

## **Bio**

Davide Marino (born 1987), PhD candidate at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. His current research focuses on Traditionalism and its relationship with Chinese religions (especially Daoism). He is particularly interested in the philosophical implications of antimodernist religionist scholars and the ideological exploitation of religious ideas.

## **Title**

Honour Religion, Beware of Religions: Traditionalism's Hidden "Chinese" Roots

## **Abstract**

Traditionalism is an esoteric movement that originated from the work of the French thinker René Guénon (1886-1951). Traditionalism is a form of perennialism, the idea that all religions derive from a common source and share an identical metaphysical core. It is commonly believed that Guénon privileged Hinduism and Islam in his understanding of religion.

My research intends to demonstrate how a certain interpretation of "Chinese Religion" played a very important (albeit neglected) role in the development of Guénon's intellectual system. This interpretation was that of "Matgioi" (pseudonym for Albert de Pouvourville 1861-1939), the man who the young Guénon called "Master".

De Pouvourville, born into an aristocratic military family, was sent to French Indochina as a soldier in the context of France's colonial wars. There, in 1890, he joined a local branch of the Heaven and Earth Society (Tiandihui 天地會 or Thiên Đa Hi in Vietnamese), described by de Pouvourville as his "Daoist Initiation". After he resigned from the army, de Pouvourville was active in the French esoteric milieu and was one of the inspirers of the journal *La Gnose*, edited by Guénon.

A cross textual comparison of de Pouvourville and Guénon's writings around the time of *La Gnose* show how de Pouvourville can be considered the father of two cornerstones of Traditionalism. In fact:

1. De Pouvourville's ideas about "Chinese Religion" become, in Guénon, the metaphysical core of his "Perennial Tradition".
2. De Pouvourville's interpretation of the dialectic between Daoism and Confucianism was the model for Guénon's theory of "esotericism" and "exotericism".

This influence resurfaced in the 1930s in Guénon's books on metaphysics. Written two decades after the end of Guénon and de Pouvourville's relationship, they remain normative for Traditionalists around the world until today.