

The Hidden Intentions of Eliade?

— Re-reading Critiques of Eliade from the Perspective
of Eliade's Expectation of the History of Religions —

Yoo, Yo-han*

- | |
|--|
| I. Introduction |
| II. Critiques of the Two Main Arguments
against Eliade |
| III. Re-reading Criticisms on Eliade's
Comparative Work |
| IV. Conclusion |

I. Introduction

Within the last several years, we have been inundated with books and articles continuing the argument between Eliade's criticizers and his disciples. Many criticisms of Eliade focus on the so-called hidden intentions of his scholarly work. First, criticizers allege that Eliade's work contains his ominous political and social views. Second, Eliade's opponents argue that Eliade's work reflects the "Western construction of Religion." It is necessary and appropriate to understand Eliade's work in relation to his historical and social views: not only have many contemporary scholars acknowledged Eliade's influence both as a scholar and as a public figure, Eliade himself also articulated his mission as one of responding to social and political issues.¹⁾ However, this paper will

* ABD, Syracuse University

1) In 1930s, the times of crisis in Romania, Eliade actively put forth his political view not through his academic work but through his prolific contributions to newspapers and other periodicals in Bucharest (See Mac Linscott Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: the Romanian Roots, 1907-1945* (Boulder: East European Monographs;

assert that Eliade's scholarly work should not be marginalized by the reckless conjecture of his political and social intentions by his opponents. As will be shown, Eliade's opponents argument of "Western construction of Religion" itself is based on the Western-centered academic tradition that has been ignorant of Eastern religious traditions. In contrast, the personal, academic, and historical background of Eliade's belief in the unity of the human mind and his respect for the East will be seen as foundational to understanding his work.

It is natural and even necessary for scholars of religion to critique and move beyond Eliade's work. There are useful criticisms of Eliade, including those of Jonathan Z. Smith, which have already become central in theories of religion.²⁾ Yet, simultaneously, Eliade's positive influence should not be ignored. I would like to note that Eliade's work has become a kind of a classical text that scholars interpret from various perspectives. Therefore, rather than entirely denying or entirely defending it, one should appreciate some respects and should criticize or amend others. Some disciples of Eliade try to defend Eliade's theory as a whole. For instance, Brian Rennie argues,

New York: Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1988) 1106-1116, and Brian Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996) 143-146). Yet, after he began his "exile" (See Mircea Eliade, *Ordeal by Labyrinth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 31, 94), he tried to "respond... to the historical moment" (Mircea Eliade, *Journal I, 1945-1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990 (1977)) 25 August 1947) through his scholarly work of the history of religion, which, to him, was a "saving" discipline that makes it possible to overcome "the terror of history" (Mircea Eliade, *Journal I*, 26 September 1952, *Journal II, 1957-1969* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989 (1977)) 2 March 1967, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Or, Cosmos and History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971 (1954)) 90). He also thought that the history of religions could help people get over the narrow-mindedness of the Western academic tradition by encouraging "the elaboration of a universal type of culture" (Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969) 69).

- 2) While J. Z. Smith has been one of the sharpest critics of Eliade's comparative work, he also appreciates Eliade's great achievements and positive influence on the history of religions. See Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is not Territory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993 (1978)) 88-90, and Jonathan Z. Smith, "Acknowledgement: morphology and history in Mircea Eliade's Patterns in comparative religion (1949-1999)," *History of Religions* (39 no. 4: 315-351) 315.

I would suggest that Eliade's thought is systematic, its internal elements referring to, supported by, and reciprocally supporting its other elements. The rejection of any one element, for whatever reason, can then result in a rejection of the whole.³⁾

However, this position is dangerous because it prevents his readers from seeing what should be reformulated or challenged in Eliade's work. Rather, Douglas Allen's approach is more persuasive. He articulates that he is both sympathetic and at the same time critical to Eliade's works. While Allen is "impressed by Eliade's great contributions toward understanding much of traditional myth and religion," he also recognizes that Eliade's method and interpretation must often be amended, reformulated, and supplemented.⁴⁾ In this sense, I agree with William Paden, who says,

Eliade's work is not something that stands or falls as a whole. It is well understood as a basic quarry of thematic studies... an eclectic resource from which one may legitimately make selections and choices for the continuous rebuilding of the analytical study of religion, and not something one has to justify or reject as a package.⁵⁾

Eliade's work has become a classical text that has deep meaning. Considering "Eliade never felt his own work was final or apodictic,"⁶⁾ and "Eliade's work is not something that stands or falls as a whole,"⁷⁾ various ways of interpreting Eliade are necessary. I do not deny that there are some reasonable and

3) Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade*, 3.

4) Douglas Allen, *Myth and Religion in Mircea Eliade* (New York: Routledge, 2002) xvii.

5) William E. Paden, "The Concept of World Habitation: Eliadean Linkages with a New Comparativism" in Brian Rennie (ed.), *Changing Religious Worlds: the Meaning and End of Mircea Eliade* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001) 249.

6) Norman J. Giradot, "Smiles and Whispers: Nostalgic Reflections on Mircea Eliade's Significance for the Study of Religion" in Rennie (ed.), *Changing Religious Worlds*, 160.

7) Paden, "The Concept of World Habitation," 249.

acceptable criticisms of Eliade's theory and methodology. However, the value of his theory and method also should not be dismissed on the basis of an unfair reading and understanding of Eliade's work. While J. Z. Smith is one of the sharpest critics of Eliade's academic work, he also recognizes Eliade's scholarly achievements: he says that Mircea Eliade's work "can be thought with or against but never thought around or away."⁸⁾ As J. Z. Smith and Allen simultaneously acknowledge and criticize Eliade, Eliade's work should be at once appreciated and challenged through a fair and reasonable evaluation of his work.

II. Critiques of the Two Main Arguments against Eliade

Some Eliade's critics insist that his work should be understood from the perspective of his political and social positions. They argue that because Eliade's academic work is charged with improper political or social intentions, it is bound to have a detrimental influence on the public as well as on scholarship. For example, Daniel Dubuisson argues that Eliade fostered a confusion "among social organization, political institution, and religious life" and that because of this confusion his work would exert a bad influence both on the general readers and on academics.⁹⁾ Dubuisson asserts that both Eliade's support of the Iron Guard movement in Romania in 1930s Romania and his conception of religious universe are based on the same principles of "metaphysical antisemitism, rejection of the legacy of the Enlightenment in the name of the unwritten rights of a putative spiritual aristocracy, and exaltation of irrational forces, celebration of a pre-Christian paganism... the denial of all humanist morality..." (173). Furthermore, Dubuisson relates one of the most

8) Smith, "Acknowledgement," 315.

9) Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction on Religion: Myth, Knowledge, and Ideology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) 174.

important Eliade's theories to his political position: he alleges that Eliade's notions of the sacred and the profane owe much to "the macabre religiosity of the fascist Iron Guard" (173).

However, Dubuisson's harsh criticism of Eliade is neither reasonable nor persuasive. Above all, he does not suggest any plausible evidence or ground for his charge against Eliade. He simply cites a passage from Eliade's *Myth and Reality*, which emphasizes the role of religious specialists and elites. Dubuisson argues that Eliade's stress on the elite indicates his disrespect for the mass of ordinary people and his antisemitic ideas.¹⁰ But this argument is not based on comprehensive and proper understanding of Eliade's oeuvre.¹¹ It is

10) Dubuisson, *Western Construction*, 174. See Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality: Religious Traditions of the World* (New York: Harpercollins, 1998 (1963)) 146.

11) There are other examples that Dubuisson does not Eliade's work fully and properly, though it is not certain he does so purposely or not. For instance, Eliade's work is too narrowly considered when Dubuisson attacks phenomenology of religion, of which "the most influential and most celebrated representative" is Eliade (Dubuisson, *Western Construction*, 173). According to Dubuisson, while "historians" (sociologists, psychologists, or historians, strictly speaking) think of religious facts as not different from other facts, phenomenologists or "antireductionists," among whom Eliade is the most problematic, regard religious facts as unconditional, unique, and "superior to all others," "because it is the sign, the more or less explicit manifestation," of the sacred (168). However, Eliade does not separate religious facts from the others. Rather, I believe, what Eliade emphasizes is concrete things that mediate the sacred and human imagination: the sacred is always revealed through something natural, historical, and ordinarily profane, such as the sky, the earth, water, a person, tree, stone, etc. (See Allen, *Myth and Religion in Mircea Eliade*, 79); without human perception and cognition, hierophany is impossible (See Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996(1958)) 39). I assert that for Eliade, religious facts are valuable because religion is based on the process of human imagination or creativity. In brief, Eliade focuses on what people see as religion, rather than what is religion. Furthermore, it should be noted that Eliade recognizes "other facts," as well as religious phenomena and that he did not regard the other as superior to the one. He repeats many times that "there are no purely religious phenomena; no phenomenon can be solely and exclusively religious" (Eliade, *Patterns*, xvii), and that "there is no such thing as 'pure' religious datum, outside of history, for there is no such thing as a human datum that is not at the same time a historical datum" (Eliade, *The Quest*, 7). In the preface of *The Sacred and the Profane*, we saw that Eliade clearly recognizes that human reactions to nature are often conditioned by his or her "culture and hence, finally, by history" (Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York:

true that Eliade often emphasized religious elites of each culture. But Eliade's emphasis on religious elites does not prove that he disrespected ordinary people and that, therefore, he was antisemitic. Dubuisson overlooks the fact that Eliade also recognized active and voluntary roles of popular or lay people in religious history. By paying attention to both "higher" and "lower" religious forms, Eliade intended to overcome the West-centered view in the study of religion. He articulates this in the foreword of *Patterns*,

By examining the "lower" and "higher" religious forms simultaneously, and seeing at once what elements they have in common, we shall not make the mistakes that result from an *evolutionist* or occidentalist *perspective*.¹²⁾

It should be noted that Eliade repeatedly emphasized the importance of "cosmic religions," or "popular living religions," which are based on folk agricultural cultures.¹³⁾ In *Patterns*, Eliade devoted more space to the religious practices of the "uncivilized" tribes and the peasants than the religion of so-called civilized culture. In *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Eliade argues that while the Hebrew religious elites created Messianic conceptions that abolished the possibility of cyclic repetition and gave a new value to history, it was the common people who maintained traditional conceptions of archetypes and repetition that represented the traditional way of facing misfortune in history.¹⁴⁾

Furthermore, even Dubuisson's purported "definitive proof" of Eliade's political and social inclinations is illogical and unreasonable. He argues,

I take *the definitive proof* (in corroboration of what is here advanced) from the reactions to my own analyses of Eliade's work. His most fervent defenders make up a rather miscellaneous cohort, where we find proponents

Harcourt, 1987 (1957)) 16).

12) Eliade, *Patterns*, xx.

13) See Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 173-174, *The Quest*, "Preface," and *Ordeal by Labyrinth*, 56.

14) Eliade, *Myth of Eternal Return*, 106-108.

of European neopaganism, a militant fascist, the inevitable follower of René Guénon, and oblivious or misguided Catholic theologians.¹⁵⁾

But this Dubuisson's proof does not prove Eliade's political and social inclinations. Rather, this claim may be the definitive proof of Eliade's broad influence on many areas. Dubuisson does not take into consideration the many scholars who still sympathize with Eliade. And he should have known that Eliade's work is accepted and used by Korean anti-Christ movement groups, as well as not a few Christian scholars in Korea. The fact that there are many Eliade's fans among both the non-academic laity and scholars of religion cannot be "the definitive proof" of Eliade's political and social inclinations. In short, Dubuisson's criticism against Eliade is based on his own oversimplified and unfair interpretation of Eliade.

Likewise, Russell McCutcheon and Steven Wasserstrom attack Eliade by relating his political activities in 1930s and his thought on public issues to his scholarly work. McCutcheon argues that Eliade's scholarly work has a covertly foul political intention. He asserts that Eliade was fascistized and that his scholarship has a politics embedded within it.¹⁶⁾ He even claims, "Eliade's fascist sympathies seem to saturate his later texts."¹⁷⁾ On the other hand, Wasserstrom attacks Eliade's belief in the possibility of a transformation of humanity.¹⁸⁾ According to Wasserstrom, Eliade's academic work reflects his "world-rejecting" and "counter-cultural" views, evidenced by Eliade's refusal to accept the regnant intellectual culture of the academy.¹⁹⁾ However, like Dubuisson's criticism of Eliade, these arguments are not very persuasive. Some

15) Dubuisson, *Western Construction*, 174, emphasis mine.

16) Russell McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 75-79, "Methods, Theories, and the Terrors of History" in Rennie (ed.), *Changing Religious Worlds*, 13.

17) Russell McCutcheon "The Myth of the Apolitical Scholar: The Life and Works of Mircea Eliade," in *Queen's Quarterly* 100 (1993: 642-663) 658.

18) Steven Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) 24.

19) Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*, 102, 239.

of Eliade's disciples have already shown the shortcomings in the critiques of Eliade's opponents. For instance, Bryan Rennie and Douglas Allen point out problems with the bases of the criticisms of Eliade²⁰⁾ and demonstrate that many of those critical arguments are based on critics' own interpretations of Eliade, which are often distorted, rather than the correct understanding of him.²¹⁾ Unfair accusations insinuating Eliade had ominous hidden intentions, either through ignorance or intent, makes it difficult to understand Eliade's work properly and to challenge constructively his theory and method.

Eliade's critics argue that the history of religions has been developed mainly by Western scholars with a Western Christian perspective. They assert that Eliade is the most notorious of such scholars.²²⁾ Further, according to them, Eliade was "theologically motivated" so his method and theory are not scientific and should be avoided.²³⁾ To them, the concept of religion, phenomenology of religion, and the theories of Eliade are Western constructs.²⁴⁾ They suggest that only a scientific perspective and method should be used for the academic study of religion. Yet, the argument made by Eliade's opponents that religion was constructed by modern Westerners is, paradoxically, very Western.²⁵⁾ Their "scientific" way of study is also West-centered in origin, as

20) See Allen, *Myth and Religion in Mircea Eliade*, 213-215, 310-315. Allen argues that while both Eliade's critics and his defenders relate his life to his scholarly work, it is impossible to determine the exact relationship between the two: "even when Mircea Eliade's personal fears, desires, and attitudes help one to understand motivations behind and specific directions taken by his scholarship on myth, time, and history, there still remains the question of determining the adequacy of his scholarly interpretations" (214-215). See also Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade*, 144-177.

21) Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade*, 4.

22) Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 9, Dubuisson, *The Western Construction on Religion*, 172.

23) McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*, 159.

24) 29, 165, 179.

25) For instance, see Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*; "It [religion] should instead be studied as an ideological category, an aspect of modern western ideology, with a specific location in history, including the nineteenth-century period of European colonization." See also Dubuisson, *The Western Construction on Religion*, 42. "We need only remember that the selection and recognition of the facts identified as religious have always depended on criteria borrowed from

it was born and developed under the influence of the Enlightenment.

Paradoxically, those opponents of Eliade who criticize Eliade's theories as Western constructs simultaneously attack Eliade's refusal to accept the dominant West-centered perspective. It is interesting that the criticisms of the three scholars are quite contradictory to each other: Dubuisson claims that Eliade was an elitist; McCutcheon alleges that he was fascistic; Wasserstrom argues that he was anti-cultural. However, they have in common the attempt to explain Eliade's refusal to adapt himself to the dominant West-centered perspective. Eliade's opponents who stick to this perspective strictly disapprove of any approach that alludes to that which falls outside of "the empirically observable world of happenstance, material objects, and social interactions"²⁶⁾ which constitutes the object of Western scholarship. However, this limitation of the field of academic study, which Western scholarship has adhered to since the Enlightenment, radically denies the longstanding Eastern academic tradition, without leaving any room for the consideration of the Eastern intellectual capability.

Most of all, they are denying the longstanding intellectual tradition of the East by implying that the concept of religion used in the East is merely Western transplant.²⁷⁾ East Asians have always subjectively and actively accepted, filtered and developed the Western concepts: they were never simply passive. If the concept of religion had been totally Western, it could not have been accepted by East Asians. Furthermore, some of these scholars distort Eastern religious traditions willfully or from ignorance. For example, Dubuisson criticizes the Western classification of the teachings of Buddha and Confucian cosmology as religion, by claiming,

our indigenous tradition..."

26) Russell McCutcheon, *The Discipline of Religion: Structure, Meaning, Rhetoric* (New York: Routledge, 2003) 197.

27) For instance, see Dubuisson, *The Western Construction on Religion*, 179-184. "The human sciences are an exclusive creation of western Europe" (179). "The idea of a universal, timeless Homo religiosus is a creation that has meaning only in the eyes of the West; it would have been inconceivable elsewhere, in any other culture" (184).

Thus, the confrontation of our initial list with what, in this same tradition, best personifies this notion of religion (for simplicity's sake, let us list them: God, immortal soul, prayer, providence, sin, faith, rite) reveals that only those examples taken from Christian civilization presuppose this familiar series of concepts or can be referred to it without great difficulty... We do not hesitate, however, to call the teachings of the Buddha religion... The Confucian conception of the world — and Confucianism, too, is classed among the great religions of humanity — comprises none of these central elements. The world, according to this doctrine, is neither divine nor sacred and presupposes no transcendence at all.²⁸⁾

Dubuisson argues that the concept of religion that is commonly used is based on a Christian understanding of religion. However, the so-called “central elements” of the Western notion of religion have existed in East Asia since ancient times. If Dubuisson had studied the history of Chinese religious movements, he would easily have recognized that the concept of religion has never been unfamiliar to East Asians.²⁹⁾ In addition, Dubuisson does not see, willfully or from ignorance, rituals, communities, and popular doctrines. He is like an outsider to Christianity who would think that the Sermon on the Mount represents the entirety of Christianity. Of course, just as the Sermon on the Mount itself is not religion, the teaching of Buddha alone is not religion. Understanding Buddhism and other Eastern religious traditions in terms of teachings alone by depending on the record of the minor religious elites is totally ignoring the religious behaviors and ideas of the masses. Though it is true that the early Indian Buddhism was based on the philosophical teachings of Buddha, the Buddhism of most people of China, Korea, and Japan has been so-called Pure Land Buddhism. Most Buddhist of the East Asian general public prayed to Amitabha, Avalokitesvara, or Maitreya, just as they prayed to local

28) Dubuisson, *The Western Construction on Religion*, 42.

29) For a brief historical overview of Chinese religious movements, see Scott Lowe, “Religion on a Leash: NRMs and the Limits of Chinese Freedom” in Phillip Charles Lucas and Thomas Robbins (eds.), *New Religious Movement in the 21st Century: Legal, Political, and Social Challenges in Global Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 179-190.

deities or ancestors for blessings. Though elite Confucian scholars stuck to the philosophical cosmology, almost all Confucians, including the elites, had no doubt that ghosts of ancestors would really come to the place of the offering and enjoy the food there. Dubuisson and many others, who recklessly assert characteristics of Eastern religious traditions though they do not have enough knowledge to interpret and explain them, should learn from Eliade's concern and respect for the East.

Eliade always tried to see what others neglected. His effort to see beyond the West should be noticed:

I felt the need to tap certain sources that had been neglected until my time... I told myself that man, and even European man, is not solely man as presented by Kant or Hegel or Nietzsche; that there were other, deeper veins to be mined in the European tradition and in the Romanian tradition.³⁰⁾

In studying Western philosophy, he sensed that something was missing: "Western philosophy cannot contain itself indefinitely within its own tradition without the risk of becoming provincial."³¹⁾ To understand the relationship between Eliade and the Western academic tradition, one has to consider Eliade's respect for the East.

III. Re-reading Criticisms on Eliade's Comparative Work

It is easy to doubt the success of Eliade's role as a public intellectual, considering contemporary harsh criticisms of his scholarly work. In particular, Eliade's hope of restoring human creativity (or imagination) and his confidence in the creative potential of the history of religions are difficult to regard as

30) Eliade, *Ordeal by Labyrinth*, 18-19.

31) Eliade, *The Quest*, 63.

totally successful since the next generation of scholars did not adopt his methods as their mainstream. While it is true that there are proper and reasonable criticisms, Eliade's scholarly work, at least in some respects, clearly played an important public role in the 20th century. It is time to consider the context of Eliade's work as I will offer one example here.

Considering that Eliade believed in the unity of history and human mind,³²⁾ it is natural that his method of comparison paid attention to "sameness" rather than difference. J. Z. Smith saw this problem with Eliade's comparison. Smith began to develop his criticism of Eliade's comparative method beginning in the early 1970s. Asserting that religion should be studied within human and historical bounds, Smith points out problems with Eliade's comparative method, paying attention to diversity, variety, and opacity,³³⁾ to which Eliade did not give much attention.

Smith's criticism of Eliade is a valuable theoretical indication that allowed students of religion to see beyond what Eliade was mainly interested in. Here, Smith's three main criticisms of Eliade's comparative work will be examined for a different purpose: they are worthy to consider in order to understand Eliade's belief in the unity of human mind.

First, Smith indicates that Eliade failed to take history and historical development into consideration in his comparative work. According to Smith, this failure is due to the characteristics of the morphological way of comparison that was used by Eliade.³⁴⁾ Because this way of comparison focuses on likeness or sameness, it swallows up the differences that would make a chain of comparisons interesting and thus little of value can be learned from it. Smith asserts, "What is required is the development of a discourse of 'difference,' a complex term which invites negotiation, classification and comparison, and, at the same time, avoids too easy a discourse of the 'same.'"³⁵⁾ As Smith points

32) Eliade, *Ordeal by Labyrinth*, 137.

33) Smith, *Map is not Territory*, 290-291.

34) Smith, *Map is not Territory*, 258-259.

35) Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1990)

out, even though Eliade obviously recognized this historical change,³⁶⁾ his emphasis was always on the universal religious experiences of human beings.

Next, Smith points out the problem with Eliade's argument about "a ritual repetition of the cosmogony."³⁷⁾ Smith makes it clear that not all mythic firsts are created as paradigmatic models and ritually repeated by showing that ritual repetition of the myth happens only under limited conditions.³⁸⁾ Actually, Eliade was not ignorant of this problem, and Smith recognizes this. According to Smith, Eliade's 1967 article alluded to a mythic pattern that is not repeated.³⁹⁾ But Smith points out that this unrepeated pattern has not been Eliade's major concern: Eliade focuses on ritual's repetition.

Finally, while Eliade mainly focused on the "Center" as a sacred place in *The Sacred and the Profane*, Smith doubts "whether one can pay such attention to the 'Center' without giving equal attention to the periphery."⁴⁰⁾ Though he agrees with Eliade concerning the existence of cosmic order, he objects to using given texts as evidence that supports "a self-serving ideology which ought not to be generalized into the universal pattern of religious experience and expression."⁴¹⁾ He points out that Eliade's study of "primitive ontology" are largely based on documents from urban, agricultural, hierarchical cultures, which were monopolized by elites.

As I said above, in general, I agree with Smith on his criticism of Eliade's comparative methodology. It is true that a more scrutinized method of

49. Also see Smith, *Map is not Territory*, 138. Here, Smith shows an example of comparison that takes history into account: by showing "the radical revaluation of the cosmos" in the Hellenistic Mediterranean world, he suggests that the sacred space and cosmogony are not universal but supposed to change through the history.

36) For instance, see Eliade, *The Quest*, 19, and *The Sacred and the Profane*, 16.

37) See Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane*, 31.

38) Smith, *Map is not Territory*, 309.

39) Smith, *Map is not Territory*, 99-100.

40) Smith, *Map is not Territory*, 99. Unlike Dubuisson, Smith does not deny Eliade's recognition of the periphery. Smith points out that Eliade does not give attention to the periphery as much as to the center. Furthermore, Smith does not relate Eliade's emphasis on the center to Eliade's political prejudice.

41) Smith, *Map is not Territory*, 293.

comparison is needed for the study of comparative religions. However, this does not mean scholars should disregard Eliade's theories, as his method of comparison can contribute to have "a viable and useful role to play in cross-cultural hermeneutics," as Carl Olson argues.⁴²⁾ According to Olson, Eliade's use of the comparative method represents an important improvement over the cultural and religious arrogance by Western scholars, including Spencer, Tylor, Levy-Bruhl, and Frazer.⁴³⁾ These predecessors of Eliade gathered material from all around the world and arranged it into a sequential evolutionistic pattern that overemphasized rationality. It was possible for Eliade to elucidate their cross-cultural misunderstandings and distortions by using a comparative method that pays attention to "sameness."

Smith's three main criticisms that I summarized above also can be understood in another perspective. First, Eliade's emphasis on "sameness" for all his recognition of "differences" clearly reflects his interest in the unity of human mind. Smith once said that the difference between his own methodology and Eliade's is due to the difference of their interests.⁴⁴⁾ Eliade's interests in the human unity led him to focus on "sameness" in his comparative work. Second, Eliade's attention to repetition of ritual was counterevidence against the theory of sequential evolutionary patterns argued by scholars of the previous generation. Finally, his stress upon the "Center" of each culture also refutes West-centered evolutionary scholarship by highlighting developed systems that are witnessed in every religion including so-called "primitive religions."

While these goals and intention of Eliade are not articulated in most his scholarly work, Eliade clarified them in some journals and his later books. In 1930s, the times of crisis in Romania, Eliade raised his political voice loudly.⁴⁵⁾

42) Carl Olson, "Eliade, The Comparative Method, Historical Context, and Difference," in Bryan Rennie (eds.), *Changing Religious Worlds: The Meaning and End of Mircea Eliade* (Albany: State University of New York Press: 2001) 75.

43) Olson, "Eliade, The Comparative Method, Historical Context, and Difference," 68-72.

44) Smith, "Acknowledgement," 351.

45) See Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade*, 1106-1116, and Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade*, 143-146.

During this period, he put forth his political view not through his academic work but through his prolific contributions to newspapers and other periodicals in Bucharest.⁴⁶⁾ After the exile began and he recognized he was never to go back to his “heart of an inexhaustible mythology,”⁴⁷⁾ his self-consciousness about his role as a public intellectual came to change radically. In his *Journal I*, he writes,

I am told, you must be at one with your historical moment. Today, we are dominated by the social problem as posed by the Marxists. You must therefore, respond through your work, in one way or another, to the historical moment in which you live... Agreed; but I shall try to respond as did the Buddha and Socrates, by transcending their historical moments and creating other, new ones or by paving the way for him.⁴⁸⁾

46) Judging from these articles, Eliade seems to have been a fierce nationalist in politics during this period. He denounced the ceding of any Romanian autonomy to any “non-Romanian” group or element, particularly Hungarians, Bulgarians, and Jews. He supported a political movement, the Iron Guard, also called the Legion of the Archangel Michael, which was a movement of the extreme right whose members were guilty of violence, murder, and antisemitic atrocities. But the movement was not related with German Nazis: in fact the pro-Nazi government eliminated the group in 1938, when Eliade also was imprisoned for four months. Then he was appointed as a member of the Romanian Legation under a fascist-royalist dictatorship and sent to London (9 months) and Portugal (until the War was over). Though some use this appointment as evidence that he served for the fascist government, he did not propagandize for the government: he refused to sign a “declaration of dissociation” from the Iron Guard. He was appointed as a member of the Legation because he was very famous in Romania, known as “a spokesman of the Romanian youth” (Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade*, 145). There are many critical arguments about the relation of Eliade's political involvement in 1930s to his later scholarly work. For instance, see McCutcheon “The Myth of the Apolitical Scholar,” 658 and Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*, 106. However, all these arguments are hypothetical hermeneutics of Eliade's work and life. As I said above, it is impossible to find just one correct way for relating his political activity to his scholarly work. What matters here is whose argument is more plausible and based on a firmer foundation. I do not think critics suggest compelling proof of the relation between the two.

47) Eliade, *Ordeal by Labyrinth*, 31, 94. See fn [3] above.

48) Eliade, *Journal I*, 25 August 1947. There is no knowing clearly why his way of responding to historical moments or of fulfilling his role as a public intellectual changed radically. But considering that this change started with his political

The history of religions and creative hermeneutics were his way of responding to his historical moment and of being a public intellectual after the exile. In this passage, Eliade did not state how he would respond to political and social issue. But later he summarizes the role of the history of religions in history, society, and culture, as follows:

The history of religions, as I understood it, is a “saving” discipline. Hermeneutics could become the only valid justification of history. A historical event will justify its appearance *when it is understood*. That could mean that things happen, that history exists, solely to force men to understand it.⁴⁹⁾

That is, by understanding historical events concerning religions and by interpreting them creatively, Eliade first tried to restore the human imagination and creativity that he believed modern men and women had lost. In doing so, he sought a way to overcome “the terror of history.”⁵⁰⁾ He was dealing with human situations and suggesting a way of overcoming “the terror of history.” To him, it was obvious that “religious phenomena express existential situations.”⁵¹⁾

In addition, Eliade thought the history of religion could play an essential role in “the elaboration of a universal type of culture.”⁵²⁾ This was the reason he objects to demystification:

despair (failure of the movement, imprisonment) and exile, it can be said that this change reflects a change in his own life. Eliade lost his own foothold, his home country. He had to create a new one by his own effort. He therefore seems to have given up on raising his political voice directly as a Romanian. Instead, he stuck to his mission and role as a scholar of religion.

49) Eliade, *Journal II*, 2 March 1967.

50) Eliade, *Myth of Eternal Return*, 90. And see *Journal I*, 26 September 1952. Against Hegel's conception of history, which is “free and always new” and “does not repeat itself,” he articulates that Homo Religiosus opposed this conception of history.

51) Eliade, *Ordeal by Labyrinth*, 121.

52) Eliade, *The Quest*, 69.

If there really has been an original and important discovery made in our time, then it is certainly that: *the unity of history and of the human mind and spirit*. That is why I do not want, or try, to 'demystify' things. One day *we shall be blamed for our 'demystification' by the descendants of those we once colonized.*⁵³⁾

This passage clearly shows Eliade's belief in the unity of history and of the human mind and his concerns for the non-West.⁵⁴⁾ Eliade was playing the role of a public intellectual through his emphasis on the unity of human mind and history, responding to Western scholarship that had been ethnocentric and evolutionary.

In sum, even though Smith's criticism is correct and relevant, the value of Eliade's comparative method should not be neglected: Eliade's comparison was truthful to his self-consciousness as a public intellectual who sought to overcome the "ethnocentric optimism, materialism, positivism, and the belief in an unlimited evolution" that dominated the time when Eliade launched into the study of religions.⁵⁵⁾

53) Eliade, *Ordeal by Labyrinth*, 137, emphasis mine.

54) Eliade's interests in the East began from his recognition of Romanian position between East and West, "a sort of bridge between the West and Byzantium, while also linking the Slavic world with the Oriental world and the Mediterranean world" (Eliade, *Ordeal by Labyrinth*, 16). That was one of the reasons he was attracted by the ancient culture of the East. See Eliade, *Ordeal by Labyrinth*, 15-16 and *Autobiography Vol. 1, Journey East, Journey West: 1907-1937* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981) 204. Simultaneously, he wanted to create Romanian culture that includes the aspects of both the West and East. He says, "I said to myself that a small culture like ours — small, but by no means minor — was obliged to adopt things from as many sources as possible" (Eliade, "Autobiographical Fragment" in Norman Girardot and MacLinscott Ricketts (eds.), *Imagination and meaning: the scholarly and literary worlds of Mircea Eliade* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982) 118).

55) See Eliade, *The Quest*, 40-47.

IV. Conclusion

Eliade as a scholar should not be marginalized based on the reckless conjecture of his intentions. Unfair accusations that Eliade had ominous hidden intentions obscures the understanding of Eliade's work and makes it difficult to challenge constructively his theory and method. In contrast, I argue that Eliade made an effort to overcome the limits of the Western scholarly tradition and suggested the possibility of the East participating in academic discussion. The relationship between Eliade and the Western academic tradition has to be understood by considering his respect for the East. His emphasis on the restoration of human creativity and imagination influenced cultural circles on the whole along with the academic world. As Olson has argued, his belief in the unity of the human mind and his effort to overcome the ethnocentric Western scholarly tradition contributed to scholarship in general.

Concluding this paper, I would like to refer to a Korean literary journal, *Munhakhongne (Village of Literature) 1999 Summer*, which carries a special feature article by a Japanese novelist named Hirano Geichiro who is very popular among Koreans as well as Japanese. In the interview with this journal, Geichiro says that Eliade is the person who most strongly influenced his writing. To him, Eliade is a “truly great intellectual who represents the 20th century.”⁵⁶⁾ Geichiro suggests several reasons for this assessment. First, he states that Eliade's work offers a reader great entertainment, because it is based on a vast amount of knowledge and because Eliade is an excellent and artful writer who conveys his knowledge without difficulty. Second, Geichiro appreciates Eliade's grand perspective which, he thinks, makes it possible to understand the whole culture that covers philosophy, studies of religion, ethnography, and literature, and thus makes it possible to understand humanity itself. Most interestingly for the discussion of this paper, Geichiro contrasts

56) This interview can be seen from a website at http://icrn.chonbuk.ac.kr/~dak/moin/moin.cgi/_c8_f7_b6_f3_b3_eb_b0_d4_c0_cc_c4_a1_b7_ce_2f_c0_ce_c5_cd_ba_e4. Translated from Korean by Yoo.

Eliade with Samuel Huntington: "People should give more thought to Eliade considering the present situation in which Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* is paid so much attention to." By a non-academic layperson, Eliade's belief in the unity of the human mind and his respect for the East, which Geichiro thinks represent the opposite of Huntington's famous West-centered viewpoint, are recognized acknowledged better by a non-academic than by contemporary scholarship.

References

** Works of Mircea Eliade

- Eliade, Mircea, *A History of Religious Ideas* (Vol. 1). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- _____, *Autobiography Vol. 1, Journey East, Journey West: 1907-1937*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981.
- _____, *Autobiography Vol. 2, Exile's Odyssey: 1937-1960*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988.
- _____, *Journal I. 1945-1955*. Trans. from Romanian by Mac Linscott Ricketts, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- _____, *Journal II, 1957-1969*. Trans. by Fred H. Johnson, Jr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989 (1977).
- _____, *Journal III. 1970-1978*. Trans. from the French by Teresa Lavender Fagan, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- _____, *Journal IV, 1979-85*. Trans. from Romanian by Mac Linscott Ricketts, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- _____, *Bengal Night*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995 (1950).
- _____, *Ordeal by Labyrinth*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- _____, *Myth and Reality (Religious Traditions of the World)*. New York: Harpercollins, 1998 (1963).
- _____, *Patterns in comparative religion*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996(1958).
- _____, *Shamanism: archaic techniques of ecstasy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974, (1964).
- _____, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Or, Cosmos and History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971 (1954).
- _____, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969.

_____, *The Sacred and the Profane*. New York: Harcourt, 1987 (1957).

_____, *Two Strange Tales*. Boston: Shambhala, 2001 (1970).

***Secondary Materials*

Allen, Douglas, *Myth and Religion in Mircea Eliade (Theorists of Myth)*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Cave, David, *Mircea Eliade's vision for a new humanism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Devi, Maitraye, *It Does Not Die: a Romance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Dubuisson, Daniel, *The Western Construction on Religion: Myth, Knowledge, and Ideology*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

Fitzgerald, Timothy, *The ideology of Religious Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Girardot, Norman J. and Ricketts, MacLinscott. (eds.), *Imagination and meaning: the scholarly and literary worlds of Mircea Eliade*. New York: Seabury Press, 1982.

Gold, Daniel, *Aesthetics and Analysis in Writing on Religion: Modern Fascinations*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

McCutcheon, Russell T., *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

_____, "The Myth of the Apolitical Scholar: The Life and Works of Mircea Eliade." *Queen's Quarterly* 100 (1993): 642-663.

Rennie, Brian S., *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.

_____, *Changing Religious Worlds*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.

Ricketts Mac Linscott, *Mircea Eliade: the Romanian Roots, 1907-1945*. Boulder: East European Monographs; New York : Distributed by

Columbia University Press, 1988.

Simion, Eugen, *Mircea Eliade: a spirit of amplitude*. Boulder: East European Monographs (New York: Distributed by Columbia University Press), 2001.

Smith, Jonathan Z., "Acknowledgement: morphology and history in Mircea Eliade's Patterns in comparative religion (1949-1999)," *History of Religions* (39 no. 4): 315-351.

_____, *Map is not Territory*, Leiden: Brill, 1978.

_____, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

_____, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*. Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1987.

Wasserstrom, Steven M., *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.