

Lexicon of self-studied indigenous beliefs till July 2017

– Citations from my works

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A. Introduction

In this paper, I summarized the work I conducted on researching indigenous beliefs. It mostly focusses on the theology of the beliefs rather than on rituals or practises, as they were mainly reported to me in video chats by first hand accounts all over the world, if no other source is given. These researches were embedded in several articles, which I cite here in this lexicon. It is intended to be a summary of my research and therefore, I did not do a new further research especially for this article. The researched religions can be grouped in several categories. Caodaism and Chondoism are text religions, while Adige Xabze, Etseg Din, Georgian mythology, and Rodnover belong to Paganism. Bön, Korean Shamanism, Meishanjjiao, Moism, Native American Shamanism, and Tengrism are shamanic traditions.

Laotian Animism is a form of animism, though it also shares a lot of features that are rather of shamanistic nature. Chinese folk religion, Nung religion, and Vietnamese folk religion are hybrid forms that exist in different varieties. The Red Banner movements take a special place since they are an informal political movement that was mainly created out of shamanic belief, but also shares features of Paganism.

I hope that the following quotes from my works make a quick research on topics concerning indigeneous religions easier, so that one must not search for my researches in the original articles for hours.



B. Definitions

Text religion: "[...] might be defined as written tradition. Thus, it is a very formalised, sometimes even dogmatised, form of belief, as there are one or more holy books that determine the views of the believer. Though lay following might appear, most of these religions have organised institutions that build societies."

Paganism: "Paganism has no traditional holy scriptures or traditional associations, and as a result paganism is fluid, vividly and easily reformable to nowadays society, making it a dynamic system of belief, since transmissions might differ from era to era."

Shamanism: "Unlike paganism which often has a folklore transmission, shamanism is more exclusive, the theological background is known to the whole society, but the worship is only known by the shaman who can instruct the community. Unlike paganism, where gods are often transcendent beings, shamanism regards the shaman to be a medium (like a priest), however, the spirit might probably live within the shaman and he or she is possessed by it. [...] The shaman works as an assistant to mediate between the immanent and transcendent world, in most shamanic traditions, the spirit lives within the shaman, thus he represents the spirit in the world."

Totemism: "Totemism is the belief in sacred objects, such as animals or mythical supernatural creatures. Totemism is the link between shamanism and animism. In shamanism, objects probably might be reference for veneration as well, such as mountains which are regarded to be holy for Koreans, since the spirits live in there. However, totemism regards the object itself to be holy, the object and the spirit are unseparable."

Animism: "[...] is a belief in spirits, however, there often is a lack of deep rooted theology. Instead, everything is transmitted through folklore or education. Thus, there often is a lack of an almighty God, as well as sacral buildings. While shamanism has a strong cosmology and mythology, animism focusses on genealogy, exorcism, and folklore. [...] unlike shamanic rituals which are often taught from one shamanic generation to another and practised collectively, the animistic belief is decentralised and varies a lot from region to region and often serves as a social function in a local community. The belief is thus often

restricted to the community, some ceremonies are more individual and play a role in families, other ceremonies are to keep together the collective and conducted collectively.”

All definitions adopted from:

Schmitz, Timo: The Different Forms of Religion, self-published online article, 16 March 2017

C. Lexicon of Beliefs

I. Adige Xabze

Adige Xabze is the moral code of the Circassians and the basic ground of Circassian society. For Circassians, “It is their code of honour and is based on mutual respect and above all requires responsibility, discipline and self-control. Adyghe Xabze functions as the Circassian unwritten law yet was highly regulated and adhered to in the past. The Code requires that all Circassians are taught courage, reliability and generosity. Greed, desire for possessions, wealth and ostentation are considered disgraceful (‘Yemiku’) by the Xabze code. In accordance with Xabze, hospitality was and is particularly pronounced among the Circassians. A guest is not only a guest of the host family, but equally a guest of the whole village and clan. Even enemies are regarded as guests if they enter the home and being hospitable to them as one would with any other guest is a sacred duty”. [A] However, in the past it also regulated the religious beliefs, and nowadays Circassian Neopaganism is undergoing a revival. Adige Xabze has strong similarities with Buddhism, as the word Xabze (Xaбзэ) itself already reveals, at it means ‘word of the cosmos’ and thus comes close to dharma, which means law – especially as Xabze functioned as moral law for centuries and still plays an important role. The cosmic idea might also have slight parallels to Daoism. The grounds of Circassian paganism were orally transmitted and later written down in the Nart Saga, which influenced the whole Caucasus. Like other Caucasian Neopaganistic concepts – such as Estseg Din (or Iron Din) of the Ossetians – Adige Xabze is monotheistic. Their God is called Tha (Тхэ). He “is the creator of the Laws of the Universe, which represent His expression. T’ha gave man an opportunity to understand the laws, bringing him closer to God. T’ha does not interfere in everyday life, presenting man with freedom of choice. T’ha does not take any shape, He is Omnipresent, ‘His spirit is scattered throughout space’.” [B] He is

symbolised through a 'T' (Т-дамыгъэ) [C], the cosmos is represented by a wheel (compare the wheel of life in Buddhism).

[A] ____: Adyghe Xabze, <http://thecircassianheritage2011.webklik.nl/page/xabze> (retrieved on 31 May 2014)

[B] ____: Khabze – The religious system of Circassians, Xabze Info, http://habze.info/publ/the_religious_system_of_circassians/1-1-0-51 (retrieved on 31 May 2014)

[C] ____: Хабзэ – Т-дамыгъэ / Т-символ, Xabze Info, http://habze.info/publ/t_damygeh_t_simvol/1-1-0-25 (retrieved on 31 May 2014)

Adopted from:

Schmitz, Timo: The Different Forms of Religion, self-published online article, 16 March 2017

II. Bön

Bön (བོན་, 苯教) is the native religion of the Tibetans that existed far before Buddhism came to Tibet. It is often compared with shamanic traditions and religions. Some scientists doubted that Bön existed in Tibet before Buddhism. A widespread conspiracy theory is the idea, that Bön was originally a Buddhist tradition that was discriminated by Buddhists and thus regarded as a new religion. I think, we should be very careful with such theories, since we do not know much about early Tibetan history. However, it would be very likely that Tibetan Buddhism mainly was shaped by Bön or another form of shamanism between the 7th and 11th century. Modern Bön religion goes back to Tonpa Shenrab Miwoche, sometimes referred to as "Buddha Shenrab" who "occupies a position very similar to that of Śākyamuni in Buddhism, but [...] we have no available sources with which to establish his historicity, his dates, his racial origin, his activities, and the authenticity of the enormous number of books either attributed directly to him or believed to be his word" [A].

He gave a vow that he guides all people to find liberation through compassion. According to the legend, he lived before Siddharta Gautama and, like him, was of royal origin. He probably refused to be the king's successor around the same age than Siddharta Gautama did, and like him, he wanted to find enlightenment.

In his 'Nine ways of Bön' we find interesting similarities and differences concerning Buddhism. The Nine Ways of Bön are: Way of Prediction, Way of the Visual World, Way of Illusion, Way of Existence, Way of a Lay Follower, Way of a Monk, Way of Primordial Sound, Way of Primordial Shen, Way of Supreme Natural Condition.

The Way of Prediction (which deals with astrology and rituals), the Way of Illusion (which explains the rituals and energies) and the Way of Existence (explains funeral rituals) seem to be of traditional Tibetan belief, while the Way of the Visual World (concerning the universe) is based on psychophysics, and the Way of the Primordial Sound (close to mandala practise), the Way of Primordial Shen (which is close to samaya), and the Way of Supreme Natural Condition (which is about Dzogchen) are close to Buddhism. The Way of a Lay Follower and the Way of a Monk seem to be specific for the religious organization of Bön.

So the closest practises to Buddhism are mandalas, samaya and dzogchen. Like in the Buddhist trikaya, Tonpa Shenrab Miwoche has three forms.

*The main philosophy of Bön which is **Dzogchen** (which means 'great perfection') has the goal to search for the 'natural condition'. It is widespread not only in Bön, but also in the Nyingma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, which is the oldest form of Buddhism in Tibet, and thus a sign that the practises of Bön were already widespread in the 7th or 8th century and Bön religion probably already existed or was in its founding state. It is possible, that Bön is an institutionalisation of loose local belief, brought together in one single 'theology' during Yarlung dynasty. The Dzogchen tradition was brought to Tibet by Padmasambhava who arrived in Bhutan at about 747. According to the old legend, Shantarakshita (founder of the Yogacara-Svatantrika-Madhyamika school who united all three philosophies into one) was invited to Tibet [B] to teach the Buddhist dharma. Demons however avoided the dharma to be taught and thus Padmasambhava was invited to subdue the demons [C]. The demons were not eliminated but had to submit to the dharma. This led to an important key principle of Tibetan Buddhism, saying one shall not eliminate negative forces but convert them into useful energy fueling one's own spiritual journey. [...] Dzogchen practise is believed to be founded in the 1st century CE in India, being introduced between the 7th and 9th century in Tibet (according to Nyingma sources). Adherents of Bön believe instead that Dzogchen was taught by Tonpa Shenrab Miwoche thousands of years ago in West Tibet. However, this legendary account was spread between the 11th and 14th century and thus has no historical importance.*

*The main key of Dzogchen philosophy is **Rigpa** (རིག་པ།), having the same meaning than Sanskrit 'vidya', meaning knowledge. The Rigpa is seen as basic knowledge, being the opposite of marigpa (in Sanskrit 'avidya') meaning ignorance. The understanding of vidya/ avidya comes*

from Hinduism and has a large importance in Indian philosophy, where it is seen as a spiritual form of knowledge, compared to the concept of 'soul'. In Hinduism, an atman can gain knowledge if one knows vidya. In Buddhism, vidya represents non-dual awareness, being present in both Theravada and Vajrayana tradition. According to Erik Pema Kunsang "Unknowing (marigpa) is not knowing the nature of mind. Knowing (rigpa) is the knowing of the original wakefulness that is personal experience" [D]. So funnily, the main essence of philosophy comes from Buddhism, rather than from local belief. [...] The Bön cosmological philosophy however is mostly based on local belief. In Bön, one shall reach a realm which is beyond duality. This non-dual realm is called **Tagzig Olmo Lung Ring**. It is believed that Tagzig comes from 'Tajik', while Olmo Lung Ring, probably refers to the city Olmaliq in nowadays Uzbekistan. Thus, people believed that the non-dual realm is located in Central Asia (although the early myths describe this realm to be near Mount Kailash), unlike the early Buddhists who believed the mythical Mount Meru to be the center of the world. However, like in most religions (including Buddhism) believing in heavens, paradises or realms, this realm is not a physical place that can be located, but a place that has to be experienced by spirituality.

The main deity in Bön is called **Shenlha Ökar** (in Chögyam Trungpa's terma referred to as 'Shiwa Ökar'), representing the sambhogakaya of Tonpa Shenrab Miwoche. The word 'shen' means priest or shaman, sounding close to Chinese 'shén' (神) meaning 'spirit' or 'deity'. Others refer to him as "corresponding exactly to the Buddhist category of dharmakaya" [E]. According to other sources, **Kuntu Zangpo**, the primordial Buddha of Bön, is regarded as 'dharmakaya'. So all what we can say for sure is that Shenlha Ökar is a kind of embodiment of the founder of Bön. In Bön belief, Shenlha Ökar has created the world [and] is often compared to Amitabha.

Another important deity is **Yeshe Walmo**, the protector deity of sacred texts. During religious struggles between Bön and Buddhist adherents, the Bön texts were hidden in the mountains to be kept safe. According to the Bön belief, Yeshe Walmo kept the texts safe. She is also called to help when one is in trouble and helps solving all kinds of problems. Thus, people believe that all Bön wisdom is united in her. There are several parallels to Bhaisajyaguru and Jainraisig. The male equivalent to Yeshe Walmo is **Sidpa Gyalmo**.

Bön adherents believe in dakini (in Tibetan: **Kazhoma**, མཁའ་འཕྲོལ་མ), which means 'sprit', as well as in **tertöns** (གཏེར་སྟོན་, gter ston), which are people discovering termas ('hidden treasures'). Termas are the key teachings of both, Vajrayana Buddhism and Bön. A tertön normally needs a sexual energy to be able to discover the terma [...].

*Bön can be taught through a spiritual teacher or non-monastic priest – which in Tibetan tradition is called Ngagpa (སྒྲུབ་པ།, sngags pa) – as well as through a monastic master. Same as in Vajrayana, followers of Bön conduct pilgrimages to holy places to perform dedication to the gods and spirits. These pilgrimages are called **Kora** (སྐོར་ར།, skor ra).*

*The above mentioned practises of Bön are part of Yungdrung-Bön, often called 'eternal Bön', which was founded at least after the 7th century. It can be seen that there has been a huge practical exchange between **Yungdrung-Bön** and Nyingma, the latter one incorporating several aspects of Indian philosophy. The pantheon of both religions was adopted to each other. The already existing Bön deities were compared to the Buddhist deities, and Buddhist deities of Nyingma were legitimated with their existence in Bön. Therefore, the spirits of Bön became a part of early Tibetan Buddhism, and the role of the buddhas and bodhisattvas was adopted in Bön. To understand this development, one has to know **Black Bön**. Black Bön was the pre-Buddhist shamanic tradition in Tibet. Although it is very controversial nowadays whether this had to do anything with nowadays understanding of Bön, the priests in pre-Buddhist era were called 'Bönpa'. In Black Bön, soteriology played a huge role. There was the belief in a life after death. To enjoy this life after death, there were complex funeral rituals and probably ancestral devotion. Despite the importance of funeral rituals, there is emphasis on magic. It is believed, that the whole nature consists of souls that can be influenced and conciliated.*

Therefore, the belief in gods, spirits and demons is very widespread. Magical rituals include experiences during trance, voyages to the underworld, influencing the weather, contacts to spirits, offerings to the gods, protection not to be attacked by demons. These traditions are alive until today. In Yungdrung-Bön, it can be clearly seen that it emphasizes the funeral rites and the believe in souls. In Tibetan tradition, it is believed that the soul comes back home, and therefore after the death of a family member, one creates a vessel for the dead person for the soul to rest. The soul would then come back to the house and searches its vessel where it will stay in peace, close to its family.

Concerning religious practise, Yungdrung-Bön has nothing to do with Black Bön, but instead focusses on Nyingma-Buddhism. Mantras were adopted, same as the ideas of being able to practise one's own mind. [...] Same than in Buddhism, there are two main principles in Bön. While it's the Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism, in Bön it is the 'four gates and the treasure room' and the 'nine ways'. [...]

*The third school of Bön, the "**New Bön**" is often regarded as a school of Buddhism, since it's a syncretisation of Yungdrung-Bön and Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism. The education*

of a monk is almost the same and after graduating, he receives the 'geshe' title, just like in Tibetan Buddhism. Devotion through icons and mantra practise are almost the same. The pantheon of deities is very Buddhist, sometimes key figures of Buddhism are venerated, such as Padmasambhava. The New Bön goes back to the 14th century, the final stage of development in Tibetan Buddhism. [...] Like in many shamanic traditions, Bön deities did not only have a human-like appearance, but also could have other appearances, such as the bird Khyung, a mythical being with a head of a bull. The Buddhist deity Pelden Lhamo (also known as Shri Devi) is probably adopted from Bön and only venerated in Tibetan Buddhism, where she represents a dharmapala. Since the belief of spirits is traditionally widespread, the interpretation of spirits and ghosts in Buddhist realm is probably interpreted differently, than in traditional Buddhism.

[A] Karmey, Samten G.: A General Introduction to the History and Doctrines of Bon, in: Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko, No. 33, Tokyo 1975, pp. 175-176

[B] Snelling, John: The Buddhist handbook – A Complete Guide to Buddhist Teaching and Practice, London 1987, p. 198

[C] Snelling (1987), p. 196-198

[D] Kunsang, Erik Pema: Quintessential Dzogchen, 2006

[E] Kvaerne, Per: The Bon Religion of Tibet – The Iconography of a Living Tradition, 2001, p. 26

Adopted from:

Schmitz, Timo: Rationalism versus Spiritualism and Atheism versus Polytheism in Buddhism, Berlin: epubli, 2015



III. Caodaism

In Caodaism (高台教), a local Vietnamese religion, there is one god called 'Cao Đài Tiên Ông Đại Bồ Tát Ma Ha Tát'. It puts together the Confucian concept of heaven (Cao Dai), the Taoist principle (Tien Ong), and the enlightened spirit of Buddhist Bodhisattva (Dai Bo Tat Ma Ha Tat) all together.

Adopted from:

Schmitz, Timo: From the creation of the world to to the eschatology in Buddhism (3 September 2016), in: Collected Online Articles in English Language 2013-2016, Berlin: epubli, 2017

In Caodaism, Cao Đài is the God, who shares Christian attributes like being almighty and acts according to its will. However, at the same time, one should be careful to call it Christian-borrowed, since Confucianism also knows the 'divine will'. Anyways, we can call Cao Đài Christian-influenced. Caodaism took the threefold revelation of Buddhism. In Buddhism, it is reported that there are three stages of the revelation: the Earliest (through Dipankara Buddha), the Recent (by Gautama Buddha), and the One to Come (by Maitreya who will become a buddha). In addition, Laozi and Confucius are emphasised as important sages who have received divine power. Caodaism was formally established in the 1920s, and thus also venerates prominent people that can not be found traditionally in East Asian belief, such as Jesus, Lenin and Shakespeare [A].

Caodaism is hierarchical and also incorporates the principle of yin and yang, where the creator is seen to be male, and the mother of humanity is female. Hoskins argues that "Caodai religious teachings provided a response to these Orientalist binaries, initially through a simple inversion of their terms, in which the Taoist Jade Emperor was recognized as the Supreme Being who had sent all other religious teachers (Buddha, Confucius and Lao Tse), and was also the father of Jesus. Through the image of the Left Eye of God, Caodaism created a masculine monotheism, activist and dynamic, which would absorb Christian teachings into a more encompassing Asian pantheon, and within which the Vietnamese people would be given the spiritual mission to spread this message and unite the nation. The radicalism of this religious vision was initially played down in presentations of its doctrine in French, where the symbolism of the left eye as 'yang' (dương) --- forceful, positive and expansive---was not revealed. Instead, messages to the French government stressed the

concern of elite groups that 'traditional values' had become corrupted, and a return to moral standards was in order." [B].

[A] Hoskins, Janet Alison: *The Divine Eye and the Diaspora – Vietnamese Syncretism Becomes Transpacific Caodaism*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2015, pp. 83-85

[B] Hoskins, Janet Alison: "God's Chosen People" – Race, Religion and Anti-Colonial Struggle in French Indochina, Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore, 2012, p. 3

Adopted from:

Schmitz, Timo: Brief overview on Vietnamese folk religion and its influence on other religions in Vietnam (10 September 2016), in: *Collected Online Articles in English Language 2013-2016*, Berlin: epubli, 2017

IV. Chinese folk religion

*The basis in Chinese traditional philosophy is the **soul**. There are two important kinds of soul, one is **hun** 魂, the other one is **po** 魄. Every human being has a hun and a po soul, which is a dualistic soul principle, which can be compared to yin and yang in Taoism. While the hun soul leaves the body after death, the po soul remains within the body. Sometimes, the hun is seen as subliminal self, such as described by Giles in 1912 [A]. [...] While hun is often regarded to be working close with the life essence qi 气 in combination with the yang 阳, as well as leading human nature and its intuition, po works with the qi of the yin 阴 and is responsible for emotions, according to the ancient Baihuatang, being composed in the latter half of the Han dynasty, and thus in the early phase of organised Taoism. [...] The world where humans live is called **yangjian** 阳间, while the underworld is known as **yinjian** 阴间 which again shows the dualism of Yin and Yang. After death, the spirits leave yangjian to go for yinjian. [...]*

[T]here are several rituals concerning a contact between the living and the dead, such as sending one's ancestral spirits some money to make life better in the world thereafter. People go to buy traditional designed paper money (sometimes called "hell bank note") – which is not real money to buy something in a shop, but only paper money which is burnt in front of graves. People believe that this way the money will give luck to the ancestors. In Mandarin, it

is known as **mingchao** 冥鈔, meaning 'underworld money'. In Cantonese, it is called *sam si zi* 陽司紙 (陰司紙) and the way which the money flows is called *sam si lou* 陽司路 (陰司路) meaning 'hell road'. The metaphor behind it is the idea, that the money will enrich the road the spirit has to go while going into the underworld. Although the word 'hell' is often used when talking about the underworld conception, the Chinese underworld does not have any negative meaning in itself and does not equal the idea of *diyu* 地獄 (meaning 'hell' as such). The reason why the word hell is used in the 'underworld context' goes back to Christian missionaries who regarded the Chinese rituals to be superstitious and thus believed that the adherents of traditional belief all go to hell. [...] Since several rituals are associated with magic, exorcism and cursing, several objects, such as swords, charms and tablets play important roles in local belief.

At least, we should see the role of people (*ren* 人) in this model. In Chinese philosophy there are two traditional kinds of people, again being dualistic. There are people who want to help and support, the **guiren** 貴人 meaning 'enriching people' and people who try to hurt, and therefore have a small value or are little cherished, in Chinese **xiaoren** 小人 ('little people'). With this knowledge, we can understand the basic worldview of Chinese philosophy. The Chinese cosmology consists of two important elements which are "Heaven" or the celestial world, and "Earth" or the terrestrial world and human-beings are built from a part of heaven and a part of Earth [B], which describes the two souls. After death, both souls go back to where they are from (and that's why one soul goes into a celestial world and the other one stays on Earth). Even further, it is believed that the celestial soul is important for mental conditions, such as the mind, its essence and vitality, while the body is part of the terrestrial soul [B]. This also explains, why there are two forms of *qi* inside the body, one *qi* is heavenly, the other one is terrestrial, which means that a human-being has to keep both essences in harmony. [...]

In the end I want to take a look at the traditional lineage of Chinese religious aspects in Early Chinese philosophy. [...] In early Chinese philosophy, people also adopted theological elements into philosophy, mostly in cases when they found a principle based on logic whose origin was not yet explainable. At the limit of philosophy, religious speculation started. Religious elements even entered Confucianism, which could be regarded as China's moral and ethical philosophy. Joseph Adler therefore argues that "The importance of the terms 'Heaven' and 'sagehood' in the Confucian tradition, from the earliest times to the present, is one of the reasons (not the only one) for calling Confucianism a religious tradition" [C].

Adler further explains that "Confucians understand Heaven to be the absolute reality, the ultimate moral authority, and the source of the creativity inherent in the natural world. Heaven is the explanation for whatever is beyond human control, for example events that we might attribute either to chance or to necessity, such as the family one is born into or the fact that we must all die" [C]. [...]

Even people who claim to be atheists or don't believe in anything often have a sense or understanding towards the basic Chinese philosophy and its worldview and connect certain beliefs in it (whether it is believing that a number represents good or bad luck; the harmony of the body; good luck charms or myths about food). This again shows, that there is a complex relation between religious conceptions and societal philosophy which is always present to a certain degree and therefore influences moral behavior and its expectations, situations of respect, ideas about birth and death, the meaning of destiny (yuanfen 缘分), ideas about a healthy way of living, societal roles, understanding about authority, expectations to one's own private life, expectations made by the family, behavior in difficult situations (which correlates a lot with yuanfen, since bad events are often described with fate) and the ideal of happiness (xingfu 幸福; xingyun 幸运). The traditional Chinese worldview therefore is heavily present until today, although it became modernized in many forms due to the ideas of science, especially humanistic skepticism; Socialism, or even both (such as Left-wing Buddhism), and therefore the traditional philosophy – besides Confucianism and Taoism that have to be regarded and analyzed separately – developed due to critical analysis conducted by both, science and the popular masses themselves, since a change of mentality arised after the fall of the Qing dynasty and old traditions were questioned as outdated or believed to clog progressive development. Therefore the whole worldview was questioned, analyzed and to a certain degree even renewed, while other older rituals still persisted the test of time and still are practised by many people in all social classes.

[A] Giles, Herbert A.: A Chinese-English Dictionary (Second edition), Kelly & Walsh, 1912

[B] Rochat de la Vallée, Elisabeth: Les Huns et les Pos dans la culture chinoise, http://www.elisabeth-rochat.com/docs/08_hunPo.pdf, retrieved on 1 November 2015

[C] Adler, Joseph A. : The Heritage of Non-Theistic Belief in China, presented at the conference, "Toward a Reasonable World: The Heritage of Western Humanism, Skepticism, and Freethought", San Diego 2011, p.3,

<http://www2.kenyon.edu/Depts/Religion/Fac/Adler/Writings/Non-theistic.pdf> , retrieved on 1 November 2015

Adopted from:

Schmitz Timo: The traditional Chinese worldview on cosmological principles and the role of human-beings in the world and beyond (5 November 2015), in: Collected Online Articles in English Language 2013-2016, Berlin: epubli, 2017

[...]Chinese traditional religion and Confucianism incorporate the belief in a Heavenly Emperor who has god-like attributes, and thus one name for god simply is 'tian' (天) which means 'heaven'. Thus, heaven plays an important role in Confucianism, too, although Confucian theologians have found different explanations. Traditionally, the Confucian heaven was comparable to the Christian heaven, although not exactly identical. However, the Heavenly Emperor was described to have superpowers to intervene when he is angry (by bringing flood, storms, or other disasters) and the Worldly Emperor was seen as medium among Heaven and Earth. The Heavenly Emperor thus always was interpreted to intervene, and the Worldly Emperor acts as representation of the Heavenly Emperor, thus law and justice was always explained with heavenly will and value. Later in the Song and Tang dynasties, Heaven was rather seen as a kind of power (comparable to the Dao). Modern Confucianists see God or Heaven as immanent ultimate truth. [...]

The 15th century founded Chinese religion LuoJiao (Luoism) takes up the three Buddhas in their eschatology where they are described as 'the three suns'. The three periods are called 'green-blue sun' (青阳), 'red sun' (红阳), and 'white sun' (白阳) [A]. In LuoJiao, the practitioners also seek enlightenment. The creation of the world is very Daoist influenced, the enlightened idea seems to be Buddhist influenced. It is combined with traditional beliefs, moral and virtue, as well as an own interpretation of cosmology. [...] The three Buddhas also play an important role in Xiantiantao, a minor Chinese folk religion that was founded in the 17th century. However, they believe in the 'Unborn Ancient Mother' to be the creator of the world, same as LuoJiao. It probably goes back to the Daoist principle that there is a kind of energy that created the Dao or from which the Dao evolved, called 'hundun' (混沌). However, a large disadvantage of Xiantiantao is their idea, that their religion could overcome all other religions.

[A] compare Seiwert, Hubert: Popular Religious Movements and Heterodox Sects in Chinese History, Brill: Leiden/ Boston, 2003, p. 327

Adopted from:

Schmitz, Timo: From the creation of the world to to the eschatology in Buddhism (3 September 2016), in: Collected Online Articles in English Language 2013-2016, Berlin: epubli, 2017

V. Chondoism

Der Chondoismus, auch Ch'öndoismus (천도교, Ch'öndogyo) ist eine einheimische Religion in Korea, wobei die meisten Anhänger im Norden (DVRK) wohnen. In den nordkoreanischen Medien wird sie als Nationalreligion bezeichnet und hat sogar eine Chondoistische Partei, aber auch in Südkorea hat der Chondoismus geschichtliche Relevanz. Auf Koreanisch wird er als Ch'öndogyo, also „Lehre des himmlischen Weges“ bezeichnet. Das Wort „Ch'ön“ (천) leitet sich vom Chinesischen „tiān“ (天) ab, während „do“ (도) vom Chinesischen „dào“ (道) kommt, was übersetzt „Weg“ bedeutet. Die chondoistische Lehre soll also den „Weg zum Himmel“ sein. Das besondere an dieser monotheistischen Religion ist die Basis: die Drei Lehren. Grundlage ist nämlich der Buddhismus, Konfuzianismus und Daoismus. Dieses Fundament wird um den koreanischen Schamanismus erweitert. Später sind auch Elemente des Christentums in den Chondoismus eingedrungen. Religionsstifter ist Ch'oe Che-u, der die Religion 1860 gründete. Der Chondoismus ist eine politische Religion, die seinen Auftrieb zu Zeiten des zivilen Aufstandes gegen die Ri-Dynastie erlebte. Die Anhänger hofften durch diese Religion, einen spirituellen Antrieb zur Verbesserung des damals sehr armen Koreas. Die Lehre ist daher sehr auf die damalige koreanische Situation beschränkt und nicht universell, bietet jedoch interessante Interpretationen einiger Thesen aus den Drei Lehren. Die Essenz des Chondoismus ist die Chumun, eine 21-Wort-Formel, die zur Erleuchtung führen soll [A]. Das Grundprinzip ist ganz simpel: „Mensch und Gott sind eins“, auf Koreanisch „In-Nae-Ch'ön“ [A]. Ziel der Anhänger ist es, ein Paradies auf Erden zu schaffen, also die Erleuchtung bereits zu Lebzeiten zu erlangen und mit Gott eins zu werden [B]. Im Chondoismus ist also das höchste Ziel die Erleuchtung, die der Chondoist mit Gott gleichsetzt. Da der Chondoismus, wie bereits erwähnt, monotheistisch ist, gibt es für die Anhänger nur diesen einen nicht weiter spezifizierten Gott. Vergleicht man das bisher gesagte mit dem Buddhismus, so fällt auf, dass das Grundprinzip, die Erlösung vom Leid durch Erleuchtung, dasselbe ist, auch wenn die Chondoisten dies auf andere Weise anstreben. Ebenso wie wohl einige Buddhisten die Götter in sich selbst suchen, die buddhistische Welt also in sich suchen

[...], so sucht auch der Chondoist scheinbar [...] Gott in sich selbst, denn der Mensch und Gott sind im Chondoismus gewöhnlich eins. Dieses Bild erinnert an den Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, indem sich alle Buddhas widerspiegeln [...]. Das südkoreanische Ministerium für Kultur und Tourismus erwähnt, dass Chondoisten Gott in ihren Gedanken tragen und die Quelle seiner Würde seien [B]. Der nordkoreanische Präsident Kim Il-Sung nannte die Religion in seinen Memoiren als fortschrittlich, da es positive Eigenschaften von Buddhismus und Christentum miteinander verbinde [B].

[...] Bisher wurde herausgestellt, dass sowohl der Buddhismus, als auch der Chondoismus als höchstes Ziel die Erleuchtung haben. Man kann bereits zu Lebzeiten durch die Erleuchtung ins Paradies gelangen. Die Chondoisten bezeichnen dies als „Paradies auf Erden“. [...] Ebenfalls erwähnt ist bereits die Ähnlichkeit des chondoistischen Gottes mit dem Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, in dem sich alle Buddhas vereinen. [...] Der chondoistische Monotheismus hat aber auch eine gewisse Anlehnung an den Amidismus, indem Amitabha die Menschen über ein Reines Land ins Jenseits rettet. Die Parallele zwischen dem Amitabha, als für einen Amidisten nicht ablehnbarer Gottheit und dem chondoistischen Gott bestehen darin, dass beide Götter eine Art „greifbarer Gott“ sind. Dadurch, dass der Glaube an den Gott elementarer Bestandteil ist, hat der Gläubige wiederum etwas, an dem er sich festhalten kann. [...] Ebenso wie im Buddhismus, so hat auch der Chondoismus die Meditation als wichtige praktische Methode zur religiösen Ausübung. Auch Rituale und Gebete sind ein Bestandteil, jedoch gehen Chondoisten, wie Christen auch, sonntags zur Kirche. [...] Ein chondoistisches Gotteshaus sucht man zur Gottesverehrung vornehmlich zu vorgeschriebenen Zeiten, zum Beispiel sonntags auf [...]. Im Chondoismus gibt es fünf Praktiken, die ein Chondoist zu befolgen hat. Die Erste lautet Chumun. Der Gläubige sucht Gott, um sich in Gedanken mit ihm zu vereinigen und singt dabei eine „Formel“ [C]. [...] Ein chondoistisches Gebet ist eine Mischung aus der mantrischen Technik des Buddhismus und der feierlichen Zeremonie mit Lesungen, Gebeten und Gesang im Christentum. Der Gläubige Chondoist muss sein Mantra jedoch jeden Tag wiederholt hinunterbeten. Das zweite Ritual ist das Ch'öngsu („Pures Wasser“). Dieses Ritual ist bei der Meditation zu vollziehen. Der Gläubige muss eine Schüssel mit klarem Wasser auf einen Tisch stellen, um bei der Meditation Gott anzubeten [C]. Die dritte Praktik wurde bereits erläutert. Es handelt sich um den Kirchgang an Feiertagen. Die vierte Praktik bezeichnet man als Songmi. Yong Choon Kim übersetzt diesen Begriff mit „Sincerity Rice“. Der Gläubige legt jeden Tag ein wenig Reis bei Seite, um es am Ende des Monats der Kirche zu spenden. [...] Dass Chondoisten Reis spenden sollen liegt vermutlich wieder am historischen Kontext. Da die Chondoisten sowohl in der koreanischen

Ri-Dynastie in der Kaiserzeit, als auch während der japanischen Besatzung stets verfolgt wurden (der Religionsstifter ist 1864, also 4 Jahre nach Kundgebung seiner Lehre exekutiert worden), und chondoistische Gelehrte nichts zu essen hatten, sollte diesem durch Nahrungsspenden Abhilfe geschafft werden. Als fünftes gibt es das Gebet (Kido), dass ein Gläubiger jeden Tag abzulegen hat und indem der Gläubige seine Wünsche äußern soll [C]. Allgemein auffallend ist die chondoistische Tendenz Gott als etwas immanentes statt transzendentes zu sehen. Da Gott ja im Menschen wohnt, wohnt er in der immanenten Welt und nicht etwa ausschließlich im Jenseits. Im Chondoismus steht das jetzige Leben im Vordergrund, weniger die Idee des Jenseitsgedanken. [...] Die Hauptähnlichkeit zum Buddhismus liegt wohl in der Meditation, die zur Erleuchtung führt, der Hauptunterschied im Monotheismus und dem Kirchenwesen (Sonntagsmesse, etc.). Sicherlich könnte man noch einen größeren Vergleich zu den Drei Lehren ziehen. Im Chondoismus ist nämlich Mensch und Gott unter anderem deswegen, als eins zu sehen, da es die gleiche Energie besitzt. Dieses Denken mit Energien kommt dem Daoismus und seinem „Qi“ (气) sehr nahe.

[A] Encyclopædia Britannica, Ch'öndogyo,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/114251/Chondogyo> (retrieved on 23 January 2013)

[B] Z. Perry: Korea – Understanding Chondoist Religion, 23.06.2006,

<http://voices.yahoo.com/korea-understanding-chondoist-religion-66202.html> (date of retrieval missing)

[C] Yong Choon Kim: Ch'ondogyo, The Religion of the Heavenly Way, Korean Cultural Center, Los Angeles,

http://eng.buddhapia.com/Service/ContentView/ETC_CONTENT_2.ASP?PK=0000593939&danrak_no=&elss_cd=0002130456&top_menu_cd=0000000808 (retrieved on 23 January 2013)

VI. Daoism of the Yao ethnicity (Meishanjiao)

Die Yao (Mien) haben eine eigene Variante des Daoismus. Sie leben u.a. in China, Vietnam, Thailand und Laos. Ihre Variante des Daoismus wird daher auch Yao-Daoismus genannt, geläufig ist aber auch die Bezeichnung „Meishanjiao“ (Lehre aus dem Pflaumen-Berg (Meishan)). Entstanden ist dieser im 13. Jahrhundert, als die Yao die daoistischen Schriften

vom Chinesischen in die Yao-Sprache übersetzt haben. Dabei haben die Daoismus-Praktizierenden Yao, jedoch nicht die daoistische Reinform angenommen, sondern Elemente ihres Schamanismus und Volksglauben, vor allem der Ahnenverehrung, mit hineingebracht. Der Yao-Daoismus wird nur von den Yao praktiziert und besitzt Gemeindefstrukturen, ähnlich anderer Religionen. Nach Vorstellung der Yao leben die hohen Götter über dem Himmel und die niederen Götter unter dem Himmel. Es gibt daher „hohe Priester“ und „niedere Priester“. Während die hohen Priester eher den Daoshi (daoistischen Priestern) nahe kommen, gleichen die niederen Priester eher den traditionellen Schamanen (auf Yao: sip mien mien (s. Barlow), sai mienh (s. Cardeinte)). Barlow merkt an, dass Langlebigkeit oder gar Unsterblichkeit und deren Methoden keine Rolle im Yao-Daoismus spielen. Auch die daoistische Alchemie ist, ebenso wie das Qi in der Yao-Variante nicht vorhanden. [...] Die Yao haben einen „gutgeordneten Kosmos“ (Barlow), der mystische Zugang zwischen „der menschlichen Gesellschaft und der Geisterwelt“ (ebda). Barlow kommt zu der Feststellung, dass nur wenige Yao in den Dörfern, die alten Schriften lesen können und daher das Wissen um die alten Schriften zurückgeht. Heutzutage schreibt man die Yao-Sprache hauptsächlich in lateinischer Schrift.

In jedem Haus bauen die daoistischen Yao einen Altar, den Hausaltar (auf Yao: mienv baaih), der – so berichtet Cardeinte – bereits durch die Haustür sichtbar ist. [...] Im Yao-Daoismus spielen die daoistischen Gottheiten aus der Entstehungszeit (nach Barlow 12. und 14. Jhd.) und der Anfang des 6. Jahrhunderts begründete daoistische Pantheon eine große Rolle, ebenso wie magische Rituale, die ab der Ming-Dynastie bei den Yao besonders populär geworden sind. Laut Barlow sind keine Kenntnisse des Daodejings von Bedeutung. In den daoistischen Gemeinden der Yao wird jedes männliche Mitglied ordiniert, „zumindest ideel“ (s. Holm). In der ersten Ordinierung, so Holm, werden religiöse Kenntnisse vermittelt und „den Göttern des Pantheons vorgestellt“. An den Ordinierungen nehmen auch Frauen teil (ebda). Sie werden geehrt bzw. gesegnet und zusammen mit ihren Männern den Geistern vorgestellt.

Im Falle eines Todes hält der niedere Priester ein Ritual, das „zoux caeqv“ (nach Cardeinte) ab. Bei diesem Ritual werden Körper und Sünde auseinandergepflückt, sodass der Körper seinen Frieden findet. Der Körper durchläuft eine zeremonielle Waschung und die bösen Geister werden aus dem Körper des Verstorbenen getrieben. Letzteres bezeichnet man nach Cardeinte als „zoux sin“. Auf dem Altar steht eine Liste mit den Namen aller verstorbenen Vorfahren.

Barlow, Joel John: Yao Taoism, Chiang Rai Guide,

<http://www.chiangraiprovince.com/guide/index.php?page=p45> (retrieved on: 21 August 2014)

Cardeinte, Alejandro: The Mien People, The Peoples of the World Foundation, 2006,

<http://www.peoplesoftheworld.org/hosted/mien/> (retrieved on 21 August 2014)

Holm, David: Daoism among minority nationalities, in: Davis, Edward L.: Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture (2005), online auf:

http://contemporary_chinese_culture.academic.ru/176/Daoism_among_minority_nationalities

(retrieved on 21 August 2014)

Adopted from:

Schmitz, Timo: Was das Dao leert – Eine Einführung in den Daoismus, Berlin: epubli, 2017

VII. Etseg Din

Etseg Din – or in Ossetian Ætsæg Din (Æцæг Дин) – is the religion of the Ossetians based on traditional folklore, such as the epic Nart, old traditions and customs. [...] The Ossetian word “ætsæg” means “exact” or “right”, the word “din” can either be translated with “faith” or “religion”. The word “din” is probably not of Ossetian origin, but assumed to be from Persian. [...] Etseg Din is a monotheistic religion, with Xwytssau (Хуыцæу) as god and creator. The word also equals the meaning for “heaven” or “sky”. Therefore, God equals the sky.

There are several respectful forms to call God. One is Yŕtyr Xwytssau (Ыуытыр Хуыцæу) meaning “Great God” (Велику Бог). The name goes back to even pre-Greek times, when people settling in the Caucasus worshipped a god called Astarat or Ishtar [compare Æстыртæ, Æстыр, Ыуытыр]. As Xwytssau is the creator of the universe and all beings in Ossetian faith, he is also called Duneskænæg (Дунескæнæг) meaning “creator of the universe”. Other respectful names are Meskænæg Xwytssau (Мескæнæг Хуыцæу) and Styr Xwytssau (Стыр Хуыцæу), the latter one meaning “the Great God” (Большой Бог). Sometimes it is also translated as “god of the gods”, however Ossetian belief has no more gods anymore. God can be found in each person. It is the human conscience that prevents bad or unworthy actions and as it is guided by God, there is the believe that God can be found in everyone’s conscious.

Xwysau is honored in a special tradition. To honor him, Ossetians put three round cakes with cheese and Ossetian beer (made after a purity tradition) on a table and gather around it. [...] The ceremony is done at special days, such as holidays. On a holiday called Dzuary Bon (Дзуары Бон) – the “day of the cross” – believers gift him a sacrificial offering and prepare the above mentioned three pies and beer. The one who is leading the prayer has to meet certain prescriptions. In the family when honoring him, the eldest man speaks the prayer, according to Æhdau (Æгъдау) – the moral etiquette of the Ossetian people. According to this etiquette, his respectful behavior towards God in the prayer should represent the whole community and therefore he has to keep sure that wise and respectful behavior is practised.

On Ossetian holidays, the chosen who had to speak the prayer, in Ossetian called Dzuary Læg (Дзуары лæg), had to meet the following prescriptions: he has to be clean and is not allowed to have sex for two months, he is not allowed to act bad or even think of something bad.

If the chosen one meets this requirements, he can be dzuary læg and pray for the cakes and the beer. According to the etiquette, every community member has to wear clean clothes, take baths and keep clean and therefore everybody should try to meet the requirements. However, while the others “just” have to try, the dzuary læg has not only the try, but the duty to keep the rules himself. Although there is only one God, he has several “supporters”. They are angels, archangels, patrons and intermediaries. Many of them are from the epic Nart, such as the Dauagi (Даягу), which are the lowest spirits in the hierarchy of spirits. Although often being described as supernatural, none of them equals God. They just help the believer on the road of seeking the right way and accompanies him through the spiritual journey. [...]

Etseg Din however does not persist as an isolated religion. It gained some influence of Christianity (the most influential religion in Ossetia besides folklore), such as worshipping Saint George as patron of Ossetia – represented in a patron called Uastyrdži (Уастырджі). Ossetian ethnic religion contains the spirit of a whole nation and its traditions. And no matter which religion an Ossetian might have, they always remember their roots and their origin and never forget to respect Æhdau.

Adopted from:

Schmitz, Timo: Etseg Din – Caucasian paganism from Ossetia (11 June 2015), in: Collected Online Articles in English Language 2013-2016, Berlin: epubli, 2017

VIII. Georgian mythology

Georgian mythology is not yet researched very much in English-language scientific literature, though there are a lot of blog entries, and copied and pasted information in the internet, which does not give a lot of reliable sources. [...] An unidentified blogger writes: "The sun was one of the main gods in Georgian mythology. He was the god of life, kindness, treat and courage. The symbol of sun is eye, and symbolic number is 9. As Georgian myths say, the sun could give life to humans." [A] He further stresses "The moon was the second main god in Georgian mythology, and Georgians believed that he was even stronger than sun. Usually in Georgian myths moon is sun's husband, but in some myths he's sun's brother who always confronts sun. Georgian myths also say that moon's mood may change time to time according to it's phases." [A]

*[...] To get a clear image about Georgian mythology I used first hand accounts. It is worthy to note that Georgian paganism is still practised in the mountains and mixed with Christian elements. As a native Georgian explained to me there are different ways of worship in every region. People still keep these traditions alive, but not like in old times. For example, every mountain region had its leader called Khevisberi and everyone obeyed his commands and way of life (which shares a certain parallel to the 'prayer master' (dzuary læg) in Ossetian belief). A few times every year, there used to be a religious fest called khatoba, during which people sacrificed animals and asked the goddess or a saint for the solution of whatever problem they had. As pointed out in an article in *The Independent*, Georgian paganism and Christianity are living next to each other like a 'parallel regime' [B]. Even further, the ritual of drinking beer shows some parallelity with the Ossetian faith, where on special occasions, beer is served as well in a religious context [C]. A cult of Heracles is reported to have been practised in the 7th to 4th century BC in Colchis [D], so that I can assume that despite elements from Scythian and Northeastern Caucasian mythology, Greek mythology entered Georgian paganism and its rites as well, especially in areas at the Black Sea coast. There is a renaissance of Colchian traditions as part of the 'Mingrelian Awakening' (1996-2004) [...].*

*A common animal in Georgian mythology is the deer, and thus, the Milky Way is called the 'Leap of the deer' [E], and even further "A mythologized Deer appears even in the ancient Georgian hagiography, *The Life of St. Nino*" [E]. In Chechen folk belief, the wolf plays an important role, while in Ingush belief, the eagle has a special importance. For Circassians, horses are very important and treated with much attention. However, the eagle also appears in Georgian literature as an important symbol, such as in Vazha Pshavela's 1887 poem "The Eagle", written during the sunset of Georgian mythological traditionalism over 80 years after*

the fall of the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti. Anna Chaudhri points out that the Ossetian hunting-goddess can be found in Georgia as well, such as in Svanetia and Georgian-claimed Abkhazia [F]. In Georgian mythology, the Ossetian Æfsati is known as Apsat and despite hunting represents the god of birds and animals. [...] Chaudhri also points out the importance of poetry and hymns in folklore. Poetry was an important means for trading traditions and myths.

In Vazha Pshavela's poem "Aluda Qetelauri", he starts by showing the conflict between Kists and Khevsuris because both sides used to cross the mountains and steal each other's cattle and because while still being kind of pagan, one nation was Christian and the other Muslim. In the poem, two of the Kist's brothers stole the cattle and Aluda, who here is the famous Khevsurian, followed to punish them. Now it is where the traditions of mountains start, because if one defeated the enemy (mainly by death) the trophy and tradition was to cut the opponents right arm, because it represented their honor. And while he killed and cut the arm of one brother, he realizes that the other one fought till the last drop of his blood and he gives him a proper resting place by keeping his arm untouched and covering him with his armor. When he reaches his village, everyone wonders why he broke the tradition and judges him for it, because he is famous for his punishments and it is being shown how many other arms he has in his house as trophies [G].

So to put it in a nutshell, most of Georgia is Christian nowadays, with Muslim minorities mainly in Adjara and the Pankisi Gorge. In Mingrelia "Formerly, Mingrelians believed in wood spirits and other pagan deities. Elements of such beliefs persist in certain customs and superstitions surrounding birth, marriage, and death and New Year or harvest festivals. Mingrelians are not, on the whole, devout churchgoers, although with the new liberal policies on religion, one may expect a degree of religious revival, as elsewhere in Georgia" [H]. In Svanetia, several old customs are still alive and there are equivalents between pagan deities and Christian saints [...]. In some places in Svanetia, blood revenge survived until today. Revenge and the restoration of honor plays an important role not only in Svanetia, but also in Tusheti and Chechnya. The importance of honor and social codes was clearly shown in the poem of Vazha Pshavela. [...] Georgian paganism is an important element of the society and has strong roots in the mountains. Therefore, it is of importance for societal harmony and living together.

[A] ____: Georgian mythology, <http://unknownblogger6.blogspot.de/2013/07/georgian-mythology.html> (retrieved on 24 June 2017)

[B] Dunbar, William: Beer and blood sacrifices – Meet the Caucasus pagans who worship ancient deities, The Independent, 14 August 2015,

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/beer-and-blood-sacrifices-meet-the-caucasus-pagans-who-worship-ancient-deities-10451756.html> (retrieved on 24 June 2017)

[C] Schmitz, Timo: Etseg Din – Caucasian paganism from Ossetia (2015), in: Collected Online Articles in English Language 2013-2016, Berlin: epubli, 2017

[D] Lordkipanidze, Otar : On the Cult of Heracles in Colchis, in : Annales littéraires de l'Université de Besançon, 1990, pp. 277-288

[E] Lerner, Constantine : The « River Of Paradise » and the legend about the City of Tbilisi – A Literary Source of the Legend, in: Folklore Vol. 16, 2001

[F] Chaudhri, Anna: The Caucasian Hunting-divinity, male and female: Tracing of the Hunting Goddess in Ossetic Folklore, in: Billington, Sandra; Green, Miranda (eds.): The Concept of the Goddess, London/ New York: Routledge, 2002, pp. 166-177

[G] ვაჟა-ფშაველა: ალუდა ქეთელაური. თბილისი, 1888 წელი

[H] ____: Mingrelians - Religion and Expressive Culture,

<http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Mingrelians-Religion-and-Expressive-Culture.html> (retrieved on 24 June 2017)

Adopted from:

Schmitz, Timo: Uncovering Georgian mythology in a Caucasian context, self-published online article, 24 June 2017

IX. Korean Shamanism

Unlike paganism which often has a folklore transmission, shamanism is more exclusive, the theological background is known to the whole society, but the worship is only known by the shaman who can instruct the community. Unlike paganism, where gods are often transcendent beings, shamanism regards the shaman to be a medium (like a priest), however, the spirit might probably live within the shaman and he or she is possessed by it. This is also the ground for Chondoism, a modern text religion which believes that God lives within the believer, which goes back to Korean Shamanism, where shamans – mostly women – are possessed by the spirits, who make them obsessed. This obsession, which is described as loss of self-control is called Sinbyöng (신병) in Korean language. As a result, one has to communicate with the spirit and receive him. A female shaman is known as 'mu' (무) or

'mudang' (무당), a male shaman is known as 'Paksu' (박수). Shamans coming into office through nomination are called 'sessŭmu' (세습무), which often appears in South Korea, while shamans who are introduced through a ceremony are called 'kangsinmu' (강신무) (which happens rather in North Korea). The theological background is the trinity of the Heavenly Emperor – Hanŭllim (하늘님) – which in its conception comes close to the Heavenly Emperor in Confucianism, the Heavenly Principle in Chinese Shamanism from Zhou period and the Highest Way from Daoism. The three divine beings are Hwanin (환인), Hwanung (환웅) and Tangun (단군). Thus, as one can see, there is a clear theological concept, and the shaman as a medium uses dances and rituals as a means of communication and expression of the spirit.

Adopted from:

Schmitz, Timo: The Different Forms of Religion, self-published online article, 16 March 2017

X. Laotian Animism

[In] Laotian animism, known as Satsana Phi, [...] Phi stand for the gods. Phi are gods that factually can be found everywhere. They protect buildings, people, temples and have many different functions. There are good spirits and bad spirits. The phi are connected to the five elements, which is very interesting since these five elements also exist in Daoism, which leads to the factual situation that Thai-Laotian animistic belief also includes shamanistic elements. Guardian spirits and ancestral spirits are very prominent.

Laotian animism also contains superstitious elements on the one side, but religious elements on the other side. Laotians took the stance of reincarnation from the Indian tradition (Hinduism/ Buddhism) which became an important matter in local belief. J.G. Learned points out: "Many Lao believe that the khwan of persons who die by accident, violence, or in childbirth are not reincarnated, becoming instead phi phetu (malevolent spirits). Animist believers also fear wild spirits of the forest. Other spirits are associated with the household, caves, mountains, rivers, or groves of trees and are neither inherently benevolent nor evil. Regular or occasional offerings however ensure their favor and assistance in human affairs. Similar rituals to ensure the favor of the spirit of the rice are performed before the beginning

of the planting season. This practice had mostly died out in the extended area around modernized Vientiane, the capital" [A].

[A] Learned, J.G.: Animism and the Bai Sii Su Khwan, North by Northeast, http://www.north-by-north-east.com/01_04_1.asp.htm (retrieved on 9 June 2014)

Adopted from:

Schmitz, Timo: The Different Forms of Religion, self-published online article, 16 March 2017

XI. Moism (Zhuang Shigongism)

The religion of the Zhuang is known as 'Zhuang Shigongism' (壮族师公教, Zhungzu Shigongjiao) or simply 'Moism' (摩教, Mojiao). The spirits in Moism are everywhere, in living and non-living-beings (such as flowers), in mountains and water – really everywhere. There is a Supreme God, as well as the 'Flower Mother' (who is the wife of the Supreme God and creator of human life). The name derives from the belief that she has a garden with golden and silver flowers. The golden flowers represent men, the silver flower represent women [A]. There are good flowers and bad flowers, and thus people who live according to the rules receive good flowers, while the others receive bad flowers. Thus, moral values and their behavior are connected with the family's fate.

One can conclude that in this way, the ancestors tried to make their following generation obeying. In addition, this concept shows societal classification, as men are compared to gold and women to silver, which gives women a lower rank by 'divine will' in the religion (since gold is worthier), which hinders emancipation, since they have to accept their role given to them by Heaven.

The Zhuang religion has three elements, and human-beings have three souls. The concept of elements might be a result of Taoism and the concept of souls also shares some similarities with Chinese folk religion. Same as in Chinese folk religion, there is a celestial soul that goes to heaven and a terrestrial soul that stays in the body[...]. However, the Zhuang have a third soul that goes to the family of the deceased.

[A] Li Jingfeng: Das Epos der Zhuang-Nationalität in China – Genese, Überlieferung und Religion, Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde der Philosophischen Fakultät der Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Bonn, 2012 (Download: <http://hss.ulb.uni-bonn.de/2012/2832/2832.pdf>)

Adopted from:

Schmitz Timo: Brief overview on Vietnamese folk religion and its influence on other religions in Vietnam (10 September 2016), in: Collected Online Articles in English Language 2013-2016, Berlin: epubli, 2017

XII. Native American Shamanism

Native Americans have a strong believe in nature and its interaction, their highest principle is an all embracing Great Spirit which is universal. It is a powerful force that guides the people with wisdom and is responsible for creation.

Adopted from:

Schmitz, Timo: The liveliness of the universe from a philosophical perspective, self-published online article, 12 March 2017

The Abenaki or Crow for instance have healers who equal the role of the shaman. The Crow belief in a God who is called "The One who made Everything". Though he created everything, the universe consists of three worlds: the physical world, the spirit world, and the world where God resides. The spirits are empowered by God, as they have a divine power that God gave them. In Crow belief, spirits are the intermediate between God and the physical world as the spirit world is in between both worlds. However, a special role is given to the healer, called Akbaalia.

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XIII. Nung traditions

[F]rom contact with natives I know that there are [...] a lot of Nung that do not believe in any god, but believe that once a person dies, the deceased has a new life in another world, thus the soul goes to the new world and life goes on. This principle strongly reminds me of samsara from Buddhism, however here it shows folk religion elements, as one does not necessarily need to be reborn in this world (to be strictly, even in Buddhism, one can be reborn in another world by being reborn in another realm), however, the belief in an underworld where life goes on also exists in folk religion where the soul gathers. There is also the belief that there is a ruler of the underworld, who is the Supreme Being in Nung religion. [...] Connection is kept to this world through the gate or altar, thus it also combines ancestral worshipping and Confucian elements. However, at the same time, since there is no deity as such, but morality is more important, it also shows atheist tendencies. [...] The Nung people for instance don't celebrate their children's birthday. Instead, the children celebrate the parents' birthday. The starting age is normally set at 50 (the Kinh normally choose 60 or 70). This festival equals the longevity celebration, as conducted in other areas of Vietnam. [...] The reason behind this longevity celebration is the Nung belief that the first life span takes only 60 years. To be able to start the second life span, birthday celebrations have to be arranged. [...]

So while the Zhuang in China believe in Moism, a religion heavily influenced by Chinese folk religion and Taoist elements, the Nung in Vietnam are more and more atheist, but keep celebrating several rituals and ancestor worshipping (as found in Chinese folk religion and Vietnamese folk religion), and seemingly even the respect towards spirits is kept up or at least the fear that something bad happens if the tradition is not kept up. But I think societal expectation also plays a certain role in the mixture of atheist and theist belief and at which point it is theist or not. Other Tai people in Thailand and Laos, however, continue having a strong belief in spirits, thus it is called the 'religion of the spirits' (Sasna Phi).

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XIV. Rodnover

An example for paganism might be the Rodnover, the faith of the Slavs. Concerning written knowledge, many "Valuable references to East Slavic paganism come from the witness of foreigners who had visited the Slavic lands in The Ancient and The Medieval Ages. A lot of information about East Slavic paganism is given by the important Slavic written sources: The Primary Chronicle, The Tale of Igor's Campaign, The Lectures against paganism. However, historical records have shown that there are not enough first-hand written ancient records of Slavic paganism, so it is also studied by the analysis of medieval and later records of oral folklore". [A] As it has to be pointed out "The Slavs inherited from the Indo-Europeans a threefold functional division of society (called tripartition) into priest-rulers, warriors, and peasant-producers. The Slavic peoples held the Indo-European concept of a universe divided into the three realms of heaven, earth, and an underworld. This tripartite division of the worldly universe was sometimes called by the deity name Triglav, which means 'three-head'. In what we can piece together of the ancient Slavic pantheon, each realm had its own set of divinities, and each class seems to have worshipped its own favorite gods". [B] [...] Rodnover work in the same way than the Western religious tradition, in which worship and veneration determines fate. However, the Rodnover focus on interaction with nature and naturalistic themes, thus ecology stands in the foreground, which is also a common theme in other religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Daoism.

[A] ____: East Slavic Paganism, <http://slavicpaganism.blogspot.de/2008/09/makosh.html> (retrieved on 28 August 2014)

[B] ____: Eurasian Studies 201 Handouts – East Slavic Paganism, http://pandora.cii.wvu.edu/vajda/russ110/handout_p1_paganism.htm (retrieved on 21 August 2014)

Adopted from:

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XV. Religious movement of the Red Banner philosophy (DPRK red banner movement)

While Kim Jong-il installed the Songun policy as official state philosophy and made it the guideline for political and economical issues, an informal belief started to grow in the DPRK: the 'red-banner philosophy'. This belief connects shaman beliefs (which are officially labeled as superstitious and counter-revolutionary) with Korean mythology (especially the superiority of the Korean emperor and nation), Confucianism (esp. their ethics and values, but also the heavenly mandate), and the glorification of political figures. Mythical figures, such as the Chollima or Mount Paektu with its Heavenly Lake became part of worship. Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-suk (Kim Jong-il's mother) were venerated and the government could informally claim the heavenly mandate. Although the government of the DPRK saw Korean religious movements and Korean traditions as superstitions, as well as the social hierarchy of Confucianism as outdated [...] the DPRK government de facto went back to the old monarchical system and implemented the Kim dynasty. [...] The media in the DPRK always emphasizes the pride of Korean history, the achievements of the Koreans, and the Koreanization process against foreign influences [...]. Mount Paektu is an important spot in Korean shamanism. [...] The spiritual ideals of Korean society were connected to the national political guideline, even though they were officially illegal and prohibited under the act against superstition. [...] At first, since Mount Paektu is that holy, it grants the DPRK government the heavenly mandate, especially as DPRK sources claimed Kim to be born on a site on Mount Paektu in 1942 (though he was born in Siberia in 1941). A legend was founded that a bright star appeared on the sky on the evening when Kim Jong-il was born, postulating the message that a ruler chosen by God's grace was born. Before that, Kim Il-sung was called 'bright star' as a reference to both, the Communist Red Star, and the mythological meaning. However, it is no coincidence that the legend of Kim Jong-il's birth shows so many parallels to the birth of Jesus Christ. Though he was not born in the peasant's barn hay, he was born in a refugee camp for revolutionaries and the star guided the people the way to the new 'messias'. Even further, the Red Banner philosophy emphasises the spiritual role of the leader, which was legitimized with the heavenly mandate [, the] revolution and the importance of the revolutionaries in the Kim lineage. [...] The whole family is venerated god-likely and thus temples, monuments and obelisks have been installed where people pray to the Kim family. People often gather together for rituals and pray to the Kim's for good harvests, health care, etc. [...] Traditional medicine, the belief in body harmony through yin and yang, as well as

fortune telling and sorcery are common in the belief of ordinary citizens, especially in low classes. [...]

[T]he Red Banner philosophy targeted especially lesser educated and least educated parts in the population who are susceptible for superstitious and sorcery, and so the Kims should get unquestionable truth in the many positive myths and legends about the leadership to consolidate faith in the system. [...] It is a tendency that governments fear the influence of religions, since the religious identification is often stronger than the national identification or governmental identification, and thus the North Korean government used to dissolve the newly created state-religion cleavage by creating its own Neo-Confucian shamanism, where state and religion are one, such as it was in Imperial Korea. [...] In the end, it has to be pointed out that traditional shamanism is repressed very much, and thus the rituals are more and more getting lost. Instead they are replaced by private rituals of individual shamans, as well as minor healing practices of folk religion [A]. However, the shamanic elements in the Red Banner philosophy can be practised publicly and people gathered together to cite the great deeds of Kim Jong-il, praying together, conducting rituals together, swearing oath to the nation, doing self-critics and promising to do better, as well as asking the gods for help and to take care of their 'beloved' Kims. [...]

Chondoism as biggest officially organised religious institution was often focussed as anti-governmental and supervised, and therefore the unofficial Red Banner movements can be seen as accepted counter-religion, though it cannot be proven that it was really state-sponsored (but at least it can be proven that it was accepted and tolerated openly by the state, since they sponsored the sites and relicts) or intended as such. [...] In 1997, it was specified with terms such as 'red spirit', 'socialist wisdom', and metaphysical words were put in the Juche Socialist context [B]. Thus, it cannot be proven anymore, whether the red banner philosophy was originally intended to address the newly forming religious movements, or whether the movements appeared as a result of a metaphysical interpretation of the Red Banner philosophy, which was never concretized, though Confucianist etiquettes were brought together with Juche Idea and Socialism was put together with 'the great spirit'.

[A] Choi, Junn: Understanding Shamanism in North Korea—A Narrative of a Female North Korean Shaman, *The Korean Cultural Studies*, 2011, vol.21, pp.171 – 199

[B] __: 김정일의 붉은기 사상, <http://nk.joins.com/dic/view.asp?idx=20010105112225> (retrieved on 1 July 2017); __: 붉은기 사상, <http://nkd.or.kr/pds/nk/view/238> (retrieved on 1 July 2017)

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Schmitz, Timo: The Red Banner philosophy as religious legitimation of the DPRK political apparatus in the civil life, self-published online article, 1 July 2017

XVI. Tengrism

Tengrists believe in an eternal blue sky which is ruled by a holy spirit – the Goddess of Fertility. Her name 'Umai' means 'womb' or 'embryo' and all kind of life is a gift by her. Despite that, the earth was seen as manifestation of the mother, thus everything on the earth goes back to the creator.

Adopted from:

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In their belief, Tengri means Heaven, and again a special interaction of Heaven and Earth such as known from Confucianism can be adopted, however, unlike Confucianism where there is one highest principle, the Tengrist Heaven has a stronger god-like quality, and the main object is not the harmony of the society and the role of the people such as done in Confucianism, but the harmony with nature and all kind of creatures and being, such as can be found in the basis of Daoism. Even further, just as in Daoism, Tengrism sees the world as a self-in-motion, and thus human-beings have to treat it good.

"Perhaps better than almost any other people, Buryats and Mongols have understood the importance of keeping the world in balance and to revere the air, waters, and land. From the traditional Buryat point of view, the world is not a dead place, but vibrantly alive with spirits and souls in every thing and in every place, also that all animals and plants have sentient souls much like ourselves." [A]

[A] ____: Buryat Mongolian Shamanism, Tengrism,

http://www.tengerism.org/Buryat_Shamanism.html (retrieved on 25 August 2014)

Adopted from:

Schmitz, Timo: The Different Forms of Religion, self-published online article, 16 March 2017

XVII. Vietnamese folk religion

Just like in China, there is not only one religion, but there are many local religions. Thus the term 'folk religion' just serves as an umbrella term, and might be partly used as classification as an ethnic religious cluster, since it is not widespread in other countries, and in other countries where it is spread, it can be mainly found by one ethnicity (sometimes residing in several countries) or several ethnicities from one country. The Chinese, as well as the Vietnamese folk religion in its term can be easily compared to Hinduism, which also fulfills the above mentioned criteria, as it is just used as an umbrella term for different local traditions among different ethnic groups in one country that probably share the same root and also share a canonical tradition. However, this comparison is just useful for formal conditions (many local beliefs that go back on shared scripture), but in its content, it is not comparable. [...]

Vietnamese folk religion is also stressed a lot by Confucianism, and thus it is often seen as 'Vietnamese-styled Confucianism', which in fact is not completely correct.

Several Vietnamese traditional religions are famous as own religions since they became formalised or are widespread in a common consent in more than just a local area. The most famous example is probably Cao Đài, known as Caodaism in English. It is a joined religion of the three religions of China (Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism) with Vietnamese mythological features. [...] An old branch of Vietnamese folk religion is Đạo Mẫu, which comes from Chinese 'Dao Mu' (道母), meaning the 'Mother of the Way'. It refers to the Mother Goddesses in Vietnamese belief [A], and "it is believed to have its roots in prehistory when the Vietnamese worshipped the spirits of nature" [B]. Vu also adds that "It is possible that the concept of the Mother Goddess came to encompass the many different spirits of nature becoming one spirit manifesting itself in many different forms or deities" [B].

[...] Vietnam was mainly Chinese in history, but they also had own dynasties which led to the creation of the Vietnamese identity. Of course, the own local religions were connected with this identity, while the religions that came through China were regarded as foreign. At the same time, Vietnamese used Chinese characters for a long period, adopted the Confucian

moral system and kept it at least to a certain degree, and Chinese Buddhism in a Vietnamese version is even the most spread organised religion in Vietnam today. Do (2003) points out four classifications of gods in Vietnamese belief: the nature spirits, the guardian spirits, "various court-like assemblies", and deities of other ethnic groups (such as the Khmer). The guardian spirits are comparable to Confucianism, and venerates heroes and political figures, while the court-like assemblies are rather Taoist and include immortals (tiên) and holy sages (thành), as well as heavenly imperial deities [C].

[...] Ancestral worshipping, as known through Confucianism and shamanism – and an alliance of both: Confucianism in its morality and piety, shamanism in the ritual practise – is not only limited to the above mentioned, but essential in Vietnamese belief in general. Thus, "Household altars offer a sacred space for remembering deceased relatives and paying homage to one's god. These altars, which may be arranged on a shelf or placed on top of a standing cabinet, are also places of formal religious worship. In many households, the religious iconography identifies the family's religious faith: a statue of Quan Am in a Buddhist household, the Virgin Mary in a Catholic one" [D].

[...] In Vietnam, when an elder celebrates birthday, a sorcerer will pray in front of meat, probably pork. After the prayer, it is eaten together. The ritual is called mừng thọ, and might be translated with longevity celebration. Longevity celebration is very common in Vietnam and is conducted on the birthday's of people being seventy or elder. [...]

Many people in Vietnam consider themselves to be atheist. So does the contact which explained me the rituals. The person confessed lacking profound knowledge of the meaning behind ceremonies and festivals, but also stressed attending family ceremonies, as well as visiting Buddhist pagodas regulary. Thus, it can be compared to people in the West, especially in Western and Central Europe, who are going to church when somebody married or died to join the ceremony, but deny God in the way proposed by the church or don't have a strong belief in religion. As a result, it can be said that Vietnamese religious ceremonies fulfill societal functions and are performed as social value.

[A] Vu, Tu Anh: "Worshipping the Mother Goddess: The Dao Mao movement in Northern Vietnam", in: Explorations in Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 6 No.1, 2006, pp. 27-44

[B] Vu (2006), p. 27

[C] Do, Thien: Vietnamese Supernaturalism – Views from the southern region, Routledge: New York, 2003, p. 2

[D] Truitt, Allison: Offerings to Kings and Buddha: Vietnamese Ritual Activities at Chua Bo De, New Populations Project, 2006,

http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/offeringskingsbuddha.html (retrieved on 8 September 2016)

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