

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
The Nethersole School of Nursing
CADENZA Training Programme

CTP002 – Psychosocial and Spiritual Care

Chapter 8: Religion and Chinese traditions among older people in Hong Kong

Copyright © 2012 CADENZA Training Programme. All rights reserved.



香港賽馬會慈善信託基金
The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust

Chapter 8: Religion and Chinese traditions among older people in Hong Kong



Course Outline

- Religions in Hong Kong
- Overview of Chinese religion
- Chinese rituals as a form of religion/spirituality in Hong Kong
- Religiosity of older people in Hong Kong

Religions in Hong Kong



Religions in Hong Kong

✕AJ8-糲

五 J88文HB糲鍾碁 糲

五 8IDHB糲道教 糲

五 DG当以ICHB糲真碁 糲

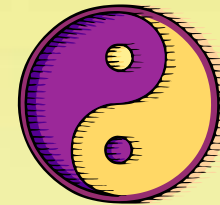
五 文GHIICHB糲高 碁 糲

五 HABHB糲伊斯蘭教 糲

五 C&JHBHB糲弟鞞碁 糲

五 7 文HBHB糲錫克教 糲

五 J8IHBHB糲酋太教 糲



Buddhism



- originated in northern India and entered China through the Indian branch of the Silk Road in the first millennium
- Siddhartha Gautama, who was also called Buddha, was the founder of Buddhism
 - *“He developed his insight into a comprehensive lifestyle comprising ethical behaviour, the understanding of certain truths about the causes and conditions of all existing things, and the focused effort to achieve purification of the mind and liberation from the mental habits that bind us to suffering.” (Alder, 2002, p.17)*
- established a religious community, Sangha (embraces monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen who follow the way of Buddha)
- took several hundred years to evolve in China

Buddhism in Hong Kong

- has an estimated 650,000 to 700,000 adherents in Hong Kong (This figure probably also includes a good number of Taoists)
- has more than 600 temples in Hong Kong (some temples have a history dating back 700 years)
- notable temples include the Chi Lin Nunnery and the Po Lin Monastery

(Hong Kong Government, 2006)

Please click on the following link for details,
http://www.yearbook.gov.hk/2006/en/18_03.htm



Taoism



- unknown origin but probably associated with the sage Laozi (老子)
- stresses that
 - *“Human beings are human beings, and human fulfillment lay in harmonising our thinking and behaviour with the Way (Tao), which they conceived as the patterns and rhythms of nature... a tradition of personal cultivation and meditation that was used to develop one's spiritual capacity to understand and harmonise with the Tao.” (Alder, 2002, p.15-16)*
- evolved into a religious community in the second century
- goals of Taoist religious practice –the achievement of immortality with the help of a huge pantheon of gods and immortals
- two major sects of Taoism today: hereditary priesthood and monastic system of training monks and nuns

Taoism in Hong Kong

- notable temples include the Wong Tai Sin Temple and the Che Kung Temple
- leading deities include Tin Hau (the 'Queen of Heaven' and protector of seafarers), Kwun Yum (the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy; Kwan Tai (God of War and the source of righteousness), etc. (Hong Kong Government, 2006)

Please click on the following link for details,
http://www.yearbook.gov.hk/2006/en/18_04.htm



Confucianism



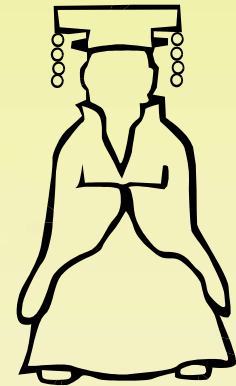
Confucianism

- is a belief in the teaching of Confucius, who was born in 551 B.C.
- emphasises the ethnics of social relationships and an orderly hierarchical society animated by the virtues of altruism, humanism, and personal integrity
- *"Human beings are understood as essentially social beings and human fulfillment involves perfecting the moral nature of both the individual and the society." (Alder, 2002, p.14)*

Confucianism in Hong Kong

- the fundamental difference of Confucianism as compared with Taoism and Buddhism is that Confucianism does not encourage people to resign from public service to become a recluse (Jochim, 1986)
- deeply involved in education in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Government, 2006)

Please click on the following link for details,
http://www.yearbook.gov.hk/2006/en/18_05.htm



Christianity



- is a monotheistic religion and emphasises the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth
- has existed as a Jewish sect in the eastern Mediterranean since the mid-1st century
- *"The core Christian belief is that, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, sinful humans can be reconciled to God and thereby are offered salvation and the promise of eternal life."* (Wikipedia, 2008)
- about 1.5 to 2.1 billion adherents in the early 21st century

Christianity in Hong Kong

Protestants:

- began in Hong Kong in 1841 with 320,000 followers
- composed of 50 denominations (such as Adventist, Anglican, Baptist, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Lutheran, Methodist, etc) with 1,400 congregations (Hong Kong Government, 2006)

Roman Catholic:

- began in Hong Kong in 1874 with 243,000 Catholics served by 289 priests, 72 brothers and 508 sisters
- 52 parishes comprising 41 churches, 34 chapels, and 27 halls for religious services (Hong Kong Government, 2006)



Other religions

- Islam (伊斯蘭教): there are about 90,000 followers in Hong Kong, among them 30,000 are Chinese. The Masjid and Islamic Centre is a major landmark in Tsim Sha Tsui.
- Hinduism (緹鞞暮): there are about 40,000 people involved in religious and social activities in the Hindu Temple in Happy Valley.
- Sikhism (錫克教): about 8,000 Sikhs participate in religious and social activities in the Sikh Temple in Queen's Road East.
- Judaism (猶太教): there are three main synagogues in Hong Kong, providing daily Sabbath and festivals for the Jewish community.

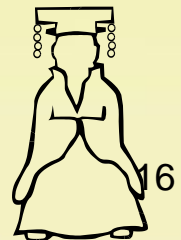
(Hong Kong Government, 2006)

Overview of Chinese religion



What is Chinese religion?

- The Chinese are often described as being superstitious rather than religious by those who are non-Chinese.
- No actual word existed for 'religion' until modern times to describe Chinese culture that has developed from great philosophical and metaphysical traditions.
- The Taoist, Buddhist and Confucian doctrines are found to be inseparable elements in a religious system representing Chinese beliefs.



The popular religion of the Chinese

- The "politico-religious side" emphasised by Confucius and the "ascetic-mystical" emphasis of Lao Tzu blended with the old magical animism and Sinicised Buddhist ideas to become the popular religion of the Chinese. (Soothill, 1973)

How did these three religions evolve into Chinese religious practices?

Answer

- Confucianism laid a foundation of primitive animism in which the forces of nature and spirits of natural phenomena were worshipped.
- Taoism was viewed as a "mystical orientation" that bears comparison with modern physics. The combinations of yin and yang are at the heart of Chinese thought and culture.

(Capra, 2010)



Impact of Chinese religion

- There is an ongoing debate over magic and superstition in Chinese religion.
- Magic and the supernatural are intertwined with the religions and seem to be inseparable from the concept of religion for the Chinese.

(Capra, 2010)

Shaping of Chinese religion

- Some religious practices evolve into rituals that serve the spiritual needs of Chinese.
- The following section will discuss some of the rituals that serve the meaning of spirit for Chinese. It includes:
 - ancestor worship
 - visits to temples
 - Feng Shui



Chinese rituals as a form of religion/spirituality in Hong Kong



Ancestor worship



- is regarded as an important component of Chinese religious practice
- seems to have originated from the ancient patrilineal system. Patriarchs who were well-regarded became objects of worship when dead
- based on three assumptions:
 - *" All living persons owe their fortunes and misfortunes to the ancestors. The second assumption is that all departed ancestors like other gods and spirits have needs that are not different from those of the living. The third is that the ancestors continue, as in life, to assist their relatives in the world just as their living descendants can lend a hand to them." (Hse, 1972, p.235-236)*
- may be perceived as a fusion of the teachings of Confucius and Laozi rather than a religious ritual
- is essentially an act of obeisance and filial duty

Ancestor worship

- ritual offerings include the burning of incense and an offering of fruits and cooked rice that may be made every morning, or weekly, or only on special occasions, such as birthdays
- there is no marked difference in worship rituals between gods and ancestors. Distinctions between gods and ancestors were made from phenomenological and sociological perspectives (Adler, 2002)

Phenomenological perspective: gods have more numinous power than ancestors and can influence a community wider than a single family.

Sociological perspective: Ancestors are worshipped by a single family whereas gods are worshipped by a larger community.



Ancestor worship

- evolves from village ancestral hall to a family altar housed in the compressed nuclear family in Hong Kong
- houses a family altar holding name plaques and images of ancestors or gods, or a family temple containing large altar cabinets with name plaques of ancestors going back many generations

Feng shui

- is described as a form of divination
- is often regarded as pseudoscience with the incorporation of ecological principles (Kinsley, 1995)
- incorporates the concepts of yin and yang, and five elemental phases emphasise the harmony of forces and their relation to a particular family, and even a village community (Jochim, 1984)
- is considered a technique to "read" a landscape to find the best way to orient the place for living, and the graves of the dead in order to harmonise with the spirits who inhabit the land (Kinsley, 1995)



Feng shui

- Suffering bad luck, poverty and unhappiness are attributed to feng shui if a house or a tomb is not situated in harmony, whereas propensity, good luck and happiness will result in a properly situated house or tomb.
- "What good feng shui meant was that you were completely at ease in it." (Freeman, 1979, p.333)

Visits to temples

- Abundance and propensity of temples and shrines in Hong Kong.
- Although a temple itself may be considered a religious institution, there is no fixed organisation to run the temple. It is considered a "diffused religion¹."
- Conceived as ways of interacting with spiritual being: sacrifice, divination and exorcism. (Alder, 2002)
- Visits to temples often undertaken on particularly auspicious days and offerings made to gods in return for good health, wealth or material benefits.



¹Diffused religion" refers to "its theology, rituals, and organisation intimately merged with the concepts and structures of secular institutions and other aspects of the social order" (Yang, 1961, p.20)

Visits to temples

- Offerings to gods in temples consist of fruit or packaged food items. Spirit money made of rough paper with gold foil trimmings is also burnt.
- There is a deeper meaning to the gifts: mutual obligations, or reciprocity in Confucian terms
 - gift exchange is seen as a mechanism by which relationships between two persons are affirmed, maintained, and strengthened
 - it also means that there are obligations on both sides

Activity

Do you know that burning incense can have psychoactive effects on our bodies? You can find out more by clicking on the following link.

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/05/080520110415.htm>

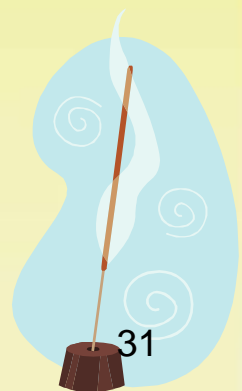
Religiosity of older people in Hong Kong

Religion practice of older people in Hong Kong

- A recent study of religiosity and psychological well-being of older women (182 older women from the six multi-service centres for the elderly) provides information about religious affiliations and religiosity of older women in Hong Kong.

Religious affiliation:

- 56.7% of them believed in folk religion and practiced ancestor worship (compared to only 14.6% of adults aged 25 to 59 in a study of Cheng & Wong, 1997)
- 9.4% of them were Buddhists
- 6.1% and 8.9% of them were Catholics and Protestants respectively (Boey, 2003)



Religion practice of older people in Hong Kong

Religiosity of older women:

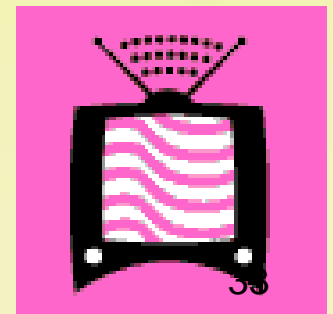
- only 16.9% and 23.2% rated religion as very important and fairly important in their lives
- only 9.6% of them perceived themselves as very religious
- only 13% of them attended religious activity 2-4 times per month
- 77.9% of them believed in supernatural beings
- 54.2% of them would not seek guidance from God when making decision (Boey, 2003)

Religiosity and depression:

- Catholics and Buddhists appeared to experience less depressive symptoms than Protestants whereas no difference was found in women who believed in folk religion as compared with other religious groups (Boey, 2003)

Daily engagement of older people with disabilities in HK

- Another local study indicated the regular daily activities of older people (n=843) who received residential services or community care services:
 - watching TV (72.6%)
 - chatting with friends (67.2%)
 - sports and exercises (64.8%)
 - listening to the radio (51.4%)
 - taking a walk in public areas and strolling inside shopping malls (49.6%) (Lee & Lo, 2005)



Daily engagement of older people with disabilities in HK

In the same study, the kinds of activities they liked to participate in were:

- outdoor activities (23.5%)
- yum cha (飲茶) (14.1%)
- interest classes (computer/karaoke/Chinese opera) (10.4%)
- festival celebrations (7.6%)
- birthday celebrations (6.1%) (Lee & Lo, 2005)



The study does not mention the participation of older people in religious activities. Is this a neglected area in Hong Kong?

What do these study results mean?



1. The practice of traditional rituals is more prominent in the older generation

It is also supported by the following studies:

- A local study by Hui (1991) indicated 46% of people aged over 65 believed in 'Chinese traditional religion', whereas less than 2% of people aged below 30 believed in the religion.
- A local study indicated that only about 50% of children in households where ancestral rites are practiced join in the ceremonies (Myers, 1981).

This is probably due to the following reasons:

- Change in a persons' livelihood, e.g. fishermen no longer consider it necessary to worship Tin Hau when they change from fishing to a land-based job.
- Urban development and lifestyle changes lead to the decline or disappearance of some rites and celebrations.



2. The increase in popularity of religions (Christianity, Buddhism and Catholics) in the younger generation

- A study indicated that 71% and 16% of youth were Protestant and Buddhist respectively. Only 1% of youth was Taoist. (Commission on Youth, 2005)

This is probably due to following reasons:

- Unique characteristics of Western religions, e.g. Protestantism "offers close companionship with other fervent young people, lively singing and group activities, an intense personal relationship with a caring supernatural friend/godfather, and the prospect of personal salvation with few conditions attached." (Lang, 1997, p.257).
- Higher level of education of people in Hong Kong lowers acceptance of Chinese traditional religions.
- Promotion of Christianity in many elite schools.

3. Considered a neglected area in services for the elderly in Hong Kong

- Need to consider spirituality as an integral part of holistic care.
- Incorporate the concepts of spiritual care into service programme design, e.g., conducting religious classes or reading and discussion groups on topics such as searching for meaning and altruism.
- Periodically assesses their religious/spiritual needs.
- Addresses their needs by providing appropriate religious programmes or spiritual interventions (depends on characteristics of service settings) to nurture their spirituality, e.g., actively listening to their feelings, recognising their spiritual strength, facilitating their meaning awareness, spiritual life review, etc.



References

- Adler, J.A. (2002). *Chinese religions*. London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd.
- Boey, K.M. (2003). Religiosity and psychological well-being of older women in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Psychiatric Nursing Research*, 8,921-935.
- Capra, F. (2010). *The Tao of physics: An exploration of the parallels between modern physics and Eastern mysticism (5th ed.)*. Boston: Shambhala Publications.
- Cheng, M.M., & Wong, S.L. (1997). Religious convictions and sentiments. In S.K. Lau et al. (Eds.). *Indicators of social development: Hong Kong* (pp.299-329). Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong
- Commission on Youth. (2005). *Benchmark study on civic engagement and social networks of youths in Hong Kong*. Unpublished report: author.
- Freeman, M. (1979). Geomancy. In G.W. Skinner (Ed.), *The study of Chinese society*. (pp. 313-333). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Hong Kong Government. (2006). *Religion and custom*. Retrieved 19 November, 2010, from http://www.yearbook.gov.hk/2006/en/18_01.htm
- Hse, F.L.K. (1972). *Americans and Chinese (2nd ed.)*. New York: Doubleday Natural History Press
- Hui, C.H. (1991). Religious and supernaturalistic beliefs. In K. Siu, M.K. Lee, P.S. Wan, & S.L. Wong (Eds.), *Indicators of social development: Hong Kong 1988*. (pp.103-143). Hong Kong: Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

References

- Kinsley, D. R. (1995). *Ecology and religion. Ecological spirituality in cross-cultural perspective*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Lang, G. (1997). Sacred powers in the metropolis. Shrines and temples in Hong Kong. In G.Evans and M.Tam (Eds.). *Hong Kong: The anthropology of a Chinese metropolis*. (pp.242-265). Richmond, Surrey: Curzon
- Lee, J.J., & Lo, S.C. (2005). *A survey of the residential care needs of older people*. Unpublished report. Tung Wah Group of Hospitals.
- Jochim, C. (1986). *Chinese religions : a cultural perspective*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Myers, J.T. (1981). Traditional Chinese religious practices in an urban-industrial setting: The example of Kwun Tong. In A.Y.C. King & R.P.L. Lee (Eds.), *Social life and development in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.
- Soothill, W.E. (1973). *The three religions of China, lectures delivered at Oxford (3rd ed.)*. London: Curzon Press.
- Wikipedia (2008). *Christianity*. Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity>
- Yang, C.K. (1961). *Religion in Chinese society: A study of contemporary social functions of religion and some of their historical factors*. Berkeley: University of California Press.