

Chinese Residents' Philosophy and Religion in Contemporary China and North America

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Abstract: The cultural dimension of sustainability as the fourth pillar of the overall sustainable development framework encompasses both tangible and intangible cultures. In this study, tangible culture refers to the home environments of Chinese residents in China and North America, while intangible culture refers to their faiths and belief systems, in other words, their philosophy and religion, reflected (or not) in their home environments. The paper argues that Chinese philosophy and religion have historically contributed to Chinese people's environmental ethics and their health and happiness. Set within this context, the paper presents the author's two empirical research findings on Chinese residents' philosophy and religion in contemporary China and North America. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected by asking Chinese residents the same research question in the 2007-2008 onsite survey and follow-up interviews in Beijing and Suzhou of China, and the 2013 online survey and follow-up interviews in the US and Canada. The findings show a significantly higher percentage of ethnic Chinese in North America holds traditional Chinese faiths than those in China, though Western cultural infiltration is also happening to them. Nevertheless, due to the limited number of participants, the findings may only be indicative.

Keywords: Chinese philosophy; Chinese religion; Civil society; Culture; China; North America

Publication date: February, 2021

Publication online: 28 February, 2021

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Introduction

This article considers that Chinese philosophy and religion have a major role to play to counteract today's global issues in environmental crisis, climate change, social isolation, and cultural hegemony, among others. It addresses these concerns by presenting how the three major schools of thought in traditional China, which are Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, and a folk belief of Feng Shui (wind and water), have contributed to Chinese people's attitudes towards protecting the natural world and gained their enlightened awareness of what constitute virtuous behaviors for their wellbeing. As such, the first part of the essay centers on three broad themes of argument: philosophy and religion as intangible cultural heritage, Chinese philosophy and religion contributing to environmental ethics, and Chinese philosophy and religion contributing to health and happiness. It then discusses the author's empirical research methods and key findings from Chinese residents in China and North America.

Philosophy and Religion as Intangible Cultural Heritage

The United Cities and Local Governments regard culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development (Hawkes, 2001), and philosophy and religion as a nation's intangible cultural heritage must be preserved. Darlow (1996) and Wheelwright (2000) have observed that sustainable development is largely a cultural task since it seeks a change in attitudes and lifestyles. Judy Spokes, the executive officer of Cultural Development Networks, asserts that "Culture is both overarching and underpinning" (Hawkes,

2001, p. 3). As such, Brand (2005) and Nurse (2006) argue that culture should be placed at the front and center of the sustainability framework and fully incorporated into the other three pillars because it is a basis for questioning the implication and practice of sustainable development at its core.

In her book, *Courtyard Housing and Cultural Sustainability*, Zhang (2013, p. 31) defines cultural sustainability as the adaptation and transmission of the beneficial parts in a nation's material (tangible) and immaterial/spiritual (intangible) culture that are conducive to the development of their present and future generations.

Cultural sustainability is a vital component of the overall sustainable development framework as UNESCO (2009, p. 6) links intangible cultural heritage with biological diversity and holds that sharing and disseminating this heritage encourages cultural exchange and understanding between peoples, constituting an asset for harmony and peace among human beings. Creative City Network of Canada (2006) recommends that one approach to cultural sustainability is to view it as an integrated planning and decision-making process that has a long-term perspective of the cultural development, vibrancy, and cohesion of communities.

Cultural diversity is as essential to cultural sustainability as biodiversity is to ecological sustainability (Hawkes, 2001; Merchant, 2004; UN World Commission on Culture and Development, 1995). Jon Hawkes (2001) contends that "Diverse values should not be respected just because we are tolerant folk, but because we must have a pool of diverse perspectives in order to survive, to adapt to changing conditions, to embrace the future" (p. 14). The UNESCO's (2002) Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity likewise asserts that "cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature" (article 1) because "creation draws on the roots of cultural tradition, but flourishes in contact with other cultures" (article 7).

Cultural diversity often provides a variety of critical worldviews to resolving problems in another culture than our own (Spaling and Dekker, 1996). For example, the knowledge of traditional medicine and human-environment relationships in non-western cultures has challenged western medical practice and environmental preservation.

In *The Nature of Design*, David Orr (2002) argues

that "the only knowledge we've ever been able to count on for consistently good effect over the long run is knowledge that has been acquired slowly through cultural maturation" (pp. 38-39), and that "only over generations through a process of trial and error can knowledge eventually congeal into cultural wisdom about the art of living well within the resources, assets, and limits of a place" (p. 48).

In her final book, *Dark Age Ahead*, Jane Jacobs (2004) asserts that the true power of a successful culture resides in its examples. To take this patient and mature attitude successfully, a society must be self-aware of its cultural wisdom. Otherwise, any culture that abandons the values that have given it competence, adaptability, and identity will become weak and hollow (p. 176).

Richard Engelhardt, UNESCO Regional Advisor for Culture in Asia and the Pacific, similarly indicates:

If a nation, a city, a community, or even a family is so unfortunate as to lose touch with its past – if we forget where we have come from, if we lose the map through time which history has drawn – if we lose our heritage, it will be impossible for us to chart where we are headed in the future. (UNESCO World Bank, 2000, p. 22)

Thus, cultural sustainability requires constructing the present and the future by adopting and absorbing past wisdom. The survival of local values should constitute the backbone of sustainability, especially in countries with traditional cultures (Özcan, Gültekin, and Dündar, 1998).

Nevertheless, Spaling and Dekker (1996) contend that cultural change is not only inevitable, but also essential and desirable. There are aspects of all cultures that are either destructive or oppressive, resulting in disharmony among individuals, communities, and the cosmos. It has been recognized that cultural values need to be changed when they violate the integrity of people, groups, or the creation.

Chinese Philosophy and Religion Contributing to Environmental Ethics

Re-establishing environmental ethics in China is not about instilling new ideas to people's heads, but recalling their traditional ideologies in existence. Chinese philosophy and religion were originally developed based on their reverence for nature. The ancient Chinese worshipped nature gods; their main

objects of worship were the Gods of Heaven and Earth. The worship related to the agricultural needs of the people. The Gods of Heaven included the gods of the four cardinal directions: east, west, north, and south. The Gods of Earth consisted of the mountain god, river god, and most important, the local god. Trees were planted on the earth mound to represent the place of worship of the Earth Gods (Chang, 1986).

Chinese philosophy has a history of several thousand years; its written records are often traced back to *Yi Jing* (or *I Ching*, Book of Changes). It can only be estimated that *Yi Jing* first flourished at about the 6th century BCE, which draws on an oral tradition that goes back to the Neolithic period (beginning c.9500 BCE). *Yi Jing* is a chart of divination that introduces some of the most fundamental terms of Chinese philosophy and is the most influential book on Chinese culture. *Yi Jing* concerns human conducts in accordance with the universe to bring good fortune. It is commonly held that the book was written by the legendary Chinese emperor Fu Xi (2953-2838 BCE); further commentaries were added by King Wen and the Duke of Zhou in the 11th century BCE. It is said that Confucius (551-479 BCE) also revised *Yi Jing*.

Yi Jing establishes a rigorous mathematical structure that depicts eight natural phenomena: heaven (乾 qián/ 天 tiān), earth (坤 kūn/ 地 dì), thunder (震 zhèn/ 雷 léi), water (坎 kǎn/ 水 shuǐ), mountain (艮 gèn/ 山 shān), wind (巽 xùn/ 风 fēng), fire (离 lí/ 火 huǒ), and marsh (兑 duì/ 泽 zé).¹ Their interactions, transformations, growth, and decline explain how things take their forms and change with time; it has been regarded as the ‘cosmic algebra’ (yū zhōu dài shù xué).² *Yi Jing* uses Yin Yang to explain things, for example, ‘-’ is for Yang and ‘--’ for Yin, then the combinations of the two will form eight trigrams (bagua) and 64 hexagrams.

Yin Yang literarily means ‘shade and light,’ with the word Yin derived from the word for ‘moon’ and Yang for ‘sun.’ *Zhou Yi* (*Yi Jing*, Book of Changes) suggests that polar opposites created Heaven and Earth, and Yin and Yang. When Heaven and Earth

intersect and Yin and Yang unite, it gives life to all things. When Yin and Yang separate, all things perish. When Yin and Yang are in disorder, all things change. When Yin and Yang are in balance, all things are constant.³ The mutual interdependence of Yin and Yang is called 和合 (hehe). The first 和 signifies ‘harmony’ or ‘peace,’ and the second 合 denotes ‘union’ or ‘enclosure.’ The combined words imply that harmonious union of Yin and Yang will result in good fortune, and that any conflict is viewed only as a means to eventual harmony (Lau, 1991; Yu, 1991).

Daoism as an indigenous Chinese ideology is based on *Yi Jing*, with two evolved branches: Daojia (Daoist philosophy) and Daojiao (Daoist religion). The Chinese word Dao can be translated into English as ‘way,’ ‘path,’ ‘route,’ or sometimes more loosely referred to as ‘doctrine’ or ‘principle,’ which was later also adopted in Confucianism. Within these contexts, Dao signifies the laws of nature, or the essence of the universe.

Daoist legendary founder, Laozi (often translated as ‘Old Master,’ whose real name was Li Er) was a sage lived between c.571-471 BCE. In his timeless guide on the art of living, *Dao De Jing* (Book of the Way), he emphasized harmony with nature, and raised the concept of wu wei, often interpreted as ‘non-action’ or ‘inaction’ contrary to nature. However, wu wei is sometimes misinterpreted in a more negative sense of ‘not to do anything,’ while in fact it advises people ‘not to do anything *against nature*.’ This idea is in line with ecology, of humans to be responsive to the natural world of flora and fauna, among other forms of life, and thus changing from a single-minded emphasis on economic development to a multi-facet emphasis on the protection of the natural environment.

Confucianism as another Chinese indigenous ideology is summoned by the disciples of Confucius (Kongzi or ‘Master Kong,’ whose real name was Kong Qiu), who was a Chinese sage lived between 551-479 BCE. Besides his famous classic writings on character building in *Lun Yu* (Analects), another central theme of his argument is found in *Zhong Yong*

¹ The first character is the classical Chinese term and the second is the modern interpretation of it. See, for example, Journey of Civilization, Qicheng Zhang: The Wisdom of Zhou Yi (CCTV-4 中文国际频道《文明之旅》20160711 张其成《周易》的智慧). Retrieved August 10, 2020 from: <http://tv.cctv.com/2016/07/12/VIDE81GQifYVXJ6OdQ6iIMfh160712.shtml>

² 宇宙代数, in Ma Bingjian, *The Architecture of the Quadrangle in Beijing*《北京四合院建筑》(Tianjin University Press, 1999), p. 38.

³ 阴阳合则生, 阴阳离则灭; 阴阳错则变, 阴阳平则恒。

(Doctrine of the Mean), often translated into English as ‘The Middle Way,’ bearing certain resemblance to the Western concept of ‘Centrism.’ The idea of *Zhong Yong* advocates targeting at the center point of things, which can be interpreted as achieving a good balance between environmental protection and economic development in today’s world.

Buddhism teaches people to let go of desires to achieve emptiness in mind and action, because to Buddhist believers, nothing is eternal and everything is temporal. Therefore, not clinging on material goods or the mundane world is beneficial for decreasing people’s craving for material gains, greed, and by extension, economic development. Instead, it advocates purifying the natural world of air and water for the healthy growth of human bodies and souls.

Feng Shui (wind and water) as China’s folk belief has been used for determining whether the potential sites for cities, towns, villages, temples, houses, gardens, cemeteries, and so on, would bring health, wealth, or misfortune to the occupants and their descendants. Dating back 5,000 years ago, writings about Feng Shui can be found in classics such as *Shijing* (Book of Odes, or Book of Songs), *Shujing* (Book of History), *Huangdi Zhai Jing* (Yellow Emperor’s Canon on Houses), and other fragmentary texts in the Western Zhou period (1066-771 BCE).

According to archaeological discoveries, Feng Shui originated from the rolling hilly regions of the loess plateau of China. Initially developed for cave-dwellers to search for ideal cave locations, Feng Shui is cultural wisdom accumulated through practices over a long time. Although its concept and principles emerged in the Han period (206 BCE-220 CE), its practice became available chiefly during the Tang dynasty (618-907) when the compass, a crucial tool for the practice, was invented (Knapp, 2005a).

The basic Feng Shui principle is that when selecting a site, establish an optimum balance by looking for ‘the right time, the right place, and the right people’ (tianshi dili renhe). To reach the ultimate goal of ‘unity of heaven and humans’ (tian ren he yi), Feng Shui masters suggest carefully observing the surrounding environments of the site and modify and utilize nature to create favorable conditions for human growth. Feng Shui has been widespread since

the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), and because of it, people’s attentiveness to environmental conditions was significantly heightened (Knapp, 2005a).

Chinese Philosophy and Religion Contributing to Health and Happiness

Traditional Chinese philosophy holds that Yin Yang balance is a fundamental prerequisite for the worldly affairs to run harmoniously, and only when the Yin Yang complementary forces are in perfect equilibrium can it create a healthy home where qi, which can be translated as ‘cosmic breath,’ ‘life force,’ or ‘matter-energy,’ can flow smoothly to nourish the occupants. This notion is expressed in the Confucian Doctrine of the Mean and manifested in Daoist interplay of open (yin) and closed (yang), or solid (shi) and void (xu)¹ spaces in classical Chinese courtyard houses.

Because China situates in the northern hemisphere of the globe where sunlight comes from the south all year round, Feng Shui advocates buildings to be ‘sitting north and facing south’ (zuo bei chao nan) or ‘carrying Yin at the back and encompassing Yang in the front’ (fu yin bao yang) or ‘having hills behind and river in front’ (bei shan mian shui). This site requirement allows to obtain the best quality of sunlight since sunlight can offer people many benefits, such as having warmer room temperatures in the winter, synthesizing Vitamin D in the human body, ultraviolet rays in sunlight can kill bacteria to improve the human immune system, and so on (Kou, 2005; Luò, 2006).

Qi is the central kernel in traditional Chinese philosophy, which has been differentiated as heaven qi, earth qi, yin qi, yang qi, wind qi, water qi, smoke qi, and human breathing qi, all of which relate to living organisms. In modern days, qi is perceived as the microwave radiation and celestial electromagnetic radiation from the sun that is constantly changing to become mountains and water, moving above the air and below the earth to nourish all things (Kou, 2005; Luò, 2006; Ma, 1999). Land is very much like an aerial receiving microwave, and a large amount of this microwave forms a special gas field. Feng Shui thus advocates that a favorable site should be able to ‘hide wind and gather qi’ (cang feng ju qi).

¹ Xu (虚) and shi (实) is Chinese aesthetic concept that can be interpreted in numerous ways. Xu may denote “void, virtual, potential, unreal, intangible, formless, or deficient” and shi may mean “solid, actual, real, tangible, formed, or full.”

Chinese people have long recognized a closed circulatory system among groundwater, wind, cloud, and rain, as groundwater evaporates into wind, wind rises up to become cloud, cloud turns into rain, rain penetrates the ground to become groundwater again, and water collects cosmic qi. When selecting a site, Feng Shui masters pay particular attention to the relationship between water and qi and consider that, a site surrounded by mountains and encircled by water must have qi because water absorbs microwaves easily, and when qi meets water it creates an enclosure conducive to human health (Luò, 2006; Ma, 1999). Thus, the goal is to enable qi to enter and flow smoothly and circulate around the house to nourish the occupants (Lupone, 1999). This is partly why water is a favorable feature near a house or in a city.

Whereas the Chinese concept of happiness was manifested in its historically favored social collectivism rather than individualism. Chinese collectivism demanded an extended family to live in the same courtyard house compound, and the family members would often pool their income together to accumulate wealth and to establish private enterprise. From a socioeconomic perspective, this practice was conducive to achieving family unity and to contribute to China's flourishing economy in its feudal society.

Confucius (551-479 BCE) then valued friendship as a pleasure, as he asked in the beginning of his *Analects*: "Is it not delightful to have friends coming from distant quarters?" (Book 1 Chapter 1 Section 2).¹ Confucius further recommended doing three things in life to bring happiness: learning etiquettes and music, speaking of the goodness of others, and having many worthy friends (*Analects*, Book 16 Chapter 5). Conversely, Confucius pointed out three things in life that are unhealthy and harmful: taking pleasure in extravagance, sauntering and inactivity, and finding joy in feasting (*Analects*, Book 16 Chapter 5).

To Confucius, happiness is being able to savor the simplest things in life, as he said: "With coarse rice to eat, with water to drink, and my bended arm for a pillow. I find joy in them" (*Analects*, Book 7 Chapter 15). In a similar vein, Confucius praised his disciple Yan Hui: "Admirable indeed was the virtue of Hui! With a single bamboo dish of rice, a single gourd dish of drink, and living in his mean narrow lane, while

others could not have endured the distress, he did not allow his joy to be affected by it. Admirable indeed was the virtue of Hui!" (*Analects*, Book 6 Chapter 9). Thus, Confucian concept of happiness is to continuously improve one's virtue, to care for others, and to obtain social unity.

Daoist philosophical view is that the eternal cycle of the four seasons helps sustain life. Daoist happiness lies in remaining one's natural instinct and returning to their primary state. Similar to Christian belief that the ultimate bliss is to know God, the Chinese are convinced that happiness is to know the Dao. Although it cannot be easily defined, Dao can be known or experienced, and its principles can be discerned by observing nature's cycle. In Daoism and Confucianism, Dao often explicitly refers to moral or ethical conducts and their natural outcomes. Confucius focused his life on the pursuit of the Dao of Ren ('benevolence' or 'virtue') rather than material goods (Wang, 2001), as he confessed in his *Analects*: "If a [hu]man in the morning hears the Dao, [s/] he may die in the evening without regret" (Book 4 Chapter 8).

Because Chinese people look at things as having Yin Yang dialectic duality, they perceive good fortune (happiness) and misfortune (unhappiness) as two ends of a pendulum that are interchangeable and can be reversed, as expressed in such phrases: "Extreme happiness may turn into sadness," and "When bitter experience is over, sweet joy will come." This wisdom may have derived from Laozi's *Dao De Jing* that "Misfortune is beside where fortune lies; fortune is beneath where misfortune lingers" (verse 58). It tells that fortune and misfortune can be transformed into one another, and that positive and negative forces interact with each other. One should not take any insensitive action to reverse things to its unfavorable side of huo ('misfortune') (Wang, 2001). However, just like Yin and Yang, the inevitable reversal of the two extremes is the Dao.

Humans often have many desires, and the fulfilment of one desire tends to lead to temporary satisfaction but more desires to come. To solve this paradox, the Chinese cherish a common idiom: "One who is content with what one has is always happy," suggesting that in order to be happy, less desire is essential. This idea may as well be attributed to

¹有朋自远方来、不亦乐乎?

Laozi, as in his *Dao De Jing*, he stated that “One who is content is wealthy” (verse 33), that “One who is content will not meet disgrace; one who knows when to stop will not encounter danger; thus one may live a long life” (verse 44), that “One who is content with knowing contentment is always content indeed” (verse 46), and that “No misfortune is greater than discontentment, and no misconduct is greater than extravagant desires” (verse 46).

Zhuangzi (c.369-286 BCE), however, observed that because different people have different inborn nature, they should follow their inherent capacity to fully enjoy themselves, and thus contentment is only relative. Zhuangzi distinguished ‘perfect happiness’ from happiness through his keen observations in life. As for most people, happiness means the possession of such mundane things as wealth, honor, longevity, tasty foods, fine clothes, admirable home, beautiful companions, pleasing music, and the like. To him, these substances are hollow vanity but not true happiness because they are external to the real value of life. Zhuangzi considered perfect happiness as beyond common values; it is a state of mind free from any confinement. This comes to the ultimate spiritual relief that transcends the distinction between happiness and unhappiness, and even between life and death (Wang, 2001). Similar to Christian humanist notion that real happiness could only be achieved in the afterlife, Zhuangzi viewed death as the perfect happiness. In Zhuangzi’s view, life and death is a natural cycle. If one sees this true nature and understands the Dao, one is not far from real happiness (Lu, 2001; Wang, 2001).

Research Methods

The 2007 onsite survey conducted in China was part of the author’s doctoral research, and the 2013 online survey in North America was part of the author’s postdoctoral research. Both studies applied quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods to complement each set of data, and to explore the topic in depth and detail.

The first part of the field survey in China involved 290 Chinese residents living in six courtyard housing renewal and redevelopment projects in the inner cities of Beijing (58%) and Suzhou (42%). The average age of the respondents was 50 years old (n=265), with slightly more females (53%) than males (47%).

Their educational levels varied from having finished primary school (4%), junior middle school (11%), and senior middle school (16%), to having obtained college diploma (12%), associate degree (18%), bachelor’s degree (39%), master’s degree (9%), and doctorate degree (1%).

Follow-up telephone and email interviews with 82 residents were further carried out by the author/researcher in 2008. The interview question was “Do you believe in any philosophy or religion? If yes, is this belief reflected in your home decoration?”

The second part of the online survey (using SurveyMonkey) in North America involved 360 ethnic Chinese who were 16 years or older, living in the US (65%, excluding Alaska and Hawaii) and Canada (35%). The average age of the survey participants was 39 years old (n=154), with more females (55%; n=163) than males (45%). The majority of them are first-generation Chinese (81%; n=160), having lived in North America for an average of 16 years (n=156). Second generation is much less (13%; n=160), only a few are third-generation Chinese (1%).

The ethnic Chinese survey respondents in North America are highly educated: 88 percent (n=175) of them have a bachelor’s degree, 56 percent have obtained a master’s degree, and 26 percent have achieved a doctorate or professional degree. Their high educational profiles may indicate good-quality data input. Only a minority of them have obtained just high school diploma (2%), attended some college (8%), or gained associate degree (2%).

The survey question was “Do you have any of the following faiths? Please select all that apply: (1) Yi Jing; (2) Feng Shui; (3) Confucianism; (4) Daoism; (5) Buddhism; (6) Catholic; (7) Protestant; (8) Islam; (9) No faith; (10) Other (please specify).”

Follow-up telephone, email, and webcam interviews with 37 of them were carried out by the author in 2013, with the same interview question as that in 2008: “Do you believe in any philosophy or religion? If yes, is this belief reflected in your home decoration?” The online survey data were computed by SurveyMonkey and presented in percentages. The interview data were analyzed by the author using Microsoft Word.

A limitation of the study is that the sample population in China was limited to residents living in six courtyard housing renewal and redevelopment

projects in Beijing and Suzhou, and the sample population in North America was largely drawn from the elite group involving Chinese scholars and students in North American colleges and universities. They may not represent the average Chinese population in China, or average Chinese diaspora in North America. Nevertheless, the findings may have indications.

Key Findings

Chinese Residents' Philosophy and Religion in China

The author's 2008 interview results show that Communism has made a major impact on contemporary Chinese people's belief systems. Regarding the question, "Do you believe in any philosophy or religion? Is this belief reflected in your home decoration?", 77 percent of 82 interviewees indicated that they had no philosophy or religion. In other words, only 23 percent of them had a philosophy or religion. Professor Chen from Tsinghua University recalled that having any other philosophical belief than Communism was illegal in China during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976); even the 93 Learning Society (a league of intellectuals established in 1946) was banned, let alone religions.

Five percent (5%) of 82 interviewed residents replied that they are Communist Party members and have faith in the Communist Party, which does not allow them to believe in any other faith. A resident revealed: "Before retirement, my work unit sponsored me to go to the Sparetime University for special training in adult education using television. I enjoyed philosophy and studied materialism. I believe in the Communist Party that provides me with money." Some even claimed, "I believe in Mao. He was a deity whose bronze statue is placed in our living room." Several other residents indicated that since they are in natural or medical science fields, they are not interested in the supernatural, as a resident explained:

I'm a Chinese Muslim (Huimin), but I'm not religious. I have not had much contact with philosophy or religion as I received a formal national education in natural sciences. I regard philosophy and religion as cultural phenomena or cultural knowledge. When we travel, we may visit

Buddhist temples without believing in them.

A few interviewees are interested in *Yi Jing* (Book of Changes). For example, a resident at Beijing Juer Hutong new courtyard housing revealed that her father studied *Yi Jing* and their apartment was chosen to suit his ideas and tastes, with Chinese ink wash paintings of landscape and a calligraphy of the Chinese character 虚 (xu, meaning 'void' or 'emptiness') to reflect Daoist philosophical worldview.

Despite the Cultural Revolution's (1966-1976) attempt to eliminate traditional Chinese philosophy and to convert its population to Communism, a number of residents still hold deep-rooted traditional faiths. Six percent (6%) of 82 interviewed residents showed interest in learning Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Neo-Confucianism. After all, these ideologies have existed in China for several millennia.

For example, a resident said: "I like them all – Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, and I respect all spirits and gods. Although I'm not devout, I believe very much in them." Another resident revealed, "Although I have not read traditional Chinese philosophy, I have been influenced by Chinese cultural sayings." Several other residents also reported that although Chinese philosophy is not plainly reflected in their home decorations, their hearts and behaviors follow traditional doctrines to do kind, morally right things, and to be forthright, as a resident elaborated:

I'm interested in Confucianism, and philosophies of Laozi and Zhuangzi. Confucian righteousness (not to act against one's conscience), Laozi's 'harmony with nature,' and one's happiness stems from one's contentment with what one has, all the above concepts are correct. Our home decoration is very simple, unadorned, and conforms to Daoist and Confucian principles.

Another resident answered: "My life philosophy is to be detached from seeking fame or wealth, and being free from material trappings," reflecting Daoist philosophical influence. Yet another resident suggested: "Have an open mind, happy spirit, and you will have a healthy body," indicating a holistic belief in the body-mind-spirit connection.

Seventeen percent (17%) of 82 interviewed residents revealed that they choose to follow Buddhist doctrines, although 5 percent neither join a Buddhist

organization nor participate in Buddhist activities. Seven percent (7%) have a Buddha statue placed at home and sometimes burn incense to Buddha, or reserve a quiet space at home for meditation. Five percent (5%) visit Buddhist temples regularly during Spring Festival, and on the 1st and 15th days of each month.

Four of 82 interviewees mentioned the Chinese folk belief of Feng Shui. For example, a resident at Beijing Juer Hutong new courtyard housing commented:

According to Feng Shui, this courtyard was not well designed because only one tree in the courtyard resembles 困 (kun, the Chinese character composed of wood 木 inside a square 口 to mean 'being held'). There should be at least 2-3 trees in the courtyard. Also, they should not be pine or cypress as only graveyards in old China would have these two trees.

A resident at Suzhou Shilinyuan new courtyard housing also explained:

I make reference to Feng Shui and I believe some of it. We live on the [ground]/ 1st and 2nd floors with the back door facing the staircases. As this is ominous for wealth according to Feng Shui, we thus altered this door by sealing it and using the courtyard door instead.

A resident at Suzhou Jiaanbieyuan new courtyard housing reflected: "When the basic requirements are satisfied, I will attend to Feng Shui, for example, moving the kitchen stove and the bathroom door's opening direction."

A foreign (French) resident at Beijing Nanchizi new courtyard housing also said: "If we buy another house, we will build it according to Feng Shui. This one is not because the kitchen and bathroom are not in the right locations."

The author noted that Feng Shui theory and practice seem to be growing interests in Beijing and Suzhou, a finding that confirms those of Ch'ü (1994), Knapp (2005b), and Weller and Bol (1998, p. 332).

Although Christianity was introduced to China by Western missionaries as early as the 7th century, it had not gained a vast popularity (Ching, 1993; Lu, 2016; Lutz, 1971), due to widespread and pervasive Confucianism. Two of 82 interviewed Chinese residents believe in Christianity. One resident

converted to Catholicism because of a personal influence from Taiwan. Another resident reported her belief in Jesus Christ without participating in any Christian activities.

Chinese Residents' Philosophy and Religion in North America

The author's 2013 online survey indicate that more than half (51%; n=171) of the ethnic Chinese participants in North America (USA and Canada) had a philosophy or religion, and the interview results confirm that 20 of 37 (54%) of them believed in a philosophy or religion. This finding contrast to the author's 2008 study in China that only 23 percent of 82 interviewees had a philosophy or religion.

A number of the ethnic Chinese respondents in North America had faith in Feng Shui (13%), Buddhism (13%), Catholicism (11%), or Protestantism (11%). Another small number of them identified themselves as Daoists (6%), Confucians (6%), or Christians (6%), while less were interested in *Yi Jing* (4%). In addition, Atheism, Agnosticism, Positivism, and New Thought were mentioned by five (5) participants, but no one cited Islam (0%).

These findings closely resemble that of the 2001 Census of Canada that, 44 percent of Canadians of Chinese origin had a religious affiliation, among them 14 percent were Buddhist, another 14 percent Catholic, and 9 percent Protestant (Lindsay, 2001, p. 12).

This outcome indicates that, although 28 percent of the ethnic Chinese participants had converted to Christianity (when adding together the Christians, Catholics, and Protestants), and 11 of 37 (30%) interviewees believed in Christianity, a significant 42 percent of the survey respondents still held traditional Chinese philosophy (when adding together the participants who believed in *Yi Jing*, Feng Shui, Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism). Therefore, it can be said that more ethnic Chinese in North America have maintained traditional Chinese faiths than those who have adopted Western beliefs.

For the interviewees who were influenced by Buddhism, their belief was sometimes reflected in their home decorations by placing a Buddha statue and/or a Guanyin¹ statue in their homes. Some informants favored Daoist philosophy and made

¹ Meaning 'Observing the Sounds (or Cries) of the World.'

their home decorations simple and balanced. Other participants believed in Feng Shui and did not place the back of their desks or chairs towards the room doors, which would mean ‘bad luck.’ Another partaker believed in Communism but did not reflect this belief in his home decoration. One interviewee was fond of Permaculture,¹ and another had a blend of simple beliefs in Nature, such as plants, sunlight, and views of the four seasons, as an important theme in almost all her rooms; although technology, such as computers, television, and radio, had also been an integral part of it.

For those participants believing in Christianity, their home decorations included placing a statue of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, a cross, a statue of St Mary, or related images in their homes. Their activities involved having monthly bible study meetings in English and Mandarin Chinese languages. This finding reveals Western cultural infiltration into ethnic Chinese population in North America.

Nonetheless, some said they believe in science or their own personal philosophy, and that their interior is decorated with plants and fish bowl, or traditional Chinese literature and calligraphy that are colorful, and have positive and motivational aspirations. Others hang their children’s drawings, timetable, word-learning cards, and the like, in their homes.

Although the author’s 2013 research was unable to generate a correlation study between happiness and religion, a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (2006) found that American people who attended religious services weekly or more were happier (43% very happy) than those who attended monthly or less (31%), or seldom or never (26%). Another research carried out by the Pew Research Center from 2011 to 2013 (Gao, 2015) likewise show that Americans stand out for their religiosity and optimism, as more than half (54%) of Americans said religion was very important in their lives, the figure is much higher than their counterpart in Canada (24%). Sternberg (2009) observed that faith can be very profound and powerful to help trigger the internal healing pathways of the brain and body.

A research by Ryff and Singer (2008) further found that personal growth, self-realization, and the fulfilment of one’s true and best potential based on

his/her talent and disposition has led to what Aristotle termed ‘eudemonic’ happiness, which requires virtuous actions rather than mere abstract ideas. This Western concept coincides with Chinese Daoist notion of self-cultivation.

Summary and Conclusion

The first half of the article introduced three traditional Chinese philosophical schools, which are Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, alongside the folk belief of Feng Shui. It centered around three thematic arguments: first, philosophy and religion are intangible cultural heritage to be preserved; second, Chinese philosophy and religion have historically contributed to people’s environmental ethics; and third, Chinese philosophy and religion have traditionally contributed to people’s health and happiness. The second half of the paper documented the author’s two empirical research on Chinese residents’ philosophy and religion in China (Zhang, 2013/2016) and North America (Zhang, 2015/2017).

The findings show that although the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) has managed to eliminate most Chinese residents’ traditional faiths with a lingering effect, Chinese philosophy and folk belief are still deeply ingrained in the minds of a small number (23%; n=82) of the interviewed residents in Beijing and Suzhou of China. In contrast, more than half (51%; n=171) of the surveyed ethnic Chinese in North America (USA and Canada) has a faith, among which many of them (42%) still hold traditional Chinese philosophical beliefs such as Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Feng Shui, albeit a significant number (28%) of the participants have converted to Christianity, suggesting Western cultural infiltration is happening to ethnic Chinese in North America.

Social media frequently report that the Chinese Communist Party has put political pressure on religions to spread in China (Augustin, 2016; South China Morning Post, March 11, 2017). However, this kind of story misses the big picture (Johnson, 2017b) as the Chinese communists in fact embrace religion (Johnson, 2017c, 2017d, 2017e), and the number of worshippers is increasing (Hruby, 2017;

¹ Permaculture advocates ecological design and natural farming that develops sustainable architecture and self-maintained agricultural systems modelled from natural ecosystems. It is an older way of sustaining a society, to keep a balance.

Lu, 2016). Johnson's 2017(a) book indicates that 185 million Chinese consider themselves as Buddhists, 173 million say they engage in some Daoist practices, and there are now as many as 80 million Christians in China, many of whom like the faith's connections with the West and its commitment to social change (The Economist, March 30, 2017). However, the situation is unparalleled; there are not as many people learning about Chinese philosophy in the United States, possibly due to the fact that there is an acute shortage of professors teaching it, but the deep root cause of the problem is the Eurocentric and superiority given to Western philosophy in American universities today (Van Norden, 2016, 2017).

Acknowledgements

This article draws heavily from the author's two published books, *Courtyard Housing and Cultural Sustainability: Theory, Practice, and Product* (Routledge, 2013/2016) based on my doctoral study completed at Oxford Brookes University in 2006-2012; and *Courtyard Housing for Health and Happiness: Architectural Multiculturalism in North America* (Routledge, 2015/2017) based on my postdoctoral study in 2012-2014, during which time I was an associate at the City Institute at York University and a visiting scholar at McMaster University. I also thank all the survey and interview participants in China and North America, who openly shared their beliefs with me, as for many people, this is often a sensitive topic uncomfortable to talk about with a stranger.

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