

# East Asian religious tolerance versus Western monotheist prejudice: The role of (in)tolerance of contradiction

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## Abstract

Accumulated research has shown that Western Christian religiosity often predicts prejudice toward various kinds of outgroups. On the contrary, initial recent evidence indicates that East Asian religiosity predicts tolerance of various outgroups—except atheists. To understand these differences, we investigated cognitive (intolerance of contradiction) and emotional (disgust) mechanisms possibly mediating the link between religiosity and prejudice versus tolerance. In Study 1 (295 Westerners of Christian tradition), high disgust contamination and, to some extent, intolerance of contradiction mediated the relationship between religiosity and prejudice against ethnic (Africans), religious (Muslims), moral (homosexuals), and convictional (atheists) outgroups. However, in Study 2 (196 Taiwanese of Buddhist or Taoist tradition), religiosity was unrelated to disgust, and predicted low intolerance of contradiction, and thus tolerance of the same religious, ethnic, and moral outgroups—but still not of atheists. Cultural differences in cognition and emotion seem to explain East–West differences in religious prejudice.

## Keywords

cultural differences, disgust, East Asia, intolerance of contradiction, prejudice, religion

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Religiosity in general, and many of its dimensions in particular, has been shown to predict prejudiced attitudes against various outgroups such as people from other religious and ethnic groups, atheists, and homosexuals (Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993; Hall, Matz, & Wood, 2010; Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005; Whitley, 2009). The relationship between religiosity and prejudice is often found to be mediated by religious people's tendencies for conservatism and global closed-minded attitudes such as authoritarianism (M. K. Johnson et al.,

2011; M. K. Johnson, Rowatt, & LaBouff, 2012; Mavor, Macleod, Boal, & Louis, 2009) or their

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epistemic needs for closure (Brandt & Reyna, 2010) and consistency (Hill, Cohen, Terrell, & Nagoshi, 2010).

This previous research, though impressive in size, methodological quality, and accumulative evidence, currently presents some limitations. The question arises as to whether the religiosity–prejudice relationship is, from the perspective of underlying psychological processes, universal across various cultural contexts and for various kinds of targets. The present work deals with this question. More specifically, does religiosity equally predict prejudice in Western (Christian) versus East Asian cultural/religious contexts? If there are differences (religious prejudice vs. tolerance) or similarities (prejudice in both cases) across these cultural/religious contexts, what are the underlying psychological processes impacting intergroup relationships? Additionally, are these processes similar or different with respect to different outgroup targets and across different cultural/religious contexts? We will detail in what follows the relevant previous research, our theorization, and the specific questions and hypotheses of the present work.

### **Religious Prejudice: Intolerance of Contradiction and Disgust Sensitivity**

Recent research has shown that, although a common global tendency for high versus low prejudice exists across a variety of targets (Akrami, Ekehammar, & Bergh, 2010), distinct, at least partially, psychological processes may be involved in different kinds of prejudice toward distinct targets. For instance, Cottrell and Neuberg (2005) have found that different outgroups imply different kinds of threat and thus, for ingroup members, different primary emotions or similar secondary emotions, albeit at different levels. Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu (2002) have found that different intergroup emotions, including different negative ones, result from individuals' assessments of other groups' warmth versus coldness and competence versus incompetence. Other scholars have distinguished between disadvantaged, dangerous, and

dissident outgroups with corresponding distinct social attitudes explaining the respective kinds of prejudice (Duckitt & Bizumic, 2013).

Is religious prejudice explained only by socio-cognitive attitudes that are very global in nature, and seemingly universal across targets and cultural contexts, particularly authoritarianism and the need for closure (the two being also importantly interrelated; Chirumbolo, 2002)? More specific, cognitive and emotional, psychological constructs may explain religious prejudice, in general, or even specifically with regard to particular outgroups and distinct cultural contexts.

In the present work, we take a somewhat different approach and focus on a more specific cognitive explanatory mechanism, that is, *intolerance of contradiction*. We argue that intolerance of contradiction is conceptually relevant, especially for religious prejudice, and should play a key role in explaining cultural/religious differences in religious prejudice, in particular between Western Christian and East Asian (Buddhist, Taoists) contexts. In addition to this cognitive factor, we focus on one emotional, complementary construct, that is, *disgust*. The latter should explain religious prejudice, in particular with regard to specific targets, and should also be relevant for examining East–West cultural/religious similarities and differences in religious prejudice.

Western civilization, as well as Christian religion, to the point it has been influenced by ancient Greek philosophy, are typically characterized by their emphasis on avoiding contradictions and favoring a 0/1 binary logic (Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001; Webel, 2014). Western monotheism is suspected of having favored in/outgroup distinctions, and subsequent intergroup prejudice and conflict (Stark, 2003). *Intolerance of contradiction* would thus be a relevant explanatory construct of the Western Christian religiosity–prejudice link. This would typically include outgroups that share religious and convictional systems which differ from or fully oppose those of the believer—respectively, persons of other faiths and atheists. But it could also apply to other, nonconvictional, “natural,” visible outgroups like racial/ethnic groups, as well as

moral (e.g., homosexuals) outgroups, which are perceived as endorsing different, thus incompatible, values, and thus constitute real or symbolic threats. Indirect evidence in favor of this idea comes from a recent study showing that literal versus symbolic religious thinking predicts prejudice against all kinds of targets: racial, ethno-religious (Arabs), homosexuals, and atheists (Shen, Yelderman, Haggard, & Rowatt, 2013).

*Disgust sensitivity* is linked to the purity incorporated into the moral codes of many religions (Rozin, Lowery, Imada, & Haidt, 1999). Disgust evolved from a food-based protection system to become a culturally adapted emotion enhancing the rejection of outgroups (Haidt, Rozin, McCauley, & Imada, 1997; Navarrete & Fessler, 2006). This is certainly the case with antigay prejudice, where disgust is clear, even physical, and provokes religious homonegativity (Inbar, Pizarro, Knobe, & Bloom, 2009; Olatunji, 2008). But moral disgust also fosters prejudiced attitudes against immigrants and foreigners (Hodson & Costello, 2007; Inbar, Pizarro, Iyer, & Haidt, 2012) as well as Western Islamophobia (Choma, Hodson, & Costello, 2012); and it is an emotional response of believers when confronted with atheist ideas (Ritter & Preston, 2011). Disgust thus functions as a “protector” or “cleaner” of the soul from moral pollution. We therefore expected (moral) disgust to also, and distinctly from intolerance of contradiction, explain the link between Western Christian religiosity and prejudice. All kinds of outgroups could be involved, that is, ethnic, religious, homosexuals, and atheists, with physical, in addition to moral, disgust playing a role in religious antigay prejudice.

In sum, we expected Western Christian religiosity to predict prejudice against both (a) “natural,” visible (racial and ethno-religious) outgroups and (b) moral/convictional (homosexuals and atheists) outgroups, due to high intolerance of contradiction and disgust sensitivity. Conceptually, each of these two hypothesized mediators fits more strictly with, respectively, ideological (other religions and atheists) and moral (homosexuals, atheists) outgroups, but the two mediators should also generalize to all targets of prejudice.

## Cross-Cultural and Cross-Religious Perspective

Can such a pattern of relationships apply to East Asian cultural/religious contexts and their related prejudice? It happens that the cited accumulated research knowledge on religion and prejudice is based on studies carried out typically in Christian contexts and Western countries. Some additional studies suggest that the relationship between religiosity and prejudice is similar across the three monotheistic religions (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism; e.g., Ginges, Hansen, & Norenzayan, 2009) and possibly extends to Western Hindus (Hunsberger, 1996). Surprisingly enough, little is known about the religiosity–prejudice relationship in non-Western, particular East Asian, cultural/religious contexts and nothing is known about the possible underlying mechanisms. The present work aims to shed light on these issues.

In fact, contrary to what is the case with Western, mainly Christian, contexts, very recent studies suggest that religiosity in East Asia predicts tolerance rather than prejudice. Indeed, in three studies, Clobert, Saroglou, Hwang, and Soong (2014) showed that religiosity in East Asia, among people socialized in a Buddhist, Taoist, or Confucian tradition, is negatively related to prejudice, at least as far as religious and ethnic outgroups are concerned. These findings were confirmed through both explicit and implicit measures of prejudice. Furthermore, additional priming studies showed that exposure to Buddhist concepts increases prosociality and tolerance of religious and ethnic outgroups, at least among low authoritarians and participants who value universalism, and this both in East Asia and the West (Clobert & Saroglou, 2013; Clobert, Saroglou, & Hwang, 2015).

Why does religion in East Asia seem to lead to ethnic and religious tolerance instead of prejudice? We argue again that intolerance of contradiction should be the underlying explanatory mechanism, but is at work here in the opposite direction than in Western Christian religiosity. East Asian religiosity should relate to a low intolerance of contradiction, which in turn should

lead to a tolerance of outgroups. This should be the case because of several theoretical and empirical reasons.

In fact, philosophical and religious-convictional systems developed and established in East Asia, like Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, are typically perceived as favoring dialectic thinking and the tolerance of disruptive viewpoints and conflicting worldviews, with contradictions not necessarily being seen as problematic (Nisbett et al., 2001; Peng & Nisbett, 1999). Therefore, contrary to Western monotheism, East Asian religions and spiritualities are perceived as being marked by a lower propensity for strongly coherent, rigid, and exclusivist belief systems and ideologies (Flanagan, 2013). Indirect psychological evidence in favor of this idea comes from research showing that religiosity is unrelated to the need for closure among (Western) Buddhists (Saroglou & Dupuis, 2006), whereas it is positively related to Western Christian religiosity (Brandt & Renya, 2010; Duriez, 2003; Saroglou, 2002). Similarly, Buddhist religiosity has been found to reflect universalistic values (Saroglou & Dupuis, 2006), whereas religiosity across the three monotheisms is unrelated or relates negatively to these values (Saroglou, Delpierre, & Dernelle, 2004). Moreover, a recent study shows that Buddhists easily tolerate alternative knowledge systems, such as science, which may contradict their religious views (Clobert & Saroglou, 2015). It is therefore not surprising that religions in East Asia are frequently blended without any difficulty under the same temple roof (Gries, Su, & Schak, 2012).

What about prejudice against homosexuals and atheists? Regarding the former, previous research is inconclusive. Some evidence indicates that antigay prejudice is also present as a function of East Asian religiosity (Detenber et al., 2007) and increases following priming with Buddhist ideas (Ramsay, Pang, Shen, & Rowatt, 2014; Vilaythong, Lindner, & Nosek, 2010). This is in favor of the idea that the link between religion and conservative, purity-based morality may be universal. However, it has also been found that the positive association between East Asian

religiosity and antigay prejudice is very weak, weaker compared to that among Catholics and Protestants living in East Asia, and is nullified after controlling for gender and age (Clobert et al., 2014, Study 1). These findings seem then to be in favor of the hypothesis that the tolerance of contradiction may sustain a religion–tolerance link in East Asia. Given thus some of the inconsistency in previous research, in the present work we were open to either possibilities, that is, antigay tolerance or prejudice as a function of East Asian religiosity.

Finally, it seems reasonable to expect atheists to represent an outgroup, even for East Asian believers. Antiatheist prejudice is the strongest found across the world, with people, including believers, being more tolerant of ethnic outgroups, other religions' believers, and homosexuals than of atheists (Gervais, 2013). Tolerance of contradiction may be efficient in allowing one to accept the coexistence or combination, either partly or substantially, of diverging perspectives, but may be less effective with perspectives that are the exact opposite of one's own, here atheism versus believing. Moreover, by definition, atheism can be seen as the full rejection of others' beliefs. Thus, tolerant people are tolerant of diverging worldviews but may not be tolerant of those who are perceived as intolerant. For instance, high religious questers are not tolerant of fundamentalists acting in an intolerant way (Batson, Denton, & Vollmecke, 2008; Batson, Eidelman, Higley, & Russell, 2001). Finally, initial evidence suggests that antiatheist prejudice is *the* exception in the global East Asian religiosity–tolerance relationship (Clobert et al., 2014, Study 1). Therefore, we did not expect tolerance of contradiction in an East Asian context to extend to atheists; disgust, for the reasons detailed in the previous section, could also explain antiatheist prejudice as a function of East Asian religiosity.

In sum, contrary to what we expected for Western Christian religiosity, we expected East Asian religiosity to be followed by a low intolerance of contradiction, which in turn should lead to overall low prejudice. This would certainly include ethnic and religious outgroups, whereas

for homosexuals the question remained open. On the other hand, high disgust sensitivity should explain religious antigay and antiatheist prejudice.

## Overview of the Studies

The previous hypotheses were investigated in two studies, one among Westerners (mostly Belgians) socialized in a Christian context, and the other among East Asians (Taiwanese) of a Buddhist, Taoist, and/or Confucian tradition. The methodology was the same across the two studies and included measures of (a) religiosity, (b) two hypothesized mediators, that is, intolerance of contradiction and disgust, and (c) prejudice against four kinds of outgroups, two natural/visible ones, that is, ethnic and religious (Africans and Muslims in both studies), and two moral/convictional ones, that is, homosexuals and atheists. Prejudice was measured explicitly, through evaluations, regarding each target, of three dimensions: social condemnation, negative affect, and social distance.

## Study 1

### Method

*Participants.* Participants were 295 adults ( $M = 21.6$ ,  $SD = 4.7$ ; 228 women) from Belgium ( $n = 170$ ), France ( $n = 108$ ), and other European countries ( $n = 17$ ) who responded to either a paper-based or an online questionnaire (in French). The respondents were mainly recruited through universities and social networks. They self-identified as Catholic ( $n = 126$ ), atheist ( $n = 95$ ), agnostic ( $n = 45$ ), or "other" (none of the major religions;  $n = 29$ ).

### Measures

*Religiosity.* Participants were administered the 12-item Four Basic Dimensions of Religiosity Scale (Saroglou et al., 2012) that measures religiosity as a composite of four basic dimensions: emotions-experience, affiliation-identity, meaning-beliefs, and values-morality. Respective sample items are: "Religious rituals, activities or practices

make me feel positive emotions"; "In religion, I enjoy belonging to a group/community"; "It is important to believe in a Transcendence that provides meaning to human existence"; and "I am attached to the religion for the values and ethics it endorses." This scale has been validated in 14 countries of various religious traditions.

*Mediators.* Participants completed short measures of intolerance of contradiction and disgust. *Intolerance of contradiction* was measured with five pairs of seemingly contradictory scientific findings presented in short statements (see Peng & Nisbett, 1999). Participants were asked to rate the plausibility of the 10 findings on a 9-point Likert scale. The absolute difference between the ratings of two contradictory findings indicated a stronger intolerance of contradiction. *Disgust sensitivity* was measured through 12 items from the revised (Olatunji et al., 2007) version of the Disgust Scale (Haidt, McCauley, & Rozin, 1994). The four items—two in a true/false format, two in a 3-point Likert scale—with the best factor loadings on each of the three dimensions, that is, core disgust, animal reminder, and contamination, measured by this scale were selected ( $\alpha = .62$ ). We used the scoring method previously described by Olatunji et al. (2007).

*Prejudice.* Prejudice against four kinds of targets (Africans, Muslims, atheists, and homosexuals) was assessed using three distinct indexes for each of them. First, participants answered four items (inspired from LaMar & Kite, 1998) measuring *social condemnation* of each of the four targets: "The [target] should not be discriminated" (reversed); "The [target] should not hold a position of responsibility"; "The increasing acceptance of the [target] in our society is aiding in the deterioration of morals"; "I would feel uncomfortable if I was alone with the [target]" (7-point Likert scale;  $\alpha$ s ranging from .60 to .78). Second, participants rated their *feelings* toward the targets on a thermometer item from 0 = *cold* to 100 = *warm*. Finally, *social distance* from the targets was evaluated using, for each target, three items commonly used in international surveys: "Would you

**Table 1.** Coefficients of correlations between measures of Western religiosity, prejudice, and hypothesized mediators (Study 1).

	Religiosity	Intolerance of contradiction	Disgust: Core	Disgust: Animal	Disgust: Contamination
Soc. condemnation					
Africans	.13*	.01	.07	.02	.28**
Muslims	.15*	.05	.10	.02	.22**
Atheists	.33**	.05	.10	.08	.14*
Homosexuals	.22**	.04	.00	.00	.16**
Negative affect					
Africans	.04	.08	.04	.07	.13*
Muslims	.04	.19**	-.08	.01	.16**
Atheists	.24**	-.08	.09	.03	-.03
Homosexuals	.12*	-.04	.13*	.07	.08
Social distance					
Africans	.09	.16**	.08	.03	.18**
Muslims	.07	.21**	.13*	.09	.15**
Atheists	.32**	.02	.00	.03	.01
Homosexuals	.17**	.01	-.05	.01	.03
Intolerance of contradiction	.13*	–	.02	.01	.15**
Disgust					
Core	.14*	–	–	.32**	.33**
Animal	.12*	–	–	–	.30**
Contamination	.15*	–	–	–	–

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

like to have this person as (1) a neighbor, (2) a political representative, and (3) a husband/wife?" on a Likert scale ranging from 1 = *totally dislike* to 7 = *totally like* (as ranging from .67 to .85).<sup>1</sup>

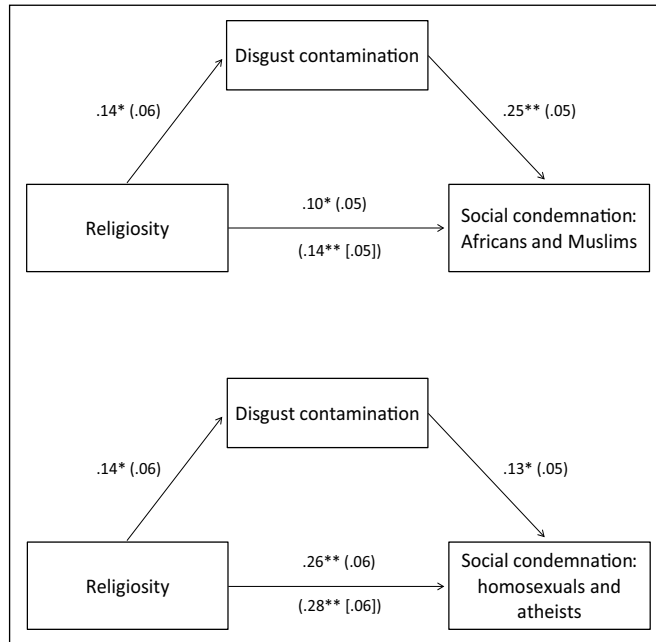
*Results*

Descriptive statistics of all measures are provided in the Appendix. Correlations between indicators of prejudice, hypothesized predictors, and mediators, as well as intercorrelations between the latter two sets of variables, are reported in Table 1. Overall, religiosity was positively correlated, consistently across all three indicators, with prejudice toward moral/convictional outgroups, that is, atheists<sup>2</sup> and homosexuals, but also with the social condemnation of ethnic/racial and religious outgroups, that is, respectively Africans and Muslims. Religiosity was positively associated with the two

hypothesized mediators, that is, disgust—all three components—and intolerance of contradiction.

Intolerance of contradiction was occasionally related to prejudice against Muslims (negative affect and social distance) and Africans (social distance). The disgust contamination dimension, but not the other two disgust dimensions, was related to intolerance of contradiction, as well as to prejudice against all targets, consistently across indicators for Africans and Muslims, and occasionally—only with social condemnation—for atheists and homosexuals. Nevertheless, negative affect toward homosexuals was also related to core disgust.

Conditions were thus unified to test four (2 [outcomes: social distance and social condemnation] × 2 [kinds of targets: ethnic/racial and moral/convictional]—see following lines) multiple mediational models, with each time (a) religiosity as a predictor, (b) intolerance of contradiction and disgust



**Figure 1.** The mediating role of disgust on the relation between Western religiosity and social condemnation of ethnoreligious (Africans and Muslims) and moral (homosexuals and atheists) outgroups (Study 1).

*Note.* Numbers on paths represent unstandardized regression coefficients; standard errors are in parentheses; the direct effects of independent variable (IV) on dependent variable (DV; c paths) are in brackets.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

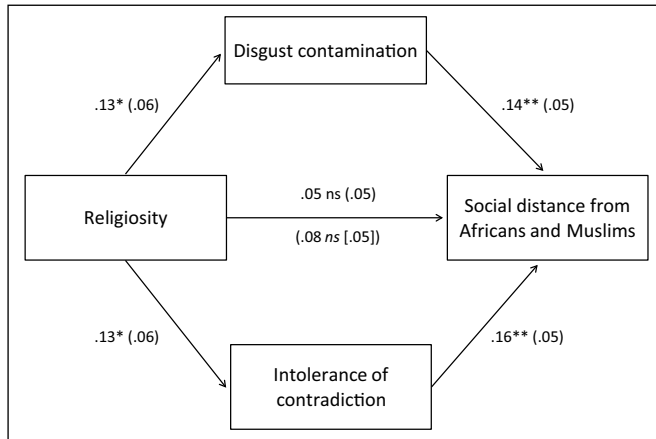
contamination as simultaneous mediators, and (c) either social distance or social condemnation as the outcome. For the economy of presentation, given the similar pattern of correlations, prejudices against Africans and Muslims were aggregated into a measure of ethnoreligious prejudice against foreigners/visible outgroups in general, whereas prejudices against homosexuals and atheists were collapsed into a measure of prejudice against moral outgroups. A SPSS macro (PROCESS) designed by Hayes (2013) was used to test for indirect effects. This macro facilitates the implementation of bootstrapping methods (5,000 resampling). All the tested models controlled for age and gender.

As depicted in Figure 1, the contamination dimension of disgust, but not intolerance of contradiction, was found to mediate the relationship between religiosity and social condemnation of Africans and Muslims,  $IE = .03$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ , 95%  $CI = [0.01, 0.08]$ , as well as homosexuals and atheists,  $IE = .02$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ , 95%  $CI = [0.01,$

$0.04]$ . These two significant mediations were partial. As far as social distance was concerned (see Figure 2), disgust contamination and intolerance of contradiction together mediated the relationship between religiosity and social distance from Africans and Muslims,  $IE_{tot} = .04$ ,  $SE_{tot} = 0.02$ , 95%  $CI_{tot} = [0.01, 0.08]$ . Finally, an additional mediational model confirmed the role of core disgust as significantly partially mediating the link between religiosity and negative affect toward homosexuals,  $IE = .02$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ , 95%  $CI = [0.01, 0.04]$ .

### Discussion

As expected, religiosity among Westerners of Christian tradition was found to be positively related to prejudice against religious, ethnic, and moral outgroups. Emotional and cognitive factors seemed to sustain such attitudes. High intolerance of contradiction and high sensitivity to the



**Figure 2.** The mediating role of disgust and intolerance of contradiction on the relation between Western religiosity and social distance from ethnoreligious (Africans and Muslims) outgroups (Study 1).

*Note.* Numbers on paths represent unstandardized regression coefficients; standard errors are in parentheses; the direct effects of IV on DV (c paths) are in brackets.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

contamination dimension of disgust seemed to explain, partially, the relationship between religiosity and prejudice against racial and ethnoreligious outgroups, that is, Africans and Muslims. Moral disgust (the contamination dimension) was also found to mediate the relationship between religiosity and prejudice against moral/convictional outgroups—homosexuals and atheists, but, in addition, physical disgust (core disgust) explained religious negative affect toward homosexuals. In sum, moral disgust seems to partially explain Western Christian religious prejudice against various kinds of outgroups. This indicates a deep discomfort with many kinds of outgroups, possibly perceived as capable of contaminating the “spiritual health” of believers, citizens of a “Western Christian” society. Intolerance of contradiction additionally sustained xenophobic attitudes toward visible minorities, especially Muslims, who are depicted today as endorsing values highly incompatible with Western civilization.

It is however unclear why intolerance of contradiction did not extend its role in fueling prejudice against homosexuals and atheists. A speculative interpretation could be that, in the very secular Belgium, which has a history of coexistence between Catholicism and secularism/

atheism, and in which the later has had success in defending liberal values (e.g., legalization of abortion, euthanasia, children’s euthanasia, gay marriage), the symbolic threat of homosexuals and atheists to believers is situated more at the level of moral values than at the ideological level of the faith versus nonfaith conflict.

## Study 2

### Method

*Participants.* Participants were 196 adults ( $M = 20.8$ ,  $SD = 2.8$ ; 134 women) from Taiwan who responded to either a paper-based or an online questionnaire. They self-identified as folk believers ( $n = 79$ ), Buddhists ( $n = 39$ ), Taoists ( $n = 21$ ), agnostics ( $n = 43$ ), atheists ( $n = 1$ ), or “other” ( $n = 12$ ). All scales used in this second study were translated and adapted to traditional Chinese by a team of bilingual experts.

### Measures

*Religiosity.* As in Study 1, participants completed the Big Four Religious Dimensions Scale. Using principal component analysis, we found an equivalent one-factor structure between the



Taiwanese and the Belgian sample (Study 1) for religiosity,  $\varphi = .99$  that is satisfactory as  $> .90$  (van de Vijver & Leung, 1997).

*Mediators.* Participants then completed the same short measures as in Study 1 to assess intolerance of contradiction and disgust. The Tucker's phi equivalence indices between the European and the Taiwanese sample were satisfactory for both scales ( $\varphi = .93$  and  $.96$ , respectively for intolerance of contradiction and disgust).

*Prejudice.* Prejudice against four targets—Africans, Muslims, atheists, and homosexuals—was assessed using the three same measures as in Study 1—social condemnation, negative affect, and social distance. The Tucker's phi equivalence indices between the European and the Taiwanese sample for the measures of social condemnation and distance were satisfactory for each target ranging from  $\varphi = .92$  to  $\varphi = .99$ .

## Results

Descriptive statistics of all measures are provided in the Appendix. Correlations between indicators of prejudice, religiosity, and mediators, as well as intercorrelations between the latter two sets of variables, are reported in Table 2. Like in Study 1, intolerance of contradiction was positively related to social distance from Africans and Muslims, but also homosexuals. Unlike Study 1, disgust (all components) was unrelated to any indicator of prejudice, with only one exception: animal disgust was positively related to social condemnation of Muslims. Like in Study 1, religiosity was positively related to prejudice against atheists, but, contrary to Study 1, religiosity was negatively related to prejudice against Africans and Muslims (negative affect and/or social distance), and, to some extent, homosexuals (marginally significant relationship with social distance), as well as intolerance of contradiction.

Conditions were thus unified to test two mediational models (two kinds of targets, see following lines) with (a) religiosity as a predictor, (b) intolerance of contradiction as a mediator, and

(c) social distance from ethnoreligious outgroups (Africans and Muslims) or homosexuals, as the outcome. (As in Study 1, prejudices against Africans and Muslims were aggregated into a measure of prejudice against foreigners/visible outgroups; but, since religiosity was related to high antiatheist prejudice and low antigay prejudice, the measures of these two prejudices were not aggregated into one, unlike Study 1.) The SPSS macro (PROCESS) designed by Hayes (2013) was used to test for indirect effects. As depicted in Figure 3, intolerance of contradiction mediated the relationship between religiosity and social distance from Africans and Muslims,  $IE = -.02$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ ,  $95\% CI = [-0.07, -0.01]$ , as well as homosexuals,  $IE = -.03$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $95\% CI = [-0.08, -0.01]$ .

## Discussion

Confirming our central hypothesis of an East–West contrast on religious prejudice and the underlying cognitive mechanism, Study 2 showed that intolerance of contradiction, which had a similar function across the two cultures in supporting prejudice, was low among religious East Asians. Subsequently, this led to an outcome of religiosity that was opposite to that of Study 1, that is, tolerance of—and not prejudice against—racial (Africans) and ethnoreligious (Muslims) outgroups, exactly the same outgroups as in Study 1. Interestingly, the same underlying process extended, through an indirect mediation, this tolerance to homosexual people as well. Note that the religiosity–tolerance link was present overall across two out of the three indicators of prejudice, but the mediational findings were only significant with one of these indicators—social distance.

Interestingly, the results of Study 2 regarding the links between religiosity and prejudice against various targets nicely replicate (and importantly extend through mediational paths and comparisons with a Western sample) a set of three previous studies (Clobert et al., 2014). In these previous studies, East Asian religiosity was found to predict tolerance of ethnic and religious outgroups,

**Table 2.** Coefficients of correlations between measures of East Asian religiosity, prejudice, and hypothesized mediators (Study 2).

	Religiosity	Intolerance of contradiction	Disgust: Core	Disgust: Animal	Disgust: Contamination
Soc. condemnation					
Africans	-.01	-.02	.05	.13	-.02
Muslims	-.02	-.01	.03	.16*	-.03
Atheists	.09	-.07	.07	.03	.03
Homosexuals	.01	.07	.06	.00	-.03
Negative affect					
Africans	-.10	.07	-.05	-.06	.08
Muslims	-.14*	.07	.01	-.12	.01
Atheists	.16*	-.07	.02	.04	.08
Homosexuals	-.08	.14+	-.07	-.02	.10
Social distance					
Africans	-.21**	.23**	.01	.06	.00
Muslims	-.27**	.18**	.03	.06	.06
Atheists	.15*	.02	-.02	-.07	.01
Homosexuals	-.13+	.20**	.06	.00	.03
Intolerance of contradiction	-.15*	—	.06	.03	.01
Disgust					
Core	-.07	—	—	.42**	.40**
Animal	.06	—	—	—	.33**
Contamination	.02	—	—	—	—

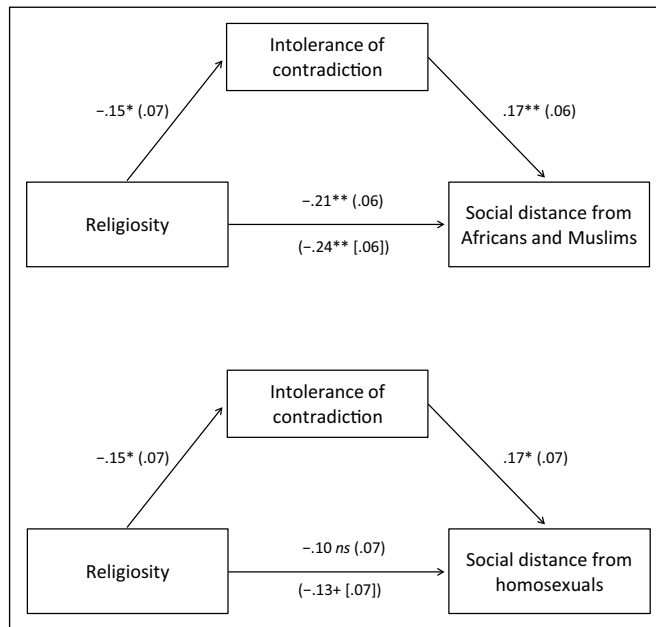
+*p* < .10. \**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01.

no overall prejudice against homosexuals, but prejudice against atheists—obviously the fundamental outgroup of any religious group.

Disgust had no overall associations with prejudice or religiosity. In only one case, there was significant meaningful association between animal disgust and social condemnation of homosexuals. The global irrelevance of disgust with regard to prejudice in general and religious prejudice in particular does not, of course, indicate lack of prejudice in Study 2. Contrary to what was the case with intolerance of contradiction, the means of disgust and various measures of prejudice in Study 2 were in fact equal, if not higher, compared to those in Study 1 (see Appendix). Other processes, yet to be identified, could explain prejudice in general, and religious prejudice (e.g., against atheists) in particular, in East Asian cultural contexts.

### General Discussion

Two studies were conducted, one in a Western country (Belgium) with participants of Christian background and the other in an East Asian country (Taiwan) with participants of Buddhist, Taoist, or folk believing tradition. Evidence was provided for meaningful cross-cultural/religious differences in the relationship between religiosity and prejudice against various kinds of outgroups, as well as for the underlying explanatory mechanisms. In Study 1, Western Christian religiosity predicted prejudicial attitudes towards racial (Africans), ethnoreligious (Muslims), and moral (homosexual) outgroups. This was partly explained by high sensitivity to disgust—overall moral disgust, but also physical disgust with regard to homosexuals—but also by high intolerance of contradiction. On the contrary, in Study



**Figure 3.** The mediating role of intolerance of contradiction on the relation between East Asian religiosity and social distance from ethnoreligious (Africans and Muslims) and moral (homosexuals) outgroups (Study 2).

*Note.* Numbers on paths represent unstandardized regression coefficients; standard errors are in parentheses; the direct effects of IV on DV (c paths) are in brackets.

$^+p < .10$ .  $^*p < .05$ .  $^{**}p < .01$ .

2, East Asian religiosity predicted tolerance—low prejudice, toward the exact same racial, ethnoreligious, and, to some extent, moral outgroups. This was partly explained by low intolerance of contradiction.

These studies do not only extend emerging research on religion and prejudice in East Asia (Clobert et al., 2015; Clobert et al., 2014; Ramsay et al., 2014). More importantly, they provide, for the first time to our knowledge, evidence on key cognitive and emotional psychological mechanisms that are partly responsible for explaining East–West differences in the way individual religiosity is involved in intergroup relations and prejudice or tolerance.

First, intolerance of contradiction, though found to underlie prejudice in both studies, predicted opposite outcomes due to opposite associations with religiosity across the two studies. In line with previous theorization and cross-cultural evidence (see our Introduction), highly religious

Western Christians tended to be intolerant of contradiction, what very seemingly accentuated their perception of “natural,” visible outgroups (Africans and Muslims) as endorsing opposite cultural values, and thus as threatening the majority’s values and the majority’s ideal of a European society built on Western Christian civilization. On the contrary, also in line with theorization (see Introduction), highly believing East Asians (Buddhists, Taoists, folk believers) tended to consider diverging, even opposite, perspectives and worldviews as somehow compatible with each other. This sustained their positive attitudes toward racial, ethnoreligious, and sexual minorities, very seemingly because diverging perspectives and worldviews are believed in this cultural/religious context to contribute to the harmony of the whole universe.

Second, religious Westerners (Study 1) also tended to be highly sensitive to moral and physical disgust, what seemingly accentuated their

perception of all kinds of outgroups as threatening their own purity and moral health. For instance, Muslims are perceived today by Western Christians to threaten gender equality, personal autonomy, personal and collective security, and the predominance of Christianity (Helbling, 2012). Homosexuals are perceived to threaten traditional roles of family and sexuality, gender differences and spiritual aspirations (having instead hedonistic motives in life), and possibly physical health (P. Johnson & Vanderbeck, 2014). On the contrary, in the East Asian context (Study 2), though disgust sensitivity was equally present, high believers did not seem to be particularly concerned by moral and physical disgust, and thus were “lacking” a key emotional mechanism underlying prejudice. Interestingly, it has been argued that negative emotions such as disgust are avoided in Buddhism (Harvey, 2000). For instance, even if vegetarianism is strongly encouraged in Buddhism, Buddhists are invited not to become disgusted with meat since disgust and hatred are closely related (Stewart, 2010). Furthermore, high disgust is inherently linked to infrahumanization (Harris & Fiske, 2006). The Western Christian anthropocentrism has accentuated clear-cut divisions between humans and the rest of the living and nonliving entities in the world (Schultz, Zelezny, & Dalrymple, 2000), what, in our view, facilitates both infrahumanization in intergroup relations and strong suprahumanization of divine entities (Demoulin, Saroglou, & van Pachterbeke, 2008). On the contrary, in religions such as Buddhism or Taoism, humans and nonhuman beings and other entities are believed to be in high interpenetration (Harvey, 2000). For instance, humans can be reincarnated into a nonhuman entity; and supernatural, transcendental beings are more impersonal than the monotheistic gods (Flanagan, 2013).

Beyond these striking differences, the samples of the two studies shared an interesting similarity. Those who were highly religious, be it in the West or the East, tended to express negative prejudicial attitudes toward one particular outgroup—atheists. This result (see also Clobert et al., 2014,

Study 1) indicates that tolerance as a function of East Asian religions is not unlimited. Those who endorse a totally opposite worldview, and who in addition, may be suspected to be immoral in many aspects (see the atheism–immorality stereotypical association shared around the world; Gervais, 2013; Harper, 2007; Saroglou, Yzerbyt, & Kaschten, 2011) or to reject all other faith beliefs, obviously constitute a fundamental, central outgroup, even for Buddhists and Taoists.

The present work also presents several limitations. The cultural/religious differences were clear, but the sizes of most effects were modest. In addition, religious tolerance in Study 2 was attested through one out of the three indicators—social distance from the various outgroups. It is unclear why this was not generalizable to all indicators of prejudice. Also, one could reasonably argue that measuring antiatheist prejudice with samples containing nonbelievers is not the best option. However, this is a common practice in related research and it is justified by the fact that negative stereotypes about atheists are broadly shared, often also by nonbelievers (Gervais, 2013). Nevertheless, it cannot be excluded that the present work provides information on ingroup preferences by believers rather than derogation of atheists per se. Moreover, it is unclear whether the results would have been to some extent different if we had distinguished between gays and lesbians in measuring prejudice against homosexuals. Also, one could argue that Muslims are not a strong outgroup in Taiwan, unlike Western Europe. Note, however, that prejudice against all outgroups was most often, across indicators, higher in Study 2 compared to Study 1, making Muslims a legitimate outgroup for both studies (see also the current international context). Finally, the present work is limited to two countries, and thus findings are not necessarily generalizable to the West or the East, and the related religions, in general.

Beyond these limitations, the present studies not only asked original research questions but also provided meaningful evidence that evokes more questions for future research. One important issue is whether the differences found here

are attributable to strictly religious factors, or to other, nonreligious, cultural factors. The question is conceptually interesting, though it is not easy to disentangle the two kinds of influences from each other. This is due to not only methodological reasons, but also historical ones, since the interaction between the two often refers to hundreds if not thousands of years of history. Nevertheless, religion may have some priority here regarding prejudice: in a previous study comparing, among East Asians, Christians, and non-Christians (Buddhists, Taoists, folk believers), the former participants expressed prejudicial attitudes whereas the latter expressed tolerant ones (Clobert et al., 2014, Study 1).

Another issue for further research is which mechanisms, in addition to those studied here, may fully explain cross-cultural/religious differences in religious prejudice. For instance, what, in addition to disgust and intolerance of contradiction, can fully mediate the Western Christian prejudice against ethnoreligious outgroups? What can explain East Asian religious antiatheist attitudes? One promising way to address these questions is to focus on specific emotions elicited by specific targets perceived as generating specific kinds of threats (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005) and then to integrate knowledge from research on cultural/religious differences on emotion (e.g., Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006; Tsai, Miao, & Seppala, 2007). For instance, the ideal positive affect valued in Buddhist contexts, compared to that in Christian Protestant contexts, is characterized by low arousal (e.g., calm) rather than high arousal (e.g., excitement; Tsai et al., 2007). If prejudice is mainly fueled by emotions like fear or anger (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005), which imply high arousal and disturbance in interpersonal relations, East Asian religious people may be less prone to feel these emotions and subsequently express prejudice.

These and other similar questions will help research on religion and intergroup relations to move further from more classic questions such as the role of underlying authoritarianism, social identity, or fundamentalist thinking; and to importantly benefit from a cross-culturally more sensitive perspective.

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## Notes

1. In the two studies, religious practice (three items), existential quest (van Pachterbeke, Keller, & Saroglou, 2012), and spirituality (Piedmont, 1999) were additionally measured. Since these variables were not of first interest regarding our hypothesis, we did not report the results for these measures. Also, in both studies, distrust was measured as an additional hypothesized mediator. This variable was indeed related to prejudice in Study 1, but failed to explain religious prejudice; it was in fact unrelated to religiosity in both studies.
2. In partial correlations, by controlling for Christian (coded as 1) versus nonbeliever (coded as -1) status, religiosity was still found to be positively related to prejudice against atheists ( $r = .15$ ,  $p = .014$ , for negative affect;  $r = .25$ ,  $p < .001$ , for social condemnation; and  $r = .19$ ,  $p = .002$ , for social distance), a finding suggesting that the relationship between religiosity and prejudice against atheists is not simply a reflection of ingroup favoritism.

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## Appendix

**Table A1.** Means and standard deviations for all variables (Studies 1 and 2).

	Study 1 ( <i>N</i> = 295)		Study 2 ( <i>N</i> = 196)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Social condemnation				
Africans	1.54	0.81	2.06	0.99
Muslims	2.24	1.36	2.29	1.14
Atheists	1.31	0.59	1.86	0.92
Homosexuals	1.45	0.75	1.98	1.11
Negative affect				
Africans	33.22	19.77	39.33	19.87
Muslims	51.90	24.56	52.72	21.08
Atheists	30.00	20.91	45.00	19.51
Homosexuals	30.64	21.33	42.41	20.73
Social distance				
Africans	3.80	1.21	4.60	0.89
Muslims	4.77	1.29	4.95	1.12
Atheists	2.91	1.20	3.62	1.01
Homosexuals	3.97	1.17	4.50	1.00
Religiosity	2.84	1.50	3.67	1.11
Intolerance of contradiction	2.48	0.99	1.54	0.83
Disgust total	15.47	2.80	17.05	3.30
Core	5.82	1.28	6.52	1.31
Animal	7.54	1.72	6.05	1.63
Contamination	3.48	1.15	4.48	1.39