



**REVIEW ARTICLE** by Tatu, R. (Romanian Orthodox Church, Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa, South Africa) : A review analyzing research already conducted on a primary source. This review summarizes the current state of research on the given topic by **John Lagerwey, *Paradigm Shifts in Early and Modern Chinese Religion: A History*, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2019, 293 p.**

In an increasingly globalized world, along with other fields of research, the study of religions is technically speaking subjected to changes as well, considering the evolution of society and the challenges posed by intercultural relations. Thus, the linguistic instrument still remains the first tool to be used toward deciphering the inner semantics and concepts of any religious system. In the foreword for volume 16 of Max Müller's monumental collection *The Sacred Books of the East* (published by Oxford University Press in 1882), Rev. Prof. James Legge, who was a famous sinologist, Christian missionary in China and the first Professor of Chinese at Oxford University, mentioned a controversy around the translation of the name of God used in the Chinese texts, realizing after extensive research that, e. g., the terms "Ti" and "Shang Ti" (which are actually "dì", 帝, and "shàng dì", 上帝) designated "the same concept which our fathers expressed by God" (page XX).

I would like to mention this interesting fact as a connection, at the outset, because, as shown in the present book for review *Paradigm Shifts in Early and Modern Chinese Religion: A History*, edited by Brill first in 2018 (the present edition in 2019), authored by the renowned scholar in Chinese studies Prof. John Lagerwey (who recently retired from the Centre for China Studies, Chinese University of Hong Kong) this is one of his most important reflections: the essential background of Chinese culture and civilization is the religious one: "*religion is just as integral a part of Chinese history as it is of any other civilization*" (Preface, p. VII).

The present volume is part of a collection of eight volumes, offering a profound interdisciplinary presentation of Chinese religious thought, coordinated mainly by Prof. Lagerwey – practically a synthesis of the collection - and constitutes an outstanding and unique contribution for the academic study of Chinese religion (-s). It is structured in four chapters, following the different periods of Chinese cultural-religious history: Intellectual Change in the Warring States and Han (481 BC – 220 AD), Religious Transformation in the Period of Division (220-589 AD), Religion and Thought in the Song, Jin and Yuan (960-1368), Structuring Values (1850-2015), preceded by a Preface and Preliminaries and followed by another chapter of conclusions, bibliography and index.

Prof. Lagerwey approaches, with abundant literary and ethnographical sources, ancient folk religions, going through the notion of divine mandate (天命) which entitled kings to rule (as during the Zhou dynasty), the practices of self-cultivation as means of reaching the *real personhood*, the conflicts of the Three Teachings (三教, sanjiao - Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism) with shamanism and ancient folk cults, Daoism, the Buddhist "conquest" of China and Confucianism, ending with the modernity period, when religion came to be considered more of a superstition (迷信, mixìn), leaving space to the political ideology of the ruling party.



The cosmological perception of early Chinese religions, gravitating around the notion of “tiān”, 天 (sky, heaven) intimately pervades all the stages of evolution in Chinese religious thought, as source of moral law (see also H. Nakamura, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India, China, Tibet, Japan*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1991, p.277). This character, essentially speaking, can be interpreted as depicting the intimate connection of sky/heaven and humankind (二, two, which suggests, in my humble opinion, the start of a communion and 人, human being or person, the aspiring entity, thus the character 天 representing the conjunction, spiritually speaking, of the two entities; therefore Chinese religiosity is obvious if we grasp the morphology of this character, and morphology entails meaning as well, after all).

As the author states, the book is built around the idea of a paradigm shift and a synthetic vision of Chinese religion as “*quintessential expression of Chinese society and culture*” (p.258), but does not pretend to offer the entire history of Chinese religion. In reality, we speak of more religions, practices and doctrines in China, borrowing elements from or interacting with different and dynamic philosophical systems which emerged in Chinese history. The author presents the cultural process of “modernization” as involving three steps: rationalization, interiorization and secularization as parts of the ongoing cycle of history. That is why, following a change of paradigm developing in Chinese religion and culture, this “-ization” process is traced in the four key periods mentioned by the chapters, conceptualizing the word “religion” as “*the practice of structuring values and paradigm shift as a radical makeover of these values in a given society at a given time*” (p.195).

It is interesting to see, among other things, that beyond secularization, the Chinese society still proves to remain a religious one, even when the traditional clergy was displaced (the religious was taken out of the public and moved in the private sphere) and new religious lay movements emerged, like 一贯道 (Yiguandao). One substantial difference is made between the Western philosophical thought oriented on a more theoretical subject preoccupied with the authentic knowledge and an ethical subject which is more concerned with a *transformative process of being*, a feature more prevalent in Chinese thought.

Mainly, the dialectic of letter versus spirit does not apply to China, where there is no literalism, and there is more of a preference for ritual over discourse, as we can for example see in Confucianism (礼教, “teaching of the Rites”), wherein the archaic rituals were important in the process of self-cultivation (p.259). Therefore, Chinese thought seems to be more oriented on interiorization, on the inner practice of perfection towards achieving the authentic 仁 (ren, humaneness). “(...) *we must go beyond individual thinkers or even movements to examine the basic metaphysical “bent” of Chinese culture. What we have seen throughout our survey of the four periods of paradigm shift is the intense concentration of the entire Chinese tradition on the inner world, the world of the human subject*” (p.271). The book covers essentially all the main aspects of Chinese religiosity in a nutshell and it constitutes an invaluable guide for extant academic research on Chinese thought.