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Philosophy, religion, and 'studies': scholarship as a spiritual exercise in Chinese thought

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ABSTRACT

That Asian traditions do not distinguish between 'philosophy' and 'religion' is an oft-repeated truism. This obscures disciplinary categories operative in Asian intellectual history, especially those that do not map onto the academic landscape as we know it today. To disambiguate the terms 'philosophy,' 'religion,' 'philosophy of religion,' and 'philosophy of religious studies,' this essay explores the status of 'studies' in Chinese thought. The tradition of *rujia* 儒家 or *ruxue* 儒學, commonly translated as 'Confucianism,' might plausibly be rendered simply 'scholarship.' The lineage of the *ru*—i.e., scholars or literati—is held together by an overarching methodology that takes the activity of studying and learning itself as a spiritual exercise aimed as scholarly excellence as well as personal cultivation. My aim is not to belabor differences between Asian and Western traditions but to invite academics to consider this rich sense of 'studies' in our own practices today.

KEYWORDS

Confucianism; Ruism; Chinese philosophy; philosophy as a way of life; Zhu Xi

Introduction

Without asserting a strict distinction here, we might say that theologians are often trained in the humanities and especially in philosophy, while scholars of religious studies are often trained in either the humanities or in one of the social sciences such as anthropology or sociology. Following from this broad distinction, whereas theology tends to address matters of faith and doctrine, religious studies tends to address matters of material culture and social practice. Where does philosophy of religion fit on the contemporary academic landscape, and what might we make of the term 'philosophy of religious studies'?

On the one hand, contemporary philosophy of religion can be compared to theology, in that its disciplinary home is in the humanities and its methodologies involve the rational investigation of religious experiences (such as matters of faith) and religious truth claims (such as matters of doctrine). On the other hand, philosophy of religion can also be said to be in conflict with theology, as when we speak of analyses rooted in revelation versus those rooted in reason alone. Certainly, the term today retains the imprint of G. F. W. Hegel (1770–1831) from his multi-volume *Lectures on Philosophy*

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of Religion, which extolls Christianity in a ranking of the world's religions and thus continues to privilege theological concerns.

With all this in mind, we might imagine a 'philosophy of religious studies' along the lines of a 'philosophy of science,' in that the former would investigate the grounding theories and methods that constitute 'religion' as an object of social-scientific discourse. Hence, we might make the general observation that whereas 'philosophy of religion' concerns the relationship between reason and faith, an imagined 'philosophy of religious studies' would concern a relationship between reason and ritual, where 'ritual' serves as a shorthand reference to the material, institutional, and socially enacted aspects of religious phenomena.

These lines are sketchy and provisional, and I begin with this possible genealogy of the 'philosophy of religious studies' only to underscore my main point, which is that I have no idea how such lines would be drawn if we were to work cross-culturally in general or engage East Asian traditions in particular. The terms 'philosophy' and 'religion' are specific to European history, or as Robert Ford Campany says of the latter: 'To speak of 'religions' is to demarcate things in ways that are not inevitable or immutable but, rather, are contingent on the shape of Western history, thought, and institutions. Other cultures may, and do, lack closely equivalent demarcations' (Campany 2003, 289). In East Asia, at least, the terms for 'philosophy' and 'religion' were first established by Japanese scholars and officials in late 1800s to translate European vocabulary, and the resulting compounds later spread to China (e.g., Josephson 2012). Nishi Amane 西周 (1829–1897) first rendered 'philosophy' in Japanese as *tetsugaku* 哲学 (Ch. *zhexue*), and he was clear in his intention to translate the name of a European discipline that, in his view, had no precise analogue in either Chinese or Japanese sources (Maraldo 2011, 556). He defined philosophy according to European accounts influential in his time, describing it as the love of wisdom, a discourse on first principles, and the unitary foundation underlying the various sciences (Maraldo 2011, 556–558).

If 'philosophy' and 'religion' are terms specific to European intellectual history, then both 'philosophy of religion' and the proposed 'philosophy of religious studies' must be peculiarly Eurocentric animals. In what follows, I suggest that these disciplinary categories are simply not useful in illuminating the dynamics of East Asian intellectual history, and, accordingly, a 'philosophy of religious studies' would make little sense to East Asian intellectuals prior to contact with European discourses. However, the very exercise of working through the points of incommensurability is useful, in that we draw attention to a perhaps easily overlooked component of a 'philosophy of religious studies'—that is, the term 'studies' itself. From the perspective of formative discourses in Chinese intellectual history, 'studies' might refer to any number of scholarly practices that double as both research methodologies and spiritual exercises. This, at the least, has thought-provoking implications for academic professionals today.

If not 'religion,' then what?

In areas such as sinology, Chinese philosophy, and the study of Chinese religions, one may hear scholars refer to the 'three teachings' (*sanjiao* 三教) of Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. This is a phrase derived from Chinese textual sources, reflecting ongoing interactions between scholars and intellectuals aligned with one tradition or another.

Some contemporary academics in religious studies, especially those trained in the social sciences, have criticized an over-reliance on the three teachings as a model for understanding Chinese religions, as this model reflects the commitments of scholarly elites and hence does not give an adequate picture of everyday people's religious lives either historically or contemporarily. To this critique I would add the related concern that the 'three teachings' model too easily gives the impression that three 'religions' have always been a part of traditional Chinese discourse. However, *jiao* 教 on its own means simply 'teaching' or 'school' and can refer, for examples, to schools of mathematics and music as well as ritual practices and spiritual pursuits (Josephson 2006, 144). Hence, following the influential work on this topic by Jason Josephson-Storm,[1] we can say that *jiao* as a category does not pick out 'religion' as a phenomenon. But, if not 'religions,' then what are Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, and why did Chinese scholars often group these three teachings together?

As I have argued elsewhere, the term *sanjiao* can be thought of as referring to three exemplary teachings that mark what Chinese scholars would have seen as three foundational disciplinary categories (e.g., Kalmanson 2017, 2023). In other words, Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism are not types of religions but are themselves 'types.' This is much clearer when we consider the source language. Daoism, a term referring to Chinese designations such as *daojia* 道家 (lineage of the Way) or *daojiao* 道教 (teachings of the Way), is associated with early iconoclastic masters such as Zhuangzi 莊子 in the Warring States Period (475–221 BCE) and various specialized schools that arose and developed over the ensuing centuries. It encompasses philosophical and cosmological theories regarding emptiness or voidness (e.g., *xu* 虛, *wu* 無, or *kong* 空), practices for bodily health and longevity, esoteric alchemical investigations, and other modes of both physical and spiritual self-cultivation. By the Han period (202 BCE–220 CE), Daoism was joined by the 'buddha-dharma' (*fofa* 佛法) or 'teachings of awakened beings' imported from the Indian subcontinent over trade routes. These teachings concerned existential matters, such as the conditions of life, death, and future rebirths, as well as practices associated with monasticism, meditation, and rituals for generating karmic merit. The branches of the Buddhist dharma that become established in China were associated not only with Śakyamuni Buddha from India but with a range of other enlightened beings past, present, and future, some clearly from earth and some seemingly from other worlds, such as the various 'buddha fields' (Sk. *buddha kṣetra*) and 'pure lands' (Ch. *jingtu* 淨土) that comprise what we might call the Buddhist multiverse.

Finally, so-called Confucianism refers to Chinese words such as *rujia* 儒家 (scholarly lineage) and *ruxue* 儒學 (scholarly studies). In what follows, I use the alternative terms Ruism and Ruists to refer to this tradition and its members. The character *ru* 儒 itself can be translated as 'scholar' or 'literati,' but it also has connotations of 'ritual master' or even 'sorcerer.' Ruists were employed as educators, government officials, and ritual functionaries, being qualified to preside over various state and civic ceremonies as well as the ancestral rites performed at family shrines. Although English-language sources commonly refer to 'Confucius' or Kongzi 孔子 (551–479 BCE) as the founder of this

[1] I cite this author in the text as Josephson, reflecting the name under which his 2006 article was published, but I refer to him otherwise by his current name Josephson-Storm.

tradition, the lineage of the Ru predates the life of Kongzi, and he himself denies being an innovator (*Lunyu* 論語 2011, 3.14).[2]

Just as Kongzi is not the founder of 'scholarship,' so, too, scholarship is not strictly limited to any one Chinese tradition. For example, the intellectual elites of Buddhism and Daoism may themselves be considered full-fledged literati and hence, in some sense, 'Ruists' (e.g., Welter 2006, 2018). This is relevant to the project of the present essay, in that to engage in the 'study' of anything is to align oneself, however loosely, with scholarly methods that have self-cultivational and even liberational relevance across a wide swath of Chinese traditions (Borup 2008, 131; Hori 1994, 5; Wong 2012, 151). Certainly from the Ruist perspective, which is the focus in what follows, the crucial term to understand when trying to parse an imagined 'philosophy of religious studies' is 'studies' itself.

Scholarship as a spiritual exercise

This takes us to the complex and multivalent meaning of 'studying' in the Chinese context in general and the Ruist tradition in particular. Key terms in Ruist scholarly and pedagogical practice are *gewu* 格物 (investigating things) and *zhizhi* 致知 (extending knowledge), both featuring in the 'Great Learning' ("Daxue" 大學) chapter of the *Liji* 禮記 or *Book of Rites*. Historically, the investigation of things had connotations of empirical inquiry into the natural world—especially the astronomical techniques needed to maintain ritual calendars, or the geographical and cartographical methods used in geomancy—but it was most closely associated with reading, reflection, and text-based scholarly study. In the Song dynasty (960–1279), the philosophical reformer Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) placed special emphasis on this chapter of the *Liji* as part of his interventions in Ruist thought associated with a movement referred to variously as *lixue* 理學 (studies of principle, pattern, or structure), *daoxue* 道學 (studies of the way), or in English 'neo-Confucianism.'

Zhu's philosophy is known (and at times critiqued) for its forays into what we might call today speculative or metaphysical investigations regarding the underlying patterns or structures (*li* 理) of existence. For Zhu Xi, the scholarly method of 'investigating things' meant reading the classics, the histories, and all the many commentaries in order to perceive *li* operative at various levels and in different contexts. For example, *li* can refer to cosmogonic narratives, cosmological structures, seasonal cycles and other environmental patterns, as well as harmonious orders in political, social, and moral affairs. Observing the functioning of *li*, both in optimal and suboptimal conditions, can help a scholar understand superlative ways of flourishing in the world as well as analyze the causes of mistakes and disasters. All such patterns were seen as interconnected, in that understanding imbalances in an agricultural context might help a scholar understand imbalances in a social context, regarding strife, or in a medical context, regarding bodily health, and so on. In this sense, grasping patterns and tendencies in one area can be extended or applied to others, which is the meaning of the second term above, i.e., the extension of knowledge.

[2]In this passage, Kongzi famously declares himself a follower of the ways of the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BCE).

Zhu's contributions to Ruist thought were both theoretical as well as pedagogical. According to Zhu's curricular reforms at the Ruist academies of his time, the methods of investigating things and extending knowledge were not to be employed simply to pass the civil service examinations but for the sake of the spiritual self-cultivation befitting an aspiring scholar-official. As such, these methods require crucial preliminary steps involving ritual and contemplative preparation. As Zhu Xi says: 'Now, when you want to read books, you must first settle the mind to make it like still water or a clear mirror' (今且要讀書, 須先定其心, 使之 如止水, 如明鏡) (Zhu Xi 2011, 讀書法下).[3] To attain this state of mind, scholars might first burn incense and pay obeisance to sages of the past; they most likely would then complete a period of meditative breathing before turning to their books and studies (e.g., Gao 2018, 19–20). At that point, the act of reading itself is a contemplative practice involving active and audible recitation. Zhu often describes this learning process via reference to dynamics such as vibration, resonance, and harmonization: 'Scholars, when reading books, must collect themselves, sit up straight, relax their gaze, hum softly, empty the mind [of forms], and fully immerse themselves [in the texts]' (學者讀書, 須要斂身正坐, 緩視微吟, 虛心涵泳) (Zhu Xi 2011, 讀書法下).[4] With proper preparation, the still and clear mind is actively sensitized to the dynamics of the content that scholars are studying as it passes through their lips in recitation.

Such terminology evocative of resonance and harmonization reflects the pervasive idea of *ganying* 感應 in Chinese thought. Translated literally as 'response-stimulus,' *ganying* refers to resonances that can be mapped between phenomena of corresponding structures or constitutions. Understanding the role of *ganying* in the case at hand—namely, resonances occurring in the intellect of the scholar in response to spoken content—requires a more detailed account of the understanding of the mind in Chinese context.

The term *xin* 心, which is often rendered as 'heart-mind,' might be translated in a more dynamic way as a 'thinking and feeling.' The activities of thinking and feeling are themselves rooted in the action of *qi* 氣, a term that is relevant to our discussion here in two important senses. The first sense concerns *qi* as one of the so-called three treasures: here, *qi* is the enlivening energy, vital energy, or 'vital breath' that composes our living selves, along with our physical allotment or genetics (*jing* 精), and that can be purified or clarified to develop into spirit (*shen* 神). In addition to this specific usage, there is also a broader philosophical sense of *qi* as the matter-energy matrix that accounts for existence itself and all individually existing things. English-language translations of this broader sense of *qi* include phrases such as 'psychophysical stuff' (Gardner 1990), 'vital stuff' (Angle and Tiwald 2017), and 'lively material' (Ivanhoe 2016), all of which try to capture the sense in which *qi* can refer to a spectrum of matter, mind, and spirit. It can refer to what is condensed and palpable, such as physical objects; it can refer to what is dispersed and intangible, such as the mental energies of human thoughts and feelings; and it can refer as well to ethereal energies, such as ghosts, gods, and spirits. The contemporary philosopher JeeLoo Liu describes this philosophical sense as a '*qi*-realism' in which (1) *qi* 'is permanent and ubiquitous in the world

[3]See passage 12 at https://ctext.org/zhuzi-yulei/11/zh. I consulted Gardner 1990, 145.
[4]See passage 21 at https://ctext.org/zhuzi-yulei/11/zh. See also Gardner 1990, 147.

of nature' such that there is 'nothing over and above the realm of *qi*'; and (2) *qi* is 'real in virtue of its causal power' such that it 'constitutes everything and is responsible for all changes' (Liu 2011, 61).

The primal behavior of *qi* involves differentiation into the polar forces of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽, where *yin* refers to forces that settle and sink, that are dark and heavy, and that tend to condense, and *yang* refers to forces that rise or flow, that are clear and light, and that tend to disperse. No single phenomenon is *yin* or *yang* on its own but only in relation to other phenomena in specific contexts. This accounts for the so-called correlative cosmology underlying the action of *ganying*, which allows for resonances across suitably entangled phenomena. With the terms *qi* and *ganying* defined, we can now better appreciate the activities of studying and scholarly learning, as activities of thinking and feeling, according to Zhu Xi. In particular, for Zhu, when we settle the mind, we are balancing two *qi*-based spiritual energies known as *hun* 魂 and *po* 魄. These are sometimes translated as *yang*-souls and *yin*-souls, and various systems enumerate them differently, but they refer overall to a diversity of spiritual forces that constitute part of any living person. As Eiho Baba discusses, Zhu Xi explains the attainment of scholarly 'perception' or 'realization' (*zhijue* 知覺) through the activities of the *hun* and *po* energies:

> *Yin* presides over storage and reception and *yang* presides over movements and applications (*yunyong* 運用). In general, the ability to memorize is all due to what *po* stores and receives, but the movements and applications that issue outward are *hun*. These two thing-events are fundamentally inseparable from each other. What enables memorization is *po*, but what issues outward must be *hun*. That which enables *zhijue* is *po*, but that which sends *zhijue* outward is *hun*. Each of them belongs respectively to *yin* and *yang*, but within any *yin* and *yang* there are further *yins* and *yangs*. (Qtd. in Baba 2017, 310)[5]

Here we see that *zhijue* is dependent upon memorization, which is described as a process of the *yin* aspect responsible for the heart-mind's ability to receive and retain what it learns. But via its *yang* aspect, so-called perception also 'issues outward' (*fachulai* 發出來).

I suggest that we should understand this rather literally: Although various *hun* and *po* reside within and move around the living person, they can also interact via resonance with external phenomena, or exist outside the body altogether—indeed, after bodily death, the *hun* and *po* may go on to exist as types of ghosts and spirits. Zhu Xi says quite explicitly: 'When a person dies, the *hun qi* issues forth and spreads upward' (人死時, 其魂氣發揚於上) (Zhu Xi 2011).[6] Thus, given his overall assumptions regarding the extra-bodily life of *hun*, Zhu's comment on *zhijue* should not be taken to mean simply that perception is directed outward. Rather, *hun* energies palpably flow outward—this outward dynamic can describe part of the learning process that results in realization as well as the efficacious reach of a scholar's spiritual energies into the surrounding world. This helps explain Baba's assertion that *zhijue* 'is not a passive seeing, as it were, of a predetermined reality, but a participatory determination of the world through cultivated appreciations and realizations' (2017, 311). Baba's observation

[5]See the original at Zhu Xi 2011, passage 5, https://ctext.org/zhuzi-yulei/87 (陰主藏受, 陽主運用。凡能記憶, 皆魄之所藏受也, 至於運用發出來是魂。這兩箇物事本不相離。他能記憶底是魄, 然發出來底便是魂□能知覺底是魄, 然知覺發出來底又是魂。雖各自分屬陰陽, 然陰陽中又各自有陰陽也).

[6]See passage 20 at https://ctext.org/zhuzi-yulei/3.

speaks to the productive power of scholarship as itself a spiritual path in the Ruist context.

To return to the opening comments on investigating things and extending knowledge, the perception of *li* 理 (patterns and tendencies) via practices of memorization and recitation proceeds in scale until the scholar aligns his or her mind with the cosmic pattern transmitted especially by core classic texts. This evokes the other sense of *qi* relevant to our discussion, namely, *qi* as one of the 'three treasures' that can be refined and clarified within the body–mind complex of an individual living person to produce spirit (*shen* 神). As Joseph Adler comments, for Zhu Xi, 'the process of learning is a psycho-spiritual transformation that refines and clarifies one's *qi*' (2004, 132). Adler goes on to make explicit the connections between educational techniques for refining *qi* and attaining spiritual force: 'In human beings, spirit is a quality of mind—specifically mind-*qi* in its finest, most free-flowing state. … To embody this epistemological potential … is to be a fully authentic (*cheng*) human being, a Sage' (2004, 141).

In short, scholarship is a spiritual practice in the Chinese context, and Ruists are among the full-time practitioners. Due to the pervasive influence of the overall Ruist scholarly and pedagogical program, adherents of other traditions from schools of Buddhism to schools of medicine may themselves be in the orbit of Ruist practice, to the extent that any 'studies' require the kind of ritual and contemplative preparation conducive to reading and learning. In broaching the question of a 'philosophy of religious studies,' we, too, approach the orbit of Ruist concerns.

Implications for the 'philosophy of' the study of religion

The above *qi*-based scholarly methods are vital avenues toward self-cultivation, from the contemplative techniques that quiet and settle the heart-mind to prepare it for learning, to physical exercises or 'energy work' (such as *qigong* 氣功 today), and to those advanced reading practices that palpably transform the minds of ordinary people into the minds of sages. Although such practices are believed to be highly efficacious, a *qi*-based model is not mechanistic or deterministic. On the one hand, *qi* does often behave in predictable ways—certain structural tendencies are evident upon observation, and we can transform the *qi* of our own heart-minds and bodies by engaging such tendencies. On the other hand, *qi* has a 'mind of its own,' as it were, which is to say that it manifests its own dynamic power, follows its own course, and behaves with its own agency. For example, Zhu Xi says that the 'heart-mind of the universe' (*tian di zhi xin* 天地之心) possesses a sort of 'numinous awareness' (*ling* 靈), which nonetheless differs from the 'deliberative thought' (*silu* 思慮) of humans (Zhu Xi 2011, 理氣上). Elsewhere he affirms that even the smallest existing things have some degree of 'heart-mind' (*xin* 心), though they may lack the power of 'realization' (*zhijue* 知覺) (Zhu Xi 2011, 性理一).[7] Hence, due to the lively agency of the world around us, our attempts to engage with or manipulate it can produce unexpected or unintended results. Sometimes, we fail to achieve our own ends; sometimes our achievements exceed even our wildest expectations; and, sometimes, such achievements appear (to use a loaded term) 'miraculous.'

[7]See a fuller discussion of these degrees of awareness in Zhu Xi's thought in Rŏsker 2012, 132.

In short, scholarship itself, like other concrete *qi*-manipulation practices, actively courts powers that may be beyond the individual's understanding, or which may be efficacious whether the individual understands what is going on or not. To 'study' anything at all—at least in the Song context—means to pursue questions whose answers may lay outside the capacities of ordinary consciousness or may evade direct confirmation via mechanistic testing procedures.

Part of the key to attaining especially impressive results involves manipulating one's own *qi* such that its primal power is freed and new forms are able to manifest naturally or spontaneously. In other words, scholarship requires, to some extent, that the scholar quiets her own willful ego and sets aside her own expectations. Hence, we might make a distinction between this active engagement with *qi*, which necessarily involves powers larger than the individual, and the scholarly investigation of *qi*, as expressed in various speculative treatises, such as the work of Zhu Xi and other Song-Ming Ruists. Is such scholarly work more 'philosophical,' whereas spiritually engaged *qi*-based practice is more 'religious'? In this case, I suggest that such terms do not in fact shed light on the traditions in question but only obscure the indigenous Chinese paradigm that we are trying to describe.

In short, there is a mismatch between today's academic philosophy and Ruism concerning fundamental goals, which has implications for what we mean by the 'philosophy of' the study of religion here. Philosophy in its contemporary academic guise has long been associated with some notion of an investigation aimed at attaining truth, whether this is understood on a coherence or a correspondence model. Accordingly, a central concern of the philosophy of religion has been the analysis and evaluation of religious truth claims. And, presumably, a central concern of an imagined philosophy of religious studies would be the analysis of evaluation of social-scientific truth claims regarding religion as an object of discourse. However, the active dimension of 'investigating things' and 'extending knowledge' in Chinese context pushes our notion of philosophy in a dynamic and creative direction, requiring us to fundamentally rethink what we mean by 'truth claims' in the first place.

For example, Stephen C. Angle discusses Ruist practice as a long path of ever-deepening and maturing commitment, facilitated by 'empirical feedback' that affirms the practitioner's experiences and insights:

> At many points the Confucian program generates empirical feedback that further deepens one's commitment to it: one *can* increasingly come to see possibilities for harmony, and these possibilities can, at least sometimes, be realized. There are even moments in which one can see flashes of interconnections that constitute universal coherence: these are "enlightenment (*wu* 悟)" experiences that many Neo-Confucians report. … such experiences do not (at least for the strand of Neo-Confucianism I am endorsing) constitute the arrival of sagehood, nor the end of the process of development, but they do help push one further along the path. … (2009, 177–178)

On this model, there is an ever-deepening progressive development of one's capacities for existential engagement and realization. There is both 'empirical feedback,' as Angle says, which confirms the expansion of mental powers and attests to what the subject is capable of experiencing; but there are also 'flashes' of something more—something beyond what the subject in her present form is able to fully grasp. Being open to scholarly investigation, in this sense, means the humbleness to acknowledge modes of awareness

beyond one's current abilities as well as the discipline to pursue those ritual practices that provide the confirmation via 'empirical feedback' that other modes of awareness are indeed possible. As such, theoretical scholarship and engaged spiritual exercises are two aspects of the same activity.

Following from this, 'truth claims' here might be understood more along the lines of performative enactments. The issue is not whether a stated claim coheres with others or corresponds to 'reality,' but whether the scholar-practitioner's activities demonstrate the power to manifest or 'realize' mental energies in Baba's sense of 'a participatory determination' that brings the external world into accordance with the scholar's own heart-mind, and vice versa. If I were to gesture toward the language of European philosophy here, I would say, along with Nietzsche, that the Chinese tradition is concerned less with the 'will to truth' than with the 'will to power.' Such a philosopher-practitioner would be a very different creature from the professional academic researcher of today.

Implications for the 'philosophy of' anything

A Greek figure such as Aristotle (384–322 BCE) pursued wisdom broadly speaking, working in areas we might now divide among the sciences, the humanities, the arts, and so forth. Moreover, being a member of a Greek school of philosophy such as Stoicism did not lead to a career in academic research but rather, in many cases, to one in statecraft or law. The separate academic disciplines as we know them today, from the arts to the sciences—indeed, *academia* as we know it today—began emerging in Europe's early modern period as various humanistic and empirical studies began to separate themselves from Church authority. In this trajectory of separation, previous components of philosophy, such as physics, branched off, such that philosophy was defined in increasingly narrow terms, and a philosopher's job options became accordingly limited. This is all to say that ancient Greek philosophy perhaps looked more like the Ruist understanding of scholarship and less like the contemporary discipline.

On that note, Greek philosophy, too, was once practiced as a 'spiritual exercise,' according to the work of the influential philosopher and classicist Pierre Hadot. The 'Stoico-Platonic inspired philosophical therapeutics' of the Greeks includes practices described as research (*zetesis*), investigation (*skepsis*), reading (*anagnosis*), and meditation (*meletai*), which all contribute to the development of self-mastery (*enkrateia*) and the training of attention (*prosoche*) (1995, 84). Some of these methods are still alive and well in the discipline today, although perhaps the 'spiritual' aspect is often overlooked. As Hadot discusses, the well-known practice of Socratic dialogue is rooted in a question-and-answer style of self-examination meant to help a person confront her own uncertainties and unearth the contradictions in her own beliefs, so as to develop the properly humble orientation toward that truth which transcends the finite human condition. In this way, the Socratic dialogue, when pursued to its end, results in a spiritual conversion on a path that aims at wisdom (Hadot 1995, 89).

However, apart from dialogue, which does remain a recognizable component of academic philosophy today, other aspects of the 'Stoico-Platonic inspired philosophical therapeutics' mentioned above do not. These include types of meditations, memorization

practices, and other contemplative exercises. For example, the Epicureans once recommended various meditations and meditative visualizations to dispel the fear of death (Sharpe and Ure 2021, 67–68). The Stoics recommended diligent memorization of certain philosophical doctrines via various contemplative techniques. For all such philosophical schools, the contemplative mode itself was seen as a form of training for everyday life. That is, by setting aside dedicated time to internalize philosophical doctrines intentionally and calmly via meditation and memorization, the practitioner would be able to apply her learning on the spot, as it were, during the less calm moments of her day-to-day affairs.

Arguably, we have lost both the practical and the spiritual aspects of philosophical exercises in contemporary academia. Regarding the first, certainly philosophy is still seen as useful to everyday life—to the extent that critical thinking skills have practical applications—but students of the discipline, as well as many members of the profession, often do not approach their work as the comprehensive 'way of life' that Hadot attributes to the Greek schools. Regarding the second, philosophy today seems only distantly related to the metaphysical worldviews underlying groups such as Epicureans, Stoics, and Neoplatonists, all of whom speculated intently about enduring spiritual realities beyond the vicissitudes of the material world and bodily vulnerabilities. The goals of self-cultivation and spiritual enlightenment may remain existentially relevant and, in that sense, still associated with certain modes of philosophical discourse, but academic programs in philosophy today do not teach the integrated spiritual exercises that once comprised coherent training agendas toward spiritual transformation.[8]

On the one hand, as I have argued here, 'philosophy of religious studies' is a particularly narrow slice of philosophy that only makes sense on the landscape of academic disciplines as they emerged during and after Europe's modern period. If 'philosophy' and 'religion' do not translate into Chinese categories before the 1800s, then 'philosophy of religion' and 'philosophy of religious studies' are both, as it were, non-starters (at least historically). On the other hand, in the course of building this argument, we explored dimensions of 'studies,' as the key term in 'philosophy of religious studies,' that might not have been apparent without recourse to East Asian terms and categories. That is to say, although the project of a 'philosophy of religious studies' quickly unravels outside the Eurocentric context, nonetheless, the labor of imagining such a possibility can and should take us directly to the deepest and most difficult questions about who we are as scholars, who we are as people, and who we are as practitioners of various philosophical, religious, and spiritual paths. Hence, I want to end by cautioning against pursuing these increasingly narrow approaches to philosophy—the various 'philosophies of' this, that, and the other that populate today's academic discourse—and invite readers back instead to the broader vista of 'scholarship' as a foundational set of transformational methodologies central to human learning and wellbeing.

[8]I would like to thank my anonymous reviewer for drawing attention to the Contemplative Studies Unit at the American Academy Religion, which supports work closely aligned with what I describe here. To that I would also add venues such as the International Society for Contemplative Research, the *Journal of Contemplative Studies*, and *The Arrow: A Journal of Wakeful Society, Culture, and Politics*, as well as a new book series at Bloomsbury on Re-Inventing Philosophy as a Way of Life (https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/series/reinventing-philosophy-as-a-way-of-life/).

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