

# Spiritual Lego. Temples, rituals and New Age in Ninjago and Chima

Sissel Undheim

## Abstract

This paper discusses the presence and use of eastern inspired New Age concepts in the creation of two recent and very popular additions to the Lego brick collections: *Lego Ninjago* and *Lego, Legends of Chima*. What kind of references to religion do we encounter in these transmediated Lego-narratives, and why are these references there? I will argue that by merging traditional fantasy-mythology with more specific references to ‘Chinese’ and ‘East-Asian’ religious traditions, the mythologies of both Ninjago and Chima rely on general concepts well known from the world of alternative spirituality. In this paper I will trace some of these references to in the narratives of Lego’s Chima and Ninjago to the seemingly successful combination of new media marketing and New Age spirituality. Focusing on the significance of *Chi /qi* as it is transferred and used as a key concept in *Legends of Chima*, the paper seeks to demonstrate how the multi-media marketing and global distribution of these Lego products make them excellent examples of how “religion everywhere” also includes children’s popular culture.<sup>1</sup>

## The worlds of Ninjago and Chima

*Lego Ninjago* and *Lego, Legends of Chima* are fantasy universes of Lego bricks, where action-filled narratives conveyed in animated TV-series, youtube teasers, books, comic magazines, online games and webpages create the context for constantly new Lego sets to be sold. Marketed mainly at boys from 5 to 14 years of age, both series have become hugely successful and are distributed worldwide.<sup>2</sup>

In September 2014, newspapers all over the world reported that the Danish toy manufacturer Lego had become the world’s largest, superseding the company’s rival, Mattel.<sup>3</sup> The Lego company has earlier had success with figures, bricks and sets based on popular films such as Star Wars, Indiana Jones, Pirates of the Caribbean, Superman, Batman, The Lord of the Rings, The Hobbit, etc. The connection between Lego and popular culture was therefore already well established through several supersystems.<sup>4</sup> Ninjago and Chima, however, are, alongside *Lego the Movie*, the biggest multimedia successes developed and produced by Lego itself, in the sense that these, in opposition to the other products mentioned, are not franchised products.<sup>5</sup> The “Change region” option on the websites for Ninjago and Lego Chima currently reveals websites in 21 regions/languages, with China, the United States, Russia, Japan and Latin America being among them.<sup>6</sup> Chances are a surprising number of boys of Primary School-age worldwide will be familiar with, - if not even dedicated fans of, - Chima and Ninjago. Nevertheless, like the Slender Man,<sup>7</sup> Ninjago and Chima belong to a world the grown-ups know little about.

## Market, spirituality and hybridizing culture

An important aspect of transnational supersystem distribution is the challenge of marketing and reception. Whether the consumers (i.e. children and parents or others with the economic means to acquire the in this case, brick sets and accompanying media and equipment) recognize or acknowledge the references discussed in this paper as “religion” and/or “spirituality” will indeed vary depending on individual as well as cultural and geographical context. In other words, although these toys are produced and marketed for a global audience, the “spiritual” references in the narratives and toys may bring about very different (if any!) connotations in, say, Denmark, Brazil or Japan. Notwithstanding the very relevant aspects of how religious references more or less subtly are brought into play in the in global reach and local marketing strategies and reception,<sup>8</sup> this paper will limit the

focus to American popular culture as the pivotal center for these Lego productions, without, hopefully, ignoring the fact that Asia, and particularly China, are now considered Lego's "core market", alongside Europe and the U.S. (Tuttle). Yiman Wang's study of "the border-crossing feeding loop of production, exhibition and reception" of Chinese films in the U.S. is exemplified in the mega success of DreamWork's *Kung Fu Panda* in both China and the U.S:

[...] what makes *Kung Fu Panda* 'Chinese' is precisely also what makes it 'Un-Chinese. Or, to be more exact, the line between the 'Chinese' and the 'un-Chinese' becomes de-essentialized, since both are now used for labelling and transnational marketing purposes (Wang 173).

In order to understand the 'Chinese' and 'East-Asian' cultural and religious references that are brought into play in Lego's *Ninjago* and *Chima*, I will in the following argue that we have to turn the transnational economy of entertainment supersystems as well as the merging of transmedia storytelling and New Age worldviews. In this approach, I rely on the perspectives of Steven Sutcliffe and Ingvild Gilhus' as presented in their *New Age Spirituality. Rethinking Religion*. Here, they argue that "The empirical data for religion are impure and reactive and potentially a mix with everything else, [...]. New Age spiritualities encapsulate this wider condition of "religion": they are all mixed up with other cultural elements." (12). In other words, my overarching approach to culture, religion and media will be from the theoretical perspective of hybridization (cf. Wang and Yeh).

## Lego ninjas

Lego *Ninjago* tells the story of the four (later five) ninja warriors and their role in the cosmic battle against the Dark Lord, also known as Overlord. The Lego-ninjas were first released with a two-episode animated pilot in 2011, which was distributed through various channels.<sup>9</sup> In the pilot, the scene was set for a narrative told in the course of (what is by now) 44 22-minute-episodes, sent on Cartoon network, but also on other local channels and available on DVDs dubbed in a multitude of languages.<sup>10</sup> Many of these episodes are also available for free at various official and not so official sites online. There are currently also plans for a *Ninjago the movie*, which is announced to be released September 23, 2016.<sup>11</sup> The film is to be produced by Warner Bros, the company that also was behind the blockbuster of the spring of 2014, *Lego the movie*.

The world of *Ninjago* was, according to the creation narrative introduced in the pilot episodes,<sup>12</sup> created by "The first spinjitzu master", who was the father of two brothers named Sensei Wu and Sensei Garmadon. Garmadon becomes bitten by the Great Devourer (a huge snake), and is turned evil from the snake's poison. The main battle is thus between these two brothers. The by now white haired Sensei Wu becomes the leader and instructor of the young ninjas who fight on his side.<sup>13</sup> The pilot series ends when Garmadon wins a battle and is released from the underworld where he had until then been confined, so that the apocalyptic battle can begin above ground. The mythological motifs are well known from fantasy literature. As in fantasy film and literature, *Ninjago*, as well as *Legends of Chima*, rely on action oriented plots, (cf. Nikolajeva 59) where cliff-hangers follow as tumbling rocks, occasionally relieved by humor, romance or a temporary restoration of harmony, balance and peace. The action is however caused by circumstances rooted in conflict over something "larger than life", and the battles that are fought have cosmic proportions (cf. Endsjø and Lied e.g. 133).

Lego *Ninjago* is an alternative world with strong similarities to this world (the protagonists are mainly "humans", - in the Lego-sense of the word, - who live in cities and villages), but there are also mysterious and otherworldly places, such as mystical temples, the underworld, the city of Ouroboros (the Snake-ruler), and the island of Darkness, where Garmadon produces Dark Matter, also described as "pure Evil", with which he will overcome the world. (cf. Nicolajeva 57-59). The warriors siding with Garmadon, however, are not human-like, but in the shape of talking and moving snakes, skeletons, warriors of stone or humanoids. Presenting the warriors fighting with "evil" as dehumanized battle machines is however a familiar feature of the genre, as we see in *Lord of the Rings*, and many other fantasy sagas. When it comes to the more human-like characters, the question of who belongs to the "bad side", and who are "undercover-good" or may be turned to the good side, is however often part of the suspense that holds the viewers.

## Legends of Chima

In contrast to the “human-like” figures of Ninjago, Lego Chima is set in an alternative world with no evident ties to this (- apart, that is, from the strikingly beautiful nature that plays a significant role in the videos). The land of Chima is inhabited by animals that walk and talk like humans. Eight different tribes (lions, crocodiles, eagles, ravens, wolves, rhinoceroses, bears and gorillas) live, according to the voice-over in the introduction, in peaceful harmony until the balance is broken in the first episode. The cause of conflict, both in this particular episode, and in the following seasons, is *chi*, described as “the power of nature itself and the most sacred resource of Chima.” Chi is provided by the falls of Mount Cavora, a mountain hovering in the air above ground, and Chi “brings life, harmony and power to the animals that inhabit the land.”<sup>14</sup> The Legends of Chima was released as bricks and animated series in 2013. The narratives are told in what is planned to be a TV-series of (so far) 41 episodes, with the third season (episodes 27-41) premiering in the US on Cartoon network August 2014.<sup>15</sup> In addition to the TV-series, Lego has produced a variety of books, comic magazines, games and constantly updated web-pages, just as for Lego Ninjago. It is this written and digital material that, alongside the TV-episodes, constitutes the material I have relied on for this present study.



Figure 1

## Temples

A striking feature of both of these fantasy worlds is the presence, and also importance, of temples. In Ninjago and Chima alike, temples set the occasional scene for the action, and are also fundamental sites for the narrative structure. Central temples featured in the Ninjago narratives have also been sold as brick sets. These are “The Fire Temple” (Figure 1) from the Pilot series, (which also hides an entrance to the underworld) and the “Temple of light” from the (until then) final battle. At Lego’s official website, the Temple of light brick set is described as follows:

## Awaken the golden mech<sup>16</sup> at The Temple of Light!

The final epic battle for the Land of Ninjago has begun! Take Sensei Wu and Lloyd, the golden ninja, deep into The Temple of Light. Sneak past Lord Garmadon and his minions to put the 4 elemental blades in place at the heart of the temple. Unite their elemental powers to awaken the golden mech for the final battle! [...] <sup>17</sup>

In the third and most recent series of Legends of Chima, “The flying phoenix fire temple” (Figure 2) is introduced. Interestingly, with the flying phoenix temple, we see that mythological creatures from other traditions than the otherwise predominantly ‘Eastern’ are mixed into the bowl, in this case the Phoenix of the Mediterranean/Christian tradition. This “mixture” of elements from different traditions into a coherent narrative aligns well with the views and aesthetics found in the New Age landscape as well as in fantasy genres.



Figure 2.

The most important temple however is to be found in Legends of Chima, where it is introduced in the very first episode. This is “The Lion temple of Chi” (Figure 3), which houses the sacred pool of Chi, and is the center of Chima. In this temple, the Chi from the falls is collected and stored. The water-like Chi pours like a water fall into what is called the Sacred pool, where it produces orbs that are distributed equally to all the inhabitants of Chima by the righteous Lion tribe. It is the duty of the Lion tribe to guard the pool in the Lion Temple. However, – not all the inhabitants receive Chi. Because Chi is said to be so powerful, the young children of Chima have to reach the “Age of becoming”, where a solemn rite of passage marks the first personal encounter with Chi. This is visualized and explained in the very first episode of the series, where the protagonist and hero Laval receives his Chi at the ceremony marking his “becoming of age”.



Figure 3

Chi is depicted as shining orbs, which, when placed in a harness at the chest, is described as a surge of power and energy. This energy provides the one who “Chi’s up” with a boost of speed, strength and instinct (West 13). The surge of Chi is visualized as a blue, electric light that surrounds a large and grown, powerful version of the animal that “takes Chi”. Conflict erupts in the first episode when one of the crocodiles steals Chi before his “Age of becoming”, as seen in Figure 4. Unable to handle this overwhelming power, the peace of Chima is disrupted and a war between the tribes breaks out.

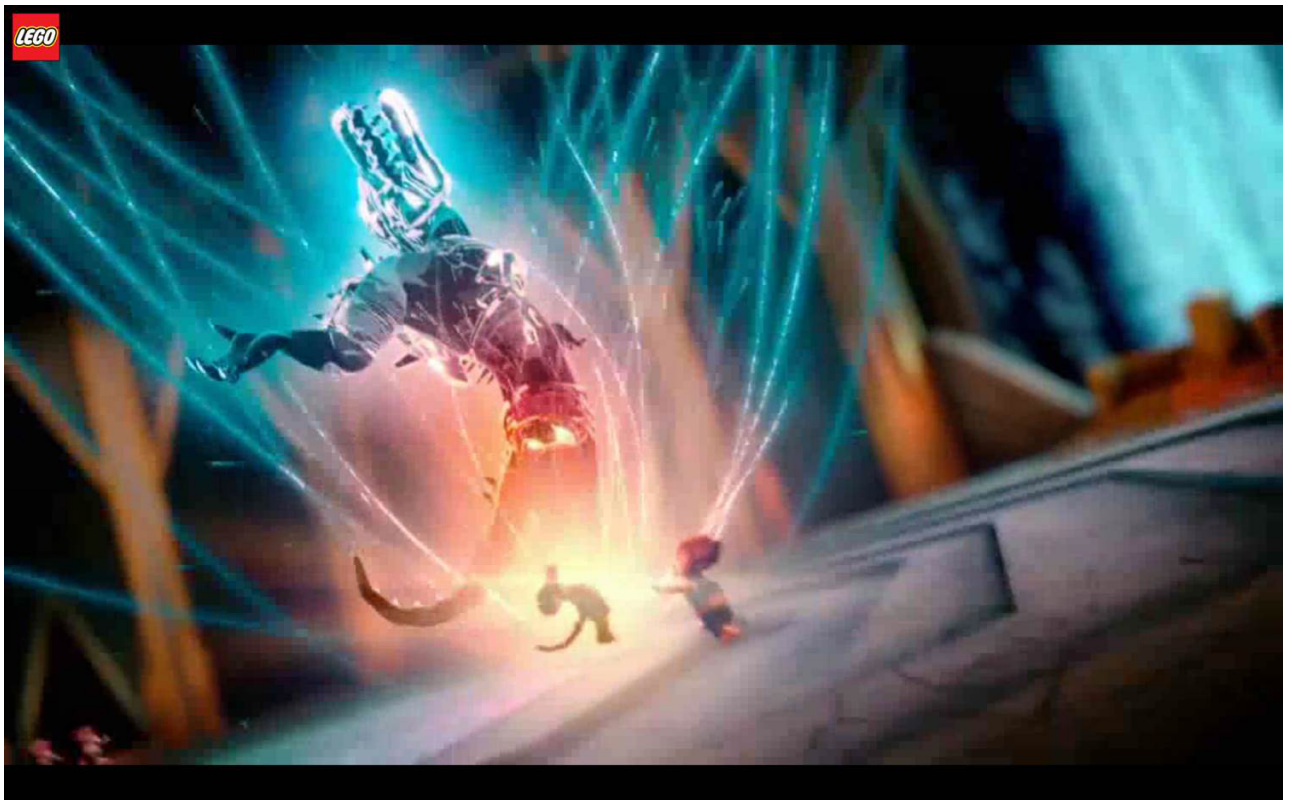


Figure 4

## Chima and *qi*

The *Lego Legends of Chima. Official guide*, introduces Chi on the very first page, with the following description:

But there is one rule that unites all of Chima: the rule of CHI. This mysterious, powerful liquid flows into Chima from Mount Cavora, which floats high in the sky above. CHI is what gave these animals their spark; it powers their vehicles and weapons, and it can transform the very land they live in. In order for Chima to thrive, the CHI must be shared equally with all of its creatures. The blue CHI orbs must be used at once, not stored up. If these rules are broken, the balance of Chima will be destroyed. (West 4)

It is difficult not to be struck by the similarities between the Chi of Chima and the Chinese concept *qilch'i*, particularly, perhaps, as it has been developed in the tradition of Confucius (Kongzi) and in Neo-Confucianism.<sup>18</sup> *Qi* is often defined as energy, or life force, and it is presented as a central concept in Chinese philosophy, medicine and martial arts. In Neo-Confucianism the material character of *qi* is also stressed. *Qi* is here seen as fundamental in a holistic world view where humans and nature is interconnected by the flow of *qi*. In New Age contexts *qilch'i* is often seen as one aspect of the holistic energy, and compared to the Indian *prana*. (Albanese 317, Mikaelsson 170) The role of *qi* in many of the Chinese martial arts, such as *t'ai chi* and *qigong (chigong)* fits well with the warrior role the protagonists of Chima assume as constantly new enemies engage in the battle for Chi, and is also easy to associate with New Age interpretations of holism, energy and mindfulness.

In the following, brief presentation of *qi*, however, I have relied on the theologians John H. Berthrong and Mary Evelyn Tucker's work on the concept. Tucker is a contemporary scholar who has written mainly on *qi* as a Confucian and Neo-Confucian concept in the context of ecumenical/interfaith theology. As director of the Forum on religion and ecology at Yale University, Tucker is deeply engaged in how religions can contribute to an ecological ethics, through developing inter/multi-religious theology where life and nature is regarded sacred.<sup>19</sup> Berthrong is likewise engaged in eco-theology, and is listed as one of the Area Specialists for the Forum' Advisory Board.<sup>20</sup> Berthrong and Tucker's focus on *qi* as a central concept for dealing with "our current ecological crisis" thus represents a scholarly, yet current interfaith, U.S.-based theological understanding of *qi* which, with its focus on ethics and a holistic worldview on some levels seems comparable to the appropriation and reinterpretation of the *Chi* that we find presented by Lego in the *Legends of Chima*.

According to Tucker, *qi* is the Chinese term that describes "the vibrancy and aliveness of the Universe" (336). In the words of Tucker

"*Qi* courses through the universe from the constituent particles of matter to mountains and rocks, plants and trees, animals and birds, fish and insects. All the elements- air earth, fire, and water – are composed of *qi*." (336-7)

*Qi* is commonly described as matter and energy, materiality and force at the same time. John H. Berthrong states that "The difficulty in translating *qi* arises from the fact that it includes the Western cultural domains of matter, substance, mind, action, vapor and force." (240) In the world of Chima, the energy-materiality of Chi is often visualized as glowing orbs, swift moving rays, waterfalls and still water. Water-metaphors are not unusual in describing *qi*. Mary Evelyn Tucker refers for instance to Mencius (Mengzi) who spoke of "the great floodlike *qi*":

One way to visualize *qi* is as a vast ocean of energy, an infinite source of vibrant potency, a resonating field of dynamic power – in matter itself, not separate from it. (337)

It is easy here to see how the Chi of Chima has become the *waterfall-like stream from Mount Cavora that gracefully falls into the Sacred Pool* in the Lion Chi Temple as tangible visualizations of such energy-matter. Even more tellingly so, when the stream stops running and the land starts to wither and die from the lack of Chi, the fundamental role of the life force and vitality that is Chi becomes evident to all. "If there is ever too little or too much CHI in the Sacred Pool, Chima will suffer from earthquakes, storms, and other natural disasters." (West 11). Dag Øystein Endsjø and Liv Ingeborg Lied have suggested that some of the recent animated Hollywood productions, such as *Ice Age 2*, *Wall E* and the *Bee* movie create a solid, complex and strongly normative eco-apocalyptic repertoire for the generations growing up in the 2000s (138). The Legends of Chima in particular seems to support this eco-apocalyptic trend, as the action is generated by imminent threat of disharmony and lack of Chi, which will cause everything to die. This reflects *qi*'s role in other modern holistic world views that elaborate and reinterpret the Chinese concept, such as seen in texts written by the theological representatives from the Forum on religion and ecology.

## Rituals of *Chi* and other ceremonies

The *rite de passage* at the age of becoming- ceremony has already been mentioned above. There is however another very interesting example of ritual that takes us even closer to the New Age cosmos. Episode 9 (Season 1) of *Legends of Chima* is called “Gorillas gone wild.” After the fade out of the by now well-known jingle, the episode starts with a meditation ritual performed by gorillas of the gorilla tribe. The gorillas are gathered in a circle, led by a gorilla who talks everyone through the proceedings. In the US-version, the aim of the ceremony is called “The great mellow”.<sup>21</sup> Sitting on the ground in positions reminiscent of meditation-position, the gorillas utter a sound (*aoum*) while a large flower begins to grow underneath them, lifting them all towards the sky (Figure 5). Gorzan, the leader of the ritual explains: “Feel the towerflower grow” (..) “We’re almost there, brotherdudes. This is what we groove towards our entire lives: The great mellow, - a state of pure bliss and oneness with all things.” The other gorillas reply, with their eyes shut: “awesome!”



Figure 6.

On the webpages (US version) the gorillas as a tribe is described as mellow, and extremely empathic. According to the “bios”, they practice daily yoga, led by their spiritual, -also described as their philosophical, - leader, called Gordo. It is also Gordo that teaches the tribe to meditate, according the online biographies. It says here that his “extra-flexible yoga skills help him wield multiple weapons in unexpected ways, always staying one pose-and-punch ahead of the enemy. But mostly he really just wants to chill.”<sup>22</sup> New Age lifestyle is thus not only a random reference; it is presented as a character trait of the lovable, yet fierce gorilla tribe.

From these two examples, we see that rituals are presented as aspects of life in the world of *Legends of Chima*, and they are integrated as central to the narratives because they in both cases, yet in very different ways, become origins of conflict and action. *Ninjago*, in comparison, do not dwell on rituals, but also here they may be part of the social and cultural “flavor”. Sensei Wu’s tea ceremony is the one that has most overt references to magic, but there are also ritual aspects to the training of the ninjas, and to their combat skills. Rituals in *Ninjago* are nevertheless not integral to the narrative in the same way as we find in the “towerflower-meditation” and “The age of becoming-ceremony” in *Legends of Chima*.

## Toys, Lego and religion “all over the place”

So what can we make of this religious “context” in Lego’s two brick universes? Is it just one more example of the prolific encounter between popular culture and religion? Or may it also open up for new understandings of contemporary religion?

I have three brief points that I wish to highlight in conclusion.

The first point is closely connected to my work on religious didactics and teaching religion in Norwegian Teachers’ education. I will therefore return to my own first encounter with this material. Working at home, with some texts by the Christian Church Fathers on early monasticism, a band of 5-year olds stumbled down the stairs outside my office, led by one of them, screaming: “Let’s hurry back to the monastery!” Not able to detach myself from the Church Fathers, this monastery of these five-year-olds made me quite perplexed. Had these boys read the books in my office? How on earth had they learned about monasteries? I then realized that they were not playing early Christian monks, nor Francis of Assisi, but Lego ninjas, withdrawing on their dragons to their dwelling place: a monastery!

And not a medieval, European or Middle Eastern monastery, but an animated one with very stereotypical ‘Asian’ architecture and design, complete with prayer flags (cf. Figure 6). The relevance of this knowledge for preschool and primary school teachers, I think, should not be underestimated. Just as research indicates that children now learn the biblical stories from Hollywood productions (Endsjø and Lied), they come to school with a rich vocabulary of religious terms and concepts that they initially learn from their toys and use of different age-specific media. In working with such concepts, and with teaching and understanding religion, it might help teachers to know how the children visualize concepts such as the underworld, what kind of temples they already know, and, when it comes to meditation, knowing that they associate it, not necessarily with mom’s Mindfulness classes, but with the great Mellow of the gorilla tribe. In a multi-cultural and multi-religious classroom, terminology and visuals from popular culture such as these Lego-products may thus contribute as something “familiar”, a common ground and starting point from where the teacher may “de-familiarize” and introduce new knowledge (cf. Muesse). In terms of a didactic based in the scientific study of religion (Alberts, Jensen), an approach that starts with religion as represented in children’s popular culture also acknowledges that religion is embedded in culture, and thus always a result of continuously ongoing hybridization and historical change.



Figure 6.

This leads me to the second point, which regards the perhaps unexpected combination of Lego and religion. Ingvild Gilhus has expanded Jonathan Smiths spatial model of religion “*here, there and anywhere*” with a fourth category she describes as *religion everywhere*. This category includes religion as mediatized and spread thinly, leav-



ing religion to be something found “all over the place”. (Gilhus 46-47, Gilhus and Mikaelsson, cf. Forbes) If we use Gilhus’ definition of religion, which covers both religion as communication with super human beings and the culturally imbedded communication about the first kind of communication (46), then the mediatized religion is actually the only kind we can access as historians of religion (cf. Meyer 5). Religion in popular culture “produced” for children should in this respect be of no less value, nor less interesting as material for understanding religion and religiosity than the “official” or institutionalized religion of religious authorities. The visual aesthetics and the holistic focus on energy, ecology, harmony and balance found in both Lego-series, but most clearly developed with the key-concept of Chi in Legends of Chima, correspond very well with currents found in contemporary research on religion and spirituality.

That a transnational and globally renowned company such as Lego has developed brick sets with such a clear reference to religious concepts is of course quite striking in itself. Although commercial toy companies have done so earlier (Playmobile, for instance, has three different Nativity scenes as well as figures from other Judeo-Christian narratives, such as Noah and the ark), and Fantasy literature for children is scattered with religious symbols and intertextual references (e.g. the Narnia Series, Percy Jackson, cf. Butler 226), the Ninjago and particularly Chima-narratives stand out with their obvious reliance on ‘East-Asian’ inspired New Age, and not, in the eyes of many European and U.S. consumers, more familiar ‘Western’ religious traditions as reference. This is perhaps best understood in light of the constantly evolving media industry. Repeated encounters and exchange between Chinese movie industry and Hollywood have over the last couple of decades demonstrated the marked value of ‘Chinese’ culture, not only in the U.S., but in transnational movie distribution. (cf. Chan, Wang, Wang and Yeh). In this sense, Ninjago as well as Chima may be seen as elaborating and alluding to elements and imagery already widely dispersed through the transmedia marketing of different movies and pop cultural phenomena as varied as *Mulan*, *Hero*, *Karate Kid*, *Kill Bill I and 2*, *Pokémon*, *Kung Fu Panda* and *Kung Fu Panda 2*.

A majority of the consumers of these Lego products are not likely to ever take notice the specific references to *qi* and New Age-spirituality, nor will they probably care much if they did. Those who do recognize these references as something “religious” will mainly be those already familiar with the specific terminology of *qi* and/or holistic spirituality. We may therefor assume that the audience (i.e. mainly parents and other adults who possess the economical means to buy the products) that do recognize the “spiritual frosting” of these Lego narratives also will connect positive associations to spirituality, holism and ecology, and thus not be opposed as potential buyers/consumers. In a recent article on energy as cognitive currency on the New Age market, Lisbeth Mikaelsson writes

The easy, fluent, all-encompassing character of energy holism dulls the sharpness of difference between religious traditions while the appeal of the exotic is retained – thereby making products with an Indian, Chinese or Native American background acceptable for Western customers. The foreign-ness of things tends to be attractive in contemporary culture [...]. (171)<sup>23</sup>

What is perhaps most remarkable with Lego’s references to religiosity and spirituality then, is how it merges concepts and representations of ‘Asian’ world view(s) with more eco-apocalyptic holistic tendencies. If indeed the religious/philosophical framework of the Chima-narratives is recognized as such by consumers, we should assume that it would bring positive connotations often attached to the term “spirituality” (and, thus, from an insider perspective be seen as different from, - or an alternative to, - (institutionalized) religion, cf. Løøv and Melvær, Heelas and Woodhead). The eco-holistic message of ideal peace and harmony in the Ninjago and Chima-narratives is as such a seemingly uncontroversial one, and not very different from that conveyed in other Hollywood successes.

On the other hand, spirituality and New Age are still met with much skepticism in many conservative religious communities, where the holistic and rather fluid approach to “the sacred” is considered a threat to dogmas and “true religion”. In this respect, the fusion of commercial interests, toy industry, mass media and (what some might consider dubious and hidden New Age mission), may still be seen as a daring project. When several online newspapers reported that a Polish Catholic priest named Slawomir Kostrzewa had claimed that some of Lego’s figures were leading “to confusion between good and evil” (Day 2014, Hall 2014, Withnall 2014), the date of publication suggests that this very likely was no more than an April Fool’s joke.<sup>24</sup> However, similar negative reactions against the Harry Potter books in the U.S. suggest that the combination of ‘heretical’ religion and children’s popular culture is not always appreciated by a potential target market (cf. Ostling 2003). One of the very many questions that still remains then, is how calculated is this blend of Chi and its New Age interpretations has been from the Lego production side.

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Figure 1 Lego Ninjago Fire Temple Image from <https://www.byronesonline.ie/shop/lego/lego-ninjago-fire-temple/> (accessed 11 May 2015)

Figure 2. Lego Chima Flying Phoenix Fire Temple. Image from [http://lego.wikia.com/wiki/70146\\_Flying\\_Phoenix\\_Fire\\_Temple](http://lego.wikia.com/wiki/70146_Flying_Phoenix_Fire_Temple) (accessed 11 May 2015)

Figure 3. The Lion Chi Temple, Image from [http://legends-of-chima.wikia.com/wiki/Lion\\_CHI\\_Temple](http://legends-of-chima.wikia.com/wiki/Lion_CHI_Temple) (accessed 11 May 2015)

Figure 4. “Chi-up” moment, Print screen image from Episode 1, Part 1 (9:30 of 11 minutes, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxjBabvLXjY> (accessed 3 February 2015), cf. West 12

Figure 5. The towerflower ceremony. Print screen image from DVD, episode 9, season 1

Figure 6. “Monastery of Spinjitzu at sunrise” Image from [http://ninjago.wikia.com/wiki/Monastery\\_of\\_Spinjitzu](http://ninjago.wikia.com/wiki/Monastery_of_Spinjitzu) (accessed 11 May 2015)

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the anonymous referee for very helpful advice on how to improve this text and clarify the argument. I also wish to thank my expert consultants, Magnus and Johannes, for introducing me to and guiding my way in these ever expanding transmedia narratives of Lego.
- <sup>2</sup> The gendering of Lego-products has been a debated topic after the company launched its Lego Friends collection, specifically aimed at girls. Cf. e.g. <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/07/03/living/lego-petition-female-minifigures/index.html> (accessed 3 February 2015). In Lego Ninjago and Lego Chima, gendering is perhaps best seen in the online commercials, where only boys and men demonstrate the toys. The male figures outnumber the female, but there are also central female characters in both series.
- <sup>3</sup> Cf. e.g. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/retailandconsumer/11074967/Lego-trumps-Mattel-to-become-worlds-top-toy-maker.html> (accessed 3 February 2015)
- <sup>4</sup> Kinder 1991:122: “A supersystem is a network of intertextuality construed around a figure or group of figures from pop culture [...]. In order to be a supersystem, the network must cut across several modes of image production; must appeal to diverse generations, classes and ethnic subcultures, who in turn are targeted with diverse strategies; must foster “collectability” through a proliferation of related products; and must undergo a sudden increase in commodification, the success of which reflexively becomes a “media event” that dramatically accelerates the growth curve of the system’s commercial success.”
- <sup>5</sup> The writer of Legends of Chima, John Derevlany, distinguishes what he calls the “Super narrative” from transmedia narrative by stressing that in Super narrative, “ALL the transmedia and multimedia narratives are created right from the start.” (capital letters and underlining in the original), Derevlaney undated
- <sup>6</sup> <http://www.lego.com/en-us/chima/> (accessed 11 July 2014)
- <sup>7</sup> Cf. Carolyn Marvin’s paper “*Youth and the Temptations of the Sacred*” Abstract available at: <http://www.nuorisotutkimusseura.fi/en/events/holy-crap/keynote-speakers> (accessed 3 February 2015)
- <sup>8</sup> According to an article by journalist Brad Tuttle in The Time from February 27, 2014, Lego expected China to be among its “core market” together with Europe and the U.S. (<http://time.com/10354/everything-is-awesome-if-youre-lego-toy-company-can-do-no-wrong/> accessed 6 May 2015)
- <sup>9</sup> In Norway, the series seems to have appeared first as a free DVD-attachment to the popular weekly comic series Donald Duck &co, which has more or less the same target group as Lego. *Lego, Legends of Chima*, was launched in the same way.
- <sup>10</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lego\\_Ninjago:\\_Masters\\_of\\_Spinjitzu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lego_Ninjago:_Masters_of_Spinjitzu) (accessed 11 July 2014)
- <sup>11</sup> <http://www.warnerbros.com/studio/news/ninjago-coming-theaters-september-23-2016> (accessed 29 October 2014)
- <sup>12</sup> Myths are, when referred to, throughout both series rendered in staccato black and white animation, in contrast to “present-day” which is always in color.
- <sup>13</sup> Cf. Iwakura 26 for the role of the Asian monk in American popular culture. The character of Sensei Wu plays on characters such as Mr. Kesuke Miyagi from *Karate Kid* and Pai Mei of *Kill Bill 2*.
- <sup>14</sup> Voice-over in the introduction to the first episodes.
- <sup>15</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legends\\_of\\_Chima](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legends_of_Chima) (accessed 6 May 2015)
- <sup>16</sup> According to Wikipedia sv. “Mecha”, ...“a mech is a concept known from science fiction, anime and manga where it designates a robot or machine “controlled by people. These machines vary greatly in size, shape, and appearance. Some are little more than cars with arms and legs, while others are giant humanoid constructs.” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mech>, accessed 11 July 2014)
- <sup>17</sup> <http://shop.lego.com/en-US/Temple-of-Light-70505> (accessed 11 July 2014)
- <sup>18</sup> For the “vital cross-fertilization of religions in East Asia”, see Tucker 2001:333
- <sup>19</sup> <http://fore.research.yale.edu/> (accessed 10 May 2015)
- <sup>20</sup> <http://fore.yale.edu/about-us/contributors/> (accessed 10 May 2015)
- <sup>21</sup> Interestingly, the terminology differs in the different dubbed translations of the episode. In the French version, the session is described as “méditation”, while the Scandinavian versions call it variations over “the quest for the great rest”.
- <sup>22</sup> <http://www.lego.com/en-us/chima/world-of-chima/animals/raven-tribe/razar#/en-us/chima/world-of-chima/animals/gorilla-tribe/gordo> (accessed 15 August 2014)
- <sup>23</sup> A telling example is the so-called Tao-line of the beauty products by “Rituals”, where we among the many products find *T'ai chi* shower foam, *Qi gong* deodorant stick and *Qi* serum, cf. <http://no.rituals.com/en-no/collections/tao-2> (accessed 3 February 2015) See also Wang for the concept of “Chinese media capital”.
- <sup>24</sup> I wish to thank Rosana Vivar for giving me the reference to these newspaper-articles after the paper presentation.