

Of Mandates and Phobias

New Library of Congress Subject Headings Originating from Atla

By Jill Annitto, Lianghao Lu, and Barnaby Hughes

ATLA'S ROLE IN SHAPING RELIGIOUS SUBJECT HEADINGS

For many years, Atla has served as the Library of Congress (LC) subject authority for religious terms. However, it had been some time since the Atla SACO (Subject Authority Cooperative Program) Funnel submitted new or updated terms for consideration. Traditionally, term submissions to LC have come from catalogers—professionals deeply versed in MARC records and bibliographic standards. But Atla's Metadata Team, with its broad and current view of religious scholarship, felt ready to take on the challenge. Indexing nearly 100,000 articles, book reviews, essays, and multimedia records annually, the team is often among the first to spot emerging trends in religion and theology. If a concept is gaining traction, Atla's metadata editors are likely to notice.

Beyond the required cataloging coursework in library school, the metadata editors needed additional training to navigate the submission process. Jill Annitto, Atla's Head of Metadata and Editorial Operations—and de facto SACO Funnel coordinator for the past two years—received a crash course in ClassWeb and LC submission protocols, thanks to the guidance of Library of Congress cataloging policy specialist Heidi Berthoud. Metadata Editors Lianghao Lu and Barnaby Hughes identified three terms for submission, which were ultimately accepted after collaborative feedback from LC's Policy, Training, and Cooperative Programs Division.

Of course, not every new idea warrants a new subject heading. LC frequently rejects new subject-heading proposals as unnecessary. And so it goes among Atla's Metadata Team. This article explores how the selected terms were identified, the research that supported their acceptance, and how Atla's Metadata Team plans to apply these lessons to future submissions.

HEAVENLY HEADINGS

Lianghao Lu, the metadata editor specializing in Asian religions and philosophy, noticed that there is a relative lack of appropriate subject headings for Confucianism and broader Chinese religions when indexing academic publications in the field. In particular, for academic journals such as *The Journal of Confucian Philosophy and Culture*, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, *Dao*, *Philosophy East and West*, *Asian Philosophy*, *Ching Feng*, and other journals interacting with East Asian religions, there are some Confucianism and Chinese religions-specific concepts that frequently appear but are not represented in the Library of Congress Subject Headings; *Tiān* and Mandate of Heaven are two of them.

The Chinese religious concept of *Tiān* has been a subject heading in Atla's thesaurus for a while. It was originally created as "Heaven (Chinese religion)," probably to distinguish it from the more prevalently used term Heaven, which has strong Christian and Western monotheistic connotations. *Tiān* is a fundamental religious concept in Chinese religions shared by Confucianism, Taoism, and later Chinese Buddhism. Moreover, it is a Chinese philosophical concept as well. Thus, it would be remiss if the indexer could not capture this concept when indexing related scholarship. After

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checking the Library of Congress Subject Headings, Lu found that Tiān was not included. Therefore, it would be a contribution from the Atla metadata team to make this important Chinese religious and philosophical concept established in the Library of Congress system for the benefit of the broader field of library cataloging.

To provide sufficient and appropriate scholarly support for establishing Tiān in the Library of Congress system, essentially an annotated bibliography needs to be made. Lu used three kinds of sources. First, for Internet sources, Lu cited the Wikipedia article for Tiān, to illustrate that this concept was well-established online. Second, from academic books, Lu cited Michael J. Puett's *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-divinization in Early China* and Robert Eno's *The Confucian Creation of Heaven: Philosophy and the Defense of Ritual Mastery*. The concept Tiān is pivotal within these two books, and Lu provided the relevant page references to highlight the discussion and relevance of Tiān for the two scholars. The third type of source is academic journals, and this is relatively easy to locate by using the *Atla Religion Database (RDB)* in which there have been hundreds of cases where Tiān is used during the indexing process. In the end, Lu listed five journal articles where Tiān is prominently used.

MARC record		Download
LC control no.:	sh2024000520	
LCCN Permalink:	https://lccn.loc.gov/sh2024000520	
000	01854nz a2200217n 4500	
001	sh2024000520	
005	20250804135914.9	
008	240314 anannbabb a ana	
010	\$a sh2024000520	
035	\$a sh2024000520	
040	\$a DLC \$b eng \$c DLC	
150	\$a Tiān	
450	\$a T'ien	
550	\$w g \$a Heaven	
550	\$w g \$a Mythology, Chinese	
670	\$a Work cat: Puett, Michael J. <i>To Become a God : Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-divinization in Early China</i> , 2002: \$b Page 22 (Puett juxtaposes the Tian with heaven, claiming the duality between tian [Heaven] and the human world) \$w (DLC)2002017257	
670	\$a Eno, Robert. <i>The Confucian Creation of Heaven: Philosophy and the Defense of Ritual Mastery</i> , 1990: \$b Page 4 (Eno discusses the evolution of meaning for this term "T'ien" (Wade-Giles spelling of "Tian"), and confirms that "from the eleventh century B.C., T'ien was an object of great religious reverence and the focus of Chou Dynasty aristocratic religious practice") \$w (DLC)89031194	
670	\$a Chen, Derong. <i>Di 帝 and Tian 天 in ancient Chinese thought: A critical analysis of Hegel's views</i> , 2009: \$b Page 22 (Generally speaking, during the Xia 夏, Shang, and Zhou Dynasties, Di was used to refer to both the emperor in the present world and the emperor in heaven. The term Shangdi was specifically used to refer to the emperor in heaven, while the concept Tian almost replaced the word Shangdi, referring to the highest ruler in heaven. Heaven used to be regarded as the place where Shangdi lived, but it eventually became another name for Shangdi.)	
670	\$a Wikipedia, viewed 2 April 2024 \$b (Tiān (天) is one of the oldest Chinese terms for heaven and a key concept in Chinese mythology, philosophy, and religion)	
688	\$a Established April 2025.	
999 ff	\$i 789eedd9-9c77-4947-b987-667797278c16 \$s 0ab130e9-1052-4390-b955-9561e785b598	

Figure 1: MARC record for Library of Congress subject heading “Tiān”

The second subject heading proposed by the Atla metadata team and accepted by the Library of Congress is “Mandate of Heaven.” It relates to Tiān but is more specific to the field of political science. Mandate of Heaven is the political legitimization invoked by rulers and political philosophers in ancient China, asserting that Tiān bestows its mandate to a virtuous ruler who would rule the world. As such, the Chinese emperors would be called “Son of Heaven.” It is an ancient political concept which was later incorporated and refined by Confucianism, becoming a crucial part of Confucian political philosophy and shared by all the major philosophical schools and religions in China. Moreover, Mandate of Heaven later spread to other East Asian countries such as Korea, Japan, and Vietnam,

where their rulers would invoke this concept to justify their political authority and legitimacy. The Western counterpart for Mandate of Heaven is the Divine right of kings, which was proposed as a related subject heading. To make the case that Mandate of Heaven is an important concept that frequently appeared in academic publications, Lu cited the Wikipedia page for Mandate of Heaven, and five scholarly works, including one monograph—all of which were recently published—to support the establishment of Mandate of Heaven as a subject heading. In addition, because of its significance, Mandate of Heaven has a broader term, “Confucianism and Politics” and “Authority”, and several related terms, including “Philosophy, Chinese,” “Tiān,” and “Confucianism and State.”

MARC record		Download
LC control no.:	sh2024000521	
LCCN	https://lccn.loc.gov/sh2024000521	
Permalink:		
000	02331nz a2200229n 4500	
001	sh2024000521	
005	20250804135914.2	
008	240314 anannbabn a ana	
010	\$a sh2024000521	
035	\$a sh2024000521	
040	\$a DLC \$b eng \$c DLC	
150	\$a Mandate of Heaven	
450	\$a Heaven's Mandate	
450	\$a Tianming	
500	\$w g \$a Authority	
550	\$w g \$a Confucianism \$x Political aspects	
670	\$a Work cat: Luo, X. The Elusive Mandate of Heaven: Changing Views of Tianming 天命 in the Eastern Zhou period, 2023: \$b Page 1 (The concept of the Mandate of Heaven (tianming 天命) is rightly considered one of the cornerstones of China's political culture. It is ubiquitous in debates about dynastic legitimacy throughout the imperial millennia)	
670	\$a Rhyddwen, Thomas Parry. A Confucian in Buddhist clothing?—Interpreting Nishida's conception of the good as a realisation of the Mandate of Heaven, 2018: \$b Page 373 (Although the Mandate of Heaven or tianming (天命) is commonly associated with the right of a benevolent regime to govern, for Confucians it applies to and is realised by all members of a community. Whereas tian (天) or Heaven refers to the sum of all phenomena, that is the cosmos and human society therein, ming (命) refers to the 'specific conditions that define existence in the world at different times')	
670	\$a Jia, Jinhua. The classical Confucian conception of Heaven's Mandate, 2021: \$b Page 2 (The concept of heaven's mandate (tianming 天命) in earlier documents referred to divine-ethical sanctions of political rulers. It later developed multiple implications such as human's destiny or fate. Its earliest mention that we have access to is in Western Zhou (ca. 1045-770 BCE) literature, subsequently pervading almost all texts in the Spring Autumn and Warring States period (770-221 BCE))	
670	\$a Wikipedia, viewed 2 April 2024 \$b (The Mandate of Heaven (Chinese: 天命; pinyin: Tiānmìng; Wade-Giles: T'ien1-ming; lit. 'Heaven's command') is a Chinese political ideology that was used in ancient and imperial China to legitimize the rule of the king or emperor of China. According to this doctrine, heaven (天, Tian) bestows its mandate on a virtuous ruler)	

Figure 2: MARC record for Library of Congress subject heading “Mandate of Heaven”

WHAT IS THERE TO BE AFRAID OF?

Barnaby Hughes, the metadata editor specializing in Catholic and medieval studies, had already created several new terms relating to Catholic theology for the *Religion Database*. Instead of proposing one of these, however, he decided to put forward a term that he had come across in many Latin American theological journals: *aporofobia*. Coined by the Spanish philosopher Adela Cortina in the 1990s, aporophobia, or the fear of poor people, is less a phobia than a prejudice. Cortina had noticed that her fellow Spaniards were often hostile to immigrants, but not as a conventional xenophobia. They were not hostile to all foreigners, just poor ones.

Hughes originally created this term in Atla's thesaurus as “Spanish language—Terms—Aporofobia” on July 23, 2020. As he began to see it crop up in other languages, Hughes modified the thesaurus

entry to “Aporophobia.” When preparing to submit the term to the Library of Congress, Hughes added the variants “Fear of poor people” and “Povertyism,” as well as the broader terms “Phobias,” “Poor,” and “Poverty.” As Lu had done with “Tiān” and “Mandate of Heaven,” Hughes added a definition from Wikipedia and references to both academic books and articles. The sole book cited was Cortina’s *Aporophobia*. To bolster Atla’s submission, Hughes read Cortina’s book and added relevant definitions and discussions of the term aporophobia. Hughes then added five of the most relevant articles he had indexed in RDB from Spanish-, Portuguese-, and English-language journals.

MARC record		Download
LC control no.:	sh2024000518	
LCCN	https://lcn.loc.gov/sh2024000518	
Permalink:		
000	02031nz a2200217n 4500	
001	sh2024000518	
005	20250804135914.2	
008	240314i anannbabn a ana	
010	\$a sh2024000518	
035	\$a sh2024000518	
040	\$a DLC \$b eng \$c DLC	
150	\$a Fear of poor people	
450	\$a Aporophobia	
450	\$a Poor people, Fear of	
450	\$a Povertyism	
550	\$w g \$a Phobias	
670	\$a Work cat: Cortina, A., <i>Aporophobia</i> , 2022: \$b Page xi (Cortina defines aporophobia as “fear of and contempt for the poor (aporos), the defenseless person who appears to have nothing to give. It’s a problem for the poor foreigner, but also for the poor native”.) \$w (DLC)2021050364	
670	\$a Clarke, Kevin Michael. “Do you suffer from povertyism?” 2023: \$b Page 42 (Clarke references a speech by Olivier De Schutter, UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, delivered at the UN’s 77th General Assembly. “Povertyism – negative attitudes and behaviours towards people living in poverty – is as pervasive, toxic and harmful as racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination and should be treated as such...they must be protected not just from the horrors of poverty, but also from the humiliation and exclusion caused by the scourge of povertyism.”)	
670	\$a Wikipedia, website accessed 19 April 2024: \$b aporophobia (The concept of aporophobia was coined in the 1990s by the philosopher Adela Cortina, professor of Ethics and Political Philosophy at the University of Valencia, to differentiate this attitude from xenophobia, which only refers to the rejection of foreigners, and racism, which is discrimination by ethnic groups. The difference between aporophobia and xenophobia or racism is that socially there is no discrimination or marginalization of immigrants or members of other ethnic groups when these people have assets, economic resources and/or social and media relevance.)	
688	\$a Established April 2025.	
999 ff	\$f efsa62c9-afdc-4331-99a8-ebb54870d295 \$s e7c4a0a2-0fd8-43a3-829f-bbb5e2430e4e	

Figure 3: MARC record for Library of Congress subject heading “Fear of poor people”

STAMP OF APPROVAL

Jill Annitto submitted these three terms to the Library of Congress on March 14, 2024. They soon appeared with some modifications on “Tentative Monthly List 11 LCSH 4 (October-November, 2024).” LC had simplified “Tiān (Chinese religion)” to simply “Tiān.” In fact, LC removed all references to Chinese religions from variant forms and related terms, leaving only “Heaven” and “Mythology, Chinese” as broader terms. “Mandate of Heaven” was mostly accepted as submitted, but without any relation to “Tiān” or “Divine right of kings.” Lastly, when it came to “Aporophobia,” LC opted to establish the variant form “Fear of poor people” instead. Only “Phobias” was accepted as a broader term. All three appear on “Approved Monthly List 11 LCSH 4 (October-November 2024),” which is rather a misnomer, as the subject headings themselves were actually established in April 2025. As of September 29, 2025, “Fear of poor people” has been applied to just one book in LC’s catalog, which means that the term has not been retrospectively applied to Adela Cortina’s book *Aporophobia*. Similarly, “Mandate of Heaven” appears in the title of ten books in LC’s catalog but has not been added

as a subject heading to any of them. By contrast, “Fear of poor people” has been applied to eleven articles in RDB, while “Mandate of Heaven” has been applied to twelve. “Tiān,” however, has proved to be a much more useful term; it has been applied to 211 records in the *Atla Religion Database*.

Atla has been incredibly gratified by the Library of Congress’ approval and acceptance of these three subject headings. The process from start to finish lasted more than a year. Through it all, Atla’s Metadata Team has learned much about what makes a successful submission: the term itself should be as simple as possible; related terms must be used sparingly and stringently; and definitions and citations should be as full as possible. Nevertheless, the Library of Congress is still likely to modify the proposed submission. Even though the previous pace of subject heading evaluations at the Library of Congress has slowed lately, Atla’s metadata editors submitted two new terms in January and are preparing to submit many more. This will allow greater visibility for new scholarship in theology and religion and enable students and researchers to find the resources they need more easily. attempt to justify the change by claiming that “Trans-exclusionary radical feminism” is a slur. In this section, the funnel meticulously dismantled this claim, demonstrating that the argument in and of itself is invalid and problematic in that it is used by an oppressive group to “claim victimhood, and deflect blame for the very real harms perpetuated against trans people that the movement encourages.”

REFERENCES

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- Library of Congress. 2025. “Approved Monthly List 11 LCSH 4 (October-November 2024).” <https://classweb.org/approved-subjects/2411c.html>.
- Puett, Michael J. 2002. *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-divinization in Early China*. Harvard University Asia Center.