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Introduction

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- 1 The Chinese and Indian worlds are both home to a religious plurality that is more vibrant and more ancient than in Europe. The comparative exercise, when it is carried out, tends however to confront each of these two worlds with that of Europe and America, and in an asymmetrical way (the theoretical models coming from the West and being applied either to China or to India). A direct comparison between these two worlds is rarely carried out, for various reasons, including the scientific languages used; by contrast, studies on the interactions between Indian and Chinese religions are quite numerous, but answer entirely different research questions. Yet, such a comparison is particularly enlightening for several reasons, starting with the very different effects here and there of the encounter with the West, which led to processes of invention of “religion” that were synchronous but took divergent directions.
- 2 These questions inspired an international conference at the Confucius Institute in Geneva on June 10-11, 2016 on the regulation of religious plurality in China and India, which provided the bulk of the papers collected here. The aim was not to ask Indianists or Sinologists to conduct the comparison themselves, but rather to confront knowledge and analytical frameworks by presenting focused studies, each on a specific set of data, whether historical or anthropological, and answering common questions. Such common questions are potentially very numerous. It would have been possible to begin by addressing the state and religious institutions and their modes of regulation. We preferred to start from below, from the observable, everyday religious plurality at the individual and local level, and from the ways in which Indian and Chinese societies manage this diversity over time.

The comparison seen from below

- 3 To do this, we must begin by clarifying the terms of the discussion. Our common object is diversity, understood as the objective fact of the presence within the same society of different traditions and forms of religious practice (including diversity within the

mainstream religions), whether or not this diversity is recognized as such. When it is recognized, we can speak of plurality, which it is essential to distinguish clearly from pluralism, the latter defined as a position (or even an ideology) aiming to present diversity as natural, healthy and desirable, hence policies to support plurality.

- 4 One of the fundamental characteristics of Indian and Chinese societies that is only rarely found in Europe or America, is the overt co-presence, from very early times, of all forms of religion: mediumistic, possession and healing cults; sacrificial cults to local deities; cults of ancestors or the deceased; ascetic, monastic or spiritual traditions; supralocal “church”-type religious institutions, structured and recognized by the state; modern and contemporary religious reform movements, some nationalistic, others universalist. Indeed, talking about possession and sacrifice, and the intense debates surrounding them, immediately rings bells for an observer of the religious field in China as in India, more so than to a specialist of religion in contemporary Europe. In the same way, the gap and the tension between domestic and community practices, often organized in a very stable way over time, and “sectarian” and proselytizing movements that aim to move the lines, are structuring elements of social dynamics in both countries, in a more obvious way than in the West.
- 5 All these forms of religion have their own places (temples, sanctuaries...) and religious specialists, but the places are often shared and the specialists closely interact, when they do not cross the borders between the categories. Moreover, in both worlds, Islam has grown deep roots since the beginning of the second millennium, and Christianity since the sixteenth century (it was already present in India at least in the fourth century). The religious layers are superimposed, without the oldest ones being erased. Even more than the copresence of different religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity...), it is the mingling of these different ways of doing religion, in which the same individuals and communities engage at different times, that deserves a comparative look.
- 6 This choice of comparative object naturally excludes various aspects of the question of religious plurality that are otherwise prominent in other scholarly works: there will be almost no question here of laws and other modes of regulation from above, nor of quantitative approaches and the language and politics of numbers; nor will we discuss violent forms of relations between religions — not to deny their existence, which current events, in China as in India, all too often remind us of — but to consider the question differently, namely the ordinary forms of plurality and the coexistence of multiple ritual practices. Indeed, contrary to evolutionary theories that assume the loss of importance of rituals in increasingly complex and secularized societies (Alexander, 2004), both India and China clearly show the privileged status of ritual as both analyzer and producer of social reality — after all, the term “orthopraxy” was coined by Frits Staal in the Hindu context, and then massively adopted by sinologists.

Comparable Objects

- 7 It has not always been self-evident that the abundant diversity of ways of doing religion in the two worlds is comparable. The historiography, for reasons that would deserve to be analyzed, has tended to insist on the systematic and constraining character of socio-religious organization in India, on the one hand, and on the great freedom of choice in China on the other; in the latter case, the recent fashion, imported from the United

States, of the theories of rational choice and of the religious market tends to occupy a large place in scholarly analyses (Yang, 2012).¹ A caste society and a meritocratic society, according to the received wisdom, cannot have the same types of religious practice. However, recent work on China shows how the same individuals or communities take part, depending on the time or the context, in very different forms of religious practice (Goossaert, forthcoming). In so doing, these scholars bring to light forms of regulation that are much more comparable with those of a caste society than one would have imagined; we would like to develop here an example that has paradigmatic value for the ambitions of the present special issue.

- 8 Recent analyses of religious life in China emphasize the distinction between distinct spheres – territory (space); filiation (time); economy (occupations); voluntary individual commitment (charity, self-cultivation) – and their relationship to different ritual traditions. Different forms of religious life relate to distinct religious specialists and different dimensions of social life. Chinese society has long worked to organize the coexistence of these various religious forms by formally separating them. In fact, if we look at Chinese religious history from the pre-modern era to the most recent developments, we cannot but notice a very strong propensity to limit religious competition and to produce internal/local regulations for this purpose. This is a cultural orientation, sometimes expressed in the sources, which remains difficult to define precisely as a formalized value, but whose formalized effects can be seen in countless circumstances.
- 9 Indeed, if we look at Chinese formal regulations, we realize that, until recently, the normative texts governing religious life recognize plurality but limit by many means the free choice of individuals and communities, competition, and the commercialization of religious services, which are three distinct but closely related aspects of pluralism.² The article by Kenneth Dean in this special issue reminds us of this, by evoking the importance of the regulations of Chinese temples, which specify the rights and duties of all those involved in ritual activities.
- 10 Contrary to the widespread idea that a typical Chinese “tries out” different religions and ritual solutions and ultimately adopts the one that works best, premodern Chinese society is marked by a very strong regulation that formally and precisely specifies who has the right to perform rituals or provide other religious services to whom, in what place and under what conditions. This regulation is largely the work of local societies and their authorities (large temples and their Buddhist and Daoist elite clerics who are at the core of religious networks; managers of temples, guilds and associations, etc.) much more than of the state, which is generally content to endorse these rules coming from below.³
- 11 On the other hand, although historiography has tended to emphasize the systematic and constraining nature of religious organization in India, it has also recognized that there is room in India for freedom of choice. In the case of Hinduism in particular, there is no shortage of examples of how freedom of choice in religious matters manifests itself. Indeed, if belonging to a particular caste determines the religious life of Hindus, it does not exhaust the whole field of possibilities, since they can also choose to follow a guru (most often but not exclusively an ascetic) and join a sectarian movement.
- 12 Indian relationships with temples and monks are in principle based on free choice, although there is a tendency for collective allegiances to particular temples and gurus,

especially in South India where communities may have long-standing ties to particular charismatic ascetics and theologies. Philosophical schools with distinct metaphysics and practices have developed in the form of religious orders that maintain relationships with certain communities. In addition, in pre-colonial times, there were many groups of wandering ascetics who could also be recruited as militias or as money lenders. In modern times these groups have been settled, although the huge Kumbh Mela festivals that still attract millions of pilgrims show how multifaceted this religious landscape remains (van der Veer, 1988).

The Division of Ritual Labor

- 13 The regulations just mentioned are based on a precise division of ritual labor. The reality, observed by many ethnographers, is that competition between the different types of religious specialists is limited for the simple reason that they do not perform the same services. In many places in China, Buddhist clergy do only funeral rituals and Daoists only rituals for the living — thus removing any possible cause for competition. It should be noted again that these are roles rather than exclusive personal identities; the same person may be qualified independently to perform Daoist and Buddhist rituals, which does not detract from the effect of religious role regulation.
- 14 Competition as we can observe it, historically or ethnographically, operates mostly within traditions; between two Daoist troupes, for example, which may perform the same ritual (but in different styles, for different costs, etc.). To limit this kind of competition, systems of regulation (well documented since the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries, but certainly with more ancient origins) divide up the ritual labor. In the particularly wealthy and populous Jiangnan region (around Shanghai), a well-documented but by no means atypical case, all religious specialists are organized into “parishes,” called *mentu* 門圖 (or 門徒) or *menjuan* 門眷, within which they enjoy ritual monopolies. Until the 1930s, each family was assigned a Daoist, a Buddhist, a Confucian (*lisheng*) priest, a troupe of musicians, and still other specialists who enjoyed the exclusive right to provide them with ritual services corresponding to their area of expertise. A family or community that hired other specialists than those to whom they were bound by this long-term *menjuan* contract could be sued by the holder of the monopoly right, who then usually won the case. These contractual relationships were stable over time (the rights actually belonged not to the individual religious specialist but to his or her religious lineage), and could be exchanged, sold, or mortgaged by the holder.
- 15 To this observation, which gives an example of a concrete way of implementing the Chinese cultural preference for a highly regulated division of religious labor, and thus a form of imposed plurality, one must add an essential element: the authorities at all levels have been constantly dismantling these systems of regulation of local religious life since the beginning of the twentieth century. As early as the last years of the empire, members of the upper strata of society protested against the constraints imposed on them by these systems (obligation to pay regularly a wide variety of religious specialists, impossibility to choose who will perform family rituals in their homes) and sometimes got local officials to deny the validity of these regulations. The dismantling by the Republican state (in some places, in a brutal manner, beginning in the first weeks of the Republic, in early 1912) of the regulatory bodies (Daoist, Buddhist

and divination officials) which were crucial intermediaries between the state and society at the local level and were at the core of the regulatory systems, accelerated the decline of the latter. Finally, a discourse of “free choice” emerged, claiming for everyone the right to deal, or not to deal, with the religious specialists of their choice. Nevertheless, the parish and right-to-practice systems remained widely in place until 1949, and traces of them can still be found today.

- 16 If one wants to think of such a form of regulation of religious plurality in a comparative way, one can turn to the neighbouring countries, Korea and, especially, Japan. In the latter case, the shogunal regime established such parishes at the turn of the seventeenth century, where each family was registered with a Buddhist temple that provided its funeral services. The purpose of this system, however, was quite distinct from that of the Chinese “parishes” (although the latter may also have been used for control and surveillance). An equally promising object of comparison then is the relationships between clients and ritual specialists in the Indian world. In descriptions of roles in Hindu rituals, the former are called *yajamana* (or *jajman*), i.e. sacrificers, while the domestic priests are generally called *purohita* (or *purohit*). Louis Dumont applied this religious model to the traditional Indian economy as a whole, arguing that the religious ideology encompasses the non-monetary economy, ensuring the interdependence of castes in village communities (Dumont, 1970). This ingenious theory, which Dumont also applied outside India to the general analysis of market and non-market economies, has been sufficiently refuted in subsequent works that it need not be repeated here (Fuller, 1989).
- 17 We can, however, return to the original model of long-term relationships between the clients of the ritual, on whose behalf it is performed, and the ritual specialists. As in China, most of these clients are more interested in the correct performance than in the symbolic meaning. In Indian pilgrimage centers (*tirtha*), the priests who serve clients from all over the country keep detailed records that may go back centuries, proving that they have performed the domestic rites of this or that family over several generations and are thus the hereditary pilgrimage priests (*tirtha purohit*) for that family. These hereditary links are nowadays under great strain due to the considerable expansion in the number of pilgrims, which sometimes leads to violent competition between religious specialists (van der Veer, 1985). The priests who perform the domestic rituals live close to the families and are well known to them; they do not need to provide evidence of the ties that bind them. Nevertheless, they too compile and store genealogical information about the families, who consult them for astrological advice when starting a business or entering into a marriage. These relationships have been challenged and weakened by the social, political and economic changes of the twentieth century, but they have by no means disappeared. Priests who specialize in death and misfortune management, on the other hand, do not maintain hereditary ties with their clients. The latter tend to avoid them after employing and paying them.
- 18 This very quick overview of the types of division of ritual labor suggests that, in China as in India, one finds a large number of ritual specialists working for families and rendering specialized services (divination, healing, possession, funeral rituals, exorcisms, rites of passage, spiritual initiations...), who tend to develop formal and stable links with their clients. In such a relationship, a family of ritual specialists (in the broadest sense) provides its services exclusively and over a very long period of time to another family, usually from another caste, which cannot itself perform the ritual labor

in question. The comparison becomes even more relevant when one realizes that some of the religious specialists (performers for weddings and funerals) bound by *menjuan* contracts in China are in reality part of marginalized social groups and (until 1723 in law, until the 1920s in reality) treated in law as an inferior caste (the *jianmin* 賤民). The division of ritual labor and the hereditary relations between specialists and clients respond to a logic of management of plurality as deeply rooted in Indian as in Chinese culture, and responding to similar requirements: to ensure that the proliferation of religious services is beneficial (maximum access for all to rituals and salvation goods) without calling into question the social order.

- 19 These contractual relationships are comparable even though the type of distinctions between the religious specialists who share the ritual labor are clearly different here and there. While in India all the priests belong to what is now called Hinduism, in China there is a distinction between Daoists, Buddhists and Confucians. In India, the ritual specialists, at least for the higher castes, are Brahmins, a social rather than doctrinal classification. It can be hypothesized that while in China ritual services are provided by specialists with different doctrinal allegiances, doctrine plays a role in the competition between specialists and its regulation, and is therefore more important than in India where ritual practices are characterized by regional variations but not by doctrinal differences. In India, doctrine is not the responsibility of Brahmin priests but of monastic orders whose members do not offer domestic rituals for families, although they may, at the request of the latter, when they are well off, perform services for the gods within the temples.
- 20 An additional floor of our comparative edifice opens on Islam and the ways in which it has been integrated into religious pluralities; while the imams of the mosques have largely devoted themselves to the service of Muslim communities, the sufi and other masters serving the holy places, numerous in India as in China, and sometimes shared (even if the Indian world is experiencing a massive wave of eradication of the Muslim presence from the pilgrimage sites), are here and there in regular contact with non-Muslims.⁴ They have borrowed a common language to create a place for themselves in the operation of ritual labor, and even, as Tristan Brown's article shows, a new niche in the division of ritual labor.⁵
- 21 What we have just briefly seen in the case of the division of religious labor can also be applied, as this special issue will show, to the relations between local communities, temples and supralocal institutions, between families and communities, between local and national gods, between normative texts and living oral traditions, etc. We have, in India as in China, comparable logics of regulation, and processes of questioning these regulations under the effect of political and social modernities. One of the dimensions of plurality to which we have paid attention is space. Not only, as Adam Chau shows, religious plurality is first and foremost a plurality of unique places with their history, character and gods, but this religious arrangement of space is at the heart of negotiations: where can a temple, sanctuary, monastery, holy site, etc., be built, and how does the arrangement of these various sites express or condition the regulation of plurality? Tristan Brown, for Southwest China in particular, offers a spatial reading of the distribution of roles and rights between religious traditions and institutions.
- 22 Thus defined, the comparison of Indian and Chinese religious pluralities can be based on two preliminary observations, one that brings them closer and the other that sets them apart. The first is that in both cases, societies, at all levels, have regulated

diversity in a non-tolerant way, through mechanisms of division of religious labor: who can perform which ritual, when and where; who can set up which deity in which place, etc. All this is the object in India as in China of negotiations and regulations, according to infinitely varied modalities – and the internal variation in each of the two worlds is just as great as between them – but the overarching logic is comparable. Even if the invention of modern states has brought radical innovations, this ancient tradition of non-tolerant regulation persists today. In China as in India, we have a plurality (different religious traditions have been recognized for a long time) which is not pluralism: the recognized religious traditions are limited in number, the barrier to newcomers is very high, and the recognized traditions are framed by very restrictive systems of regulation.

- 23 The second observation is the radically different role that the state has played historically; a centripetal force in China, where the imperial state has pursued cultural and religious unification policies for more than two thousand years (even if their real effects remain subject to debate and are often overestimated) (Sutton, 2007), centrifugal in India, where the processes of unification, sanskritization in the first place, had quite other causes movers (often foreign) (Srinivas, 1967). The castes seem to have played here a role in regulating the plurality which is played there by the state and the local elites (including the clergies). However, the contemporary rise of literate forms of religion linked to that of the middle classes is visible in both worlds and strongly affects the balances of plurality – as many specialists in “popular” traditions can attest at their expense. In India, families are increasingly demanding to be served by educated priests who have a real command of Sanskrit; comparable phenomena are observed in China as well as in the Muslim world (Eickelman, 2010). What needs to be analyzed here, then, is the evolving role of sacred texts and their reading, as well as their theological interpretations. One of the results of this evolution is that, in India as well as in China, it is now monks with an MBA and a certain level of English who are in charge of many temples.
- 24 If we find in both societies the unifying forces of textualization and the differentiating forces of ritual (and thus of the oral), the actors who mobilize these forces do not have the same resources and the same status everywhere. Same problems, different solutions; the ingredients for a fruitful comparison are therefore present.

Methods of comparison

- 25 Once the aims and feasibility of the comparison have been established, the question of methods arises. At least three methods have emerged in the course of our discussions and are represented in this special issue. The first, the most obvious but not the easiest, is the direct confrontation of the trajectories of the two worlds, considered as taken in the same global context that imposes itself on them. This is the approach developed by Peter Van der Veer in his book devoted to the question of modern religious histories of China and India (Van der Veer, 2014).⁶ He shows how the colonial (or imperialist) context provoked in China, as in India and elsewhere, the invention of religions, which modern states have all had to learn to govern, but by making very different choices, just as religious actors have also reacted in different ways. This has led to opposite articulations between nationalism and religion – tending towards exclusion in China and towards fusion in India. As an extension of this work, we consider that the

comparison must necessarily take into account the whole of the socio-political structures that produce religion and its regulation in order to make sense of the different directions that religious developments take here and there. Indeed, the various forms of worship and rituals found in India and China do not occupy the same position in the social order here and there (and these positions are evolving), and they cannot therefore be compared if they are abstracted from their own context.

- 26 We also want to draw attention to the language used to talk about the religious practices being compared. We can only note, and probably deplore, that, with rare exceptions (studies on ritual are probably the best example), social-scientific research on religious diversity in China and India largely applies theories developed in Europe and North America, and contributes little to theoretical and analytical renewal. Comparative work such as ours needs a conceptual toolkit that is both anchored in the reality of the Chinese, Indian and other fields, and that opens up universal perspectives. This is what is at stake in the first article, in which Adam Chau proposes the concept of ritual *terroir* to talk about the visceral, sensitive attachment of many individuals to the way religion is made and felt in a place,⁷ which makes it different from any other place. The approach is *etic* (the term *terroir* and its French gastronomic connotations say it clearly enough), the ethnographic examples are Chinese, but the ambition is universal, not European-centric.
- 27 Finally, the third approach, which represents the bulk of our special issue, consists of case studies on common questions and comparable objects: it proposes materials for comparison, rather than conclusions that would be obviously premature. This special issue brings together eight articles: four concern a Chinese case study and as many the Indian world. They allow us to consider local regulations of religious diversity at two different levels: situations of transplantation on the one hand; the articulation between the individual, the community and the national institutions on the other.

Situations of Transplantation

- 28 Southeast Asia has long been a place of interaction between Chinese and Indian cultures and religions; the history of Chinese and Indian migration and acculturation, however, has been split. The colonial regimes, those of the British Empire in particular, had to set up systems of regulation of religious plurality common to these various populations, which were inherited by the post-colonial states, notably Singapore and Malaysia as well as Mauritius. The articles by Sudheesh Bhasi and Kenneth Dean both document the history of the management of Indian and Chinese religious plurality in the Malay world, while Mathieu Claveyrolas pursues a parallel history in the Indian Ocean.
- 29 Bhasi is interested in the cults of the tutelary deities of the Tamil clans that migrated to Malaysia. These cults, which are vibrant in the Tamil homeland, are in the midst of a revival and reinvention among the descendants of the migrants, but in a very different way: building a temple to one's tutelary deities both requires and demonstrates a social and cultural capital accessible only to some. Here we touch on an essential question of our comparative enterprise: who regulates the possibility of building a temple, and of choosing the deity? Clearly, a lesser presence of "traditional" authorities in the local diaspora and a Muslim Malay state change the balance of power, which does not mean

that there is no regulation, as shown by the campaigns of the temple federations to prohibit bloody sacrifices.

- 30 The question of the sacrifices is also at the heart of the negotiations that have historically allowed Islam to establish itself in the Chinese empire. Tristan Brown, adopting our shared approach of plurality from below to focus on the place taken by the very minority Muslims in Han areas, notes how their monopoly of the cattle trade and slaughter during the last two dynasties allowed them to claim a legitimate place in the division of religious labor.
- 31 Reading Kenneth Dean's account of the life of the great opium merchant Cheang Hong Lim (1841-1893), one may think that we find ourselves in another world, but the underlying issues are in fact largely the same. It was by building temples to their tutelary deities that the Chinese merchants in Singapore organized and controlled society, and were recognized by the colonial authorities. On this basis, they negotiated rights and monopolies with the colonial authorities – starting with the lucrative opium trade.
- 32 Mauritius, like Singapore and Malaysia an independent state with a long British colonial past, is demographically dominated by a large Indian community (which coexists with, among others, a Chinese community) that has organized itself around its temples. In his article, Mathieu Claveyrolas traces the history of this construction, drawing attention to the stakes of both economic and symbolic control of these temples – which again raises the question of regulation: who can decide how to build and decorate a temple and what rituals to conduct there? The tension between centripetal forces (a “national” identity, a discourse on Hindu cultural homogeneity, the political and economic strength of global institutions) and the vitality of local initiatives and the taste for “terroir”, to adopt Chau's concept, are at the heart of community decisions about what is done with and in temples, and the possibility of maintaining a plurality of practices.⁸

The Individual, the Community and the National Institutions

- 33 The previous articles have focused on community regulations and temples. However, our approaches to plurality as defined above also make room for the diversity of individual choices. Chinese and Indian societies have long valued individual commitment (the taking of one's destiny into one's own hands), provided that the ritual obligations incumbent on the individual by virtue of his or her position in society (belonging to a family, lineage, clan, caste; to a territorial community; to a profession) are respected. Voluntary communities of practice are founded and led by spiritual masters of which Indian and Chinese societies are inexhaustible producers, and which also form, incidentally, a superb comparative object: the Indian gurus and the Chinese saints.⁹
- 34 Finally, Aminah Mohammad-Arif's article, which does justice to the place of Islam in religious plurality in India, analyzes the diversity of practices as a form of plurality internal to the traditions, and this in the case of a particularly unifying institution, the Tablighi Jama'at, which imposes a strict orthopraxy on its members. The gap between the discourse of the actors, which is very unified, and the observed practices, which are

much more diverse, is of course not specific to this movement, nor to the Indian world, but what makes this study particularly relevant is its argument that the general level of plurality in the surrounding society, at various levels (communities, families) directly affects the field of possibilities for diversity between individuals.

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NOTES

1. For a critique, see Palmer (2011). See also Weller & Seligman (2014).
2. On commercialization, see Chau (2016).
3. This section is abstracted from Goossaert, 2013.
4. Our special issue does not address the issue of shared holy sites, on which there is a large literature; see for example Bigelow, 2010.
5. On India, see Gaborieau, 2002.
6. For a broader reflection on the comparative approach, see Van der Veer, 2016.
7. Chau has also developed a conceptual apparatus to compare, from China, the ways of doing religion across cultures: Chau, 2011a, 2011b, 2013.
8. For similar thinking in Chinese settings, see Goossaert, 2014.
9. In their introduction to a collective work on modern Chinese saints, Ownby, Goossaert & Ji, 2017, open the comparison to gurus; see Copeman & Ikegame, 2012.

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