

Asian Christianity in its Interaction with Asian religious traditions - 2 (Maria Sereti)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



Relations between in Christianity and Hinduism

Hinduism appeared in 600 BC and continues to exist until today. However, its roots are detected since 1,500 BC. Hinduism is the oldest religion in the world and the third most populous, after Christianity and Islam. Furthermore, it is a polytheistic pagan religion with no founder and with many Gods of various attributes. Therefore, there are 33 major Gods and 330 million minor deities. Nowadays, within Hinduism some accept Vishnu as the supreme God while others think that Siva is the supreme God[1]. The greatest goal of Hindus is the liberation (moksha) from the cycle of incarnations which is achieved by the unification with God. The major Hindu communities are spotted in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, Mauritius, Fiji etc. The Hindu sacred scriptures are the Vedas, while their teachers are the Guru.

Due to its diversity, Hinduism is difficult to compromise with other religions, let alone Christianity. It is a religion that demands the respect of all other religions and the recognition that it bears the great truths. Hinduism seems unwilling to cooperate with Christianity, because Hinduism has a longer history, the theories of its pandits are profound and the influence of these theories in India is great. Nevertheless, the World Council of Churches[2] has attempted to make the two religions approach one another. During the 3rd General Assembly of New Delhi in 1961[3], this fellowship of Christian churches tried to give solutions to the problems of Christians in India whose rate is just 3.5%.

Christianity and Hinduism differ in many essential issues. There is a possibility of coexistence if one of the two religions retreats as far as some basic questions are concerned. Specifically, the Christian seeks help through his faith, as his religion is the only way out, but this is not the case for the Hindu follower. Moreover, in Christianity the universal salvation is dominant, whereas the Hindu tradition denies it. Furthermore, Christians participate in the rites and pray all together in their

churches for the salvation of everybody, while Hindus pray individually for their own salvation. This is explained by the Law of Karma which is personal. A Christian may be willing to approach a Hindu, but this is not feasible as long as he/she is incapable of interpreting Hinduism. As a result, for many years, Hinduism had no contact with the West, still the last few years the situation has changed. Naturally, the first contact between Christians and Hindus is due to the Persian nation with the wars between Greeks and Persians.

A remarkable Hindu religious practice is yoga that aims at the unity with the Supreme Being. If we would like to define yoga, we could say that it is a parareligious event that recognizes the existence of God without accepting that God created and rules the world. Through physical practices based on self-concentration, yoga aspires to separate the soul from the matter in order to fill the spiritual gap of people who practice it. The unity is achieved through mental and physical exercises. Even though in Europe and in America yoga[4] is a system of exercise that helps people relax, yoga cannot be detached from Hinduism. At this point lays the objection of Christianity: through physical exercises people turn to Asian religiousness. In other words, self-hypnosis results to the distortion of the salutary message of Christ's Resurrection.

The Taoism Theory and its benefits for Christianity

Taoism owes its name to its central idea, the Tao, which means "path". It is a folk religion and philosophy. It is the first religion founded in China during the 6th century by Laozi. It does not differ highly from Confucianism, because all Chinese religions have the same cosmology. However, Taoism focuses on the individual and on the spiritual life, while Confucianism is centered on the ethical and social aspect of life. Taoism desires a non-violence world which is obtained through Wu Wei[5]. The Wu Wei is an important concept in Taoism that literally means non-action or non-doing. In the Tao te Ching, Laozi explains that beings (or phenomena) that are wholly in harmony with the Tao behave in a completely natural, uncontrived way. The goal of spiritual practice for the human being is, according to Laozi, the attainment of this purely natural way of behaving, as when the planets revolve around the sun. Their common characteristic is that they both highlight the importance of harmony and of the benefits coming from the respect of the laws of nature. The basic principle of Taoism is the two contrary but complementary forces of the world, i.e. Yin and Yang which represent the positive and the negative, the light and the darkness, the spirit and the matter, life and death and reflect the harmony of nature.

Taoism is a term applied in three occasions. Primarily, it designates a philosophical

school based on the texts of Laozi[6] (Laozi had been the master of both Buddha and Confucius); secondly it indicates a group of religious movements such as the Zen sects and lastly, it is a religion recognized by People's Republic of China. The deities of this religion are considered the deities of virtuous people and differ according to the geographical region and the historical period. Taoism is characterized by a transgression. It does not focalize on God as a Supreme Power, but on his presence in the world. Moreover, it exercises influence in the West, mostly due to martial arts. The martial arts include some practices of both attack and defense. They are connected to the basic religious goal of Asian Taoist culture, i.e. the achievement of deification in an arbitrary way, not as it was appointed to the people by God. There are no official heresies within Taoism, although scholars underline that there are two different approaches of the Taoist tradition: 1.Religious Taoism and 2.Philosophical Taoism. These assumptions concerning the differences of Religion and Philosophy are stranger to the traditional Chinese thought; therefore it is impossible that they were expressed by single Taoist thinkers. Religious Taoism does not have religion in the core of the faith and Philosophical Taoism does not refer to a Taoist school or a group of philosophers. Tao te Ching (the Book of the Logos of Nature) is a fundamental text for both philosophical and religious Taoism as it contains the basic principles of Taoism.

Nowadays, there are 20 million Taoists spread mostly in China, Taiwan and South East Asia[7]. However, in China there is also a Christian majority of Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox. At the beginning of the 21st century, Protestants were roughly 40-75 million, having increased immensely, given the fact that in 1949, Protestants in China were just 500,000 people. The rate of Christians is increased constantly in China, in both rural and urban areas, an important factor being the birthrate of Chinese Christians compared to Chinese of other faiths. Christians in China were always seen as strangers, because their ways and traditions were totally different from those of locals. As a result, they were strongly persecuted.

Even though the Taoist theory is different from the Christian, Western or Christian traditions may profit from the Taoist tradition in regards to ecological issues. Specifically, dialogue concerns Laozi and Zhuangzi or Taoist, philosophical and religious subjects. The friendly relations of Christianity and Taoism through dialogue must evolve while both religions have to deal with practical issues, such as the role of harmony and serenity in everyday life.

Christianity and Confucianism

Confucianism is an ethical and philosophical system founded by Confucius in 551-479 BC and is considered the prevailing religion in China. It is also widespread in

Japan, Korea and Vietnam. Confucianism aspires to a state where justice will reign, the leaders will be adept and the administration skilled. The base of Confucianism lies in the three following concepts: Heaven-Earth-Human. As far as Heaven is concerned, Confucius' teachings were traditional. What is new is the cosmologic diarchy of Heaven and Earth[8]. Along with Earth, Heaven gives existence to all things; therefore, it is mandatory to balance our existence, i.e. the microcosm, with the energy of Heaven and Earth, i.e. the macrocosm. Confucius did not intend to found a new religion, but to interpret morally and politically the traditional Chinese teachings. Confucius was born in Shantung in 551 BC, lived in misery and then realized that the only hope for salvation is the alteration of the administration of the country. He was interested in the human relationships and the attitude of people towards society; he incited people to live in harmony with other people and was focused on two concepts: Tao, the "path" and Ren, the "human dignity". When adhered to the rules of Tao, willpower falls in with the willpower on Heaven. The first worship of Confucius takes place in 195 BC when Emperor Han Gao Zu offered a sacrifice to the spirit of Confucius at his tomb in Qufu.

In Chinese society, Christianity and Confucianism interact and at the same time, their rivalry is accentuated. Dr. Yao studies the role both religions play in China, since compared to other religious traditions their followers have increased. Since 1980 Protestantism is characterized as the most evolving religious community. Today, in China there is one of the largest Protestant communities of the world. The personal story of Confucius has impressed many and since 1990, there has been an unprecedented dynamic of his tradition. Despite its growth, compared to Christianity and other religions, Confucianism presents the drawback of lacking any institutional basis and organizational structure. In continental China, the massive expansion of Christianity amazed many, while Protestantism appeared as the "winner" with the highest increase rate of followers among all religious traditions. As a result, it was treated with hostility from the other religions and especially Confucianism whose faithful decided to defense their nation.

Theologians sustained that there is no space for an approach between Christianity and Confucianism without the devaluation of the first. Dr. Kevin Yao studies the progress of the two religions which leads to an uncontrollable rivalry[9]. According to Dr. Yao, the conferences where Confucianism came in dialogue with Christianity gained international attention. The encounters of Christians and Confucians are dominated by hostility. It should be stressed that Confucians are amazed by some conceptions and theories in Christianity, i.e. the formality of religious rites, the personalized concept of God as creator of the world, the projection of the divine and human aspect of life, the religious creeds, the concept of the sin, the

Incarnation of Logos, the Resurrection of the Lord and the post-mortem life, the Doctrine of the Trinity and the equality of men and women. All of the above insult the cosmology of the Chinese religion, therefore the Christian preaching is affronted impassively. Christianity focalizes on the relation with the personal God who is active in the world, while Confucianism deals with life on earth. The Chinese are only interested in moral issues and since the beginning there has been a distinction between morality and religion. In the course of time, Confucianism became a way of life for the Chinese people. It was indifferent towards the spirit world, the destination of the people and the concept of God. However, both religions stress the importance of the perfection of human nature and incite humans to adopt moral values.

A dialogue between Christianity and Confucianism would offer the personal encounter with God, the virtue of love. It is imperative to build bridges between the two religions and this will be accomplished through the Jen of Confucianism and the Tao of Taoism. In the case that a Confucian converts to Christianity, he/she will not reject all the principles of Confucianism, but he/she will find in Christianity a plethora of teachings complementary to the existing principles of proper education [10].

[1] Panagiotis G. Foygias, *The Christian Religion and the Three Big Religions Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism*, edit. «SYNTHETIKI», Athens, 1968, p. 54-55 όπου «Ο Vishnu: Είναι ο ανώτατος Θεός των Ινδουιστών. Σε διάφορες καταστάσεις της ανθρωπότητας εμφανίζεται ως λιοντάρι, νάνος, ψάρι, χελώνα, γουρούι και άνθρωπος». Και «ο Siva: Είναι ο Θεός των λαϊκών στρωμάτων των Ινδιών και παρουσιάζεται ως Θεός της ευσπλαχνίας. Είναι ο φοβερός τοξότης Θεός που απομακρύνει από τους ανθρώπους τις διάφορες ασθένειες».

[2] Stylianos Tsompanidis, *The Contribution of the Orthodox Church and Theology to the World Council of Churches*, edit. Pournara, Thessaloniki, 2008 p. 116 όπου: «Το Παγκόσμιο Συμβούλιο Εκκλησιών διαμορφώθηκε από τις εκκλησίες για να υπηρετεί τη μια οικουμενική κίνηση. Αυτό συνεχίζει το έργο των παγκόσμιων κινήσεων 'Πίστης και Τάξης' και 'Ζωής και Εργασίας', καθώς και του Διεθνούς Ιεραποστολικού Συμβουλίου και του Παγκοσμίου Συμβουλίου Χριστιανικής Εκπαίδευσης».

[3] Angeliki Ziaka, *Dialogues between people of different religions*, vol. B', edit. Pournaras, Thessaloniki, 2010, p. 197 (in Greek)

[4] Yoga, <http://el.wikipedia.org> όπου: «are the physical, mental, and spiritual

practices or disciplines that aim to transform body and mind. The term denotes a variety of schools, practices and goals in Hinduism, Buddhism (including Vajrayana and Tibetan Buddhism) and Jainism, the best-known being Hatha yoga and Raja yoga. The term yoga is derived from the literal meaning of «yoking together» a span of horses or oxes but came to be applied to the «yoking» of mind and body.

[5] Gregory D. Ziakas, *Religions and Cultures of Asia*, edit. Sfakianaki, Thessaloniki, 2006, p. 525 όπου το Γου - Γουέϊ είναι: «η Απραξία, είναι μια προστατική αρχή που λέει: πράξε έτσι, όπως οι σαράντα άνθρωποι, ήρεμα και αυθόρμητα, έτσι που οι πράξεις σου να μην είναι συνειδητές σε σένα και τους άλλους, έτσι που οι ενέργειες σου να προσαρμόζονται αρμονικά στη κάθε περίπτωση και να μην έρχονται σε αντίθεση με το περιβάλλον, να μην παρενοχλούν».

[6] Alexander S. Kariotoglou, *Study in Theology*, edit. Gregory, Athens, 2005, p. 315 όπου ο Λάο Τσέ λέει χαρακτηριστικά: «Γι αυτό ο σοφός λέει, δεν έχω ανάμιξη οι άνθρωποι θ' αλλάξουν μόνοι τους. Προτιμώ την ησυχία ο λαός θα διορθωθεί μόνος του. Δεν κάνω τίποτα οι άνθρωποι θα προκόψουν μόνοι τους. Δεν έχω επιθυμίες ο λαός θα βρει μόνος του το απελέκητο ξύλο».

[7] Fast Facts on Taoism (Daoism), An Overview of Taoism, <http://www.religionfacts.com>

[8] Gregory D. Ziakas, *Religions and Cultures of Asia*, edit. Sfakianaki, Thessaloniki, 2006, p. 507

[9] Kevin Yao (2014), Contemporary Confucian Revival and Its Interactions with Christianity in China, <http://www.chsource.org> , [Thursday 13 March 2014].

[10] Panagiotis G. Foygias, *The Christian Religion and the Three Big Religions Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism*, edit. «SYNTHETIKI», Athens , 1968, p. 131