other more diffused cults of Chinese Religion. Their pantheon

may also have been slightly reorganized by the addition of a few new deities.

These sects are products of attempts to syncretize the "three teachings" (*san jiao*) or the "five teachings" (*wu jiao* 五教), the "five teachings" referring to the "three teachings" plus Christianity and Islam. In actual fact, this boils down to addition of Jesus Christ and the Prophet Mohammad as deities in the Chinese religious system rather than any incorporation of Christian and Islamic theology.

The use of the "five teachings" to form Chinese sects is a modern phenomenon and is important in the development of Dejiao in Malaysia and Singapore. The Dejiao Hui or "Dejiao Association" is usually known in English as "Moral Uplifting Society," a name which hardly portrays the religious nature of the organization. This sect worships all the Chinese deities known in Chinese Religion with the addition of Jesus Christ and the Prophet Mohammad. The Jade Emperor we know is considered to have abdicated as ruler of the court in heaven and his throne has been taken over by Guan Sheng Dijun 関聖帝君, who is the new Jade Emperor, more accurately known as "Jade Emperor the Great Heavenly Honored One" (Yuhuang Da Tianzun 玉皇大天尊). He is considered to be the chairman of De De She 德德社, the Association of Deities in Heaven.

Guan Sheng Dijun, Popularly known by Chinee Malaysians as Guan Di Ye 関帝爺, is a famous deified hero of the Chinese, originally a warrior by the name of Guan Yu 関羽 during the second and early third century A.D. In Dejiao, this hero has achieved the highest level of deification. All Dejiao temples (called *ge* 閣) have well defined ways of worship and divination, but they are all practices of Chinese Religion, only more systematized by the sect. It is only proper to consider the various Chinese religious sects, of which Dejiao is an example, as sects within Chinese Religion rather than as independent systems of religions.

It is not surprising that "deities" of other religions have been accepted as "Chinese" deities because of the syncretic and polytheistic nature of Chinese Religion. The ideology of polytheism means that many deities exist in the universe and therefore the existence of deities in other religions must also be accepted. Hence, polytheistic religions are tolerent of other faiths. While the more exclusive religions may deny the existence of Chinese deities, Chinese Religion does not deny the existence of the deities of other religions, but treats them as belonging to the religions of other ethnic groups. This also means that Chinese Malaysians do not see it inappropriate to worship at, say, certain Hindu shrines which are known to be very efficacious.

This does not mean that the Chinese worshipers have incorporated

the Hindu deities into the Chinese religious system. Only persistent and widespread worship of certain non-Chinese deities may eventually lead to the incorporation of these deities into Chinese Religion, such as in the case of Nadugong worship mentioned earlier. While Jesus Christ and the Prophet Mohammad are incorporated as " Chinese " deities in Dejiao, they are not so significant as deities, but are more honored as founders of religions. Outside Dejiao and other " syncretic " sects, the Prophet Mohammad, who is not considered a deity in Islam, is regarded by many Chinese Religion followers as merely a Muslim deity, not worshiped by the Chinese. Jesus Christ is also not treated as a deity in Chinese Religion other than by those sects that base their doctrines on the " five teachings." The Peranakan Chinese (Baba) in Melaka, however, treat Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mother, represented by the statues at Saint Peter's Church, as efficacious Christian deities known to many Peranakan Chinese there as Datuk Kristian or " Christian Deities." Once a year on Good Friday, when the church is open to the public, the non-Christian Baba visit the church to pray to these " Christian deities " to ask for blessing, especially in their children's education. That the " Christian deities " are associated with education may be due to the " traditional " stereotype that colonial masters were well educated and these " Christian deities " were regarded as the deities of the Europeans.

On the whole, Chinese Religion is a diffused system even though it has a number of organized sects. It basically lacks a coherent system of ethics due to the traditional separation of Chinese ethics from religion. Hence what Granet (1975: 146) notes concerning religion in early twentieth-century China still applies here: neither dogma nor clergy presides over the religious life of the Chinese. Compared to Christianity and Islam, Chinese Religion worshipers are more concerned with material welfare than life after death. Even funeral rites are performed not only for the deceased but also for the prosperity and general welfare of the living. This is not a case of man serving the supernatural as much as it is of the supernatural serving man.

When Chinese worshipers give offerings to deities, they expect them to reciprocate by protecting them and fulfilling their requests. Except in special cases, Chinese Malaysians are not bound to worship any particular deity (Fig. 4). They worship those that are popular and can serve them most. This rather secular orientation of Chinese Religion may be due to the rather this-worldly Chinese world view which has been partly influenced by Confucian ideology. Furthermore, Chinese Religion in Malaysia had been shaped by the experience of the immigrants who sought divine protection and blessing in their worldly

ventures. In fact, folk religions grow out of the experience of the masses and therefore reflect their worldly concerns for peace, prosperity and security.

To conclude, I would like to stress again the need to see Chinese Religion as a system. It is a system in the sense that it has an unified symbolic system of its own and the religious behavior of the worshipers show it to be so. If I may repeat Geertz's (1966: 4) words, Chinese Religion is a " system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." One can then study how the symbols are employed to cope with spiritual and social problems, how religious power is derived and used, and how the cults make the religion believable. In other words, various aspects of Chinese Religion can be analyzed systematically as parts of a whole rather than separate unrelated parts.

NOTES

1. This paper is in fact the first part of a rather long draft, of which the second part deals with the pantheon, the nature of worship and Chinese religious sects in Malaysia. My serious attempt to understand Chinese Religion began with my research on the Peranakan Chinese (Baba) in Malacca in 1977. I have so far visited many Chinese shrines and temples as well as interviewed people in various parts of Malaysia. In 1981, I studied a Chinese religious sect called Dejiao Hui and visited the temples of this sect throughout Malaysia and Singapore. My contacts with students and various scholars who are interested in studying or merely understanding Chinese Religion in Malaysia, have convinced me of the urgent need for a paper on the Chinese religious system in Malaysia. While the title mentions only Chinese Religion in Malaysia, I will also refer to the religion in Singapore when it is useful to do so. The Chinese worshipers in Malaysia and Singapore share basically the same Chinese religious system.

2. See Freedman (1974) for a description of the sociological study of Chinese Religion. To briefly mention just a few of the more famous works, the reader is advised to consult de Groot (1892–1910, see 1976), Granet (1922, see 1975), Chan (1953) and Yang (1961). For Malaysia and Singapore the studies of Elliott (1955), Freedman and Topley (1961), and Topley (1952, 1953, 1954, 1956, 1957, 1961) are among the most important ones. There are also three theses, by Choo (1968), Wee (1977) and Cheu (1982). Wee's study is the most interesting because she attempts to view Chinese Religion in Singapore as a coherent symbolic system.

3. In Chinese ritual context, the left and right positions follow the traditional Chinese system, that is, right refers to the right side of a person standing in the living room and facing out of the house directly in front. Left is the seat of honor. Ancestors are low in rank below the deities and their altar is placed on the right side of the principal altar for deities.

4. According to Choo (1968: 137–138), Xian Si Shiye refers to the deified duo

who were good friends of Yap Ah Loy 葉亜来 (Ye Yalai), the pioneer of Kuala Lumpur. In Kuala Lumpur, there is a temple which honors this duo and Yap Ah Loy.

5. *The Four Books* consists of *Daxue* 大学 (The Great Learning), *Zhongyong* 中庸 (The Doctrine of the Mean), *Lunyu* 論語 (Confucian Analects) and *Mengzi* 孟子 (The Works of Mencius). For a translation of these texts, see Legge (1960a, 1960b, 1966) and Chan (1963: 14–114).

6. The worship of the God of Heaven is especially important to Hokkien (Fujian) Chinese who called him Ti^{n}-Kong. His "birthday" on the ninth day of the first Chinese month is widely celebrated by Hokkien families in Malaysia, and to a lesser extent by other Chinese speech groups. He is generally regarded as the same deity as Yuhuang Dadi 玉皇大帝 or "Jade Emperor," the Taoist deity still regarded by Chinese Malaysian worshipers as the ruler in heaven.

7. In January 1978, I saw a number of tombstones bearing Confucian dates at the graveyard in Cipinang Muara, East Jakarta.

8. Straits Chinese leaders, however did not play a significant role in the Confucian movement (cf. Yen 1976: 51). Dr. Lim Boon-Keng was an exception. He published a number of articles on social reforms in *Straits Chinese Magazine*, of which he and Song Ong-Siang were editors.

9. I visited this association on 25 December 1981.

10. The Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce, which was pro-Manchu government, had already supported the Confucian revival movement (see Yen 1976: 46). For a brief history on Nanyang Confucian Association, See Wang (1978).

11. For memorial speeches on Cai Duohua, see *Shengdan Jinian Zhengwen Yu Shufa Bisai* 聖誕紀念徵文与書法比賽 (Birthday Celebration Essay and Calligraphy Competition). Singapore: Nanyang Confucian Association, 1981, pp. 52–57.

12. For a fuller description of the ceremony, see Leo Juat-Beh (1977: 84). I have not attended any ceremony of Confucius' birthday but have interviewed an informant about this.

13. See *Kongsheng Miao Zhonghua Zhongxue Xin Xiaoshe Luocheng Dianli Tekan* 孔聖廟中華中学新校舍落成典礼特刊 (Souvenir Magazine for the Inauguration Ceremony of Confucian Temple Zhonghua Secondary School New Building), 1972: 1.

14. There is a small statue of Zhang Bishi in a glass case at the office of the Confucian Association, Penang.

15. See *Souvenir Magazine in Commemoration of the 2521st Birthday of Confucius and the 48th Anniversary of the Confucian Association, Penang*, 1970, p. 13. The magazine is published in Chinese and some English.

16. The description here is based on a copy of the constitution (in Chinese) given to me by the Secretary of the association. I interviewed the secretary, who is a retired headmaster of "Chung Hwa" primary school, on 19 April 1982. The secretary rejects the idea that the association promotes Confucian religion. According to him, the members either honor Confucius or worship him as a deity, and the "Straits Chinese" are especially serious about praying to him whenever they enter the office.

17. See Yang (1961: 244–293) for a detailed description on the religious aspects of Confucianism and its relationship to the traditional moral order. See also Yang (1957).

18. See Chapter 16 and 50 of *Daode Jing*. There are many English translations. See, for example, Legge (1959) and Chang Chung-Yuan (1975). For a brief discussion on the Taoist concepts of being (*you* 有), non-being (*wu* 無) and non-action (*wuwei* 無為), see Fung (1966: 93–117).

19. During the first four centuries A.D., there were two important works on

Chinese alchemistry. The first one is *Can Tong Qi* 参同契 (approximately second century A.D.) by Wei Boyang 魏伯陽. The second is *Bao Pu Zi* 抱朴子, by Ge Hong 葛洪 (284–364) of the Eastern Jin 東晉 Dynasty. In the latter work, Ge Hong brought together the different traditions of Taoist beliefs and practices. It is an important work on Taoist Immortals and the methods of attaining longevity and immortality. It also contributed much to the development of Taoist religion.

20. For descriptions on the rise of collective Taoist movements, see Fu (1937: 54–98), Saso (1978: 17–61), Welch (1966: 113–123) and Yang (1961: 112–115). On the history of Taoist religion, Fu's work (1937) is the most important and has facilitated more research by other scholars. Xu's paper (1927) is a very useful work on the early development of Taoist religion. Of the Western works, Maspéro's book (1950) is most known, while Welch's book (1957, see 1966) is especially important to those who have no access to Maspéro's original work which is written in French. Maspéro's book has now been translated into English as *Taoism and Chinese Religion* (1981), but it is not yet available in Malaysia. Today we have a long list of works on various aspects of Taoist religion in different languages. See, for example, the articles in Welch and Seidel (1979). See also Sakai and Noguchi (1979) on Taoist studies in Japan. I should also mention the comprehensive study on the Taoist Canon by Chen Guofu (1963).

21. See Chan (1953: 146–156) on the reasons for the decline.

22. On the Taoist Canon, see Chen Guofu (1963) and Ofuchi (1979).

23. For a general introduction to Buddhism, see Schumann (1973).

24. In his description of Buddhism during Later Han, Three Kingdoms, Western Jin, Eastern Jin, Southern Dynasties and Northern Dynaties, Huang Chanhua (1980: 3–53) has mentioned the many texts translated by these scholars.

25. I should mentioned two famous monks in South China, namely Hui Yuan 慧遠 (334–416) and Fa Xian 法顯. The former was later regarded as the founder of the Pure Land School (Ch'en 1964: 103–112). The latter was the first Chinese pilgrim not only to go to India (in 399) but also to return with Buddhist scriptures (414).

26. For a description of Buddhism during the Tang Dynasty, see Ch'en (1964: 213–240, Nogami et al. 1978: 55–96).

27. For descriptions of the various schools of Buddhism in China, see Ch'en (1964: 297–364), Zhongguo Fojiao Xiehui (1980: 227–394).

28. I investigated this temple on 28 August 1981.

29. "Arhats" or "arahants" are beings who have attained enlightenment and liberation through instruction in Buddhist teachings. "Bodhisattvas" are beings who are striving for enlightenment or who have obtained it but postponed their *nirvana* in oder to help to liberate other beings. For a brief description of the Pure Land School and Mahayana Buddhist deities, see McDougall (1956: 18–25).

30. Of course there are certain Chinese Buddhist temples where Sakyamuni Buddha is given prominence. For example, in the temple of The Sandakan (Sabah) Buddhist Association in Sandakan, the statue of Sakyamuni Buddha is placed in the most prominent place at the principal altar, with the statue of Amitabha to his right and the statue of the Buddha of Medicine (Yaoshi Liuli Guang Rulaifo 薬師琉璃光如来佛) to his left. According to the resident nun I interviewed on 30 August 1981, this temple was founded by the monk Shi Daguang 釋大光 from Hualian (華蓮) Temple in Hong Kong.

31. In Malaysia, Malay identity is equated with Muslim identity since Malays are Muslims.

32. I have done some preliminary research on Nichiren Daishōnin's Buddhism and interviewed the leaders of Nichiren Shōshu 日蓮正宗 in Kuantan (Pahang) on

15 November 1980. I also attended a religious meeting there.

33. However, Yang (1961: 300) argues the contrary. He argues that Chinese diffused religion does not have the enduring quality of the universal religions due to its dependence on the fate of the secular institutions. He argues that in the modern period, the emphasis on science has caused the decline of diffused religion which to him "seems to have lost irrecoverable grounds." We should note that the situation in modern China is unique because of the anti-religion ideology of Communism. It is the Communist ideology which has caused the weakness of religions in China.

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Fig. 1. Confucius' altar at The Confucian Association, Penang. (19 April 1982)

Fig. 2. A stone slab bearing the characters *Namo Emituofo* by the roadside at Sungai Penjuring New Village in Pahang (9 April 1981).

Fig. 3. Puh Toh Sze Buddhist Temple in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. (28 August 1981).

Fig. 4. Domestic altars in the living room of a Hokkien Chinese family in Sungai Ayam, Batu Pahat, Johor. The patron deity is Dabogong 大伯公 or God of Prosperity. On his far right side is the altar of ancestors. In front of the picture of Dabogong and his assistants are the statues of Ne Zha 哪吒 (also known as San Taizi or The Third Prince), Guanyin or the Goddess of Mercy, and the black statue with long hair and beard is Fazhugong 法主公, a popular deity among the Hokkien of Yongchun 永春 descent, especially among the Zhang 張 families for the surname of the deity is Zhang. (8 May 1983).