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Candidate session number

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Examination session (May or November)

Year

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: World Religions

(For an extended essay in the area of languages, state the language and whether it is group 1 or group 2.)

Title of the extended essay: The consequences of religion when used as "excuses" rather than "encouragements"

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I confirm that this work is my own work and is the final version. I have acknowledged each use of the words or ideas of another person, whether written, oral or visual.

I am aware that the word limit for all extended essays is 4000 words and that examiners are not required to read beyond this limit.

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Candidate session number	
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**General assessment criteria**

*Refer to the general guidelines.*

	Achievement level		
	First examiner	maximum	Second examiner
<b>A</b> Research question	<input type="text"/>	2	<input type="text"/>
<b>B</b> Approach	<input type="text"/>	3	<input type="text"/>
<b>C</b> Analysis/interpretation	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
<b>D</b> Argument/evaluation	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
<b>E</b> Conclusion	<input type="text"/>	2	<input type="text"/>
<b>F</b> Abstract	<input type="text"/>	2	<input type="text"/>
<b>G</b> Formal presentation	<input type="text"/>	3	<input type="text"/>
<b>H</b> Holistic judgement	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>

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*Refer to the subject guidelines.*

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<b>J</b>	<input type="text"/>	
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Examiner number:

# **Extended Essay – World Religions**

The consequences of religion when used as  
“excuses” rather than “encouragements”

Candidate Name:

Candidate Session Number:

School:

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## **Abstract**

The role of religion in society can be questioned. Sometimes, people take advantage of religious belief to open your wallet and take money away. Even knowing that, you are still smiling happily. Other times, there are groups of people who follow religious guidelines, don't really work and eat from others'. Other times, lack of religious belief might save us from the destiny of living under a huge empire. In this extend essay, I will discuss and show how the consequences of religion when used as "excuses" rather than "encouragements".

## **The consequences of religion when used as “excuses” rather than “encouragements”**

Religion deeply engrains into people’s lives. Most religions tell people to be friendly and kind, and give up greed to be a socially beneficial figure. However, religions are sometimes interpreted as “excuses” for not putting a reasonable amount of effort in to achieving an aim rather than working as a spiritual promoter to “encourage” people to be good. Religion is a double-edged sword; it has the capacity to block the development of a society and even totally change the fortune of a country.

Putuo Mountain is one of the four most significant places for Buddhism in China; it is widely considered as a must-see place for a lot of Chinese Buddhists and regarded an extremely holy place for Buddhism. However, when I visited Putuo Mountain, I saw phenomena where people were “religiously” forced to buy the official joss stick to pray for the “god”, 298 RMB per each family. The average income of China is 2010 USD per year according to a World Bank report. Calculating using 1:7.5 for USD to RMB, an average Chinese is currently earning only 1256 RMB per month. Spending as much as one fourth of one’s average salary per month on a visit to a religious place isn’t cheap when taking into account that there are still hundreds of millions of Chinese residents who live below the salary average. This is a religious place that has lasted for more than one thousand years and that is supposed to be the people’s, including both rich and poor, spiritual support throughout Chinese history.

There were still other options for buying the joss sticks - 99 RMB for a person, 198 RMB for mate and children, or not buying one at all. However, the official staff on the Putuo Mountain notifies us that we are not allowed to bring in any joss stick from outside of the place and we have to pray for every god we visit otherwise all the present prayers will lose their meanings. In addition, Chinese tradition puts a great emphasis on filial piety; it is a tradition that has been deeply permeated into the Chinese spirit for thousands of years, which means it is not likely for Chinese people to go to a religious place to pray for themselves without regarding their parents as well. As a result, although there are other more economical options for visitors to choose from, it is most likely for visitors to choose the most expensive one because of the traditional Chinese belief. Therefore, even there are choices, it is about the same as having no choice.

The original role of religion in any country is supposed to be spiritual support for everyone, not an expensive game for rich people. Poor people are more likely to believe in religion because they have received less education including science that can make people question the validity of religions. Furthermore, a lot of religious places in western countries and ancient China provided people free food and places to stay, and they took absolutely no money from them if they were really poor. Moreover, the cost of the joss stick they bought is extremely low - as low as nothing compared to the money the visitors had to pay to get them because the government gives temples on Putuo Mountain subsidies because they are considered to be cultural heritage sites. Therefore, it is reasonable to analyze that the temples have



enough money for maintenance without taking a lot of money from normal people. Industrialization of religious activities not only gives up the original thought of "god", but at the same time drives poor people away or gives them an even harsher time, people simply not able to afford that high fee.

On Putuo Mountain, there is a temple containing a huge gold replica of a god that only people who bought 15,000 RMB worth of miniature size gods are able to go in to the temple and pray for that god. There I come to a question - can a merciful god use human currency and will he evaluate a person's sincerity toward him only based on whether a person paid him a fixed money of 15,000 RMB? Such a system automatically keeps poor people, or people unwilling to pay the exorbitant fee, away from the chance of accessing the god.

Furthermore, there were a lot of individual small temples that had many different purposes: temples for child birth, job, richness, and academic excellence to name a few. People were told to touch a model of a religious animal so that they can be rich or go into a specific temple to pray to a specific god for obtaining number one on tests; all of them, of course, cost additional money. When a religion is interpreted as one can be rich and be number one on tests just by praying, it takes away the incentive of people to work hard, which will end them in failure anyways because in reality anyone who successfully gains works very hard to achieve.

At another place, there were long chains nearby a hill where couples write their names on a lock. Then, they lock the lock onto the chain and throw the key beyond the hill nearby to make sure the lock never can be opened again to symbolize their

neverbroken love. Although it is same as the above temple's example that does not have any practical effect, this one is different because the temple's results cannot be controlled by prayer, but the lock can. People cannot determine if they will get rich and get number one on a test or not, but they can decide whether if they are going to break up or stay together. One is done to look for an excuse to not work hard, but the other is done to indicate the strength of a decision and hope it to be eternal. Religion is supposed to encourage people instead of taking money or leading people to come lazy.

There are still some other disputable arguments regarding the impact of religious actions and beliefs on real life.

Tibetan people are well known for being extremely loyal to their religion in China. People who don't believe in any religion can hardly understand why Tibetans dedicate themselves so much to their religion; they kneel down every three steps on their walk to the temple which usually takes as long as several months or even a year. Their family brings food for each other and they eat on the road and continue their long way of kneeling down.

While people in other places are working very hard to maintain their life, Tibetans are spending most of their time on religious activities. While people in other places are creating their life with their own hands, Tibetans are praying to god for everything. The facts illustrate that, Tibetans aren't magicians and they cannot create an easy life with just prayer. Tibet has always been very poor throughout history, and people there have one of the lowest standards of living in China. The aid that the

Chinese central government gives to Tibet for religious activity maintenance is as high as two hundred million dollars for ten years; it was much more when considering economical aid as well.

Tibetans are poor not because of other factors but their way of facing life. They dedicate everything to their god, but their god does not give them any special power that can differentiate them positively or at least practically from anyone else in the world. A lot of people in other places take religion as a spiritual part of life, not like Tibetans who consider religion as everything in their lives. The economy cannot be maintained by itself; there must be people who go and support it. The economy does not develop by itself; there must be people who dedicate time and effort to it.

It would be reasonable for them to keep their practice if they could feed themselves without outer aid. However, now that Tibet is ruled by the Chinese communist government, the Chinese central government gives her huge amounts of aid to sustain a certain standard of living in China. In other words, other parts of China are working day and night to bring up the country, but Tibet is still doing her irrelevant things to pull the leg off China economically and eating what others have been earning. Tibet's excuse for it is religious belief.

Now, that question of whether religious belief affects real life comes to a larger scale: not only affected modern life that we can see, but also human history itself. I would say that if there is no religious belief, the world would not have developed the concept of countries as we recognize them today. The Axis would have been united the world without religious beliefs hindering them. It is the religious beliefs that

ironically saved the world or Chinese people from being conquered.

1941's Pearl Harbor attack, from the perspective of history, is definitely a huge turning point of World War II. The axis was unstoppable in decimating many countries. Japan, especially, was about to take over the whole east and southeast part of Asia. However, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and made the United States enter the war before completely taking over the territories with which she was fighting

Before Japan's secret attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese emperor of that time, Showa emperor, questioned the general, Toujyou Hideki, with statistical reports. The United States had ten times more iron product, three times more petroleum resources, and plenty more resources that were essential to winning wars than Japan had, so why would Japan attack the United States at this time?

Compare the production of two countries during World War II.

	<b>United States</b>	<b>Japan</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>Tanks and self-propelled guns</i>	88,410	2,515	<b>2.84%</b>
<i>Artillery</i>	257,390	13,350	<b>5.19%</b>
<i>Machineguns</i>	2,679,840	380,000	<b>14.18%</b>
<i>Military trucks</i>	2,382,311	165,945	<b>6.97%</b>
<i>Military aircraft of all types</i>	324,750	76,320	<b>23.50%</b>
<i>Fighter aircraft</i>	99,950	30,447	<b>30.46%</b>
<i>Bomber aircraft</i>	97,810	15,117	<b>15.46%</b>
<i>Transport aircraft</i>	23,929	2,110	<b>8.82%</b>
<i>Training aircraft</i>	57,623	15,201	<b>26.38%</b>
<i>Aircraft carriers</i>	141	16	<b>11.35%</b>

<i>Battleships</i>	8	2	<b>25.00%</b>
<i>Cruisers</i>	48	9	<b>18.75%</b>
<i>Destroyers</i>	349	63	<b>18.05%</b>
<i>Submarines</i>	422	167	<b>39.57%</b>
<i>Merchant tonnage</i>	33,993,230	4,152,361	<b>12.22%</b>
<i>Coal (millions of metric tons)</i>	2,149.7	184.5	<b>8.58%</b>
<i>Iron Ore(millions of metric tons)</i>	396.9	21.0	<b>5.29%</b>

Now, compare two countries' military forces at that time by simply multiplying the percentage difference.

$$2.84\% \times 5.19\% \times 14.18\% \times 6.97\% \times 23.50\% \times 30.46\% \times 15.46\% \times 8.82\% \times 26.38\% \times 11.35\% \times 25.00\% \times 18.75\% \times 18.05\% \times 39.57\% \times 12.22\% \times 8.58\% \times 5.29\% \times 0.62\% = 0.0000000000000000493\%$$

The United States was  $2 \times 10^{17}$  times stronger than Japan! With the statistics presented above, even primary school students who can do simple multiplication know who is going to win the war when Japan and the United States fight against each other. And of course, anyone with a sane mind would know if the country should go to such war or not when he or she is presented with such an undeniable statistics.

However, surprisingly, the general neither gave up nor presented a persuasive

military strategy to the emperor to answer his question, but instead, the general pulled out a story from Japanese history to support his firm conviction to go to war against the United States.

The story concerns the Mongolian attack of Japan in Kamakura Bakufu of Japan and Yuan Dynasty of China. The Mongolians took over the whole of China eight hundred years ago and kept expanding its land. Subsequently, Mongolia attacked Japan. Hundreds of ships with tens of thousands of armed men appeared on Hakata port from the sea side. The Japanese had been isolated from the rest of the world for too long. Japan had no navy and no experience in fighting with the sea forces. Furthermore, the available force of Japan was only ten thousand. Ten thousand inexperienced soldiers stacked on the land. No matter from what perspectives - human resources, experience, weapon, or ships - Japan, logically speaking, had no chance of protecting Japan from the Mongolian invasion. Japan, seeing those hundreds of deadly ships were coming toward the port, could do nothing but pray.

Who could ever expect, just as the ships were getting nearer and nearer to the port, some huge wind blew and most of the ships sank. It was a strange natural phenomenon that saved Japan from her doomed day. It was an absolutely unexplainable phenomenon according to science of that time.

Defeated by some natural accident, Mongolia did not give up the ambition of taking over Japan. To them at that time, the idea of conquering Japan was not an ambition, but instead, just a piece of cake. Mongolia decided to send their navy to Japan again for another try. This time, they prepared even more with more ships,

soldiers, and weapons.

The Japanese didn't have time to celebrate the holy defeat of the Mongolians; they saw those ships appear again to Hakata port. But this time, there were many more. If the former blow of huge wind was just an extremely fortunate coincidence, there was no way for them to be saved on this attack. This time, the Japanese are in absolute crisis, they could even be considered to have used up all their luck.

Japanese people have an old idiom of "What happens twice will happen for the third time." The idiom has two meanings. One meaning is that a coincidence or rare accident can only happen once. Therefore, if something that seems impossible actually happened, then it is not a coincidence, so it is going to happen again and again when some condition is met.

To everyone's surprise, the sudden blow of huge wing defeated Mongolian ships and saved Japan from another deadly danger. When aliens invade the Earth one day and the whole Earth is saved by an unscientific meteor strike, and that happens twice, then the whole human race will believe in the existence of God. Just like that, after the Mongolian is defeated by the holy wing twice, the Japanese people started to believe and admire the "Holy Wing" as the super natural power that protects Japanese from dangers. In addition, this event gave Japanese people further confidence about their idea that they are the sons and daughters of God: according to the Japanese traditional religion, Shinto.

The other meaning of the old Japanese idiom of "What happens twice will happen for the third time" is that, literally speaking, what happened twice will not

just be a coincidence; it actually exists. Therefore, it will happen again and again. This is what a Japanese old grandmother usually likes to tell children when children beg for forgiveness for their mistake a second time. Firm education during the developing ages will last in children's hearts forever. When those children grew up, like Toujyou Hideki or the emperor after he is convinced, they used that idiom with the same meaning but an exactly opposite way. Toujyou believed that if the Holy Wing was going to save Japan twice, it must exist and will save Japan for another time. So, knowing the great risk Japan would have, they are going to go for it, because they have the Holy Wing as back up. It is going to blow again when Japan is under danger.

As a result, as history indicates, Japan immediately lost their advantageous position in World War II after the United States declared the war against the Axis.

At almost the same time, on the other side of the Globe, Hitler was not doing as successfully as he had hoped at the beginning of the World War II; he failed to lock up England completely. However, he still had confidence in himself and told his followers not to worry because a nation that has never been defeated for more than two thousands year after its formation is at their back; he meant Japan.

It is true that Japan had not been defeated before World War II. However, it was not a result of how strong Japan was as Hitler believed her to be. Instead, it resulted from Japan's special location: isolated from rest of the world. Before the invention of the airplane, it took months to arrive in Japan even from the closest countries like Korea and China. Because Japan did not have a lot of natural resources for production, in 1930 they started to invade other countries. At that time, Japan had



no concept of industry or natural resources under the ground because of technical reasons. Even if they had those, they couldn't really use them at that time.

What was behind Hitler's high religious-like confidence in Japan? In history, before Japan opened up to western countries she actually only had experienced three wars with foreign countries. Two of them were the Mongolian invasion as mentioned above. The other was when Japan tried to help one side of Korea fight a war against the other side of Korea under Chinese support during the Korean revolution. The side Japan supported got defeated and she was forced to take army forces back to Japan. However, Hitler only defined the word "defeat" as getting invaded by other nations, but did not include those wars that don't result in losing control of the country to other nations. Looking at this from some other perspective, when Japan signed the unfair treaty from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Japan was to a large extent under the control of those foreign countries. From the perspective of foreigner's benefit, Japan almost wasn't much different from a colony of those countries. The only difference was that it didn't involve war, didn't result in blood, and was different only in the name.

Looking at the problem from the opposite angle, first of all, Japan had been defeated by "others" when those people ruling the country lost power numbers of time in her history, for example, during those changes of Bakufu or rulers. Furthermore, if Japan had not really experienced those wars with foreign countries, she must be inexperienced and not really good at it. Hitler should have been worried at this; he should not be proud of this. However, of course these are the facts that

Hitler wouldn't want to interpret this way, simply because he wanted to believe the one on his back is extremely strong who can push him to victory as much as possible.

Any belief that cannot be explained or proven by logical analysis or scientific investigation, no matter if it is intentionally or unintentionally avoided, I define it to be religious belief. Under this definition, recognizing Japan as his undefeated back up is the strength of his exceptional arts of speech; however, Hitler just used that religious belief to give him unreasonable confidence under disadvantageous conditions.

Again, as history presents firmly in front of whole human beings, the Axis got defeated. Although there is no point of saying "if" to history, it's still thinkable that the world's history would be absolutely different if world's leaders didn't make superior judgments while deferring to religious belief.

No matter how religious belief is being financially abused on Putuo Mountain, or being the heavy luggage dragging down the whole Tibetan economy or even the whole Chinese economy down, to Toujyou's and Hitler's unscientific judgments, religious belief has been playing a huge role in human activities and life. However, it is undeniable that it was the religious belief that created negative impacts - financially, economically, or politically - to the Axis being defeated in World War II. The best solution to this would be to locate religion correctly at a balancing position. "The separation of religion and politics" is suggested by great philosophers. It should also be separated from important decision making. It should only remain on the stage of saving people spiritually and supporting people from their hearts. When it

comes to decisions that will directly affect life, rational choice, logical analysis, and science should be the standard.

(3331 words)

