Towards a Global History of Religion

Reflections on Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz's «Lamas and Shamans»

ARGOS

Towards a Global History of Religion: Reflections on Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz's "Lamas and Shamans"

Special Issue / Numéro special / Sonderheft / Numero monografico

ARGOS 3 (2) / 2024

Towards a Global History of Religion: Editors' Note

Andrea Rota / Anja Kirsch

Editors' Note

Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz's article at the core of this special issue of *ARGOS* marks an early foray into a subject that has recently gained traction in the conceptual and methodological debates within religious studies: the development of a *Global History of Religion*. Initially published under the title "Lamas und Schamanen: Mongolische Wissensordnungen vom frühen 17. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert. Ein Beitrag zur Debatte um aussereuropäische Religionsbegriffe," this work appeared in the conference anthology *Religion in Asien? Studien zur Anwendbarkeit des Religionsbegriffs* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Library, 2013, 151–200). The anthology, edited by Max Deeg, Oliver Freiberger, Christoph Kleine, and Astrid van Nahl, was a product of the 2010 conference held by the Workgroup on Asian Religious History (AKAR), which is part of the German Association for the Study of Religions (DVRW). Established in 1998, AKAR seeks to foster connections among scholars specializing in Asian religions and to particularly bolster historical research on non-European cultures. In this vein, the workgroup itself may be viewed as a global initiative, endeavoring to diversify academic perspectives on religion and to internationalize theoretical and methodological debates.

The conference, under the provocative title "Is 'Religion' a European Invention?", encouraged participants to critically examine possible semantic and functional equivalents to religion within Asian religious history. This discussion contributes to the development of a metalanguage, a central task of our discipline, yet it is deeply entwined with a pervasive challenge faced by all scholars who attempt to contribute to knowledge production across linguistic boundaries: the issue of translation.

Translations are inherently complex, as they necessarily involve acts of comparison and interpretation. To translate words is to translate concepts, and ultimately, cultures. Just as neutral knowledge production is unattainable, so too is neutral translation. Academic translations, laden with specialized topics and technical terminology, are certainly not exempt from these complexities. Despite not being professional translators, we have undertaken this challenge with the intention of making Kollmar-Paulenz's text accessible to a broader international audience.

Corresponding authors: Andrea Rota, University of Oslo; Anja Kirsch, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim.

We are convinced that her 2013 seminal article significantly contributes to the debate on the epistemic framework essential to ground a *Global History of Religion* that conceptually extends beyond the nineteenth century and the emergence of a (colonial) umbrella term "religion." Indeed, we believe that a global approach to the history of religion that seeks to transcend cultural essentialism and the national paradigm must be translatable into other languages.

Echoing Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz's assertion that "the realization of the cultural contextuality of academic languages should not lead to a rejection of a common academic vocabulary" (2024: 9),[1] we have invited experts in the fields of Asian religions and the global history of religion to respond to her research program drawing on their respective research fields and focuses. The ensuing contributions engage with ongoing conceptual, methodological, and theoretical debates in the study of religion, critically pointing to enduring challenges and new research opportunities. Some contributors encountered Kollmar-Paulenz's work for the first time through its English translation, whereas most were already well acquainted with her writings, being close colleagues and friends. Reflecting this personal relationship, many authors affectionately address her as Nina. Thus, this special issue represents not only an academic endeavor but also a unique opportunity to celebrate Prof. Dr. Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz upon her retirement in late 2023.

Due to various life circumstances, not everyone who wished to contribute to this special issue was able to do so. However, they join many others in congratulating Nina on her retirement. We extend our profound gratitude and respect to Nina, an outstanding scholar and a role model for future generations of academics:

Sven Bretfeld	Michael Bergunder	Sergio Botta
Edith Franke	Oliver Freiberger	Maria Chiara Giorda
Amy Heller	Magali Jenni	Christoph Kleine
Yannick Laurent	Carola Lorea	Christoph Monnot
Anja Kirsch	Oliver Krüger	Alice Küng
Till Mostowlansky	Inken Prohl	Andrea Rota
Jens Schlieter	Hubert Seiwert	Piotr Sobkowiak
Ricarda Stegmann	Katja Triplett	Marion Wettstein
Michaela Wisler	Ülo Valk	

Martin Baumann, president, on behalf of the *Swiss Society for the Study of Religion* and its affiliated institutes and organizations

---

[1] "Die Einsicht in die kulturelle Gebundenheit von Wissenschaftssprachen sollte jedoch nicht zu einem Verzicht auf ein gemeinsames wissenschaftliches Vokabular führen." (Kollmar-Paulenz 2013: 155).

About the Editors

Andrea Rota is an associate professor of the Study of Religion at the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), University of Oslo. He obtained his PhD from the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, and received his Habilitation from the University of Bern, where he served as an assistant professor for the systematic study of religion. He is the current coordinator of the IKOS Religion and Politics research initiative. Publications include: *Religion and Academia Reframed. Connecting Religion, Science, and Society in the Long Sixties*. Leiden: Brill 2023; *Collective Intentionality and the Study of Religion. Social Ontology and Empirical Research*. London: Bloomsbury 2023.

Mail: andrea.rota@ikos.uio.no

Anja Kirsch is a professor of Religious Studies at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at NTNU, Trondheim. Her research focuses on the relationship between religion and "the secular" in contemporary and historical perspective, nineteenth-century utopia and migration, and narrative and cognitive approaches to the history of religion. Publications include: *Narrative Cultures and the Aesthetics of Religion*, ed. with Dirk Johannsen and Jens Kreinath. Leiden: Brill 2020; "Narrative Strategies" (with Dirk Johannsen), in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of the Cultural and Cognitive Aesthetics of Religion*. London: Bloomsbury 2020, pp. 143–153.

Mail: anja.kirsch@ntnu.no

Lamas and Shamans: Mongolian Orders of Knowledge from the Early 17ᵗʰ to the 21ˢᵗ Century. A Contribution to the Debate on Non-European Concepts of Religion

Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz

Translated by Anja Kirsch and Andrea Rota

Published on 29/01/2024

Translators' note

The following text reflects the discursive context of German-speaking religious studies in the 2000s, a period marked by prevalent generalizations about "Asia." For instance, it was commonly asserted that an umbrella concept of religion, comparable to the European notion, did not exist in Asia prior to colonial influence. The text frequently addresses and counters these types of assumptions.

In terms of style, we opted for a semantic translation approach, adapting the text to the nuances of the English language. This necessitated breaking up some sentences and anglicizing certain expressions to achieve a more natural flow in English. Consequently, the translation exhibits some distinctive features. For instance, to underscore the presence of female shamans, we systematically refer to "male and female shamans" to translate the German "Schamanen und Schamaninnen" into English. Although this choice may appear heavy-handed in English, we deemed it crucial, especially given Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz's emphasis on the historical underrepresentation of shamanesses in research (see footnote 74).

We are grateful to the publisher of the original German text, The Uppsala University Library, for granting us the translation rights free of charge. This translation has been approved by the author. Any errors in the translation are entirely our responsibility.

The author has elaborated on her concept of a *Global History of Religion* in a recent article. See Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, "Nga rang gi chos khyod rang gi chos: 'My Religion and Your Religion?' About Some Fundamental Issues in the Global History of Religion," *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary* Society, published online ahead of print, 2023, 1–20.

Introduction*

[151] In his influential work, *Provincializing Europe*, historian Dipesh Chakrabarty asserts right from the beginning:

> " Sad though it is, one result of European colonial rule in South Asia is that the intellectual traditions once unbroken and alive in Sanskrit or Persian or Arabic are now only matters of historical research for most—perhaps all—modern social scientists in the region. They treat these traditions as truly dead, as history. Although categories that were once subject to detailed theoretical contemplation and inquiry now exist as practical concepts, bereft of any theoretical lineage, embedded in quotidian practices in South Asia, contemporary social scientists of South Asia seldom have the training that would enable them to make these concepts into resources for critical thought for the present.[1]

The question "Is 'religion' a European invention?" which was discussed at the 6th conference of the "Workgroup on the History of Asian Religions" (AKAR) of the German Association for the Study of Religions directly addresses the issue raised by Chakrabarty. "Religion" is one of the key concepts of European orders of knowledge, through which parts of reality are selected and assigned to cohesive category, contributing to making the world accessible to us. As a classificatory concept, religion is a category of collective perception of reality that would not exist as such without the word and its associated concepts. Although Chakrabarty acknowledges the historical existence of non-European knowledge systems that have generated their own [152] analytical conceptualizations, their existence is still often not recognized. Chakrabarty refers to this phenomenon as "asymmetric ignorance"[2] in the academic world; non-European scholars cannot afford a similar lack of familiarity with European-American intellectual history without risking being deemed "outdated" and not taken seriously.

The realization that knowledge and systems of knowledge do not represent timeless universals but are culturally specific has led to critiques within cultural and social studies involved in postcolonial debates, particularly regarding the application of the European concept of "religion" to non-European contexts. Efforts have been made to prevent the imposition of European normative concepts onto non-European cultures by tracing the so-called "world religions",[3] primarily "Hinduism" and "Buddhism", back to their European orientalist presuppositions and subsequently deconstructing them.[4] This deconstruction is, however, often accompanied by the

---

1   D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton 2000), 5–6.

2   Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 28.

3   See T. Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago 2005).

4   See, among others, S.N. Balagangadhara, *"The Heathen in His Blindness": Asia, the West and the Dynamic of Religion* (Leiden 1994); D. S. Lopez, ed., *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*

argument that Asian societies do not conceptualize a field of "religion" separate from "culture"[5] and therefore have not developed a corresponding terminology.

In the German-speaking study of religion (*Religionswissenschaft*), an essay by sociologist Friedrich Tenbruck has been particularly influential, contending that "the concept of religion has been and still remains exclusive to European civilization. […] In non-European languages, one searches in vain for a term equivalent to 'religion,' as Christian missionaries repeatedly discovered to their great surprise and bitter embarrassment".[6] Tenbruck [153] goes as far as asserting that "the other peoples" could not even discuss religion in their own languages due to the absence of this concept.[7] Some proponents of Burkhard Gladigow's concept of "European History of Religion"[8] supported this claim.[9] However, even in a study of religion that perceives itself as postcolonial and discursive[10] [154] it is frequently postulated that non-European cultures have not developed

---

(Chicago 1995); R. King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and "The Mystic East"* (London 1999); T. Fitzgerald, "Hinduism and the World Religion Fallacy", *Religion* 20 (1999): 101–118.

5   See F. Staal, "Religions". In *Rules without Meaning: Ritual, Mantras and the Human Sciences*, edited by F. Staal (New York 1993), 387–419. Staal assumes a specific concept of "religion" that is based on the three monotheistic middle-eastern traditions as a prototype.

6   F. Tenbruck, "Die Religion im Maelstrom der Reflexion", *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Sonderheft no. 33: *Religion und Kultur* (1993): 37.

7   Ibid.

8   B. Gladigow, "Europäische Religionsgeschichte", in *Lokale Religionsgeschichte*, edited by H.G. Kippenberg and B. Luchesi (Marburg 1995), 21–42. See also B. Gladigow, "Europäische Religionsgeschichte seit der Renaissance", *Zeitenblicke* 5, no. 1 (2006), http://www.zeitenblicke.de/2006/1/Gladigow/index_html ([16/04/2023]). Gladigow also confirms Tenbruck's assumptions, see B. Gladigow, "Von der 'Lesbarkeit der Religion' zum iconic turn". In *Religionswissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft*, edited by B. Gladigow (Stuttgart 2005), 284, and ibid., note 61.

9   Christoph Auffarth proposes that distinguishing religion as a separate aspect of culture is a European invention, as seen in Ch. Auffarth, "Religion". In *Wörterbuch der Religionen*, edited by Ch. Auffarth et al. (Stuttgart 2006), 429. His notion of a "European Religious History" is riddled with untenable statements about "religions in other geographical areas" (Ch. Auffarth, "Europäische Religionsgeschichte – ein kulturwissenschaftliches Projekt". In *Aspekte der Religionswissenschaft*, edited by R. Faber and S. Lanwerd [Würzburg 2009], 37), exposing a startling lack of expertise. For example, he asserts that in Asia there is only a "regional coexistence" of religions, while Europe is characterized by an "ongoing confrontation with differences". The "concurrent alternatives" he outlines for medieval Europe (see Ch. Auffarth, "Mittelalterliche Modelle der Eingrenzung und Ausgrenzung religiöser Verschiedenheit". In *Europäische Religionsgeschichte: Ein mehrfacher Pluralismus*, edited by H. G. Kippenberg et al., Vol. 1 [Göttingen 2009], 193–218) can also be substantiated for Asian religious history using numerous examples, see, for example, the works of Hubert Seiwert and Joachim Gentz for China, and those of Michael Pye for Japan, to name but a few. In 8th-century Tibet, as just one example of many Asian cultures, we already have a Buddhist polemical text against non-Buddhist opponents, the "Summary of the Proofs for the True Revelation", which justifies the Tibetan ruler's decision to adopt Buddhism as the authoritative religion for the Tibetan empire; see bKa' yang dag pa'I tshad ma las mdo btus pa, *Tibetan Tripitaka* 144, No. 5839, folio 64r4-103v6. Also, refer to K. Kollmar-Paulenz, *Zur Ausdifferenzierung eines autonomen Bereichs Religion in asiatischen Gesellschaften des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts: Das Beispiel der Mongolen* (Bern 2007), 14. Auffarth's concept reads by no means as a serious proposal for a religious studies program, but as self-affirming rhetoric of a European "special path" constituted with the aid of long-debunked stereotypes of the non-European "Other". Here, religious studies research is adapted to the interpretative framework of a singular European modernity.

10   H. G. Kippenberg and K. von Stuckrad, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft* (München 2003), 14 and 69.

abstract concepts of order for their religious traditions, and thus, no common overarching term.[11]

The academic debate surrounding the definition and applicability of the concept of religion in non-European cultural contexts has been a contentious topic of discussion for quite some time. Rather than delving into the main arguments of this debate again, I will recall only one key aspect of it: the diversity of definitions suggested by researchers demonstrates that seeking a definition that claims universal validity is an impossible task. This is because the European notion of religion is a particular concept that has been universalized from a concrete historical tradition. Thus, attempting to strip the concept of its historical particularity is a futile endeavor.[12] Furthermore, our discourse and description of religion as a separate social domain in non-European societies are unavoidably dependent on a culture-specific preconception of what religion is as we equate it semantically, functionally, or structurally with the European realm of religion.[13] This cultural [155] preconception shapes our assumptions about "religion", and it determines not only the texts selected for our research corpus but also their analysis and comparison, including the comparison of discursive formations and strategies.[14] However, the realization of the cultural contextuality of academic languages should not lead to a rejection of a common academic vocabulary. Instead, we should use it in a controlled and reflective manner to ensure that we do not lose sight of the nuances and complexities of our subject matter.

Like Chakrabarty, I also assume the simultaneity and equivalence of various particular cultures of knowledge, in which access to reality is achieved through socially constructed concepts of order. Since the present volume [*Religion in Asien? Studien zur Anwendbarkeit des Religionsbegriffs*] deals with the European concept of religion and possible semantic, functional, or structural

---

[11] Cf. Kippenberg and von Stuckrad, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*, 41–43. Specifically, non-European written cultures, such as Indian and Tibetan, are addressed here. The self-reflective analysis of one's own cultural forms of knowledge is described here as a response to European constructions, since these cultures, according to the postulate, did not possess their own conceptual definitions, "not even for the general term 'religion'" (p. 41), and also had no unified identity (p. 42). This claim is factually incorrect. Moreover, the argument is methodologically problematic because European-colonial discourses are not related to Asian discourses but rather to practices. The obvious question of which emic discourses were pervasive concerning these practices, is, however, not asked at all. This silence about emic discourses makes them disappear and leads to the "asymmetric ignorance" as outlined by Chakrabarty.

[12] This observation would, of course, apply equally to non-European terms. Descriptive and analytical terms that serve as concepts of order always have an inescapable, culture-specific component. In other words, every understanding is historical: "In truth, history does not belong to us, but we belong to it". Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen 1990), 281.

[13] See also J. Schlieter, „Nachwort". In *Was ist Religion? Texte von Cicero bis Luhmann*, edited by Jens Schlieter (Stuttgart 2010), 250. Schlieter refers here to Ricœur's "hermeneutics of trust". See also Richard King's remarks on "cultural understanding" in *Orientalism and Religion*, 77–78; and Reinhard Schulze, "Weltbilder der Aufklärung: Zur Globalgeschichte neuzeitlicher Wissenskulturen". In *Vom Weltgeist beseelt: Globalgeschichte 1700–1815*, edited by M. Grandner and A. Komlosy (Vienna 2004), 166.

[14] On the method of discourse comparison see Oliver Freiberger, *Der Askesediskurs in der Religionsgeschichte: Eine vergleichende Untersuchung brahmanischer und frühchristlicher Texte* (Wiesbaden 2009), in particular pp. 255–258. In difference to Freiberger, however, I understand discourses as "patterns of order that are regulated and inextricably linked with forms of power" (see Achim Landwehr, *Historische Diskursanalyse* [Frankfurt am Main 2008], 98), in which societies organize their knowledge production.

equivalents in Asian religious history, my contribution focuses on historical Mongolian societies and the differentiation of "religion" as an autonomous social sphere. This differentiation can only be reconstructed based on the written sources of that time period and is reflected on the level of discourse. Therefore, my contribution focuses on the analysis of discourse formations.

In the following, I will provide insight into how elite[15] Mongolian orders of knowledge were constructed, through which reality was represented, interpreted, and modeled. My main focus is on the 17th to the 19th centuries, with a glimpse into the 20th and 21st centuries. The perspectives held and socially enforced by the elites were objectified in the historical process and [156] became constitutive of the, at times, significant changes in the socio-religious field.

The first part of this article explores a discourse in Mongolia spanning from the 17th to the 19th century, in which a socio-politically significant segment of its society was differentiated through descriptive practices.[16] I will elucidate how through the encounter and interaction between different actors a comparative terminology emerged that linguistically maps the differentiation of an autonomous field of "religion" within historical Mongolian societies.

My source corpus comprises individual texts across diverse genres in both Tibetan and Mongolian languages, including chronicles[17] and biographies, colophons of the Mongolian Buddhist Ganjur,[18] Buddhist ritual texts, legal texts, bilingual terminological dictionaries, a shamanic chronicle, recent records of orally transmitted shamanic songs, and modern Mongolian cultural studies analyses. These texts were generated over a period of approximately four hundred years, with the earliest dating to around 1600 and the most recent originating from the first decade of the twenty-first century. The diachronic depth of this corpus allows tracing the historical development of the discourse.

In light of the unique circumstances faced by the Mongols in the late 16th century, who experienced a sometimes-aggressive pressure from Tibetan Buddhist monks to adopt Tibetan Buddhism, the Tibetan Buddhist terminology[19] plays [157] a crucial role in this context. This intra-

---

[15] Given that non-European societies are still often viewed as sociologically undifferentiated, it is essential to note that linguistic representations of social reality are not inherent to the general understanding of the world, but rather created and imposed by social and political elites. As Bourdieu states, "symbolic power is the power to create things with words", Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge 1991), 153.

[16] I had already presented preliminary results on this complex topic in my 2007 study *Zur Ausdifferenzierung eines autonomen Bereichs Religion in asiatischen Gesellschaften des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*. The present article delves deeper into the problem discussed there and situates it within the framework of a global history of religion.

[17] On Mongolian historiography see Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, "Mongolische Geschichtsschreibung im Kontext der Globalgeschichte". In *Geschichten und Geschichte: Historiographie und Hagiographie in der asiatischen Religionsgeschichte*, edited by Peter Schalk et al. (Uppsala 2010), 251–257.

[18] I refer to the Mongolian Buddhist canon, translated from Tibetan at the beginning of the seventeenth century, see Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, "The Transmission of the Mongolian Kanjur: A Preliminary Report". In *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism*, edited by Helmut Eimer and David Germano (Leiden, Brill, 2002), 151–176.

[19] See Ulrike Rösler, "Die Lehre, der Weg und die namenlose Religion: Mögliche Äquivalente eines

religious polemical terminology was employed and adapted within the cultural context that I am examining. I will discuss the Tibetan terminology only briefly but will delve into the specific connotations, adaptations, and developments in the Mongolian religious field.

The second part of my article aims to situate my empirical findings within the framework of a "global history of religion" giving equal consideration to both European and non-European theoretical perspectives on the discursive field of religion. The terminology that developed since the 17th century has profoundly influenced and continues to influence the perception and constitution of reality in the Mongolian regions, as an integral part of Mongolian orders of knowledge. Today, European-American discourses on "religion" have been incorporated into Mongolian epistemic systems. As I will demonstrate, this interweaving of Mongolian and European-American discourses plays a crucial role in shaping the religious field. This observation underscores the necessity of examining and contextualizing Mongolian terminology through a conceptual-history approach.[20] Similar to the longstanding practice of subjecting European terminology to consistent historicization, investigating the historical semantics of Asian descriptive and analytical terminologies appears as the most urgent methodological desideratum of a study of religion that claims a global scope for its subject matter.[21] [158]

Religionsbegriffs in der tibetischen Kultur". In *Religion in Asien? Studien zur Anwendbarkeit des Religionsbegriffs*, 129–150.

[20] The few religious studies works that examine non-European analytical terminologies often lack historicization and contextualization. For example, in *Der Religionsbegriff in den Religionen: Studien zum Selbst- und Religionsverständnis in Hinduismus, Buddhismus, Judentum und Islam* (Bodenheim 1999), Hans-Michael Haußig discusses the Buddhist concept of *dharma* (103–132). He relies heavily on general secondary literature on Buddhism, which is often interpreted through the lens of the European model as a "religious system" and cites primarily the Pāli canon and unspecified commentarial literature. Historical context is largely missing, and dates are rarely mentioned, making the concept of *dharma* appear as an ahistorical, Buddhist universal.

[21] This has also been demanded by Joachim Gentz in "Die Drei Lehren (*sanjiao*) Chinas in Konflikt und Harmonie: Figuren und Strategien einer Debatte". In *Religionen Nebeneinander: Modelle religiöser Vielfalt in Ost- und Südostasien*, edited by Edith Franke and Michael Pye (Münster 2006), 17–40; and in "Multiple religiöse Identität in Ostasien", in *Multiple religiöse Identität: Aus verschiedenen religiösen Traditionen schöpfen*, edited by Reinhold Bernhardt and Perry Schmidt-Leukel (Zürich 2008), 115–135.

1. The differentiation of an autonomous sphere of "religion" among the Mongols

1.1 The enforcement of Buddhism among the Mongols

In 1578, Altan Khan of the Tümed Mongols and bSod nams rgya mtsho,[22] the abbot of the `Bras spungs monastery in Central Tibet and the most important spiritual figure of the newly formed dGe lugs pa school, met at Lake Kökenor in northeastern Tibet. This meeting marked the beginning of the adoption of Buddhism by the Mongols.[23] During the meeting, participating princes and monks exchanged honorary titles, including the title "Dalai Lama", or "Ocean-Lama", for bSod nams rgya mtsho, who later became famous as the 3rd Dalai Lama. Shortly after this encounter, Tibetan lamas and their Mongolian disciples began spreading the Dharma among the Mongols. Within a period of just under fifty years, the majority of Mongolian peoples had embraced Tibetan Buddhist practices and concepts.[24] The "Buddhization" of the Mongols succeeded so quickly in part because the secular authorities actively supported the efforts of Buddhist monks through measures such as Buddhism-friendly legislation and material incentives. In the late 16th century, two legal codes were established that [159] both prohibited certain Mongolian practices, namely shamanizing[25] and related practices, especially bloody animal sacrifices.[26]

---

[22] Regarding bSod nams rgya mtsho, see K. Kollmar-Paulenz, "The Third Dalai Lama Sönam Gyatso and the Fourth Dalai Lama Yönten Gyatso". In *The Dalai Lamas: A Visual History*, edited by M. Brauen (Chicago 2005), 52–60.

[23] Regarding the historical significance of the meeting in the context of Tibetan-Mongolian religious-political relations, see K. Kollmar-Paulenz, *Erdeni tunumal neretü sudur. Die Biographie des Altan qayan der Tümed-Mongolen: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der religionspolitischen Beziehungen zwischen der Mongolei und Tibet im ausgehenden 16. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden 2001), 112–147.

[24] Buddhism was known among the Mongols since the 13th century and became widespread and popular among the elites during (and after) the Mongol Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368). Tibetan chronicles from the 15th and 16th centuries report on the travels of Buddhist dignitaries to Mongolian princes, for example in the *Deb ther sngon po* (`Gos lo tsa ba gZhon nu dpal, *Deb ther sngon po* [Chengdu, 1984], 651), regarding the journey of the 4th Zwa dmar pa Cod pan dzin pa in 1470 to the Mongols and his teaching activities there. See also H. Serruys, "Early Lamaism in Mongolia", *Oriens Extremus 10* (1963): 181–216, and "Additional Note on the Origin of Lamaism in Mongolia", *Oriens Extremus* 13 (1966): 165–173.

[25] The Mongolian bögele- is a denominal verb formed from the noun "böge", which means "shaman", and the suffix "le", which expresses the acquirement of the quality of the primary word. In this context, the term simply translates the Mongolian verb and by no means implies specific "features" as explicitly expressed in academic shamanism theories, such as trance, ecstasy, soul journey, etc.

[26] Animal sacrifices were banned because they violate the first of the five Buddhist precepts, to refrain from taking life, which are binding for both lay Buddhists and the Sangha. One of the most important topoi in Tibetan Buddhist discourse on the religiously and culturally "other" was the accusation that non-Buddhists are people who "eat and drink the flesh and blood of living beings", as described in K. Kollmar-Paulenz, "'Religionslos ist dieses Land': Das Mongolenbild der Tibeter", *Asiatische Studien/Etudes Asiatiques* LIV no. 4 (2000): 875–905, and "Uncivilized Nomads and Buddhist Clerics: Tibetan Images of the Mongols in the 19th and 20th Centuries". In *Images of Tibet in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, edited by M. Esposito, Vol. II (Paris 2008), 707–724.

These codes indirectly fostered the dissemination of Buddhist teachings and practices.[27] The legal texts were specifically directed against a certain social group, the so-called böge—male shamans—, and the *iduyan* or *udayan*—female shamans. Those who shamanized were subjected to sometimes draconian penalties. If we believe 19th-century orally transmitted legends of the Buryat Mongols, there were even instances of shamans being burned.[28] From Mongolian sources, we know that the most important tools for shamanizing, the *Ongyod*,[29] small figurines made of felt or wood, which represented [160] both the ancestral spirits and the helper spirits of the male and female shamans, were systematically collected and burned in many places.[30] Buddhist monks smoked out shamans by burning dog excrement in their yurts, an exorcism technique that was also applied in other contexts.[31] The vacuum created by the absence of shamanic actors was filled by Buddhist monks who offered the population relevant Buddhist rituals and practices.

An example of material incentives is the offer from the then Tüsiyetü Qan of the Qorčin Mongols. He pledged to give cows or horses to those who memorized and applied Buddhist mantras instead of summoning shamans. Besides local princes, Tibetan lamas also employed such "bribery" methods to make Buddhist teachings more appealing to people. The biography of the

---

[27] The legal code of Jasaɣtu Qaɣan and that of Altan Qaɣan are referenced in R. O. Meisezahl, "Die Handschriften in den City of Liverpool Museums (I)", *Zentralasiatische Studien* 7 (1973): 230–231, and in Š. Bira, "A Sixteenth- Century Mongol Code", *Zentralasiatische Studien* 11 (1977): 7–34. The legal code of Altan Qaɣan, which is only preserved in Tibetan language, is given in facsimile by Meisezahl in "Handschriften", 268–284.

[28] G. N. Potanin, *Ocherki severo-zapadnoj Mongolii. Rezul'taty puteshestviya, ispolnennago v 1879 godu po porucheniyu Imperatorskago Russkago geograficheskago Obshchestva*. (St. Petersburg 1881–1883), 289–290, and W. Heissig, "Persecution and Continuation: Some Recent Innermongolian Shamanist Traditions", in id. *Schamanen und Geisterbeschwörer in der östlichen Mongolei: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Wiesbaden 1992), 198–199.

[29] Regarding the *Ongyod*, see U. Harva, *Die religiösen Vorstellungen der altaischen Völker* (Helsinki, o.J.), 371ff., and W. Heissig, "Die Religionen der Mongolei", *Die Religionen Tibets und der Mongolei*, edited. by Giuseppe Tucci and Walther Heissig (Stuttgart 1970), 312–314. The Mongolian shamanic chronicle *Ongyod qara sakiyusun teüke sudur bičig orosiba* (Royal Library, Copenhagen, Mong. 41) deals extensively with the *Ongyod*. My thanks go to librarian Bent Lerbæk Pedersen from the Oriental and Judaica Collections, who made the text accessible to me. According to the chronicle, the *Ongyod* were originally the souls of powerful male and female shamans. A part of the chronicle was published in Latin transcription and English translation by W. Heissig, "A Mongolian Source to the Lamaist Suppression of Shamanism", *Anthropos* 48 (1953): 2–29, 493–536.

[30] See, for example, *Boyda neyiči toyin dalai mañjusryi-yin domoɣ-i todorqai-a geyigülügči čindamani erike kemegdekü orosiba* (short title *čindamani erike*), written in 1739 by Prajñasagara, folio 54r5–13. A German translation can be found in Heissig's "Mongolian Source", 42, as well as in K. Kollmar-Paulenz, "Der Buddhismus als Garant von 'Frieden und Ruhe': Zu religiösen Legitimationsstrategien von Gewalt am Beispiel der tibetisch-buddhistischen Missionierung der Mongolei im späten 16. Jahrhundert", *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft 11* (2003): 186. See also Isibaldan, *Erdeni-yin erike* (1835), folio 28v8. Tibetan sources also mention the burning of the *Ongyod*, see Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, "rJe btsun thams cad mkhyen pa bsod nams rgya mtsho'i rnam thar dgnos grub rgya mtsho'i shing rta zhes bya ba bzugs so". In `Phags pa jig rten dbang phyug gi rnam sprul rim byon gyi khrungs rabs deb ther no bu'i phreng ba*, Vol. 2 (Dharamsala, 1984), 150, 2–5. Even in the early 19th century, the burning of *Ongyod* and shaman costumes ordered by Buddhist monks is reported in the Buryat-Mongolian regions, see *Selengge-yin mongyol buriyad-un darqan tayiša danbi jilčan lombočeren-ü jokiyaysan mongyol buriyad-un teüke bolai*, 34.

[31] According to the biography of the famous Jaya Pandita (1599–1662), see Heissig, *Religionen der Mongolei*, 340.

Western Mongolian monk Neyiči Toyin, perhaps the most renowned "missionary" among the Mongols, states:

> " Of all the various types of jewels, gold and silver, and various items such as silk and sable that had been presented to him by many alms-givers, princes as well as great and small rulers, Neyiči Toyin distributed in all directions one ounce of gold each to those who could recite the Yamāntaka Dhāraṇī by heart, and one ounce of [161] gold and silver each to those who could memorize the Sādhana and the Bīja Mantra of Guhyasamāja, and to the poor people, according to their wishes, goods and livestock. Consequently, there were generally many people who learned the Yamāntaka and Guhyasamāja Dhāraṇīs by heart.[32]

These few indications may suffice to illustrate an important aspect of the initial interactions between indigenous religious specialists and the newly arrived Buddhist monks. These interactions were primarily characterized by economic competition. The issue was the limited material resources of the lay population who sought the services of religious specialists. Since the Tibetan Buddhist monks had the support of local rulers, they enjoyed certain competitive advantages.

The encounter between Tibetan Buddhist monks and shamans in the late 16th and early 17th centuries manifested discursively in a categorization of religious competition by the Buddhist actors. It is noteworthy, however, that we almost exclusively have Buddhist sources and are, thus, able to hear only one side of the dispute between indigenous and Buddhist actors. This is because shamanic practices were transmitted orally; this orality was elevated by the shamanic actors themselves as a distinctive feature of their culture. Even in the 20th century, some shamans sang of their "teachings without script".[33] As the Buryat-Mongolia chronicle *Qori-yin arban nigen ečige-yin jun-u uγ učiγur-un tuγuji* from the year 1875 states,

> " People who follow the teachings of the shamans (*böge-ner-ün šasin*) have never had any religious scriptures of their own. All instruction and teaching is given orally and learned by heart, as it has been passed down through tradition.[34]

Both the prevailing illiteracy and the political support of Mongolian princes, the Qing government, and, for [162] the Buryat Mongols, the Russian Empire,[35] gave Tibetan Buddhist monks the

---

[32] *Čindamani erike*, folio 74r16–74v5. The author of the biography calls this way of spreading the Dharma "the two paths, the inner path of giving Dharma and the outer path of giving material goods" (folio 74v5-8)".

[33] W. Heissig, "Schamanen und Geisterbeschwörer im Küriye-Banner". In id., *Schamanen*, 26–24.

[34] *Qori-yin arban nigen ečige-yin jun-u uγ ijaγur-un tuγuji*, 92. Cf. also *Qori kiged aγuyin buriyad-nar-un urida-daγan boluγsan anu*, 20.

[35] In the 18th century, on the eve of massive attacks against the Muslim subjects of the empire, Empress Elizabeth Petrovna (r. 1741–1762) allowed for the free practice of religion by her Transbaikalian Buddhist subjects. Although the corresponding written manifest must now be considered lost, it is regarded as the beginning of the official recognition of Buddhism in Russia. See N. Tsyrempilov, "Buddhist Minority in a Christian Empire: Buryat Religious Survival and Identity Problems in Russia in the 18th–early 19th Centuries". In *Religion and Ethnicity in Mongolian Societies: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives,* edited by Karénina

opportunity to impose their own definitions of reality. The Tibetan perception of Mongolian socio-religious reality was influenced by internal Buddhist polemical debates, which involved negotiating religious and social classifications and boundaries. For centuries, Tibetan societies had theoretically reflected upon and conceptually framed the social differentiation of an autonomous domain of "religion". Tibetan monks brought with them a nuanced analytical terminology, offering a conceptual toolkit that could also be applied in a comparative manner to interpret and make sense of the unfamiliar reality. Consequently, a discourse emerged that, on one hand, led to the reification of the diverse practices performed by male and female shamans, resulting in the "invention" of a distinct "doctrine of the shamans". On the other hand, a comparative concept emerged to describe teachings and practices that exhibit functional equivalence to the European category of "religion" within the Mongolian cultural context.

1.2 Mongol-Buddhist self-descriptions: *nom* and *šasin*

Sociologist Alois Hahn once aptly observed: "The self-thematization of religion can only occur once the religious interpretation of the world has emerged as a distinct form of knowledge".[36] In the following, I will explore such a process of differentiation. [163]

Before proceeding with terms that describe Buddhism (in the singular), I would like to clarify that I employ the generic term Buddhism solely for linguistic conventions. In reality, "Buddhism" did not denote an abstract "world religion"[37] among 17th-century Mongols; rather, it referred to a specific historical doctrine introduced by Tibetan monks. Frequently, there is even a very particular mention of the "doctrine of Tsongkhapa", to whom the dGe lugs pa school attributes its founding. Given the actual diversity of the Tibetan-Buddhist traditions[38] within Mongolian territories, the rhetoric of exclusion employed by the dGe lugs pa monks highlights their endeavors to steer the perception of their contemporaries towards a homogeneous Tibetan-Buddhist doctrine and its adherents. The written text functioned as an instrument of social manipulation.

Early 17th-century Mongolian biographies and chronicles use a standardized terminology to denote the Tibetan form of Buddhism. Two terms are omnipresent in the sources: *nom* (from the Greek *nomos*)[39] and *šasin* (from Sanskrit *śāsana*). Both terms translate the Tibetan terms *chos*

Kollmar-Paulenz, Seline Reinhardt, and Tatiana D. Skrynnikova. Wiesbaden (Harrassowitz 2014), 61–77.

[36] A. Hahn, "Glaube und Schrift – oder die Selbstthematisierung von Hochreligionen". In *Konstruktionen des Selbst, der Welt und der Geschichte* (Frankfurt am Main 2000), 237. Hahn initially developed his ideas on the importance of written culture in the self-thematization of religions with reference to the knowledge system of Protestant Christianity, but they are also applicable for analyzing Buddhist traditions.

[37] On the emergence and development of the discourse on world religions, see Masuzawa, *Invention*.

[38] This variety is documented in material evidence such as temples, statues, thangkas, ritual texts of the rNying ma pa, Sa skya pa, gCod pa, and other schools, incarnation lines of rNying ma pas like the famous Danzan Ravjaa, and references in chronicles and biographies (e.g., in *Erdeni tunumal*, folio 47r1–2, and *Erdeni-yin erike* of Isibaldan, folio 35v11–12).

[39] This Greek word was borrowed into Syriac and used by the Manichaeans as a technical term for "law, doctrine". In Sogdian, *nom* appears as *nwm* and translates the Sanskrit word *dharma* in Buddhist texts. In

("Dharma") and *bstan pa* ("[Buddhist] doctrine").[40] [164] Both *nom* and *šasin* often contain the attributive addition *burqan-u*, "of the Buddha", that is, *burqan-u nom*/*burqan-u šasin*, "Dharma of the Buddha, Doctrine of the Buddha". In addition to its previously mentioned meanings, *nom* is also used in the sense of "rule, norm" as in the 1662 chronicle *Erdeni-yin tobči*.[41] In this context, it is employed for both the secular and the religious domains within the religio-political concept of the "Two Orders" (Tibetan: *lugs gnyis*, Mongolian: *qoyar yosun*): *burqan-u nom* versus *kümün-ü nom*[42] and *sansar-un nom*. Although the word *šasin* is utilized to denote the Two Orders in the 16th-century treatise *Čaγan teüke*,[43] the use of *nom* (in the narrower sense of "Dharma") predominates in both texts, the *Čaγan teüke*[44] and the *Erdeni-yin tobči*.[45] The verse biography of Altan Qaγan, composed around 1607, *Erdeni tunumal neretü sudur*,[46] mainly uses either *šasin* [165] ("doctrine") or *burqan-u šasin* ("doctrine of the Buddha") to refer to Buddhism.[47] *Nom* is

---

Turkish, it was used in both Manichaean and Buddhist texts and from there found its way into the Mongolian languages.

[40] In early *Ganjur* colophons and chronicles, *chos* and *bstan pa* were often unsystematically translated as *nom* and *šasin*. However, during the 18th-century large-scale translation project of the Tibetan *bsTan `gyur*, a standardization of translation terminology began. In the Tibeto-Mongolian terminological dictionary *Dag yig mkhas pa'i byung gnas*/*Merged γarqu-yin oron*, compiled in 1741/42 by a team of translators led by the 2nd lČang skya Qutuγtu Rol pa'i rdo rje, *bstan pa* is translated as *šasin* and *chos* as *nom*. For example, see chapter ka, folio 6v2, 7r1, 10r2. I consulted the Beijing block print that is part of the Ernst collection. I am grateful to Professor Ernst for his generous permission to access the block print.

[41] Composed by the Ordos noble Saγang Sečen. I used the Urga manuscript of the work, see Erich Haenisch, ed., *Eine Urga-Handschrift des mongolischen Geschichtswerks von Secen Sagang (alias Sanang Secen)* (Berlin 1955).

[42] This probably translates the Tibetan *mi chos*.

[43] *Arban buyantu nom-un čaγan teüke*. This religio-political treatise was edited by Qutuγtai Sečen Qung Tayiji in the 16th century. Some parts go probably back to the 13th century. A translation and analysis of the work is provided by K. Sagaster, *Die Weisse Geschichte (čaγan teüke): Eine mongolische Quelle zur Lehre von den Beiden Ordnungen Religion und Staat in Tibet und der Mongolei* (Wiesbaden 1976). The facsimile of the text can be found in W. Heissig, *Die Familien- und Kirchengeschichtsschreibung der Mongolen, 16.–18. Jahrhundert*; I. (Wiesbaden 1959), 1–24.

[44] *Nom* is used in a variety of combinations in the *Čaγan teüke*, e.g., *nom-un ejen* (3v3/4, 6v7), *nom-un jasaγ*, *nom-un törö* (6v3, 7r7), *nom-un yosun* (6v5), *nom-un jerge* (7r12/13), *ünen nom* (15v1), *ünen nom-un jasaγ* (20r1). *Nom* is also used in the concrete sense of "instruction" in the phrase *qamuγ nom-ud* (7r2), "all instructions". In contrast to the omnipresent use of *nom* in its various meanings, from "rule, norm" to "instruction" and "religion", i.e., Buddhism, the term *šasin* is rarely found, either in its meaning as "Buddhism" (see e.g., folio 3v3: *degedü šasin*, "the sublime doctrine") or as part of the *qoyar yosun* (see folio 15v4 and 15v6).

[45] In the *Erdeni-yin tobči*, *nom* is used 42 times, compared to *šasin*, which is used 24 times.

[46] The *Erdeni tunumal*, authored by an anonymous writer, is one of the earliest known Mongolian historiographical sources today. It is only preserved in a single manuscript, which is kept in the library of the Institute of Language and Literature of the Inner Mongolian Academy of Social Sciences in Hohhot (People's Republic of China). The text is accessible in a modern Uighur-Mongolian version along with a facsimile edition, see Jorungγ-a, ed., *Erdeni tunumal neretü sudur orosiba* (Beijing 1984). Meanwhile, translations into Japanese (T. Morikawa, *Study of the Biography of Altan Khan* [Fukuoka 1987]), Chinese (Zhu rong ga, *A-le-tan han zhuan* [Hohhot 1991]), German (Kollmar-Paulenz, *Erdeni tunumal*) and English (J. Elverskog, *The Jewel Translucent Sūtra: Altan Khan and the Mongols in the Sixteenth Century* [Leiden 2003]) are available. I had access to a photocopy of the manuscript.

[47] For example, in folios 20v2, 20v8/9, 20v18, 21v11, 21v15/16, 21v23, 22r1, 22v22, 25r10/11, 25v5, 25v18. *Burqan nom* is used only once (23r20).

also used, but in most cases, it means "scripture, book",[48] "Dharma",[49] in the triad "Buddha, Dharma, Sangha",[50] or in compound words like *nom-un qaγan*, "Dharmarāja".[51] The chronicle *Qad-un ündüsün quriyangγui altan tobči*,[52] which was composed in the first half of the 17th century, speaks of Buddhism as *šajin* (an orthographic variant of *šasin/sasin*), or occasionally as *Čongkaba-yin sajin*,[53] as does the 1677 historical work *Asaraγči neretüyin teüke*.[54]

In the colophons of the handwritten *Ganjur* edition,[55] which was produced under the last Mongolian Great Khan Ligdan in 1628/29 and largely drew on earlier translations, *šasin* and the combination *šasin nom* are used to designate Buddhism.[56] *Nom* alone is rarely found. [166]

In conclusion, both the early *Ganjur* translations and the 17th-century Mongolian historiographical and biographical works distinguish an autonomous domain of "religion", which continuous to remain synonymous with "Buddhism". The terminology used does not serve to represent a plurality of religions. Consequently, individuals who are not Buddhists are referred to as *nom ügei*,[57] which in this context signifies "without religion". Outside of Dharma, there is no religion. The domain of religion coincides with "Dharma". Non-Buddhists also belong to *nom*, but to a "false" *nom*, *buruγu nom* or *buruγu üjel*.

---

[48]   Folios 2r22, 30v8, 31v8.

[49]   Folios 21r2, 23r20.

[50]   For example, in folio 17v13.

[51]   Folio 29r10.

[52]   Also known as *Altan tobči anonymus*, see Ch. R. Bawden, *The Mongol Chronicle Altan tobči: Text, translation and critical notes* (Wiesbaden 1955). In addition to Bawden's edition, I have used the modern reprint (*Qad-un ündüsün quriyangγui altan tobči* [Kökeqota 1980]).

[53]   Ibid., 121 and 122.

[54]   Written by the Qalqa noble Byamba erke Dayičing. The relevant passages can be found in Pringlai, ed., *Byamba: Asaraγči neretü-yin teüke* (Ulan Bator 1960), 67ff. There is also an Inner Mongolian edition of this chronicle with an extensive commentary, see Bayan-a, ed., *Asaraγči neretü-yin teüke* (Beijing 1984). H.-R. Kämpfe provides a description and translation: *Das Asaraγči neretü-yin teüke des Byamba Erke Daičing alias Šamba Jasaγ (Eine mongolische Chronik des 17. Jahrhunderts)* (Wiesbaden 1983).

[55]   This *Ganjur* is stored in St. Petersburg, see Z.K. *Kas'yanenko, Katalog peterburgskogo rukopisnogo "Tanzhura": Sostavlenie, vvedenie, transliteraciya i ukazateli* (Moskva 1993).

[56]   For example, in the colophon to *Bilig-ün činadu küruksen jaγun mingγan toγ-a-tu*, see Kas'yanenko, *Katalog*, no. 524, 136–138. The editorial committee appointed under Emperor Kangxi, which was to prepare the printing of the *Ganjur* in the years 1718–1720, did not change the terminology of *nom* and *šasin*, as a comparison of the colophons revealed. Compare L. Ligeti, *Catalogue du Kanjur mongol imprimé. Vol. 1, Catalogue* (Budapest 1942), no. 746, 166–168. See also the colophons of no. 510, 539, 545, 599, 616, 669, 727 in the manuscript *Ganjur*.

[57]   As found in a fragment of the history of Güsü-Lama, dated around the year 1600, see E. Chiodo, *The Mongolian Manuscripts on Birch Bark from Xarbuxyn Balgas in the Collection of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, Part 2* (Wiesbaden, 2009), 166. For the narrative of Güsü-Lama, see A. G. Sazykin, "Die mongolische 'Erzählung über Güsü-Lama'", *Zentralasiatische Studien* 16 (1982): 111–140, and A. G. Sazykin, *Videniya buddijskogo ada: predislovie, perevod, transliteraciya, primechaniya i glossarii* (St. Petersburg 2004), 229–242. *Nom ügei* is also used in the *Erdeni tunumal*, folio 25r16, to refer to non-Buddhists. The term *nom ügei* appears again in a text from the mid-19th century, see the biographies of the Jebtsundamba Khutuktu, folio 1r4.

The discourses analyzed here are closely linked to strategies of political power employed by Tibetan Buddhist monks, who gained social and political control through the rhetoric of religious exclusion, equating "religionlessness" with a "lack of civilization", as well as through the dichotomy between literacy and illiteracy.[58] The effectiveness of these strategies is evidenced, on the one hand, by the Mongolian legislation of the late 16th century, which documents the social loss of power experienced by male and female shamans. On the other hand, following the integration of the Mongols into the Qing Empire,[59] the Buddhist Sangha was politically on par with the Mongolian princes. [167]

1.3 The religious "other": The categorization of male and female shamans

Analytical vocabulary for self-presentation and characterization of religious opponents often emerges in encounter situations in which existing differences need to be negotiated. When cultural boundaries are crossed and new, potentially competing traditions are confronted, religious practices and concepts are assigned names and treated as standardized entities. The inclination to reify religious practices and concepts into closed, coherent systems of order frequently stems from situations of religious rivalry, often accompanied by economic competition. Such circumstances can be observed in the Mongolian regions during the 17th century. To analyze the development from an exclusivist to a comparatist notion of "religion"[60] that emerged there, it is essential to closely examine the terminology Buddhist monks used to describe their religious adversaries.

The majority of Mongolian chronicles and biographies from the 17th to 19th centuries rarely mention the male and female shamans, who posed significant challenges to Buddhist monks at least until the mid-17th century in the regions of Inner and present-day Mongolia. The only source that extensively addresses the confrontation between Buddhist and shamanic actors is the aforementioned biography of Neyiči Toyin, written in 1739. Composed approximately a century after the events, it offers a retrospective account. Other 18th-century sources mention male and female shamans only incidentally. The terminology used in these texts for the religious "Others" effectively illustrates the reification processes to which male and female shamans and their practices were subjected.

1.3.1 *Buruɣu üjel/Buruɣu nom*

From early on, a discourse developed concerning the "true doctrine", Buddhism, and the "false view" held by the shamans. In a text fragment concerning the warding off of bad omens[61] from

---

58 Compare the very similar strategies of early modern Europeans towards the inhabitants of the American continent, see Ulrike Brunotte, "Religion und Kolonialismus". In *Europäische Religionsgeschichte: Ein mehrfacher Pluralismus* Vol. 1, edited by Hans G. Kippenberg et al. (Göttingen 2009), 342–344.
59 The Mongols of Inner Mongolia joined the Manchus in 1636, and the Mongols of Outer Mongolia in 1691.
60 See Haußig's remarks, *Religionsbegriff*, 29–31.
61 Text XBM 150, published in Chiodo, *Manuscripts*, *Part 2*, 182.

[168] the Xarbuxyn Balgas stupa,[62] which can be dated around 1600, we find the first mention of the term *buruɣu üjel-tü böge [idu][63]ɣan*, referring to "the male and female shamans who possess a false view". The term *buruɣu üjel*, meaning "false view",[64] was primarily used in opposition to *burqan-u šasin*, the "teaching of the Buddha", as illustrated by the following example: "In this manner, the false view was brought to an end, and the teaching of the Buddha appeared pure and clear".[65]

The term *buruɣu üjel* is a translation of the Tibetan *lta log*, which means "heretical view", and it originates from an intra-Tibetan polemical discourse. *Lta log*, or *chos log*, is employed in Tibetan polemical writings to designate the doctrinal adversary. The usage of *chos* and *chos log* is contingent upon the doctrinal standpoint of the respective authors. The application of the term *buruɣu üjel* suggests that, at the onset of the Buddhist confrontation with male and female shamans, they were perceived from a normative Buddhist perspective, likely a dGe lugs pa one. Alongside *buruɣu üjel*, we also find *buruɣu nom*[66] and *qaɣučin ba buruɣu üjel*.[67] The followers of *ɣadaɣadu ongɣod*, the "outer Ongɣod", are [169] described in relation to the Mongolian term *ɣadaɣadu*, which translates the Tibetan *phyi pa*, meaning "the one who is outside". This is in contrast to *nang pa*, "the one who is inside" or the one within the Dharma. The terms "outside" and "inside" not only form part of intra-Buddhist polemics, but also denote social group affiliations.[68]

The utilized terms—*nom*, *šasin*, and *buruɣu üjel*—each correspond to Tibetan expressions and confirm the existence of an intra-Buddhist discourse about the religious "Other". On one hand, their application reveals the reification processes present in the Buddhist elite discourses of the

---

[62] In 1970, the Mongolian historian and archaeologist X. Pėrlėė and his Russian colleague E.V. Šavkunov discovered Mongolian manuscript fragments written on birch bark inside a partially destroyed stūpa near Xarbuxyn Balgas, a ruined settlement in the southern part of Bulgan Aymag, 240 kilometers west of Ulaanbaatar. About a thousand larger and smaller fragments, including fifteen complete texts, were deposited in the stūpa. This find is not the only one of its kind in Mongolia, cf. W. Heissig, *Die mongolischen Handschriften-Reste aus Olon süme Innere Mongolei (16.–17. Jhdt.)* (Wiesbaden 1976), but it is the largest so far. The manuscripts found in Olon Süme in Inner Mongolia and the manuscript fragments from Xarbuxyn Balgas share a common stock of eleven texts, suggesting a cultural and literary connection between early 17th-century "inner" and "outer" Mongols. E. Chiodo gives a description of the most important texts and text fragments from Xarbuxyn Balgas, *The Mongolian Manuscripts on Birch Bark from Xarbuxyn Balgas in the Collection of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, Part 1* (Wiesbaden 1999), and Chiodo, *Manuscripts, Part 2*.

[63] Chiodo, *Manuscripts, Part 2*, 182, note 11, suggests *iduɣan* for the incomplete word. However, the variant *udaɣan* is equally possible. The *Čindamani erike*, folio 46r26/27, for example, writes *buruɣu üjel-tü böge udaɣan*.

[64] Mongolian *üjel* is a deverbal noun, formed from the verb *üje-*, "to see, to behold", with a suffix -l. A deverbal noun with this suffix expresses abstract ideas, see N. Poppe, *Grammar of Written Mongolian* (Wiesbaden 1974), 47.

[65] *Čindamani erike*, folio 54r11–13.

[66] For example, in Isibaldan, *Erdeni-yin erike*, folio 28r11.

[67] "Old and false view", *Čindamani erike*, folio 13v24–25.

[68] For example, in Saɣang Sečen, *Erdeni-yin tobči*, Urga-Ms., folio 34r19–21, where the phrasing *dotoɣadu nom-tan-u üjel*, translated as "the view of those who belong to the inner teaching", is used.

time; on the other, it reaffirms the previous observation that the concept of a plurality of different religions did not exist in the 17th century. The practices of male and female shamans are conceptually understood from a normative and exclusivist Buddhist perspective, in their deviation from the "true, Buddhist teaching". The terms *üjel*, referring to "[world] view", and *nom*, in this context "teaching", suggest a range of different concepts, particularly when placed in binary opposition to *burqan-u šasin*. It remains unclear which concepts or practices are systematically subsumed under these terms. To my knowledge, no 17th- or 18th-century texts provide an explication. It is only in the specific context of *böge udayan-nar-un buruyu üjel*, or "the false view of male and female shamans", that the actors of this "false view" are identified.[69]

This personalization of religious discourse offers insight into the structural aspects that led Tibetan monks to regard male and female shamans as actors within the same social field, consequently assigning them to the same class concept. The activities of male and female shamans are described in competition with those of Buddhist monks, primarily as healers and exorcists. The *Ongyod*, their auxiliary spirits, feature prominently in the texts, resulting in male and female shamans occupying, at least partially, the same social function as some Tibetan-Buddhist *chos pa*. The Tibetan term *chos pa* is precisely defined in a contemporary Tibetan-Tibetan [170] terminological dictionary as "male and female lamas and laypeople with knowledge in religious practice (*chos byed*)".[70] This term encompasses all religious practitioners, with the categorization of Mongolian male and female shamans being based on their societal roles.

The Mongolian terms employed, namely *üjel* (*lta*),[71] *nom* (*chos*), and *šasin* (*chos*), should be interpreted in light of the Tibetan terms, but they adapt to the new communicative contexts. The Tibetan terms already possess significant semantic breadth within their contextual references.[72] In various contexts, *chos* may denote (1) philosophical teaching systems or individual teaching opinions, (2) solely Buddhist teachings, the Dharma, (3) "teaching traditions",[73] referring to social communities or groups that adhere to specific teachings and ritual practices, and (4) even moral and legal rules, as in the compound *mi chos*. In relation to the communicative situation surrounding *chos* and *chos pa*, the statements encompass social groups and their communicative activities. By describing the practices and rituals performed by male and female shamans as "teachings", a transformed perception of Mongolian socio-religious reality emerged. Social structures were further solidified, while concurrently experiencing a reification process in

---

[69] This personalization of religion is also a defining characteristic of European religious history, as demonstrated by the use of the label "Mohammedans" for Muslims.

[70] *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (Beijing 1985), I, 840. Various religious specialists fall into the social category of *chos pa*: nuns and monks, *ser khyim*, often referred to as "village lamas", exorcists, weather-makers, and other ritual specialists.

[71] As in Isibaldan, *Erdeni-yin erike*, folio 28r12/28v1: *böge-yin üjel*.

[72] This is not exclusive to Asian knowledge cultures but also pertains to the concept of religion (or more accurately, the concepts of religion) in European historical contexts, as well as academic religious discourse, see Martin Riesebrodt's work, *Cultus und Heilsversprechen: Eine Theorie der Religionen* (Munich 2007), 27–29.

[73] Mostly, but not exclusively, in the composition *chos lugs*.

linguistic appropriation, culminating in the establishment of a "teaching of the shamans". This becomes particularly evident in the term *Udaɣun-u surtaɣun*, "the teaching of the female shamans",[74] which is employed in the shamanic [171] chronicle *Ongɣod qar-a sakiɣus-un teüke sudur bičig*.[75] In Mongolian, *surtaɣun* literally signifies "that which is taught or studied, science, rules, teachings". While the chronicle presents the practices of shamanic actors in an almost epic narrative, the rhetorical use of *surtaɣun* strikingly demonstrates how self-evident the—discursively produced—"teaching" of male and female shamans had become in the 18th century.

Alongside the *term buruɣu üjel*, additional terms are utilized to characterize the "shamanic teaching", which similarly suggest a homogeneous teaching or worldview. For instance, in the colophon of an early translation of the Tibetan *'Dzangs blun*, the phrase *qara jüg*, "black direction",[76] can be found, which continued as *qara šasin* or *qara nom*, "black teaching", from the 18th century onwards. Further elaboration on the latter two terms will be provided later in the text.

1.3.2 *Böge mörgöl*

To distinguish "Buddhist doctrine" from "shamanic doctrine", a binary conceptual pairing also was—and still is—in use, namely *šasin mörgöl* and *böge mörgöl*.[77] In the Mongolian language, *mörgöl* denotes "bowing" in a literal sense, placing emphasis on the physical act of reverence. Both terms can be translated as "bowing [172] before of the Dharma" and "bowing before the shaman", respectively. These terms underscore the visible and performative aspects inherent to the Mongolian understanding of religion and point towards the resulting success of the missionary strategies of the Tibetan monks. The rapid process of Buddhism being adopted into Mongolian societies occurred, in part, because Mongols and Tibetans shared a similar habitus

---

[74] This reference underscores the importance of female shamans in Mongolian societies. The texts under discussion mention female shamans as being equivalent to male shamans. However, it is no longer possible to determine today whether there were more female than male shamans in historical Mongolian societies. The significance and role of female shamans, particularly in Siberian societies, have long been a subject of contentious debate in research. See Ronald Hutton, *Shamans: Siberian Spirituality and the Western Imagination* (Hambledon; London 2001), 104–109. The European depiction of the shaman as primarily male can be partly attributed to the male perspective of early travelers and ethnographers.

[75] P. 4, 1–2.

[76] The Tibetan text *'Dzangs blun zhes bya ba'i mdo*, translated into Mongolian as *Üliger-ün dalai sudur orosiba*, see Ligeti, *Catalogue*, No. 1103. The original title of the translation, prepared by the renowned translator Siregetü güsi čorji, was *Siluɣun onol-tu kemegdekü sudur*. This work is still mentioned with its original title in the manuscript *Ganjur*, as indicated in Kas'yanenko's *Catalogue*, No. 839. However, the cited translation was carried out by a contemporary of Siregetü güsi čorji, Toyin guosi, under the title *Siluɣun budaɣun üye onoqui neretü sudur* between 1578 and 1612. I did not have access to this translation, but the colophon has been published in Latin transcription (alongside a German translation), see Walther Heissig, "Toyin guosi ~ Guisi alias Čorji: Versuch einer Identifizierung", *Central Asian Studies* 9 (1975): 361–446, specifically on pages 391–408. For the term *qara jüg*, see page 398.

[77] For example, in *Qori kiged ayuyin buriyad-nar-un urida-dayan boluysan* (1863), 21ff. and in *Qori-yin arban nigen ečige-yin jun-u uɣ ijaɣur-un tuɣuji* (1875), 91–93.

within a shared religious field.[78] The *habitus*, shaped by historical and social influences, is constituted by individual and collective experiences. Its structures are implicit and as such provide the basis for orientation within the social world. The habitus influences one's mode of existence extending to one's physical expressions; it is "a state of the body".[79] The swift dissemination and establishment of Buddhism within the Mongolian regions can be attributed to these performative strategies.[80] The call to "spread the Dharma" (*nom-i delgerekü*), as consistently mentioned in the works of that time, primarily entailed the enforcement and physical embodiment of Buddhist rituals and practices. This involved loud recitations of mantras and Dhāranīs as well as the implementation of various practices and rituals. The spread of the Dharma was based on physical performance, and as a second step, on the acquisition of social power through spatial presence. The Dharma needed to be performed publicly, before an audience. Therefore, when we speak of "religion" within this specific historical and local context, it is important to recognize that we are dealing with an understanding of religion that accentuates particular aspects, which often do not take precedence in our everyday understanding of religion and in the conceptual framework of the academic study of religion. "Religion" (*mörgöl*) refers here to the performance, the bodily enactment, of practices and rituals. However, to my knowledge, *mörgöl* is employed in the sources [173] solely in direct reference to "shamanism" and—more rarely—to "Buddhism", and even in these cases only as part of the pair *böge mörgöl / šasin mörgöl*.

The extent to which the reification of male and female shamans as a homogeneous group had advanced by the end of the 17th century is evident in an article in the so-called Kangxi Law Code for the Qalqa Mongols, which was published in Mongolian after 1694.[81] In 1691, the Qalqa Mongols had recently pledged their allegiance to the Kangxi ruler at the famous Assembly of Dolon Nor. The law code comprises a total of 152 legal articles, one of which addresses the "community of Buddhist lamas and the community of male and female shamans" (*lam-a-nar-yin ayimaɣ: böge iduɣan-u ayimaɣ*). This article provides instructions on how to deal with lamas or

---

[78] According to Pierre Bourdieu, *habitus* forms are "durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them" (Pierre Bourdieu, *Entwurf einer Theorie der Praxis auf der ethnologischen Grundlage der kabylischen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main 1976), 165 [English 1990, 53]).

[79] See P. Bourdieu, *Sozialer Sinn: Kritik der theoretischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt am Main 1987), 126.

[80] In this regard, see K. Kollmar-Paulenz, "Embodying the Dharma: The Buddhist Way into Mongolia". In *Transformations and Transfer of Tantra in Asia and Beyond*, edited by István Keul (Berlin; Boston 2012), 239–261.

[81] This collection of individual laws is kept in the State Library of Ulaanbaatar under the title *Ɣadaɣadu mongɣol-un törö-yin jasaqu yabudal-un yamun-un engke amuɣulang-un üye-e-dü 1693 on-du keblegsen, dotora 1629 on-ača ekileged udaɣ-a daraɣ-a qayad-un üy-e-dü jarlaɣsan čaɣaja-du-i jasamjilaɣsan mongɣol-un čaɣajan-u bičig*; see D. Heuschert, *Die Gesetzgebung der Qing für die Mongolen im 17. Jahrhundert anhand des Mongolischen Gesetzbuches aus der Kangxi-Zeit (1662–1722)* (Wiesbaden 1998). As Heuschert points out, the publication date of 1693 mentioned in the title cannot be correct because the most recent law article in the collection is dated 1694.

shamans who have violated the rules (*yosun*) of their respective communities. The encounters and confrontations between Buddhist monks and local religious specialists, as well as the accompanying and formative discourse, resulted in new categorizations and practices: the Qing government came to consider and treat a number of ritual actors—referred to as *böge* and *iduɣan*—, who were previously loosely connected and very differently integrated in their respective local social contexts, as a homogeneous, supra-regional community with its own code of conduct. In this way, a process of reification that was initiated on a discursive level by the Buddhist Tibetan and Mongolian elites found its counterpart in legislation and, indeed, in social reality. Here, Foucault's dictum according to which discourses are practices that "systematically form the objects of which they speak" finds a striking confirmation.[82] [174]

1.4 *Šasin* as comparative concept

Šasin remained the preferred concept in Mongolian works of the 18th and 19th centuries, as evidenced by the analysis of three important Mongolian chronicles—*Altan kürdün mingyan kegesütü bičig*,[83] *Bolor erike*[84] and *Bolor toli*,[85]—along with the biographies of the Jebtsundamba Qutuɣtus.[86] In the 18th and 19th centuries, the terms *šasin* and, to a much lesser extent, *nom*, emancipated themselves from their exclusively Buddhist meaning. *Šasin* was increasingly used in a comparative sense now serving to subsume various areas of reality, perceived as functionally equivalent, under a general or overarching term. This development was most likely prompted by the engagement with the male and female shamans. At this point, they were referred to using the term *böge-ner-ün šasin*,[87] but also increasingly [175] the pejorative *qara šasin* ("black

---

[82] M. Foucault, *Archäologie des Wissens* (Frankfurt am Main 1997), 74.

[83] Composed in 1739 by Siregetü guosi dharma, see Heissig, *Familien- und Kirchengeschichtsschreibung*, 134–159. I have used the manuscript edited by Heissig, see W. Heissig, ed., *Altan kürdün mingyan gegesütü bičig: Eine mongolische Chronik von Siregetü Guosi Dharma (1739), Herausgegeben und mit Einleitung und Namensverzeichnis versehen* (Copenhagen 1958). Siregetü guosi dharma almost exclusively uses *šasin*, see III, folio 4r9 and 10, IV, folio 14v5 and 6, 20v1, and V, folio 2v8 and 13r2. Buddhism in Mongolia is also often specified as *bConggaba-yin šasin* (in the 4th and 5th books), reflecting the dominant dGe lugs pa discourse of the 18th century.

[84] This chronicle was written in 1774/75 by the nobleman Rasipungsuɣ, see W. Heissig, *Bolur Erike "Eine Kette aus Bergkristallen". Eine mongolische Chronik der Kienlung-Zeit von Rasipungsuɣ (1774/75). Literarhistorisch untersucht* (Peiping 1946), and Heissig, *Familien- und Kirchengeschichtsschreibung*, 198–200. I have used the edition by Mostaert and Cleaves, see A. Mostaert and F.W. Cleaves, eds., *Bolor Erike. Mongolian Chronicle by Rasipungsuɣ*. 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA 1959). Rasipungsuɣ mostly speaks of *burqan-u šasin* and *bCongkaba-yin degedü šasin*.

[85] Composed between 1834 and 1837 by the Buddhist monk Jimbadorji, see W. Heissig, ed., *Bolur Toli "Spiegel aus Bergkristall" von Jimbadorji (1834–1837). Buch III: Geschichte der Mongolen* (Copenhagen 1962). Jimbadorji deals with the conversion of the Mongols to Buddhism similarly to Saɣang Sečen, who he likely used as a model, see *Erdeni-yin tobči*, folio 76v14ff, and *Bolor toli*, Book III, 54–58.

[86] Folio 1r1, 1r34 etc. The manuscript I used does not have a title, see Ch.R. Bawden, *The Jebtsundamba Khutukhtus of Urga. Text, Translation and Notes* (Wiesbaden 1961). Another manuscript of the text bears the title *Boyda jebcundamba qutuɣtu-yin namtar-a*. This work by an anonymous author can be dated to 1859, as revealed by a note on folio 47v3–4.

[87] See the chronicle *Qori-yin arban nigen ečige-yin jun-u uɣ ijaɣur-un tuɣuji*, 92s. The chronicle *Qori kiged aɣuyin buriyad-nar-un urida-daɣan boluɣsan anu* (1863) deals with keristos-un šasin, or "religion of Christ" (p. 15).

teaching"),[88] contrasted with *sira šasin* ("yellow teaching").[89] *Sira šasin* generally refers to the Tibetan form of Buddhism that was widespread among the Mongols, with the dGe lugs pa school elevated to the norm.[90] Interestingly, the shamanic actors quickly embraced *qara šasin* as a self-designation, also carrying a reifying connotation. Male and female shamans identified themselves with a "black teaching".[91] The color of male and female shamans among the Mongols has been white since the thirteenth century. It is unclear why they adopted this pejorative external designation. Even today, they identify themselves as belonging to *qara šasin*.

In addition to the "Buddhist" and "shamanic teachings", Mongolian sources dating back to the early 17th century, have also referenced Muslim peoples such as the Kazakhs or the Uighurs. From the 19th century onwards, Islam has been categorized under the organizing concept of *šasin* and labeled as *Lalu-yin šasin*. Attributive modifiers were employed to define group affiliations. For instance, Christianity is referred to as *Keristos-un šasin*. The "Inner" and "Outer" Mongols were only (re)introduced to this religion in the 19th century,[92] while the Buryat Mongols had been exposed to Christian missions at an earlier time. [176]

1.5 Preliminary results

In summary, we can state the following preliminary results: Throughout the centuries, Tibetan intellectual elites have developed a nuanced terminology to name their own doctrine or teaching system, as well as to identify both intra-Buddhist adversaries and non-Buddhist teaching systems. Within the Tibetan context, we find early instances of comparative terminological usage, for example, the term *kla klo'i chos* for Islam.[93] Yet, as a concept of social order, the semantic field of *chos* also encompassed the actors in the religious field, known as *chos pa*. In light of functional analogies with actors in the Tibetan religious field, corresponding classification terms were

---

[88] In the chronicle *Qori-yin arban nigen ečige-yin jun-u uγ ijaγur-un tuγuji*, the vilification of religious competitors is very severe. The author speaks of the *böge-ner-ün šasin* as a "corrupted system" (*qačaγai yosun*) and refers to shamans as *mekeči*, "frauds, charlatans", see *op. cit.*, 115.

[89] The term refers back to the yellow headgear worn by dGe lugs pa monks.

[90] For example, see the biographies of the Jebtsundamba Qutuγtus, folio 1r8.

[91] A further inner-shamanic division, which was still relevant at least in Eastern Mongolia in the mid-20th century, and which distinguished between so-called white shamans (*čaγan böge*) and black shamans (*qara böge*), cannot be discussed here. In this distinction, "black shamans" were considered the more powerful ones who follow the "old, pure" shamanic teachings, while "white shamans" were considered "Buddhicized" shamans, see Heissig, "Persecution", 205 and 210.

[92] Christianity, in its form as the Church of the East, had many followers among the Mongolian elite in the Mongol Empire.

[93] For example, see the explanatory commentary on the teachings of Islam in the Vimalaprabhā: "... the Creator Rahman creates all moving, living and immobile, inanimate things. By satisfying the Creator Rahman, the reason for their liberation (*thar pa*), the white-clad heretics called sTag gzig, certainly attain heaven (*mtho ris*), and by not satisfying him, hell. Thus is the doctrine (here: *bstan pa*) of Rahman" (*Vimalaprabhā-nāma mūlatantrānusārinī dvādaśasāhasrikālaghu kālacakra-tantrarāja-tīkā*; Tib. title, *bsDus pa'i rgyud kyi rgyal po dus kyi `khor lo'i `grel bshad rtsa ba'i rgyud rjes su `jug pa stong phrag bcu gnyis pa dri ma med pa'i `od ces bya ba*. I use the edition compiled by Bu ston Rin chen grub (1290–1364); see L. Chandra, ed., *The Collected Works of Bu-ston*, Part II (KHA), text fig. 203,2–4).

applied to specific Mongol ritual practices and their practitioners within the socio-cultural context of the 17th and 18th centuries. The terms *šasin* and *nom* are derived from religious terminology.[94] They served a dual purpose: firstly, to establish a distinction from outsiders, and secondly, since the 18th century, to subsume particular aspects of one's own and other people's realities, perceived as functionally equivalent, under a generic term.

A certain degree of standardization of the comparative terms can be observed in the sources analyzed. Although *šasin* and, to a lesser extent, *nom*, had become prevalent, a variety of other designations can still be found in both the 18th and 19th centuries, which are used in a comparative sense. This is the case, for instance, of *surtayun* or *yosun*,[95] a term that has a range of meanings in the [177] 18th century that extends from "custom, socially accepted rule", to "habit", and even to "system, method".

It is also worth noting that in Mongolian Buddhist elite discourses we can observe analogous processes of reification regarding so-called shamanism similar to those well-known from European intellectual history, especially in recent centuries, which also gave rise to the study of religion (as an academic discipline). As Michael Pye already pointed out at the 2nd conference of the "Workgroup on the History of Asian Religions" (AKAR) of the German Association for the Study of Religions:

> " Reification [...] seems to be a characteristic of at least one phase in the emergence of any historical view of religions, in East Asia as well as in the Western world. Significantly, therefore, it is not just some kind of western disease.[96]

The extent to which the Mongolian discourse on "shamanism" has influenced the European one cannot be further explored here.[97]

---

94 This is not a specific characteristic of Buddhist knowledge cultures. In Europe as well, the Enlightenment discourse emerged from a religiously framed tradition; see Schulze, "Weltbilder", 168.

95 Thus in the biography of the 2nd lCang skya Qutuɣtu Rol pa'i rdo rje, see *rDo rje `chang lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje ye shes bstan pa'i sgron me dpal bzang po'i rnam par thar pa dad pa'i padmo rnam par `bye dpa nyi ma'i òd zer zhes bya ba bzhugs so/ Včir dhar-a ljang sky-a lilida bajar-a jñana šasan-a dibi srii badr-a-yin čadig süsüg-ün lingqu-a-yi teyin büged negegči naran-u gerel kemegdekü orosiba*, folio 140r21, where the Tibetan Bon religion and the dGe lugs pa teachings are referred to as *bomo-yin yosun* and *dge legs ba-yin yosun*, respectively. For the Mongolian *yosun*, the Tibetan text writes *lugs*. The biography was written in 1787 by Ngag dbang thub bstan dbang phyug. The facsimile of the Tibetan and Mongolian versions is included in H.-R. Kämpfe, *Ñi ma'i `od zer/ Naran-u gerel. Die Biographie des 2. Pekinger lČan skya-Qutuqtu Rol pa'i rdo rje (1717–1786). Herausgegeben, eingeleitet und zusammengefasst* (St. Augustine 1976).

96 Michael Pye, "Overcoming Westernism: The End of Orientalism and Occidentalism." In *Religion im Spiegelkabinett: Asiatische Religionsgeschichte im Spannungsfeld zwischen Orientalismus und Okzidentalismus*, edited by Peter Schalk et al. (Uppsala 2003), 111, note 40.

97 In this regard, see Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, "The Invention of 'Shamanism' in 18th-Century Mongolian Elite Discourse." In *Rocznik Orientalistyczny / Yearbook of Oriental Studies* [T. 65, Z. 1 (2012), 90–106].

2. Towards a global history of religion

2.1 The "glocalization" of the religious discourse

2.1.1 *Mongolian shamanism*

The triumph of the comparative term *šasin* has continued into the 20th and early 21st centuries. Mongolian cultural and social sciences cannot do without this term [178], as evidenced by the titles of numerous book publications in the fields of social and cultural studies.[98] Today, *šasin* is consistently used in all scholarly works written in the Mongolian language. This is most clearly illustrated by the title of the bilingual "Dictionary of Religions", the *Šasin-u toli*,[99] literally "Mirror of Religions" [published by a collective of authors in 1996]. In addition to Tibetan-Mongolian Buddhism, to which it devotes the most space, the dictionary presents the historical and contemporary religious traditions of the world. Terms such as *yuda šasin* for "Jewish religion" or the already known *böge-yin šasin* for "religion of the shamans", continues the terminology developed over the past centuries. It would therefore be factually incorrect to assume that contemporary Mongolian authors, in the absence of their own term, adopted the European concept of "religion" and translated it with the Mongolian word *šasin*. Such an assumption would ignore the centuries-long conceptual history of Mongolian knowledge cultures. *Šasin* does much more than merely provide a translation of a European term: The modern concept draws upon corresponding historical Mongolian meanings. Along with the terminology, the respective orders of knowledge and conceptions of the world are also conveyed. However, the influence of globalized, primarily Protestant-influenced "Western" religious discourses is also unmistakable. In the following, various constructions of "shamanism" will serve to illustrate the interaction between local and globalized European-American discourses on "religion".

As discussed above, the terminological reification of the "teaching of the shamans" is quite tangible in the texts from the 17th and 18th centuries, but the discursively constructed "teaching of the Shamans" remains only vaguely defined in content. We learn merely that healing and exorcism are the only distinctive characters of male and female shamans. It is only 19th-century Buryat Mongolian chronicles [179] that first provide detailed and systematic representations of the "teaching of the shamans". The chronicle *Qori kiged aγuyin buriyad-nar- un urida-dayan boluγsan anu* contains an origin story of the "teaching of the shamans". It also provides a description of the shamanic equipment, explains the purpose of shamanizing, and then elaborates on the various activities of the male or female shaman. These activities include healing

---

[98] See, for example, Altanγarudi und Bao De, *Mongγoljin-u šasin surtaγun* ("The Religious Traditions of the Mongols") (Qayilar 1995); Coyiji, *Mongγol-un burqan-u šasin-u teüke* ("History of Mongolian Buddhism"), 2 Vol. (Kökeqota 1998 and 2003); Sutubilig, *Chos lugs kyi tshig mdzod/ šasin-u toli* ("Dictionary of Religions") (1996).

[99] Literally, the Tibetan title translates "Treasure House of the Religious Systems". For bibliographical information, see the previous note.

the sick through the evocation of an *Ongγon*; exorcising evil spirits (*čidkür*) by binding them to a substitute, which is then burned, or to an animal that is slaughtered; divination (*tölge*) using a sheep's shoulder blade bone; and driving out evil spirits that cause harm to a person's possessions (*ed tavar*). Male and female shamans also perform invocations through blessings, benedictions, and the like to protect the family, children, livestock, or hunters from evil spirits or contagious diseases, and to generally bring happiness, blessings, and prosperity.[100]

Male and female shamans shared the worldview of the communities they belonged to.[101] They were ritual specialists, primarily active in healing the sick. However, shamanic practices and rituals were only one aspect of the numerous Mongolian religious practices encountered by the Buddhist monks. Other ritual practices and beliefs played (and, in part, continue to play) an important role in daily life. This is the case, for example, of the mountain cult,[102] the fire cult,[103] and the worship of the hearth deity.[104]

In addition, a number of cults existed around the figure of the "White Old Man" (*čaγan ebügen*),[105] the epic hero Geser Qan,[106] as well as a variety of deities and spirits. [180] Buddhist

---

[100] *Qori kiged aγuyin buriyad-nar-un urida-daγan boluγsan anu*, 17,4–19,12. In the representation, the focus is on the practices. The author even emphasizes that the shamans possess neither writings (*nom bičig*) nor dogmatic teachings (*surγal*) (page 20).

[101] Heissig, *Religionen der Mongolei*, 349–420. Heissig distinguishes between a Mongolian "folk religion", "shamanism", and "Lamaism", that is, Tibetan Buddhism. See also Á. Birtalan, "Die Mythologie der mongolischen Volksreligion". In *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, edited by E. Schmalzriedt and H. W. Haussig. *I. Abteilung: Die alten Kulturvölker;* 34th edition (Stuttgart 2001).

[102] M. Tatár, "Two Mongol Texts Concerning the Cult of the Mountains", *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 30, no.1 (1976): 1–58.

[103] Fundamental on the fire cult, Nima, *Mongγolčud-un γal* (Kökeqota, 2003); see also Ch. Atwood, "Buddhism and Popular Ritual in Mongolian Religion: A Reexamination of the Fire Cult". *History of Religions* 36, no.2 (1996): 112–139.

[104] In this regard, see D. Dumas, *Aspekte und Wandlungen der Verehrung des Herdfeuers bei den Mongolen. Eine Analyse der mongolischen "Feuergebete"* (Bonn 1987).

[105] An indigenous Mongolian deity responsible for cattle and fertility; see Heissig, *Religionen der Mongolei*, 383–389. Čaγan ebügen, known in Tibet as *sGam po dkar po*, was introduced into the Buddhist pantheon, as evidenced by a series of ritual texts and prayers; see also A. Sárközi, "Incense-offering to the White Old Man". In *Documenta Barbarorum: Festschrift für Walther Heissig zum 70. Geburtstag*, edited by K. Sagaster and M. Weiers (Wiesbaden 1983), 357–369. One of the most popular prayers to the "White Old Man", the *γajar usun-i nomuγadqan daruγulun čidaγči neretü sudur*, has the form of a Buddhist sūtra and even presents an invented Chinese title, although no sūtra with such title is known in the Chinese canon. In the *Tsam*-dance, the "White Old Man" played the role of the jester; see the historical recording of the 1937 *Tsam*-dance in Urga, present-day Ulaanbaatar, in P. Berger, "Buddhist Festivals in Mongolia". In *Mongolia: The Legacy of Chinggis Khan*, edited by P. Berger and T. T. Bartholomew (San Francisco 1995), 152. During the Christianization of the Buryat Mongols in the second half of the 18th century, the White Old Man was identified with the Russian Orthodox Saint Nicholas.

[106] The classic work on the Mongolian Geser epic is still C. Damdinsüren's *Istoricheskie korni Gėsėriady* (Moscow, 1957). Early on, Geser was identified with Bisman tngri, Skt. Vaiśrāvana. In Mongolian Buddhism, he has a dual role: on the one hand, he is one of the four Lokapāla; on the other hand, he is a god of wealth and belongs to the so-called *Tngri*, a group of indigenous deities (which also entered into a symbiosis with Buddhist deities). The Qing rulers promoted the emerging Geser Qan cult and identified Geser with Guan Di, the hero of the Chinese historical novel "Three Kingdoms" and war god; see P. K. Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley et. al., 2002), 244–245 and 284–285.

monks did not consider shamans as the primary actors in these rituals and practices. Thus, during the late 16th and early 17th centuries when Buddhism was established, these practices were not forbidden or persecuted, but gradually buddhicized.

As late as the 19th century, rituals such as mountain worship, the worship of the hearth deity, the *obo* cult, and other practices were not associated with the "teaching of the Shamans", as shown by the aforementioned Buryat-Mongolian chronicle, in which they are not mentioned. This is also confirmed by the chronicle [181] *Qori-yin arban nigen ečige- yin jun-u uγ ijaγur-un tuγuji*, which follows the chapter on Buddhism among the Buryat Mongols with a chapter on *Böge-ner-ün mörgöl*.[107] The chapter discusses the emergence of the male and female shamans and provides detailed information on their practices and objectives. In contrast to the first-mentioned chronicle, author Yamdan Yumsunov devotes considerable space to describing various *Tngri*,[108] which serve as "supports for invocation" (*jalbariday sitügen*). He does not mention other Mongolian everyday religious practices. From the 19th-century Mongolian accounts, readers gain the impression of a "teaching of the Shamans" that focuses on specific ritual practices, all aimed at providing practical life assistance to people.

Today, the representation of the "shamanic[109] teaching" (*böge mörgöl / böge-yin šasin*) has undergone significant changes. Over the past twenty years, Mongolian cultural studies research has explored nearly all everyday religious practices under the umbrella term "shamanism". Therefore, relevant publications discuss the sacrificial cult to the hearth divinity, the worship of mountains and waters, the cult of the "White Old Man", and more as components of "shamanism".[110] The uniquely Mongolian "shamanism" discourse, which had established a "teaching of the shamans" long before the European construction of "shamanism" as a distinct religious category, has merged with the European-American "religion discourse" that integrates everyday religious practices into its concept of shamanism.[111] In many contemporary Mongolian

---

However, there was also resistance from the Sangha against a Buddhist cult of Geser Qan, since already in the early printed version of the epic from 1617, some stories present a clearly anti-monastic tone. In one story, Geser Qan is transformed into a donkey by a monster (Mo. *mangγus*) disguised as an incarnated Lama (*qubilγan*). In the Buryat Mongolian versions of the epic, the Buddhist "setting" eventually disappears completely. Mongolian prayers to Geser Qan describe the epic hero as a mountain and warrior deity who is invoked for the protection of livestock herds and promises success in military campaigns, hunting, and male competitions such as wrestling, horse racing, and archery.

[107] P. 63–91: *šasin mörgöl-ün učira*; 91–115: *böge-ner-ün mörgöl-ün* učira.

[108] Literally: "heavenly"—an important group of Mongolian deities that were introduced into the Buddhist pantheon.

[109] The Mongolian languages do not have a grammatical adjective, only nouns. Nouns can perform nominal or adjectival functions in a sentence. Therefore, *böge* can mean either "shaman" or "shamanic", depending on the context.

[110] See, for example, the table of contents of the 1991 work by L. Qurča- baγatur and Č. Üjüm-e *Mongγol-un böge mörgöl-ün tayily-a takily-a-yin soyul* ("The Culture of Sacrifice of the Shamanic Religion of the Mongols").

[111] See, for example, Ch. Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire* (New York 2004), 465, or Á. Birtalan, "Die Mythologie der mongolischen Volksreligion". In *Dictionary of Mythology*, edited by E. Schmalzriedt and H. W. Haussig, *I. Abteilung: Die alten Kulturvölker*, 34th edition (Stuttgart 2001).

accounts, the Mongols possess two religions, shamanism and Buddhism.[112] Previously unsystematized religious rituals and practices from earlier centuries [182] are now subsumed under "shamanism". This categorization prevails not only in academic discourse, but also in the broader societal context. This view is widely accepted today, as evidenced by religion statistics that provide corresponding categories. Indeed, recent sociological surveys conducted in the Republic of Buryatia, for example, pose the question "If you are religious, what religion do you belong to?" and offer response categories such as (1) Shamanism, (2) Buddhism, (3) Russian Orthodoxy, and (4) Protestantism (Lutheran, Baptist, Adventist, etc.).[113]

2.1.2 *Christian religion from a Mongolian perspective*

Another example of "glocalization" in Mongolian and European-American religious discourses can be found in the previously mentioned Mongolian "Dictionary of Religions". This dictionary combines elements of traditional Tibetan-Mongolian Buddhist terminological dictionaries with modern European-American reference works, such as the "Oxford Dictionary of Religions". Of all the religions, Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhism has the most entries by far. Descriptions of non-Buddhist religions utilize Buddhist nomenclature.[114] Similar to European-American dictionaries that depict non-Christian religions using Christian terminology, this can result in intriguing shifts in meaning. For instance, the Christian term "God" is translated as "Qormusta Tngri, he who created the world".[115] Qormusta [183] Tngri presides over the group of so-called "Thirty-Three Gods";[116] he is also equated with Indra from Indian mythology. However, the idea of a personal and absolute divine omnipotence is foreign to this Mongolian-Buddhist conception. Quite on the contrary, the Thirty-Three Gods are part of *Saṃsāra*. Thus, translating "God" with "Qormusta Tngri" evokes entirely different associations in the Mongolian reader compared to the Christian understanding of God—resulting in a significant deviation from Christian self-understanding. Scholars should pay greater attention to such transformation processes that arise in non-

---

[112] Thus, historian Liu Jin Süe writes in his "Short History of the Mongols" (*Mongyol-un quriyangyui teüke*, Kökeqota 1998), 126, that after creating the empire, Chinggis Khan established the religion of the shamans. Although the ruler and his successors granted equal rights to all religions (*šasin bükün*), the Mongol's central faith was rooted in the religion of the shamans (*mongyolcud youl ni böge-yin šasin-i sitüdeg bayijai*).

[113] G.E. Manzanov, *Religioznye tradicii v kul'ture burjatskogo naroda* (Ulan-Ude 2005), 172–173.

[114] Thus, the Old and New Testaments are naturally described as *sudur*, sūtra (for example, *Šasin-u toli*, 46).

[115] *Šasin-u toli*, 506. Accordingly, Jesus is the "only son of Qormusta Tngri", see *Šasin-u toli*, 46. Conversely, in Mongolian Bible translations, the established term to translate "God" is *burqan*. In addition to a deity invoked in everyday religious practice, the Mongolian *burqan* refers especially to the Buddha or Buddhas. Recently, the use of *burqan* for "God" has sparked controversy among Buddhists in Mongolia. This was partly due to the considerable success of Christian, mostly Protestant, mission churches, which have made Buddhist institutions feel threatened.

[116] The *Trāyastrimśa* are assigned to the *kāmadhātu*, see G. Grönbold, "Die Mythologie des indischen Buddhismus". In *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, edited by H.W. Haussig (Stuttgart 1976), 393–394. For the status of "gods" in Buddhism in general, see also O. Freiberger and Ch. Kleine, *Buddhismus. Handbuch und kritische Einführung* (Göttingen 2011), 206.

European cultural contexts due to the utilization of terminologies specific to their own historical knowledge cultures.

2.2 Mongolian and European intellectuals

Scholars of religion have often lamented that the hegemonic dominance of the European Protestant concept of religion has led to the standardization of emic traditions worldwide according to this model. A thorough examination of the reception history of Asian religious traditions in Europe has indeed revealed the Protestant patterns upon which both "Hinduism" and "Buddhism"—but also "Confucianism", "Daoism", or "Shintoism"—were constructed. However, some scholars now criticize these genealogies of non-European religions for depriving the local actors of any initiative and instead degrading them to passive objects of their own history (which they have, in effect, lost). Charles Hallisey,[117] Richard King, and others have increasingly pointed out in recent years that "Hinduism", "Buddhism", etc. emerged through the active participation [184] of local actors. As Richard King emphasizes in his genealogy of the "Discovery of Buddhism": "It is important to reiterate at this point the role played by Asian Buddhists and specific Buddhist texts in the modern construction of Buddhism".[118] Early European Orientalists primarily obtained their knowledge from indigenous informants who were actively involved in shaping "Hinduism" and "Buddhism". Recognizing the "intercultural mimesis," as Hallisey calls these mutual relationships between the "West" and the "East",[119] represents a further step in overcoming the East-West dichotomy still perpetuated in Asian studies and the study of religion. However, it continues the familiar pattern that the "West" acts and the "East" reacts. Asian knowledge cultures are only relevant to us if "aspects of a culture of a subjectified people influenced the investigator to represent that culture in a certain manner".[120] This fixation is undoubtedly due to the asymmetry of knowledge and power in the orientalist discourses shaped by the colonial situation. However, it not only obscures our view of the equality between European and Asian knowledge cultures, but also suggests that the history of the latter only dates back to the 18th and 19th centuries—the centuries of colonial "encounters". Asia only enters history through its encounter with Europe, or, put another way: Asian knowledge systems gain their legitimacy through their engagement with and incorporation of European ideas.

This bias results in a peculiar timelessness that still clings to Asian societies and to local knowledge systems developed before the 18th century. This, in turn, has considerable influence on our view of the historical elite discourses in these societies. In Asian studies and the study of religion, these discourses were (and are) mostly read not as dynamic intellectual debates, but as repetitive and static confirmations of a timeless tradition. The carriers of these discourses, the local intellectuals,

---

[117] Ch. Hallisey, "Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravāda Buddhism". In *Curators of the Buddha. The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, edited by D.S. Lopez (Chicago; London 1995), 31–61.

[118] King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 149.

[119] Hallisey, "Roads Taken", 33.

[120] Hallisey, "Roads Taken", 33.

are all too often perceived as representatives of a tradition that they merely substantiate and perpetuate, rather than as individual personalities. Thus, in the relevant publications on the history of [185] the Mongols in the 16th century, Qutuɣtai Sečen Qung Tayiji, a Mongol prince, general, and intellectual who reconceptualized the "White History"—the doctrine of the two orders of state and religion—is seen more as the representative and administrator of a tradition than as an individual pioneering thinker of his time.[121] In contrast, Francis Bacon, who lived only a short time later, is praised as an "innovative natural scientist",[122] a scholar who, in the scientific context of the European early modern period, engaged with a wide variety of different traditions.

The still prevailing tendency to de-historicize Asian knowledge cultures also involves a de-individualization of their intellectual elites. One result of this often-unconscious attitude towards our research objects is that, so far, the study of religion has paid insufficient attention to the influences of emic analytical concepts on the discourse field "religion". The example provided here of the interweaving of emic and etic discourses in current Mongolian academic works on "shamanism" demonstrates the importance of considering particular Asian orders of knowledge in their historical depth, as they affect the modern "glocal" discourse. As "Western" and "non-Western" scholars continually meet and collaborate in the internationalized academic world, one can only hope that non-European knowledge systems will influence our own conceptualizations over time.[123]

2.3 Global history of religion

What theoretical implications do the results presented here have for the study of religion, specifically for research pursuing the project of a "global history of religion"?

First, it is essential to clarify the meaning of a [186] "global history of religion". The concept of global history of religion has been developed in response to the recent historiographical theoretical approaches to global history. These approaches concentrate primarily on examining the global interconnections of historical actors, focusing on the interrelationships between different world regions. Consequently, they abandon the fixation on Europe as the center of historical events and attempt to write a multi-centric history. This includes adopting a theoretical perspective that incorporates non-European historical concepts. Similarly, a global history of religion aims to de-Europeanize the theoretical perspectives on "religion". The concept seeks to implement what Richard King posed in his rhetorical question eleven years ago: "…why should theorists be limited by the Western framing of the debate?"[124] He further expounds:

---

[121] See W. Heissig, *Familien- und Kirchengeschichtsschreibung I*, 17–18.

[122] W. Reinhard, *Lebensformen Europas: Eine historische Kulturanthropologie* (München 2004), 567.

[123] However, this is counteracted by the normative primacy of English. For an examination of the significance of "unequal languages" in the academic discourse, see Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore; London 1993), 189–199.

[124] King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 198.

> " [...] as if the European framings of the debate were the only options available to the postcolonial critic. The introduction of a variety of indigenous epistemic traditions is, in my view, the single most important step that postcolonial studies can take if it is to look beyond the Eurocentric foundations of its theories and contest the epistemic violence of the colonial encounter. This challenge requires engagement with the knowledge-forms and histories of those cultures that have been colonized by the West [...][125]

However, implementing this is easier said than done, as evidenced by Dipesh Chakrabarty's lament cited initially. While I would not want to restrict the issue formulated by Richard King solely to the peoples colonized by Western powers,[126] a global history of religion pursues exactly this specific interest. It aims to globalize theoretical perspectives on "religion", relinquish Europe's primacy in favor of a multi-centric viewpoint, and equitably incorporate European and non-European analytical perspectives within the discourse field of "religion". Thus, the concept of a "global history of religion" relies on the premise that the development of secondary orders of knowledge is not exclusive to Europe. Rather, various regions worldwide have developed distinct analytical instruments and knowledge classification systems. [187] Despite differences in content, these systems can be brought into functional and structural analogy with each other and in this way, explored comparatively. Consequently, a global history of religion challenges European hegemony over the analytical concept of "religion". It adopts a multi-perspectivity that relates European and non-European analytical perspectives within the discourse field of "religion".[127]

The research topics of a global history of religion include:

- local cultural conceptualizations of the field of "religion",
- historical interactions among different world regions,
- long-term developments from global perspectives and
- micro-studies focusing on regional developments,
- inter-regional and transcultural historical comparisons, and finally,
- possible connections, interdependencies and transfer processes between various knowledge cultures, such as "religion", "science", "literature", and others, in both non-European and European societies.

2.4 Mongolian orders of knowledge as a case study of a global history of religion

In the first part of this article, we delved into a specific aspect of Mongolian historical orders of knowledge and analyzed the ordering concepts that reveal the linguistic differentiation of an

---

[125] King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 199.

[126] Thus, the Mongols, with the exception of the Kalmyks and Buryat Mongols, were colonized by one of the other early modern colonial powers, the Qing Empire.

[127] Michael Pye called for this already in 1994: "[...] there is also a need for an Afro-critical approach and a Sino-critical approach—that is, for approaches that allow African and Chinese perceptions of religion to influence our view of its shape" (M. Pye, "Religion: Shape and Shadow", *Numen* 41 (1994): 56).

autonomous domain of "religion" from a diachronic perspective. The case study presented here contributes to a global history of religion in several ways:

- It demonstrates that within historical Mongolian societies, an autonomous domain of "religion" emerged and was conceptually delineated at the level of discourse;
- It thoroughly historicizes Mongolian analytical terminology effectively capturing the dynamics of Mongolian discourse on "religion"; [188]
- It identifies the substantive differences between European and Mongolian discourses on religion and highlights the functional similarities that provide a basis for comparison;
- It unveils the entanglements and discrepancies between the empirical field and the discourse, and traces the reification processes that transform heterogeneous practices into a homogeneous "system";
- It directs attention towards the societal power dynamics that shape the discourse on religion;
- It lays the groundwork for analyzing the historical interconnectedness of European and Mongolian religious history within the "shamanism" discourse. Using the example of the invention of the "shamanism" construct, which has been previously attributed to Europe, it reveals hitherto unexplored connections between European and Asian discourses on religion.

2.5 Outlook

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize some aspects that I consider particularly significant for a future, globally oriented study of religion. It has become evident that the concept of a "global history of religion" not only aims to expand the scope of the subject area but also carries structural implications. I find three desiderata to be especially pressing: First, the same research fields must be opened for non-European knowledge cultures as for their European counterparts. So far, neither Asian studies nor the study of religion have explored whether there have been processes of appropriating of foreign cultures and religions [189] through the medium of science, or knowledge transfers between different knowledge cultures[128]—as has been established for

---

[128] So far, there have been no studies on the intellectual exchange between the Indian scholars who visited Lhasa in the 17th century and the Tibetan monastic scholars, led by the Dalai Lama. In the period between 1654 and 1681, almost forty Indian scholars visited Lhasa. Most of them were intellectuals, medical practitioners, philologists, and mathematicians, many of whom came from Varanasi, a center of Indian scholarship at the time. The 5th Dalai Lama not only mentions his scholarly conversations with the Indian visitors in his autobiography, but also generally praises the city of Varanasi as an intellectual center "where gather many scholars of vast intellect, skilled in all linguistic and philosophical topics", K. R. Schaeffer, "The Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobzang Gyatso (1617–1682)." In *The Dalai Lamas: A Visual History*, edited by Martin Brauen, 70. Furthermore, 19th century Tibetan doxographical works, such as the famous *Grub mtha' shel gyi me long* ("Crystal Mirror of Teachings"), written in 1802 by the Mongolian scholar Thu'u bkvan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, contain their own chapters on Indian philosophical-religious teachings. Which were the effects of these representations of Indian religion, conveyed in texts, among Tibetan scholars, and how does this transmission of systems of meaning differ from the situation in Europe, where "philosophy and

European history of religion.[129] The fact that these questions have not yet been asked and these issues have not yet been investigated should make us aware of our own epistemological foundations that shape our academic discourse. Central to this understanding of "science" is a notion that defines this category as inconceivable outside Europe. It is noteworthy that the categories "science" and "natural science" can be applied diachronically to Europe without any issues;[130] however, both categories are not employed comparatively to describe non-European knowledge traditions. They remain exclusive to European knowledge cultures. The rules underlying this discourse can be easily identified in the distinction between "Greco-European science" and "Oriental philosophy". Consequently, only "Europe" or the "West" has produced secondary orders of knowledge [190] in the form of generalizable theoretical reflections. From this perspective, certain research questions do not even emerge for non-European contexts. The primacy of the European master narrative thus persists in the study of religion, or rather, scholars of religion continue to perpetuate this master narrative instead of challenging it.[131] It is also striking in this context that the few, but extant, studies on non-European theoretical

---

philologies [...] have presented traditions and heritage over many centuries" that "no longer had any 'bearers,' or had never had bearers (in the Weberian sense) and were thus only conveyed through the medium of academic disciplines" (Gladigow, "Europäische Religionsgeschichte", 29)?"

[129] This was done especially by Burkhard Gladigow, see his aforementioned contributions "Europäische Religionsgeschichte" and "Europäische Religionsgeschichte seit der Renaissance". However, his contributions also establish the unique path of the "European history of religion" by distinguishing it from (a never explicitly mentioned, but implicitly postulated) non-European religious history. If European religious history is characterized by a "choice between systems of meaning" (Gladigow, "Europäische Religionsgeschichte", 21) and a "pre-enlightenment pluralism" (Gladigow, "Europäische Religionsgeschichte", 27), then this characteristic is missing in "other" religious histories. But what distinguishes, for example, the Tibetan situation in the early 18th century, in which people could choose between Buddhism, *Bon*, Catholicism (consider the edict issued on September 9, 1741 by the Tibetan regent Pho lha nas for the free practice and preaching of the "teachings of the white-headed Lamas", that is, the Capuchins in Lhasa) and Islam (Tibetan women who married into the Muslim community established in the 17th century in Lhasa usually embraced Islam), from the situation in Italy, France, or Spain in the early 18th century?

[130] For example, by H. Blumenberg for the early modern period; see his contribution *Pseudoplatonismen in der Naturwissenschaft der frühen Neuzeit* (Mainz 1971).

[131] Chakrabarty points to the implicit tragedy of this theoretical production in the humanities and social sciences when he states: "For generations now, philosophers and thinkers who shape the nature of social science have produced theories that embrace the entirety of humanity. As we well know, these statements have been produced in relative, and sometimes absolute, ignorance of the majority of humankind—that is, those living in non-Western cultures. [...] What allowed the modern European sages to develop such clairvoyance with regard to societies of which they were empirically ignorant?" (*Provincializing Europe*, 29). The answer lies in the very exclusionary discourse that separates the rational and reflexive Europe from the mythic-religious rest of the world. This discourse is inscribed and reproduced even in a study of religion that understands itself as "postcolonial" and "discursive". An example is provided by the already cited *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*, published in 2003 by H.-G. Kippenberg and K. von Stuckrad, which does not dedicate a single chapter to non-European theoretical approaches to religion. The world outside of Europe plays a role in the historical and current constitution of religious studies, on the one hand in the process of *intercultural mimesis* (Charles Hallisey), and on the other as a research object.

conceptualizations of religion receive limited attention within the discipline.[132]

The second desideratum, namely the historicization of non-European knowledge cultures, has already been addressed. While European categorizations such as "religion" are consistently historicized, with their conceptual histories extensively investigated, there is often a lack of analogous conceptual histories for corresponding Asian terms. For example, the conceptual history of the Tibetan term *chos* remains to be written. The absence of such history is no coincidence—on the contrary. We treat non-European categories as though they possess no historicity, but rather exist within a temporal void. Consequently, they appear timeless and, thus, [191] static, and rigid. Yet, non-European terminologies look back on a longstanding written tradition and feature complex historical semantics. Only by considering these terminologies as *historical* terms, instead of timeless, ahistorical entities, can we begin to challenge the prevailing rhetoric of European superiority.

Thirdly, we must discover new linguistic methods of description. The attempt to avoid the cognitive imperialism of imposing our terminology on other cultures often produces unwanted—and probably completely unintended—consequences. The use of untranslated emic terms or newly created terminology leads to an exclusion of other cultures from European modernity. This creates cultural particularity that resists comparison, solidifies an insurmountable difference, and simultaneously singles out specifically European cultural achievements in which the "Others" have no share. What would happen if we described these cultures using our terminology? Few dare to attempt this experiment due to the looming specter of "cultural imperialism" in the academic community.

American Tibetologist Kurtis Schaeffer took the risk and authored a wonderful book. *The Culture of the Book in Tibet* delves deeply into the Tibetan book culture that emerged from the 10th century onward. Deploying the same vocabulary used to describe medieval and early modern scriptoria, printing houses, monastic universities, and scholarly circles in Europe of the 12th to 18th centuries, Schaeffer describes the Tibetan writing rooms, printing houses, learned circles, and monastic universities during the same period. The result is quite astonishing: an image of a Tibetan scholarly world focused on philological and editorial ideals and striving to understand the world through rational means emerges. By utilizing terms such as "editorial theory and method", "philology", "philological methods", "textual scholar and bibliophile" (as Schaeffer describes the great Tibetan scholar Bu ston), "cultural history of scholarship", etc., historical Tibetan societies are inadvertently stripped of their religious garb in which they usually appear firmly encased.

---

[132] For example, the important work of M. Pye, *Emerging from Meditation: Tominaga Nakamoto Translated with an Introduction by M.P.* (London 1990). Pye also points out repeatedly "that most accounts of the history of theories of religion(s) are restricted to western intellectual history" ("Overcoming Westernism", 109). On this topic, see also Ch. Kleine, "Wozu aussereuropäische Religionsgeschichte? Überlegungen zu ihrem Nutzen für die religionswissenschaftliche Theorie- und Identitätsbildung". *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 10, no.1: 3–38.

Suddenly, the Tibetan scholarly world appears compatible with European societies of the same era. "Philology" is not exclusively a European academic discipline; it is also Tibetan, even though some philological principles in Tibet may differ from those in Europe. The same likely holds true for "religion".

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Arban buyantu nom-un čaɣan teüke. Facsimile reproduction. In *Die Familien- und Kirchengeschichtsschreibung der Mongolen. I. 16.–18. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Walther Heissig. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1959, 1–24.

Baɣan-a, B*., ed. Asaraɣči neretü-yin teüke.* Beijing: Ündüsüten-ü keblel-ün qoriy-a. 1984.

Bawden, Charles R*. The Mongol Chronicle Altan tobci. Text, translation and critical notes.* Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1955.

Biographien der Jebtsundamba Qutuɣtus. Mongolian text in *The Jebtsundamba Khutukhtus of Urga. Text, Translation and Notes*, ed. by Charles R. Bawden. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1961, 5–33.

Dag yig mkhas pa'i byung gnas zhes bya ba bzhugs so/ Merged ɣarqu-yin oron neretü toɣtaɣaɣsan dayiɣ orosiba. Block print, Beijing. Private collection of Professor Richard Ernst.

Degedü šasin erdeni ber mongɣol oron-i tügegülügsen uy-i üjegülügsen iraɣu kelen-ü kürkirel neretü. Buryat block print.

Erdeni tunumal neretü sudur. Photocopy of the manuscript, Library of the Institute of Language and Literature of the Inner Mongolian Academy of Social Sciences, Hohot (People's Republic of China).

ɣadaɣadu mongɣol-un törö-yin jasaqu yabudal-un yamun-un engke amuɣulang-un üy-e-dü 1693 on-du keblegsen, dotor-a 1629 on-ača ekileged udaɣ-a daraɣ-a qaɣad-un üy-e-dü jarlaɣsan čaɣaja-ud-i jasamjilaɣsan mongɣol-un čaɣajan-u bičig. Photocopy of the text, Mongolian National Library, Ulaanbaatar.

Gong gsal zhal lce bcu gsum gyi dgong pa'i gzhung. Decree of the Altan Qaɣan. Facsimile reproduction of the text. In Richard O. Meisezahl. "Die Handschriften in den City of Liverpool Museums (I)." *Zentralasiatische Studien* 7, 1973, 268–284.

`Gos lo tsa ba gZhon nu dpal. *Deb ther sngon po.* 2 Vols. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1984.

Haenisch, Erich, ed. *Eine Urga-Handschrift des mongolischen Geschichtswerks von Secen Sagang (alias Sanang Secen).* Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1955.

Heissig, Walther, ed. *Altan kürdün mingɣan gegesütü bičig. Eine mongolische Chronik von Siregetü Guosi Dharma (1739).* Kopenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1958.

Heissig, Walther, ed. *Erdeni-yin erike. Mongolische Chronik der lamaistischen Klosterbauten der Mongolei von Isibaldan* (1835). Facsimile with introduction and index of names*, ed. by Walther Heissig. Kopenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1961.

Heissig, Walther, ed. *Bolur Toli "Spiegel aus Bergkristall" von Jimbadorji (1834–1837). Buch III: Geschichte der Mongolen*. Kopenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1962.

Jorungγ-a, ed. *Erdeni tunumal neretü sudur orosiba*. Beijing: Ündüsüten- ü keblel-ün qoriy-a, 1984.

bKa' yang dag pa'i tshad ma las mdo btus pa. Tibetan Tripitaka 144. No. 5839, folio 64r4-103v6.

Khobituev, Širabningbo. *Rus-un kür-ün jegün sibiiri-yin dotora aγci buriyad kemekü yasutan jun-u terigün γaruγsan ba tegün dotora-ača qori 11 ečige-yin buriyad jun-u tegüke egüni siirabningbova qubitu-yin eblegülen bičigsen bülüge*. In *Letopisi khorinskikh buryat*. Vyp. 2. *Khronika Širab-nimbo Khobitueva*, ed. by Nikolaj N. Poppe. Trudy instituta vostokovedeniya, IX. Moskva, Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1935.

Lombotseren. *Selengge-yin mongγol buriyad-un darqan tayiši danbi jilčan lombočeren-u jokiyaγsan mongγol buriyad-un teüke bolai*. In *Letopisi selenginskikh buriyat*. Vyp. 1. Khronika Ubashi Dambi Dzhalcan Lombo Cerenova 1868 g., ed. by Nikolaj N. Poppe. Trudy instituta vostokovedeniya, XII. Moskva, Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1936.

Mongγol čaγajin-u bičig. Manuskript. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. Signature: MS Mongol 132.

Mostaert, Antoine and Francis W. Cleaves. *Altan Tobči. A Brief History of the Mongols by bLo bzang bsTan `jin with A critical Introduction by The Reverend Antoine Mostaert, C.I.C.M., and An Editor's Foreword by Francis Woodman Cleaves*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952.

Mostaert, Antoine and Francis W. Cleaves. *Bolor Erike. Mongolian Chronicle by Rasipungsuy*. 5 vols., Cambridge, MA: The Harvard Yenching Institute, 1959.

Ngag dbang blo bzang chos kyi rgya mtsho. *rJe btsun btsun thams cad mkhyen pa bsod nams rgya mtsho'i rnam thar dngos grub rgya mtsho'i shing rta zhes bya ba bzhugs so*. In `Phags pa `jig rten dbang phyug gi rnam sprul rim byon gyi `khrungs rabs deb ther nor bu'i `phreng ba, Vol. 2. Dharamsala: Tibetan Cultural Printing Press, 1984, 1–171.

Ongγod qara sakiγusun teüke sudur bičig orosiba. Mong. 41, Royal Library of Copenhagen.

Prajñasagara. *Boγda neyiči toyin dalai mañjusryi-yin domoγ-i todorqai-a geyigülügči čindamani ke kemegdekü orosiba*. Photocopy of the block print.

Pringlai, ed. *Byamba. Asaraγči neretü-yin teüke*. Ulaanbaatar: Erdem šinžylgeenij khevlekh ujldver, 1960.

Qad-un ündüsün quriyangγui altan tobči. Kökeqota: Öbör mongγol-un arad-un keblel-ün qoriy-a, 1980.

Siluγun onul-tu kemegdekü sudur. Translated by Siregetü güsi corji. Manuscript *Ganjur*, Manuscript Collection at Saint Petersburg State University Library, no. 839.

Siluɣun budaɣun üye onoqui neretü sudur. Translated by Toyin guosi.

Thu'u bkvan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma*. Grub mtha' thams cad kyi khungs dang `dod tshul ston pa öegs bshad shel gyi me long.* Indian reprint in pothi format, n.y.

Toboev, Tuɣultur. *Qori kiged aɣuyin buriyad-nar-un urida-dayan boluysan anu*. In *Letopisi khorinskikh buryat.* Vyp. I. Khroniki Tuyultur Toboeva i Vandana Yumsunova, ed. by Nikolaj N. Poppe. Trudy instituta vostokovedeniya, IX, 1–47. Moskva, Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1935.

Vimalaprabhā-nāma mūlatantrānusārinī dvādaśasāhasrikālaghu kāla- cakra-tantrarāja-tīkā. Tibetan title: *bsDus pa'i rgyud kyi rgyal po dus kyi `khor lo'i `grel bshad rtsa ba'i rgyud rjes su `jug pa stong phrag bcu gnyis pa dri ma med pa'i `od ces bya ba*. In *The Collected Works of Bu-ston*, ed. by Lokesh Chandra. New Delhi, 1965. Part I (KA), Part II (KHA).

Yumsunov, Vandan*. Qori-yin arban nigen ečige-yin jun-u uɣ ijaɣur-un tuɣuji.* In *Letopisi khorinskikh buryat.* Vyp. I. Khroniki Tuyultur Toboeva i Vandana Yumsunova, ed. by Nikolaj N. Poppe. Trudy instituta vostokovedeniya, IX, 48–172. Moskva, Leningrad: Izadatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1935.

Secondary Literature

Altanɣarudi, and Bao De*. Mongɣoljin-u šasin surtaɣun.* Qayilar: Öbör mongɣol-un soyul-un keblel-ün qoriya, 1995.

Asad, Talal. *Genealogies of Religion. Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam.* Baltimore / London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993.

Atwood, Christopher. "Buddhism and Popular Ritual in Mongolian Religion: A Reexamination of the Fire Cult." *History of Religions* 36 no 2 (1996) 112–139.

Atwood, Christopher. *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire*. New York: Facts on File, 2004.

Auffarth, Christoph. "Religion." In *Wörterbuch der Religionen*, ed. by Christoph Auffarth, Hans G. Kippenberg and Axel Michaels. Stuttgart: Kröner, 2006, 429–431.

Auffarth, Christoph. "Europäische Religionsgeschichte – ein kulturwissenschaftliches Projekt." In *Aspekte der Religionswissenschaft*, ed. by Richard Faber and Susanne Lanwerd. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009, 29–48.

Auffarth, Christoph. "Mittelalterliche Modelle der Eingrenzung und Ausgrenzung religiöser Verschiedenheit." In *Europäische Religionsgeschichte: Ein mehrfacher Pluralismus*, ed. by Hans G. Kippenberg, Jörg Rüpke and Kocku von Stuckrad. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009, 193–218.

Autorenkollektiv. *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1985.

Balagangadhara, S.N. *"The Heathen in His Blindness": Asia, the West and the Dynamic of Religion*. Leiden: Brill, 1994.

Bawden, Charles R. *"*Two Mongolian texts Concerning Obo-worship.*"* *Oriens Extremus* 5 no 1 (1958): 57–61.

Bawden, Charles R. *The Modern History of the Mongols*. London / New York: Kegan Paul International, 1968.

Berger, Patricia. „Buddhist Festivals in Mongolia." In *Mongolia. The Legacy of Chinggis Khan*, ed. by Patricia Berger / Terese Tse Bartholomew. San Francisco: Thames and Hudson, 1995, 149–184.

Bira, Šagdaryn. "A Sixteenth Century Mongol Code." *Zentralasiatische Studien* 11 (1977): 7–34.

Birtalan, Ágnes. "Die Mythologie der mongolischen Volksreligion." In *Wörterbuch der Mythologie,* ed. by Egidius Schmalzriedt and Hans Wilhelm Haussig. I. Abteilung: Die alten Kulturvölker. 34. Lieferung. Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 2001.

Blumenberg, Hans. *Pseudoplatonismen in der Naturwissenschaft der frühen Neuzeit*. Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1971.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Sozialer Sinn: Kritik der theoretischen Vernunft*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power.* Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Rede und Antwort*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Entwurf einer Theorie der Praxis auf der ethnologischen Grundlage der kabylischen Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009.

Brunotte, Ulrike. "Religion und Kolonialismus." In *Europäische Religionsgeschichte. Ein mehrfacher Pluralismus*, ed. by Hans G. Kippenberg, Jörg Rüpke and Kocku von Stuckrad, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009, 339–369.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Chiodo, Elisabetta. *The Mongolian Manuscripts on Birch Bark from Xarbuxyn Balgas in the Collection of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences*. Part 1. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1999.

Chiodo, Elisabetta. *The Mongolian Manuscripts on Birch Bark from Xarbuxyn Balgas in the Collection of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences*. Part 2. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2009.

Coyiji. *Mongγol-un burqan-u šasin-u teüke. Yeke mongγol ulus-un üy-e (1206–1271)*. Kökeqota: Öbör mongγol-un soyul-un keblel-ün qoriy-a, 1998.

Coyiji. *Mongyol-un burqan-u šasin-u teüke. Yuvan ulus-un üy-e (1271– 1368)*. Kökeqota: Öbör mongyol-un soyul-un keblel-ün qoriy-a, 2003.

Crossley, Pamela Kyle. *A Translucent Mirror. History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology*. Berkeley et al: University of California Press, 2002.

Damdinsüren, C. *Istoricheskie korni Geseriady*. Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Aka- demii Nauk, 1957.

Dumas, Dominique. *Aspekte und Wandlungen der Verehrung des Herdfeuers bei den Mongolen. Eine Analyse der mongolischen "Feuergebete"*. Bonn: Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms- Universität, 1987.

Elverskog, Johan. *The Jewel Translucent Siitra. Altan Khan and the Mongols in the Sixteenth Century*. Leiden und Boston: Brill, 2003.

Fitzgerald, Timothy. "Hinduism and the World Religion Fallacy." *Religion* 20 (1999), 101–118.

Foucault, Michel. *Archäologie des Wissens*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997.

Freiberger, Oliver. *Der Askesediskurs in der Religionsgeschichte: Eine vergleichende Untersuchung brahmanischer und frühchristlicher Texte*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009.

Freiberger, Oliver and Christoph Kleine. *Buddhismus. Handbuch und kritische Einführung*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*. Tübingen: Mohr, 1990.

Gentz, Joachim. "Von der ‚Lesbarkeit der Religion' zum iconic turn." In *Religionswissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft*, ed. by Christoph Auffarth and Jörg Rüpke. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2005, 274–288.

Gentz, Joachim. "Die Drei Lehren (sanjiao) Chinas in Konflikt und Harmonie: Figuren und Strategien einer Debatte." In *Religionen Nebeneinander: Modelle religiöser Vielfalt in Ost- und Südostasien*, ed. by Edith Franke and Michael Pye. Münster: Lit-Verlag, 2006, 17–40.

Gentz, Joachim. "Europäische Religionsgeschichte seit der Renaissance." *Zeitenblicke* 5 no 1 (2006). http://www.zeitenblicke.de/2006/1/Gladigow/index_html (26/10/2007).

Gentz, Joachim. "Multiple religiöse Identität in Ostasien." In *Multiple religiöse Identität: Aus verschiedenen religiösen Traditionen schöpfen*, ed. by Reinhold Bernhardt and Perry Schmidt-Leukel. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2008, 115–135.

Gladigow, Burkhard. "Europäische Religionsgeschichte." In *Lokale Religionsgeschichte*, ed. by Hans G. Kippenberg and Brigitte Luchesi. Marburg: diagonal, 1995, 21–52.

Gladigow, Burkhard. "Europäische Religionsgeschichte seit der Renaissance", *Zeitenblicke* 5 no. 1 (2006). http://www.zeitenblicke.de/2006/1/Gladigow/index_html (16/04/2023).

Gladigow, Burkhard. "Von der 'Lesbarkeit der Religion' zum iconic turn". In *Religionswisschaft als Kulturwissenschaft*, ed. by Burkhard Gladigow. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2005, 274-288.

Grönbold, Günter. "Die Mythologie des indischen Buddhismus." In *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, ed. by Hans Willhelm Haußig. Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1976, 393–394.

Hahn, Alois. "Glaube und Schrift – oder die Selbstthematisierung von Hochkulturen." In *Konstruktionen des Selbst, der Welt und der Geschichte*, ed. by Alois Hahn. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000, 237–260.

Hallisey, Charles. "Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravada Buddhism." In *Curators of the Buddha. The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, ed. by Donald S. Lopez Jr. Chicago / London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995, 31–61.

Harva, Uno. *Die religiösen Vorstellungen der altaischen Völker*. Helsinki: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, n.y.

Haußig, Hans-Michael. *Der Religionsbegriff in den Religionen: Studien zum Selbst- und Religionsverständnis in Hinduismus, Buddhismus, Judentum und Islam*. Bodenheim: Philo, 1999.

Heissig, Walther. *Bolur Erike "Eine Kette aus Bergkristallen" Eine mongolische Chronik der Kienlung-Zeit von Rasipungsuy (1774/75). Literaturhistorisch untersucht*. Peiping: The Union Press, 1946.

Heissig, Walther. "A Mongolian Source to the Lamaist Suppression of Shamanism." *Anthropos* 48 (1953), 493–536.

Heissig, Walther. "Neyici Toyin. Das Leben eines lamaistischen Mönches (1557–1653). Aus seiner mongolischen Biographie übersetzt und mit einer Einleitung." *Sinologica* 3 (1954), 21–38.

Heissig, Walther. *Die Familien- und Kirchengeschichtsschreibung der Mongolen. I. 16.–18. Jahrhundert*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1959.

Heissig, Walther. "Die Religionen der Mongolei." In *Die Religionen Tibets und der Mongolei*, ed. by Giuseppe Tucci and Walther Heissig. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1970, 312–314.

Heissig, Walther. "Toyin guosi ~ Guisi alias Cortu guisi: Versuch einer Identifizierung." *Zentralasiatische Studien* 9 (1975), 361–446.

Heissig, Walther. *Die mongolischen Handschriften-Reste aus Olon süme Innere Mongolei (16.-17. Jhdt.)*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1976.

Heissig, Walther. "Persecution and Continuation: Some Recent Innermongolian Shamanist Traditions." In *Schamanen und Geisterbeschwörer in der östlichen Mongolei. Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. by Walther Heissig. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992, 198–214.

Heissig, Walther. "Schamanen und Geisterbeschwörer im Küriye-Banner." In *Schamanen und Geisterbeschwörer in der östlichen Mongolei. Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. by Walther Heissig. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992, 1–50.

Heuschert, Dorothea. *Die Gesetzgebung der Qing für die Mongolen im 17. Jahrhundert anhand des Mongolischen Gesetzbuches aus der Kangxi-Zeit (1662–1722)*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1998.

Hutton, Ronald. *Shamans. Siberian Spirituality and the Western Imagination*. Hambledon and London: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Kämpfe, Hans-Rainer. *Das Asarayci neretü-yin teüke des Byamba Erke Daicing alias Šamba Jasay (Eine mongolische Chronik des 17. Jahrhunderts)*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983.

Kas'yanenko, Zoya K. *Katalog peterburgskogo rukopisnogo "I'anzhura". Sostavlenie, vvedenie, transliteraciya i ukazateli*. Moskva: Izdatel'skaya firma „Vostochnaya literatura", 1993.

King, Richard. *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and "The Mystic East"*. London: Routledge, 1999.

Kippenberg, Hans G. and Kocku von Stuckrad. *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*. München: Beck, 2003.

Kleine, Christoph. "Wozu außereuropäische Religionsgeschichte? Überlegungen zu ihrem Nutzen für die religionswissenschaftliche Theorie- und Identitätsbildung." *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 18 (2010), 3–38.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. "'Religionslos ist dieses Land': Das Mongolenbild der Tibeter." *Asiatische Studien / Etudes asiatiques* LIV no. 4 (2000), 875–905.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. *Erdeni tunumal neretü sudur. Die Biographie des Altan qayan der Tümed-Mongolen. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der religionspolitischen Beziehungen zwischen der Mongolei und Tibet im ausgehenden 16. Jahrhundert*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2001.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. "The Transmission of the Mongolian Kanjur: A Preliminary Report." In *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism: PIATS 2000: Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, ed. by Helmut Eimer and David Germano. Leiden: Brill, 2002, 151–176.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. "Der Buddhismus als Garant von 'Frieden und Ruhe'. Zu religiösen Legitimationsstrategien von Gewalt am Beispiel der tibetisch-buddhistischen Missionierung der Mongolei im späten 16. Jahrhundert." *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 11 (2003), 185–207.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. "The Third Dalai Lama Sönam Gyatso and the Fourth Dalai Lama Yönten Gyatso". In *The Dalai Lamas. A Visual History*, ed. by Martin Brauen. London: Serindia Publications, 2005, 52-63.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. *Zur Ausdifferenzierung eines autonomen Bereichs Religion in asiatischen Gesellschaften des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts: Das Beispiel der Mongolen*. Bern: Schweizerische Akademie der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften, 2007.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. "Uncivilized Nomads and Buddhist Clerics: Tibetan Images of the Mongols in the 19th and 20th Centuries." In *Images of Tibet in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. by Monica Esposito. Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2008, 707–724.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. "Mongolische Geschichtsschreibung im Kontext der Globalgeschichte." In *Geschichten und Geschichte: Historiographie und Hagiographie in der asiatischen Religionsgeschichte*, ed. by Peter Schalk, Max Deeg, Oliver Freiberger, Christoph Kleine and Astrid van Nahl. Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 2010, 247–279.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. "Embodying the Dharma: The Buddhist Way into Mongolia." In *Transformations and Transfer of Tantra in Asia and Beyond*, ed. by Istvan Keul. Berlin / Boston: de Gruyter, 2012, 239–261.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. "The Invention of 'Shamanism' in 18th-Century Mongolian Elite Discourse". In *Rocznik Orientalistyczny / Yearbook of Oriental Studies* 65 no 1 (2012), 90–106.

Landwehr, Achim. *Historische Diskursanalyse*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2008.

Ligeti, Louis. *Catalogue du Kanjur mongol imprimé.* Vol. 1*, Catalogue*. Budapest: Société Kőrösi Csoma, 1942.

Liu, Jin Süe. *Mongyol-un quriyangyui teüke*. Kökeqota: Öbör mongyol-un arad-un keblel-ün qoriy-a, 1998.

Lopez, Donald S. Jr. *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Manzanov, Georgij E. *Religioznye tradicii v kul'ture burjatskogo naroda*. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Burjatskogo nauchnogo centra SO RAN, 2005.

Masuzawa, Tomoko. *The Invention of World Religions Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Meisezahl, Richard O. "Die Handschriften in den City of Liverpool Museums (I)." *Zentralasiatische Studien* 7 (1973), 221–284.

Morikawa, Tetsuo. *Study of the Biography of Altan Khan*. Fukuoka: Kyushu University, 1987.

Nima. *Mongyolčud-un yal*. Kökeqota: Öbör mongyol-un arad-un keblel-ün qoriy-a, 2003.

Poppe, Nicholas. *Grammar of Written Mongolian, 3ʳᵈ edition*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974.

Potanin, Grigorij N. *Ocherki severo-zapadnoj Mongolii. Rezul'taty pute- shestviya, ispolnennago v 1879 godu po porucheniyu Imperatorskago Russkago geograficheskago Obshchestva*. St. Petersburg, 1881–1883.

Pye, Michael. "Religion: shape and shadow." *Numen* 41 (1994), 51–75.

Pye, Michael. *Emerging from Meditation. Tominaga Nakamoto. Translated with an introduction by M.P.*. London: Duckworth, 1990.

Pye, Michael. "Overcoming Westernism: the End of Orientalism and Occidentalism." In *Religion im Spiegelkabinett. Asiatische Religionsgeschichte im Spannungsfeld zwischen Orientalismus und Okzidentalismus*, ed. by Peter Schalk, Max Deeg, Oliver Freiberger and Christoph Kleine. Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2003, 91–114.

Qurčabayatur, L., und C. Üjüm-e. *Mongɣol-un böge mörgül-ün tayilɣ-a takilɣ-a-yin soyol*. Öbör mongɣol-un soyul-un keblel-ün qoriy-a, 1991.

Reinhard, Wolfgang. *Lebensformen Europas. Eine historische Kulturanthropologie*. München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2004.

Riesebrodt, Martin. *Cultus und Heilsversprechen. Eine Theorie der Religionen*. München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2007.

Rösler, Ulrike. "Die Lehre, der Weg und die namenlose Religion: Mögliche Äquivalente eines Religionsbegriffs in der tibetischen Kultur". In *Religion in Asien? Studien zur Anwendbarkeit des Religionsbegriffs*, ed. by Peter Schalk, Max Deeg, Oliver Freiberger, Christoph Kleine and Astrid van Nahl. Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2013, 129–150.

Sagaster, Klaus. *Die Weisse Geschichte (Čaɣan teüke). Eine mongolische Quelle zur Lehre von den Beiden Ordnungen Religion und Staat in Tibet und der Mongolei*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1976.

Sagaster, Klaus. "The History of Buddhism among the Mongols." In *The Spread of Buddhism,* ed. by Ann Heirman and Stephan Peter Bumbacher. Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2007, 379–432.

Sárközi, Alice. "Incense-offering to the White Old Man." In *Documenta Barbarorum. Festschrift für Walther Heissig zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. by Klaus Sagaster and Michael Weiers. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983.

Sazykin, Andrej G. "Die mongolische 'Erzählung über Güsü-Lama'." *Zentralasiatische Studien* 16 (1982), 111–140.

Sazykin, Andrej G. *Videniya buddijskogo ada. Predislovie, perevod, transliteraciya, primechaniya i glossarii*. St. Petersburg: Isdatel'stvo A. Teren'eva "Nartang", 2004.

Schaeffer, Kurtis. "The Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobzang Gyatso." In *The Dalai Lamas: A Visual History*, ed. by Martin Brauen. London: Serindia, 2005, 65-91.

Schaeffer, Kurtis R. *The Culture of the Book in Tibet*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

Schlieter, Jens, ed. *Was ist Religion? Texte von Cicero bis Luhmann*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 2010.

Schulze, Reinhard. "Weltbilder der Aufklärung: Zur Globalgeschichte neuzeitlicher Wissenskulturen." In *Vom Weltgeist beseelt: Globalgeschichte 1700–1815*, ed. by Margarete Grandner and Andrea Komlosy. Wien: Promedia Verlag, 2004, 161–179.

Henry Serruys. "Early Lamaism in Mongolia." *Oriens Extremus* 10 (1963), 181–216.

Henry Serruys. "Additional Note on the Origin of Lamaism in Mongolia." *Oriens Extremus* 13 (1966), 165–173.

Staal, Frits. "Religions." In *Rules without Meaning: Ritual, Mantras and the Human Sciences*, ed. by Frits Staal. New York: Peter Lang, 1993, 387–419.

Sutubilig. *Chos lugs kyi tshig mdzod. Šasin-u toli*. Öbör mongγol-un surγan kümüjil-ün keblel-ün qoriy-a, 1996.

Tatár, Magdalena. "Two Mongol Texts Concerning the Cult of the Moun- tains." *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 30 no 1 (1976), 1–58.

Tenbruck, Friedrich. "Die Religion im Maelstrom der Reflexion." *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Sonderheft 33 *Religion und Kultur* (1993)*, 31–67.

Tsyrempilov, Nikolay. "Buddhist Minority in a Christian Empire. Buryat Religious Survival and Identity Problems in Russia in the 18th–early 19th Centuries." In *Religion and Ethnicity in Mongolian Societies: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. by Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, Seline Reinhardt and Tatiana D. Skrynnikova. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014, 61–77.

Zhu rong ga. *A-le-tan han zhuan*. Hohhot: Nei Menggu Renmin Chubanshe, 1991.

About the author

Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz is Professor Emerita of Science of Religion and Central Asian Cultural Studies at the University of Bern, Switzerland. Her research focuses on the global history of religion, the Tibet-Mongolia interface, the history of non-European knowledge systems, and the relationship between politics and religion in Inner Asian Buddhism. Publications include: *Die Mongolen. Von Dschingis Khan bis heute.* München: 2024 (2nd edition); *Grenzen der Religion. Säkularität in der Asiatischen Religionsgeschichte.* Leiden: Brill 2023 (ed. with M. Deeg, O. Freiberger, C. Kleine).

Mail: karenina.kollmar-paulenz@unibe.ch

About the translators

Anja Kirsch is a professor of Religious Studies at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at NTNU, Trondheim. Her research focuses on the relationship between religion and "the secular" in contemporary and historical perspective, nineteenth-century utopia and migration, and narrative and cognitive approaches to the history of religion. Publications include: *Narrative Cultures and the Aesthetics of Religion*, ed. with Dirk Johannsen and Jens Kreinath. Leiden: Brill 2020; "Narrative Strategies" (with Dirk Johannsen), in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of the Cultural and Cognitive Aesthetics of Religion*. London: Bloomsbury 2020, pp. 143–153.

Mail: anja.kirsch@ntnu.no

Andrea Rota is an associate professor of the Study of Religion at the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), University of Oslo. He obtained his PhD from the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, and received his Habilitation from the University of Bern, where he served as an assistant professor for the systematic study of religion. He is the current coordinator of the IKOS Religion and Politics research initiative. Publications include: *Religion and Academia Reframed. Connecting Religion, Science, and Society in the Long Sixties*. Leiden: Brill 2023; *Collective Intentionality and the Study of Religion. Social Ontology and Empirical Research*. London: Bloomsbury 2023.

Mail: andrea.rota@ikos.uio.no

What Religion Can Be: Mongolian Classifications,
Comparative Perspectives, and a Global View

Oliver Freiberger

29/01/2024

Abstract

This article highlights some important conclusions in Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz's study, "Lamas and Shamans," and offers some reflections on its relevance for the study of religion more broadly. It argues that comparing the Tibetan/Mongolian process of creating a classification system for religion(s) with the parallel and analogous process in "Western" discourses can yield important insights, especially for the endeavor of category formation, which is crucial in Religious Studies.

1. Introduction

In the decade since it was first published in German, Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz's "Lamas and Shamans" (2024) has lost nothing of its relevance. Rather, reading this essay afresh and realizing how many details and important insights it contains, I feel that it is more like a good wine that only got better with age. A thorough reading also reveals its intricate composition, in which arguments about specifics are carefully woven into the broader thesis and vice versa. All parts are important here, since they constitute aspects of an approach that requires both depth and breadth. In the following remarks I wish to highlight, and reflect on, some points that I find particularly noteworthy.

First, it is important to recall the essay's original context. It was published in a volume that had emerged out of a conference entitled "Is Religion a European Invention?" and organized by the Workgroup on Asian Religious History (AKAR) of the German Association for the Study of Religions. In that volume, case studies from South, Central, North, and East Asia complicate and rebut the common notion that the concept of religion as a distinct segment of culture had originated exclusively in Europe and was then imposed upon the rest of the world through colonization or general Western cultural imperialism. For most of the case studies, the starting point is the discussion of terms in premodern sources that serve as semantic or functional equivalents of the Western category "religion." They demonstrate that premodern Asian thinkers were perfectly capable of theorizing and classifying religion(s) without Western guidance. But while the respective terms' semantic ranges and (linguistic and political) functions overlap

considerably with modern Western uses of the term "religion," the studies also argue that they are not simply identical and that the differences can only enrich our conceptualization of religion (Schalk et al. 2013).

Viewed in the context of that volume, "Lamas and Shamans," or especially its first part, functions as one case study among several. Pointing this out is important because it very much reflects the spirit of the essay's thesis. Yes, it is about Tibet and Mongolia, lamas and shamans, but they primarily serve as a historical example which corroborates a much bigger argument that is consequential for religious studies more generally. For this reason, the lack of expertise or interest in Tibetan or Mongolian religions is no excuse for not reading this essay. Yet, while its general conclusions go far beyond this specific case, its grounding in historical evidence is indispensable.

2. Mongolian classifications of "religion(s)"

Let me make a few remarks about the historical study before I address its relation to the broader argument. The study discusses the rapid spread of (Tibetan) Buddhism among the Mongols from the late 16th century onwards. The multi-pronged missionizing effort included new laws issued by the Mongol rulers that favored Buddhism; the burning of shamanic ritual objects; material incentives ("bribes") for memorizing and performing Buddhist mantras; the Buddhist rebranding and incorporation of indigenous deities, spirits, and worship practices; and more. The focus of the analysis lies on the terminology with which Buddhist lamas imagined and framed indigenous religious experts, the shamans. Since the shamans transmitted their knowledge orally, the essay explains, the only available textual sources for studying the early process are Buddhist ones, leaving us with a one-sided perspective.

While it may seem self-evident to scholars of premodern Asian cultures, it should be noted that this kind of study requires a firm command of the respective languages, here: Mongolian and Tibetan as well as Russian, since Russian scholars have done important work in this field. Even a cursory look into the essay's footnotes reveals that most of the original sources are only available in manuscript form and have not been translated into a Western language. Nina Kollmar-Paulenz is one of very few academics with the expertise to do this painstaking work, which makes this essay all the more valuable.

The Tibetan monks who brought Buddhism to the Mongols in the 16th century quickly figured out who their Mongolian competitors were. They did not need a European Orientalist time traveler from the future to classify Buddhism and Shamanism as two "religions" for them. Nor would they have cared for a modern critic explaining to them that "religions"—and the boundaries between them—were merely Western inventions. Rather, they drew boundaries and classified "us" and "them" with categories long established in their own Tibetan Buddhist intellectual tradition. The terms *nom* (Tibetan *chos*; Sanskrit *dharma*, "[Buddhist] doctrine, truth, law") and *šasin* (Tib. *bstan pa*; Skt. *śāsana*, "[Buddhist] teaching, tradition") were used, first, to demarcate the religious from the secular realm. Second, they also denoted the right Buddhist view in contrast to the wrong views of others, here: the shamans. And the monks applied yet another familiar term that had

been used in internal Tibetan debates for labeling a doctrinal adversary, *buruɣu üjel* (Tib. *lta log*, "wrong/heretical view"), to juxtapose the shamanic with their own *burqan-u šasin*, "teaching of the Buddha" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 12–18).

While the Buddhist texts contain little information about what exactly the "wrong views" were, they clearly identify those who held them: the male and female shamans (*böge*). The texts discuss their practice as healers, exorcists, and spirit (*ongɣod*) mediums more extensively, likely because the Buddhist monks identified them as direct competitors. Shamans fulfilled a societal function similar to theirs, tapped into the same patronage resources, and had a similar habitus. These and other parallels allowed them to be identified as a "species" of the same "genus"—a genus we may call "religious experts." The classifications demonstrate that Buddhist monks identified a distinct *religious* segment of society—one in which both monks and shamans operated—long before European scholars would introduce the term "religion" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 18–23).

During the 17th and 18th centuries the terms *nom*, *šasin*, and *üjel* underwent gradual changes to include more aspects of religious practice. Shamanism was eventually reified as *surtaɣun*, "teaching," and as *böge mörgöl*, "shamanic worship," a term that highlights (public) ritual performances. Now the shamans (*böge*), which had formerly been embedded in individual local contexts in a variety of ways, were imagined as forming a distinct, unified community and treated as such, also by the state through legal regulations.

Gradually, during the 18th and 19th centuries, the term *šasin* lost its exclusive Buddhist connotation and fully developed into a comparative category which fulfilled a function almost analogous to that of "religion" in contemporary Western usage. Aside from the "yellow *šasin*" (i.e., the Buddhist religion, referring to the yellow hats of the dGe lugs pa school of Tibetan Buddhism which is dominant in Mongolia), there was a "black *šasin*" (a derogatory designation of Shamanism), a *Lalu-yin šasin* (Islam), and a *Keristos-un šasin* (Christianity). As the final step of the reification process, the shamans appropriated the originally pejorative term "black *šasin*" as a self-designation and have identified as such since (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 23–25).

This short and insufficient summary of Nina Kollmar-Paulenz's rich historical study has left many details out, but I hope it captured the main points. The study is crucial for the essay's broader argument; once exposed to this history, you cannot unsee it. When we ask how contemporary Mongolian scholars in the humanities and social sciences conceptualize "religion" and we encounter the term *šasin*, one can no longer claim that the latter merely translates the modern Western term *religion* into Mongolian. Rather, just like *religion* in Western intellectual history, *šasin* operated as a category long before Mongolians became aware of the 19th-century Western discourse. This ever-evolving category demarcated a religious vs. a secular realm of society; distinguished true/Buddhist from false/shaman ideas and practices; and classified systems of belief and practice more generically. An in-depth comparison of this process with the evolution of the term *religio/religion* in Europe during roughly the same centuries, including the analysis of semantic networks in which they evolved, should reveal intriguing similarities.

The point here is that these developments took place largely independently. Surely, the exchange between Western and Mongolian scholars in more recent times did have an impact, as the example of the term Shamanism illustrates: While accounts from the 19ᵗʰ century depicted shamans as experts for very specific ritual performances, today the Mongolian semantic of "Shamanism" (*böge mörgöl / böge-yin šasin*) has merged with a Western usage of the term to encompass all folk religious practices. Yet, it is important to note that Mongolian scholarship also expresses concepts from European religions, such as "God" in Christianity, in a terminology that is rooted in the Buddhist tradition, which causes some semantic shifts. Again, this is not unlike Western scholarship trying to capture non-Western religions with categories that were rooted in European antiquity and Christianity (such as calling the Japanese *kami* "gods").

3. Comparison and the *Global History of Religion*

This takes us from the historical study to the essay's broader argument. The study demonstrates that in a centuries-long process, Buddhist thinkers created a classification system for religion(s) that is parallel and analogous to the system that developed in Western discourse. This, by itself, proves that the Western idea of religion is not a unique concept foreign to other cultures. Western intellectual thought can no longer be celebrated as an extraordinary accomplishment that supersedes all other cultures. Nor did the West, with its colonial power, simply impose its categories upon "innocent" cultures who had allegedly never classified that way. While it takes only one counterexample to disprove uniqueness, Nina Kollmar-Paulenz's argument assumes— correctly, as other chapters in the volume demonstrate—that this Mongolian case is only one of several knowledge and classification systems that developed largely independently in Asia but that seem structurally and functionally analogous to the Western discourse.

These apparent analogies call for a deeper comparison, for which Nina Kollmar-Paulenz proposes the framework of a *Global History of Religion*. As a scholarly method, comparison comprises the investigation of both similarities and differences. Once two (or more) items have been determined as potentially productive comparands, they are studied individually and juxtaposed in view of a certain common aspect (*tertium comparationis*). In this case, the comparands are discourses, namely Mongolian (and/or other) and Western discourses about religion. Discourse comparison assumes that none of the comparands has an essential core and that everything can be contested within the discourses (Freiberger 2019, esp. Ch. 5). In the present case, it also includes the analysis of diachronic developments and then, in more recent times, of mutual exchange and impact. In the Mongolian sources, we saw a rich terminology develop and change over time with *šasin* being only one among several terms in this semantic field. Western discourse too has a variety of terms aside from *religio/religion*, e.g., *spirituality, philosophy, faith, worship, cult, sect, church,* and more. The method of discourse comparison identifies topics in the discourses, analyses the arguments related to those topics, explores the intentions and motivations of the actors, assesses the impact of the arguments, and identifies structural, semantic, and functional similarities and differences.

51

Such a comparative analysis of intellectual discourses about religion will, as Nina Kollmar-Paulenz argues, globalize theoretical perspectives on religion. A *Global History of Religion* allows for a multi-centric view that incorporates various analytical perspectives, Western and non-Western. (I'm using the term "Western" instead of Nina Kollmar-Paulenz's "European" here, only because I feel that American scholarship should be part of the conversation, for better or worse.) With a comparative vocabulary that develops out of such comparisons, cultural accomplishments in non-Western contexts—such as sophisticated book production—can be acknowledged more appropriately, as can the creativity and achievements of individual thinkers. Perhaps most importantly, this approach reveals that non-Western discourses are no less dynamic than Western ones, that they develop over time and have a documented history. To give one other example: In her book, *The Past Before Us*, which appeared in the same year as "Lamas and Shamans," historian Romila Thapar demonstrates that already in early India the *idea* of history existed, a "concern with a historical past, even if this past is constructed in ways different from what we conventionally regard as historical" (Thapar 2013: 701). And again, the concepts of history develop over time. Already in her early Indian texts Thapar identifies three phases which she calls historical consciousness, historical traditions, and historical writing (Thapar 2013: 684–685). All this debunks the older Western idea that India, unlike Europe, lacked a sense of history.

But as "Lamas and Shamans" shows, such comparisons will not only reveal cultural accomplishments in non-Western contexts but also expose some of their less flattering aspects. Just as Western colonialism had devastating effects on colonized people, so did non-Western forms of domination within Asia. With strong support from the Mongolian rulers who outlawed shamanic practices and perhaps even burned shamans to death, Buddhist monks had shamanic representations of the spirits (*ongyod*), made of felt and wood, as well as the shamans' ritual attire systematically collected and burned, and they exorcised their yurts by burning dog feces in them. Mongolian people were strongly incentivized with gifts to adopt Buddhism, abandon the shamans, and instead turn to Buddhist monks for their ritual needs. Through their power alliance, rulers and monks oppressed shamanic practice and the practitioners, both shamans and lay people. And as we saw, the Buddhist monks, as the new literate elite, framed shamanic beliefs and practices in derogatory ways by imposing their own concepts and terms upon them ("wrong/heretical view," "black *šasin*") and by portraying shamans as illiterate and uncivilized. This reminds us of Christian missionary strategies in America, Africa, and elsewhere, a fact that opens ample opportunities for more comparisons.

Interestingly, despite all those oppressive efforts the Buddhist monks and the ruling elite were unable to eradicate shamanism and fully Buddhicize the Mongolian lands. Even if the term has seen expansions and modifications, it seems telling that a contemporary survey which asks Buryat Mongols to state their religious affiliation lists Shamanism first, followed by Buddhism, Russian Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. Comparative studies could explore whether this may tell us something about the limits of missionary and colonial efforts and the persistence of indigenous culture.

4. The positionality of global historians of religion

While the project of a *Global History of Religion* questions the superiority of Western over non-Western discourses, its comparative insights also challenge the binary of Western vs. non-Western. Aside from some factual geographical and historical differences, such polarizing terms are imprecise, politically charged, and, considering the similarities, rather misleading. But critics might ask: What is the positionality and perspective of those who conduct the above-mentioned comparisons and who write the *Global History of Religion*? Since Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, myself, and others who champion this programmatic approach are Western academics, is it possibly just an extension of the Western discourse on religion and thus only the latest attempt to organize the world in Western terms?

In response to these questions, I wish to make two points, both of which are related to the problematic concept of "the West." First, in the globalized 21st century it seems difficult to isolate a "Western" discourse. Recent generations have grown up with an increasingly global awareness and, reversely, are less familiar with European intellectual history, Christian concepts, or Greek and Latin terms. Roughly one third of my students in Austin, both undergraduates and graduates, are of Asian descent, most of them second- or third-generation Americans. When such a person is born in the United States into, say, a pious Hindu family, graduates from a secular Ph.D. program in Texas, and then publishes an academic book on Hindu worship with an American university press, does that person count as a "Westerner"? What about the generations of students who have been educated at Asian universities in the past seventy years, partly by professors that were trained at European and American universities? Nor is the "Western discourse" static. Are we sure that the study of Asian cultures and religions in the past 150 years has not impacted the approaches of Western scholarship at all? For example, I see a conspicuous parallel in the Buddhist concepts of impermanence and non-self and the anti-essentialist approach of contemporary religious studies, to which I too subscribe. I wonder if that is mere coincidence.

Second, the phrase "Western discourse on religion" glosses over the diversity and substantial disagreements within that discourse. Especially the gradual emancipation of religious studies from theological approaches seems notable. At German-speaking universities theology is still the dominant academic discourse on religion, with theologians outnumbering religious studies scholars by far. But the *Global History of Religion*, at least in my mind, is a religious studies project, which means that it has no religious agenda, that it studies religion critically—neither affirming or dismissing particular religious expressions or religion in general—and that it explores the cultural expressions that we subsume under the abstract category "religion" as comprehensively as possible. For the latter, it is important to reflect critically on the historical roots of our discipline and the semantic limits of our categories, including "religion." And it is important to study the intellectual discourses in other parts of the world to explore other semantic ranges and functions of the respective categories.

Of course, we should not expect that non-Western discourses on religion are any less agenda-driven or "theological" than Western ones. While the Buddhist monks in Mongolia did develop a complex comparative terminology in the field of religion, the study of which is highly productive and illuminating, I doubt that many of them would have been interested in adopting a religious studies approach. This is not to suggest that this approach has never been developed outside of the West—Michael Pye's study of Tominaga Nakamoto's work provides powerful counterevidence (Pye 1990)—, but in the extant sources theological and apologetic agendas seem much more common and dominant. While the classification systems in non-Western cultures developed at the same time and can be viewed as equivalent to those in the West, religious and missionary interests behind the discourses were often similar too. The religious studies approach grew out of those discourses, but its goal is notably different.

In my view, writing a *Global History of Religion* must be both a global endeavor and a religious studies project. Today scholars of religion with a diversity of cultural and linguistic backgrounds enrich the religious studies discourse, whether or not they specialize in studying their own cultures. Just as Western scholars of religion can produce excellent scholarship on non-Western cultures, as "Lamas and Shamans" impressively demonstrates, scholars in Mongolia (or Korea, or Malaysia, or Sri Lanka…) could study European discourses and compare them with those in their cultures and languages. Or religious studies scholars in Japan could compare Mongolian and Indonesian classifications of religion. Whatever the respective specialization, all this will enrich the global academic discourse of religious studies. Certainly, power imbalances remain—from language advantages of English speakers to funding opportunities—and need to be addressed. Other conditions too, such as different academic cultures or political and institutional restraints, may keep the number of scholars who are able and willing to engage in this project low. But I would argue that the spirit of a religious studies perspective is not tied to any specific culture and that it allows for a productive global collaboration of like-minded scholars. Following Nina Kollmar-Paulenz's path-breaking scholarship, together we can expand and enrich our understanding of what religion *can* be.

Bibliography

Freiberger, Oliver. 2019. *Considering Comparison: A Method for Religious Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2024. "Lamas and Shamans: Mongolian Orders of Knowledge from the Early 17th to the 21st Century. A Contribution to the Debate on Non-European Concepts of Religion." *AЯGOS* 3 (2) Special Issue *Towards a Global History of Religion*, 6–47.

Pye, Michael, transl. 1990. *Tominaga Nakamoto, Emerging from Meditation.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Schalk, Peter / Max Deeg / Oliver Freiberger / Christoph Kleine / Astrid van Nahl, eds. 2013. *Religion in Asien? Studien zur Anwendbarkeit des Religionsbegriffs*. Uppsala: Uppsala University Press.

Thapar, Romila. 2013. *The Past Before Us: Historical Traditions of Early North India*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

About the author

Oliver Freiberger is Professor of Asian Studies and Religious Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, USA. His research interests are Indian Buddhism, asceticism, religious boundary-making, and the comparative method in the study of religion. He has immensely benefited from many productive discussions (and social hangouts) with Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz.

Mail: of@austin.utexas.edu

From the History of Religions in Asia to a Global History of Religion

Christoph Kleine

Published on 29/01/2024

Abstract

This article examines the relationship between two contemporary perspectives on conceptualizing a global history of religion. The first is anchored in an entangled conceptual history, reconstructing the genealogy of "religion" back to the colonial nineteenth century. The second favours a multicentred perspective in studying knowledge systems and general concepts independent of the West and predating global modernity. By analysing Japanese religious history, the article illustrates both the potential for and the necessity of integrating these two approaches.

> " What is distinctive about modern anthropology is the comparison of embedded concepts (representations) between societies differently located in time or space. The important thing in this comparative analysis is not their origin (Western or non-Western), but the forms of life that articulate them, the powers they release or disable. Secularism—like religion—is such a concept. (Asad 2003: 17)

The article to be discussed in this special issue, titled "Lamas and Shamans—Mongolian Knowledge Orders from the Early 17th to the 21st Century: A Contribution to the Debate on Non-European Concepts of Religion," originally appeared in 2013 in German as a contribution to a conference proceeding (Schalk et al. 2013) that consolidates the findings of the sixth conference held by the *Arbeitskreis Asiatische Religionsgeschichte* (AKAR) within the *Deutsche Vereinigung für Religionswissenschaft* (DVRW). The original agenda of AKAR was to have researchers from different fields of the history of religions in Asia present and discuss cross-cutting topics in the study of religion. The founding of the working group was not least motivated by our concern that the history of religions in Asia was becoming increasingly marginalised within the German-speaking study of religion. Very soon after Max Deeg, Oliver Freiberger, and myself had founded AKAR in 1998, Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz (hereafter: Nina) became an invaluable member of our working group. The sixth conference, held in Leipzig in 2010, specifically engaged with the question, "Is Religion a European Invention?"

Nina deserves credit for being the first in our group to explicitly address and define the contribution of non-European religious histories to a global history of religion. The project of a

global history of religion has since progressed significantly. It is arguably one of the most exciting and challenging fields of historical research within the study of religion. Nina undoubtedly made pioneering efforts in this direction.[1]

Roughly simplified, two currents in the global history of religion have emerged in recent years. I would like to refer to one of them as the "Heidelberg School," represented, among others, by Michael Bergunder, Julian Strube, and Giovanni Maltese. This approach primarily focuses on an entangled discursive and conceptual history. A central argument of this strand of a global religious history is that a global discourse on religion, along with the underlying globalised concept of "religion," is the result of entangled historical processes that gained momentum in the second half of the nineteenth century. In this way, the protagonists of the "Heidelberg School" make a significant contribution to overcoming a diffusionist Eurocentric perspective, which—as Bergunder very aptly puts it—is based on a "regionalisiertes Ursprungsdenken," (Bergunder 2020: 48) meaning that it presupposes a Western origin of the concept religion.

Nina adopts a slightly distinct approach by challenging the prevailing focus on the nineteenth century and a restricted perspective on history that exclusively centres on the interactions between "the West and the rest." This critique has been reiterated by Nina on numerous occasions. As a scholar of Buddhism, she consistently highlights the significance of intra-Asian entanglements, which have yielded profound consequences in shaping comparative concepts transcending regional borders. The emphasis placed on the discourse surrounding religion in global modernity usually neglects entanglements in which Europeans were not involved. It also tends to ignore "the historical existence of non-European knowledge systems that have generated their own analytical conceptualisations." Non-European cultures are only acknowledged when, and to the extent that, they engage in interactions with "the West." Consequently, Europe continues to serve as the central point of reference, resulting in a (smoothened) Eurocentric perspective despite the purported global scope of this approach to religious history.

The disregard for pre-colonial non-Western knowledge systems and conceptual histories, a concern rightly expressed by Nina, also leads to hasty conclusions, such as contending the absence of semantic equivalents of the concept of religion or "abstract concepts of order for their religious traditions" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 9). As a rule, however, those who make this claim, have neither taken the effort nor possessed the expertise to engage with the history of non-European classification systems in order to empirically support this assertion.

---

[1] In contrast to Nina, Bergunder insists that the German term "globale Religionsgeschichte" should not be translated "as 'global history of religions' as the latter reminds too much of Eliade's "Chicago School", the essentialist universalism of which this new approach strictly opposes." (Bergunder 2021: 442) I would argue, that "global religious history" is not quite unproblematic either. In this contribution, I use "global history of religion" when I refer to Nina's approach and "global religious history" when referring to the "Heidelberg school."

In contrast, Nina delves deeply into the history of concepts and convincingly demonstrates "how a comparative terminology emerged from intellectual reflections of encountering and interacting actors" in Mongolia during the period spanning the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. She concludes that this terminology exemplifies the development of an autonomous domain of "religion" within historical Mongolian societies.

Thus, her approach is not primarily (though potentially) oriented towards historical entanglements between Western and non-Western cultures. She rather intends "to globalize theoretical perspectives on 'religion', relinquish Europe's primacy in favor of a multi-centric viewpoint, and equitably incorporate European and non-European analytical perspectives within the discourse field of 'religion'" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 32). Accordingly, the concept of a global history of religion, in her view, "relies on the premise that the development of secondary orders of knowledge is not exclusive to Europe. Rather, various regions worldwide have developed distinct analytical instruments and knowledge classification systems" (2024: 32).

The question that emerges is whether the two approaches outlined here in a somewhat simplified manner—the modern-centric entangled history approach on one hand, and the polycentric multi-perspective approach on the other—are mutually exclusive or mutually reinforcing, incompatible or complementary. Aside from a creeping rapprochement of these approaches in recent years, I aim to present an argument in favour of not only considering both approaches compatible, but also asserting that their combination is essential for the advancement of a comprehensive global history of religion.

Essentially, the fusion of analyses concerning entangled histories, on the one hand, and the reconstruction of local knowledge systems and terminologies on the other is already suggested and partially explored in Nina's article. She names the following as "research topics of a global history of religion":

- local cultural conceptualisations of the field of "religion,"
- historical interactions among different world regions,
- long-term developments from global perspectives,
- micro-studies focusing on regional developments,
- inter-regional and transcultural historical comparisons, and finally,
- possible connections, interdependencies and transfer processes between various knowledge cultures, such as "religion," "science," "literature," and others, in both non-European and European societies.

In my opinion, Nina has succinctly summarised the tasks of a global history of religion. However, one question remains unanswered: to what extent is knowledge of non-European systems of knowledge, conceptual and entangled histories important for understanding the emergence of a global religious discourse in modernity? In other words, why should colleagues, who argue that a global history of religion can only begin in the second half of the nineteenth century onwards—

because only by then did "religion" become a globalised comparative concept—engage with pre-modern or pre-colonial non-European systems of knowledge and conceptual histories?

The answer seems evident. If we agree that the formation of a global discourse around a globalised concept of religion is the product of intense transcultural exchange, it is crucial to understand what each participant contributed to this discourse. What historical experiences, cultural imprints, epistemic structures, and conceptual resources underpin the local contributions to the global discourse? This question must be addressed if we genuinely aim to emancipate ourselves from maintaining "that 'religion' has its historical 'origin' in the 'West/Europe,' and that this would make 'religion' a 'European/Western' concept" (Bergunder 2021: 447).

No doubt, ten years after Nina presented her program for a global history of religion in Leipzig, significant progress has been made in this field. This progress can arguably be attributed, at least in part, to Nina's interventions. The contribution of non-Western actors to the global discourse on religion is now widely recognised. The development of the field is well documented in the special issue titled "Global Religious History" of *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*. Edited by Giovanni Maltese and Julian Strube in 2021, the issue exemplifies the latest developments of the "Heidelberg School." Maltese and Strube make a compelling argument in their introduction:

> " Instead of assuming that a "Western understanding of religion" has been exported into the rest of the world, and "non-Westerners" merely reacted to that export, meanings of religion are understood as something fundamentally unstable. Actors outside of "the West" actively and decisively participated on debates that attempted to "fixate" the meaning of religion. (Maltese/Strube 2021: 230)

However, the contributions of actors outside of "the West" are still mainly conceived of as mere reactions to the epistemic challenges posed by the West—which they undoubtedly were. It remains somewhat unclear, however, in what indigenous conceptual resources and epistemic structures non-Western contributions to the fixation of the meaning of religion were grounded. Hence, Nina's call for the reconstruction of "non-European knowledge systems" and the "analytical conceptualisations" engendered by them remains unanswered.

Therefore, although there exists a slight difference between Nina's approach to a global history of religion and the Heidelberg approach to a religious global history in terms of empirical focus, they are in no way antithetical but rather complementary. The "Heidelberg School" directs its attention towards a global entangled discursive and conceptual history that can be traced back to the latter half of the nineteenth century, whereas Nina emphasises the importance of conceptual histories and the development of knowledge systems and general concepts independent of the West and predating global modernity. To be sure, Bergunder does not deny the significance of engaging with "historical phenomena that traditionally belong to the scope of religious studies." He insists, however, that "the starting point is always a present-day global understanding" (Bergunder 2021: 458) of these phenomena.

As far as I understand it, this represents the divide between a critical genealogy favoured by Bergunder, and Nina's polycentric-multiperspective approach to the history of religion. In this short article, I aim to show that this divide can be easily bridged.

First and foremost, I wholeheartedly concur with Bergunder's assertion that "History emerges as a function of the present" and, consequently, the "entry point for any research can only be the contemporary global usage of general terms, never any supposed 'origin' or 'forerunners' in the past" (Bergunder 2021: 456). I have no doubt that Nina, as a historian, would also endorse these statements. In historical research, it is widely accepted that historical investigations take place within the epistemological framework of the present, using materials available in the present and addressing issues relevant to the present. Nonetheless, divergences may become evident when it comes to the practical consequences of acknowledging the situatedness of historical research in the present.

While Nina seems fully aware that her research takes its starting point from the "contemporary global usage of general terms," she does not engage in genealogical critique in the way Bergunder advocates. One could accuse Nina (and many others) of attempting a "direct leap into the past," which, according to Bergunder, "is not possible" (Bergunder 2021: 449).

I would raise the objection, and I find myself in alignment with Nina's perspective, that genealogical critique holds significant importance, and indeed, it is an indispensable approach in the global history of religion. However, it is not the sole valid approach. The investigation into the origins of the "contemporary global usage of general terms" is not always the primary focus, even though it may consistently reverberate in the background. Moreover, it would not be practically feasible to consistently meet the stringent requirements of a genealogical critique while simultaneously generating comprehensive insights into pre-modern orders of knowledge, classification systems, and the use of general terms or comparative concepts in diverse cultures.

Furthermore, one crucial question that holds immense significance to me (and I believe to Nina as well) still remains unanswered: How can I, in a genealogical manner, write a history of general terms that emerge as potential semantic equivalents of religion in other linguistic systems? If the starting point of my research is the globalised general term "religion"—and I align with Bergunder's stance that it is an "empty signifier," a mere "name" the meaning of which becomes fixated only through constant repetition—, then how can I undertake a genealogy of constant repetition, encompassing the "re-signification" of non-European and pre-modern "names" and "empty signifiers," all while remaining within the realm of a religious global history that commences only in the latter half of the nineteenth century? "Genealogical critique," says Bergunder, "asks about the immediate pre-history of the present and then about the immediate pre-history of this pre-history. The aim is to explore historically how far today's discourse can be continuously traced back into the past" (2021: 456). However, if the continuous tracing ends at the point in history where the designation "religion" is no longer (i.e., not yet) employed, then the genealogical endeavour would never extend into the domain of pre-modern non-European

religious history. As a result, the exact outcome that Nina rightfully criticises would manifest itself—a significant disregard for "the historical existence of non-European knowledge systems that have generated their own analytical conceptualisations" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 7) within the purview of a global history of religion.

I am, however, firmly convinced that the postulates of genealogical critique can indeed be applied within the framework and in the service of a global history of religion without excluding "non-European knowledge systems" with their distinct "analytical conceptualisations" from our research.

In the context of the project "Multiple Secularities—Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities,"[2] in which Nina participated as a fellow, I have consistently endeavoured to demonstrate this using Japan as my historical example. Due to space limitations, I can only provide a brief indication of the steps and outcomes here. The central question of our project is genuinely genealogical: How have present global discourses concerning "secularity" (i.e., concerning the boundaries between the religious and the secular) unfolded historically? Using Bergunder's terminology, this endeavour involves tracing "the chain of repetition, on which a general term is based, back into the past" (Bergunder 2021: 456). For now, let us concentrate on the term "religion," as "secularity" is inconceivable without it.

First and foremost, we must pose the question of whether discourses surrounding the Japanese term *shūkyō* 宗教 are part of a global discourse on religion at all. I am inclined to believe that we are indeed dealing with entangled discourses here, which nevertheless each possess their own distinct characteristics. However, for the time being, I would like to set aside this issue. After all, the term *shūkyō* serves as the standard translation for "religion," and every academic and non-academic work translated from a European language into Japanese employs "*shūkyō*" to represent "religion." One could now inquire "about the immediate pre-history" of the usage of the term in the "present and then about the immediate pre-history of this pre-history," in order "to explore historically how far today's discourse can be continuously traced back into the past" (Bergunder 2021: 456).

In my project and within this paper, my primary concern revolves around the inquiry of how to proceed at the historical juncture where the term "*shūkyō*" (in its present "sedimented" and "materialised" meaning) is no longer employed (i.e., not yet in conventional chronology). To the best of my knowledge, this point occurs in 1866, when the term "*shūkyō*" was initially used for translating the European term "religion" (Krämer 2015: 44).

However, simultaneously and in analogous contexts of application, terms like *shūmon* 宗門, *shūshi* 宗旨, and *shūhō* 宗法 were also extensively used. With the conclusion of the so-called "unequal treaties" between Japan and leading Western nations starting from 1858, conceptual entanglements emerged and discursive knots were tied. When concepts from two languages—

---

here "religion" on one side, and *shūmon*, *shūshi*, *shūhō*, and *shūkyō* on the other—become actively related to each other as a result of cultural encounters, such as in the practice of translation, our genealogical backward movement has led us to a point where two conceptual histories meet and start to interact. In line with my specific research focus, I typically embark on the path that leads back to Japanese pre-modernity. Notably, the terms *shūshi* and *shūmon* are ubiquitous in the nineteenth, eighteenth, and seventeenth centuries, primarily serving as signifiers for Buddhism and Christianity. Then, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we encounter yet another, albeit more loosely tied discursive knot. Through the Jesuit mission and the encounter between Japanese and Europeans, "religion" and "*shūshi*" or "*shūmon*" were employed as equivalents. The discourse on competing systems of orientation and socio-cultural formations employing these and other terms can be genealogically traced back even further to the late eighth century (Kleine 2019; 2023).

This should suffice as an example to demonstrate that, starting from the interest in a global history of religion, it is possible to write pre-modern and non-Western histories of concepts and discourses beyond the repeated use of the "empty signifier" "religion" in modern times. I contend that such an approach is not only possible but imperative. Otherwise, we fail to understand the emergence of a global discourse on religion, inclusive of the contributions made by non-Western participants. If we genuinely acknowledge the role played by, for instance, the Japanese in the globalisation of the concept of religion and the associated discourse, it is incumbent upon us to consider the epistemic conditions under which they engaged in the discourse and to ask to what indigenous conceptual resources they resorted. Consequently, the scope of genealogical critique must not terminate at the onset of the global discourse on religion; rather, it must encompass its local prehistories, as well as their antecedents and so forth. Through this undertaking, one inevitably arrives at the juncture where local cultural conceptualisations of the field of "religion," historical interactions among different world regions, micro-studies focusing on regional developments, inter-regional and transcultural historical comparisons, and finally, possible connections, interdependencies and transfer processes between various knowledge cultures come into sharper focus.

We should perhaps think of the concept of religion and the corresponding discourse as a river that has various tributaries. If we want to understand how the river was formed, we have to know the tributaries. A genealogical global history of religion would have to start from the mouth of the river and go upstream until we reach a confluence of two rivers or brooks. Depending on inclination and expertise, we will decide which of the tributaries to follow further upstream. In other words: The river does not originate where—seen from the mouth—two streams converge for the first time.

Bibliography

Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bergunder, Michael. 2020. "Umkämpfte Historisierung: Die Zwillingsgeburt von 'Religion' und 'Esoterik' in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts und das Programm einer globalen Religionsgeschichte." In *Wissen um Religion: Erkenntnis – Interesse: Epistemologie und Episteme in Religionswissenschaft und Interkultureller Theologie*, ed. by Klaus Hock. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 47–131.

Bergunder, Michael. 2021. "Global Religious History in Theory and Practice." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 33 (3/4), 441–462.

Kleine, Christoph. 2019. "Premodern Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogues and the Formation of Comparative Concepts: How Encounters Between European Missionaries and Japanese in the 16th and 17th Centuries Changed the Conceptual World. Part 1." *NotaBene* 44, 1–18 (Special Issue East-West Dialogue: Cultural and Religious Aspects, ed. by Antoaneta Nikolova).

Kleine, Christoph. 2023. "When Christianity Became a Shūshi 宗旨: Cultural Encounters and Comparisons Between Europe and Japan and the Origins of a Global History of Religion." *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 10, 1–25 https://doi.org/10.30965/23642807-bja10084.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2024. "Lamas and Shamans: Mongolian Orders of Knowledge from the Early 17th to the 21st Century. A Contribution to the Debate on Non-European Concepts of Religion." *AЯGOS* 3 (2) Special Issue *Towards a Global History of Religion*, 6–47.

Krämer, Hans Martin. 2015. *Shimaji Mokurai and the Reconception of Religion and the Secular in Modern Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Maltese, Giovanni / Julian Strube. 2021. "Global Religious History." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 33 (3/4), 229–257.

Schalk, Peter / Max Deeg / Oliver Freiberger / Christoph Kleine / Astrid van Nahl, eds. 2013. *Religion in Asien? Studien zur Anwendbarkeit des Religionsbegriffs*. Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet.

About the author

Christoph Kleine is professor of the History of Religions at Leipzig University, Germany, and co-director of the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences *Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities*. His principal research areas include the religious history of Japan and East Asian Buddhism, with a special focus on Pure Land Buddhism in Japan. Among his recent publications is the article, "When Christianity Became a Shūshi 宗旨: Cultural Encounters and Comparisons Between Europe and Japan and the Origins of a Global History of Religion." *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 10 (2023), 1–25.

Mail: c.kleine@uni-leipzig.de

From Dharma to Sound:
Decolonizing Definitions of Religious Community

Carola Lorea

29/01/2024

Abstract

This piece takes as a starting point a close reading of Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz's work and connects it to ongoing debates intersecting the fields of religious studies, the anthropology of religion, sensory studies, Global South studies and decolonial theory. It argues that attention to the layered history of local language categories that articulate religious difference constitutes a form of intellectual labour towards epistemic justice.

It is a great pleasure to engage in a virtual conversation with Prof. Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz's work. I hope that many scholars who like myself, did not have access to her scholarship in German language will read the English translation (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024) at the centre of this special issue and engage with its many generative ideas. In the lack of space to comment upon the richness of thought-provoking insights exhaustively, in this short piece I will pick a selected few and bring them into dialogue with my own research agenda.

The article that I am invited to reflect upon analyses the terminology associated with the "religion" discourse in Mongolian written sources spanning across four centuries. It examines its evolving acceptations, dynamic interpretations, and reification processes. Such painstaking work has the transformative potential of dislodging European notions of religion from their normative podium and provincialising them (Chakrabarty 2008), while bringing to the forefront an already global premodern Central Asia. Already global, in the sense that confrontations and encounters with diverse religious traditions and ritual communities, from Franciscan friars (Valtrová 2016) to Tantric Buddhist missionaries, resulted in an elaborate vocabulary. Such nuanced vocabulary, as Kollmar-Paulenz does not fail to highlight, is often the result of discursive practices of exclusion, alterity, and othering, in a pluri-religious context where terms for self-definition emerge from situations of social rivalry, between negotiation and competition. The activities of shamanesses and shamans as healers and exorcists are described in competition with those of Buddhist monks, within a semantic field dominated by Mongolian equivalents of Tibetan Buddhist terms that the Mongolian elites had embraced.

When facing new, potentially competing traditions, religious practices and concepts are assigned names (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 18–21) and these categories take a life of their own. Even when undesired appellations are assigned by outsiders and detractors, local communities—in their search for distinction and differentiation—may reclaim and self-apply these pejorative names. Thus, the derogatory *qara šasin* (black teaching) designating shamanic experts was quickly embraced as a term for self-designation (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 23–24). These dynamics at the interface of language and religious diversity, derived from granular and contextual analysis, have the potential of generating broader theories on religious encounters, providing transferable knowledge and interpretive keys well beyond the confines of a regional area-focus.

In the context of my own research, in modern South Asia and in the borderlands of the Bay of Bengal, similar dynamics have accompanied the emergence of discrete religious identities over the course of the 19th century. A veritable proliferation of religious movements, groups, and sects, each with their own newly reified names, appear in Bengali sources from the second half of the 19th century. *Bāul* for instance, an adjective that positively described the madness of the medieval saints, became a noun for a particular group of antinomian singers and esoteric practitioners (Openshaw 2002; Urban 1999; Lorea 2016). The time roughly corresponds with the maniacal endeavour by colonial ethnographers and administrators to list categories of people, endogamous groups, and tribes of India (e.g., Risley 1892). Some low-caste communities proudly adopted the derogatory names that higher caste outsiders had used to ridicule them. Such is the case of the Matua community (Lorea 2020). Outsiders with higher social status finger-pointed their music, drumming and trancing practices and called them "matua," from *matta, mātāl*: meaning maddened, intoxicated, or drunk. The leaders of this group embraced the title and glossed it as "matua": those who are drunk in divine love, soaked in the intoxicating nectar of the holy name. In the same decades, loosely institutionalised lineages that participated in the fluid realm of Caitanya Vaishnavism (Bhatia 2017) started to demarcate their boundaries through a precise nomenclature of sectarian scissions (Lorea 2018). A new bourgeois class of Western-educated Bengali reformers used time, resources, and the affordances of the print press to marginalise and condemn lineages that fell outside their new definitions of a pure and proper (*śuddha*) modern Vaishnava identity. Lower caste esoteric movements and upper caste reformers mutually shaped the definitions of each other's boundaries with naming practices that have relevance and repercussions up to the present day.

Postcolonial scholarship has emphasised the repercussions of Christian-inflected ideas of religion imported by European colonialism. Universalism, charity, a sober aesthetic regime, devoid of idolatry and superstition, and privileging abstract non-dualist philosophy, became the hallmarks of modern (neo) Hinduism. But the influence of "the West" was not the sole historical agent shaping modern ideas about Indian religions (Weiss 2019; Hatcher 2020). Intra-religious debates in (written *and* oral) Bengali sustained by groups with different social status were already at play and equally crucial in developing the lexicon that practitioners adopt up to this day for designating their sense of affiliation and belonging. This is not to undermine the fact that European epistemic

colonisation and cultural imperialism contributed to repress and reframe indigenous discourses around religion. British politics and poetics of "*divide et impera*" unquestionably produced rigid religious formations, and indeed can be factored among the decisive impulse behind modern Hindu-Muslim polarisation, communalism, and ongoing ethnic conflicts (Baruah 2020). But the notion that top-down divisions operationalised by colonial policies were embedded within an allegedly fluid, harmonious, syncretic grassroot religiosity is both factually and epistemically misguiding (Wong 2018). It obfuscates the sophisticated ways in which precolonial South Asian societies had already, for centuries and in dozens of languages, discussed and phrased religious alterity, doctrinal divergences, heterogeneity, and incompatibilities of praxis.

Dharma, panth, sampradāya, jāti, mat, to name a few: the wealth of vocabulary employed to define and distinguish "religion" in modern South Asia testifies, similarly to the Mongolian case, to nuanced internal debates where European notions are but a few among the many components contributing to the modern construction of "religion" as a domain-specific order of knowledge. Hand in hand with the emergence of Indian charitable "missions" and proselytising monastic organisations, colonial India also saw a revival of interest towards Yogic, Tantric, and esoteric traditions among urban educated elites (Strube 2022; Cantú 2023), which in turn influenced the ways modern orthodox religious establishments presented themselves both locally and globally.

The heterogeneous Baul tradition of songs, music, and esoteric ritual practice, sanitised and elevated to the status of indigenous cultural heritage by 20th-century intellectuals (Tagore 1931), can serve as an emblematic example. An "interweaving of emic and etic discourses," of Western and non-Western scholarship, and of historically dynamic discourses on orders of knowledge, as Kollmar-Paulenz (2024: 31) suggests, collectively contributed to the eclectic range of nomenclature utilised by Bengali scholars who wrote in English about the Baul tradition, variously discussed as "obscure religious cult" (Dasgupta 1962), "heretic tradition" (Dasgupta 1994) or the path of "mystic minstrels" (Chowdhury/Roy 2014).

Although Kollmar-Paulenz does not spell it out as such, her intellectual intervention is a step forward towards decolonising the study of religion (Nye 2019). To dig deep through the layered history of local language to articulate religious difference is not simply an empirical contribution. The digging is, on a larger scale, a labour towards epistemic justice. It aims to give academic representation, and thus validity and scientific legitimacy, to theories from the global South. In the process, repressed epistemologies, and ways of knowing that have been delegitimised through historical processes—European colonialism, superimposition of modern Western science as neutral, rational, and universal, cultural imperialism, and exploitative forms of neo-colonialism—can find a place in the international sphere of academic knowledge (De Sousa Santos 2014).

Such place is not merely a token slot of diversity that shows "other," alternative epistemologies to then reinforce the hegemonic position of global North modernity as the sole spring of rational and abstractable thought. As Kollmar-Paulenz demonstrates, and as Kuan-Hsing Chen (2010)

would likely second, theories of religion from Asia and in Asia not only estrange European normative concepts and orientalist presuppositions of what religion ought to be, but also engage them in a constructive dialogue for a truly global history of religion, ultimately reformulating the future of our field with a multi-centric viewpoint.[1]

In the history of modern academic practice, Asia has provided the white Western scholar with a pool of empirical data, a field for fieldwork, a mine to extract archival sources, a paradise of ancient languages and traditions for the emergence of both philological and anthropological studies on "the East." While the information and the informants are Asian, what really matters for academic prestige—the method, the theorisation, the analytical dimension—remain European. The decolonising suggestions in Kollmar-Paulenz's article indicate that our discipline needs to employ methods and theories that are close to the people and the traditions that scholars work with. Asian religions would then become not only sources of data, but generative springboards to theorise on religious language and cultural encounters globally, with transferable frameworks that emerge indeed from Asian languages and regions but can be applied in fruitful ways to other contexts of human history and society. This requires not only fine-grained "area" studies and decolonial sensibilities, but also infrastructural changes, new hiring policies, designing new syllabuses, rethinking the archive and the canon of the field, tackling the gender and race gaps in the politics of citation, and welcoming the reverse gaze of new generations of scholars from / based in / trained in Asia that are qualified to employ indigenous theories to critically study religion in the global North.

Kollmar-Paulenz offers us a concrete example to reflect upon, with her focus on the language that Mongolians developed to make sense of competing socio-religious formations. *Šasin mörgöl* and *böge mörgöl* refer to two different communities of practitioners. In Mongolian, *mörgöl* denotes "bowing" in a literal sense, placing emphasis on the physical act of reverence ("bowing before the [Buddhist] Dharma" and "bowing before the shaman"). These phrases underscore the visible and performative aspects "inherent to the Mongolian understanding of religion" (2024: 21). Conversion to the teachings of the Buddhist dharma involved loud recitations of mantras and *dhāraṇī*s, as well as the implementation of various ritual practices. Kollmar-Paulenz notes that embracing the dharma signified, first and foremost, physical performance—embodied acts, sensory engagements—that needed to be "performed publicly, before an audience." Such aspects, she adds, do not take precedence in "our everyday understanding of religion" (2024: 22). The author implicitly points to a normative understanding of religion that is entrenched in Protestant presuppositions (Schopen 1991; Cheah 2011).

---

[1]   Chen's *Asia-as-Method* argues that there is an urgent need to rewrite and remap history to shift the frame of reference from Europe and North America to a comparative framework with multiple local and regional referents. The book emphasizes the importance of inter-referencing and inter-Asian cultural studies, encouraging societies in Asia to become each other's point of reference, so that subjectivities impacted by the epistemic violence of colonialism and imperialism could be rebuilt. See Chen (2010).

But the adoption of Buddhism into Mongolian societies has little to do with private belief, and more with embodied performance. It is not about the silent, inner, personal relationship with God, but rather a sonorous chanting of powerful syllables, a highly public, audible, sensory participation. Echoing the intervention of Birgit Meyer (2009) and other scholars of religion, aesthetics and media who have helped reframe the field (e.g. Grieser/Johnston 2017), religious communities can be then redefined by moving away from mentalistic preoccupations with theological, doctrinal or scriptural dimensions, and focusing instead on "sensational forms" (Meyer 2009), or shared aesthetic, embodied and sensory ways of mediating the divine that are collectively performed and co-create the identity and sense of belonging of those who participate.

This shift in the understanding of religion, from text-bound groups of believers to epistemic communities of sensory practices, has changed the way I conceptualise religious communities in my own scholarship. Subaltern, so-called untouchable, Bengali-speaking performers of the Matua community have taught me to pay attention to sonic ways of being in the world. In the first half of the 19th century, they differentiated themselves from the older and more prestigious Bengali Vaishnava fold to pursue upward social mobility, and to maintain the salvific performance of their collective music-making, singing, and dancing ritual called *mātām-kīrtan*. Like the loud mantras and dhāraṇīs of the Buddhicised Mongols discussed by Kollmar-Paulenz, Matua practice is centered around the repetition of efficacious sounds: sacred drums (*ḍaṅkā*), the syllables of sacred songs (*kīrtan*), and trance-inducing mantras (*haribol*). Thinking with such *communities of sound* prompts us to redefine religious communities and the ways we study them because they remove the latent assumption that doctrines and scriptures constitute "real" religion. By provincialising the importance accorded to institutions, textual specialists and elite priestly classes, communities of sounds underscore the agentive roles of subaltern and often silenced community makers: listeners, dancers, ululating women, stateless musicians, peripatetic story-tellers and their participating publics. More broadly, they inspire us to think of community as a way of listening; religious identity, in this sense, is largely a result of what we hear, the stories we are told, the sounds we are entrained and socialised to play, the ingrained ways in which we move our bodies and attune our emotions, according to the soundscapes and kinetoscapes that we inhabit.

The relevance of the ideas contained in Kollmar-Paulenz's scholarship, who is indebted to the cultural owners of the traditions that she studied and worked with in several Asian countries, should provide fruitful food for thought not only for academics, but also for revising the priorities of public institutions. The support structure that makes it possible for students to seek training in Asian languages and cultures is perennially on the edge of collapse in countless universities. In our increasingly neoliberal models of education, subjects without immediate economic impact and applicability become tinged with the prejudice of being little-known, remote, impractical, and attract dwindling numbers of students. The trend among managerial boards of educational

institutions is to cut down on resources dedicated to focused regional, linguistic, and cultural-historical studies in precise geo-political areas.

Against this current, Kollmar-Paulenz's article brings to the forefront the renewed need to train future generations of scholars in the imperfect and yet crucial field of "Area Studies." Only the in-depth knowledge of regional languages, classical and vernacular literatures, contextual social and cultural dynamics, and their entangled histories with their "Others" would make such a contribution possible.[2] As Kollmar-Paulenz's work demonstrates, scholarship on religion emplaced in a particular linguistic and regional history, combined with cultural immersion and deep historical understanding, can contribute to transdisciplinary fields and to conceptual issues much broader than the niche of one's own "area" of specialisation.

Bibliography

Baruah, Sanjib. 2020. *In the Name of the Nation: India and Its Northeast*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bhatia, Varuni. 2017. *Unforgetting Chaitanya: Vaishnavism and Cultures of Devotion in Colonial Bengal*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Cantú, Keith. 2023. *Like a Tree Universally Spread: Sri Sabhapati Swami and Śivarājayoga*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2008. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Cheah, Joseph. 2011. *Race and Religion in American Buddhism: White Supremacy and Immigrant Adaptation*. *AAR ACADEMY SER*, Oxford Academic (online), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199756285.003.0002

Chen, Kuan-Hsing. 2010. *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Chowdhury, Sanchita / Anjali Gera Roy. 2014. "Bâuls, Mystic Minstrels of Bengal." *Muse India* 58.

De Sousa Santos, Boaventura. 2014. *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*. Boulder: Paradigm.

Dasgupta, Atis. 1994. "The Bauls and Their Heretic Tradition." *Social Scientist* 22 (5/6), 70–83.

Dasgupta, Sashibhushan. 1962. *Obscure Religious Cults as a Background of Bengali Literature*. Kolkata: Firma KLM.

---

[2] Among other advocates of the area studies approach and their contribution, see Charles Macdonald (2020) and George Quinn (2019).

Grieser, Alexandra K. / Jay Johnston. 2017. *Aesthetics of Religion: A Connective Concept*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Hatcher, Brian A. 2020. *Hinduism Before Reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2024. "Lamas and Shamans: Mongolian Orders of Knowledge from the Early 17th to the 21st Century. A Contribution to the Debate on Non-European Concepts of Religion." *AЯGOS* 3 (2) Special Issue *Towards a Global History of Religion*, 6–47.

Lorea, Carola E. 2016. *Folklore, Religion and the Songs of a Bengali Madman: A Journey Between Performance and the Politics of Cultural Representation*. Leiden: Brill.

Lorea, Carola E. 2018. "Sectarian Scissions, Vaishnava Deviancy, and Trajectories of Oral Literature: A Virtual Dialogue between the Bengali Songs of Bhaktivinod Thakur (1838–1914) and Duddu Shah (1841–1911)." *Zeitschrift für Indologie und Südasienstudien* 35 83–114.

Lorea, Carola E. 2020. "Religion, Caste and Displacement: The Matua Community." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, ed. by Willem van Schendel, Oxford University Press (online), https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.428.

Macdonald, Charles. 2020. "What is the use of area studies?" *IIAS Newsletter* 35, 4–5. https://www.iias.asia/sites/default/files/2020-11/IIAS_NL35_0104.pdf.

Meyer, Birgit. 2009. "Introduction: From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations: Religious Mediations, Sensational Forms, and Styles of Binding." In *Aesthetic Formations*, ed. by Birgit Meyer. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1–28.

Nye, Malory. 2019. "Decolonizing the Study of Religion." *Open Library of Humanities* 5 (1): 43, https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.421.

Openshaw, Jeanne. 2002. *Seeking Bāuls of Bengal*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Quinn, George. 2019. *Bandit Saints of Java*. Leicestershire: Monsoon.

Risley, Herbert Hope. 1892. *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal: Ethnographic Glossary*. Vol. 1. Kolkata: Bengal Secretariat Press.

Schopen, Gregory. 1991. "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism." *History of Religions* 31 (1), 1–23.

Strube, Julian. 2022. *Global Tantra*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tagore, Rabindranath. 1931. *The Religion of Man*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

Urban, Hugh B. 1999. "The Politics of Madness: The Construction and Manipulation of the 'Baul' Image in Modern Bengal." *Journal of South Asian Studies* 22 (1), 13–46.

Valtrová, Jana. 2016. "'Religion' in Medieval Missionary Accounts about Asia." *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* 82 (2), 571–592.

Weiss, Richard S. 2019. *The Emergence of Modern Hinduism: Religion on the Margins of Colonialism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wong, Lucian. 2018. "Against Vaiṣṇava Deviance: Brāhmaṇical and Bhadralok Alliance in Bengal." *Religions* 9 (57), 1–19.

About the author

Carola E. Lorea is a Global Encounters Junior Professor of Rethinking Global Religion at the University of Tübingen. She is the author of *Folklore, Religion and the Songs of a Bengali Madman* (2016) and the editor of collaborative projects like *CoronAsur: Asian Religions in the Covidian Age* and *The Ethnography of Tantra* (2023).

Mail: carola.lorea@uni-tuebingen.de

Decolonizing Concepts before It Was Cool: Taking "Lamas and Shamans" for a Ride through Global History

Till Mostowlansky

Published on 29/01/2024

Abstract

In her work on "Lamas and Shamans," Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz takes a broad aim at the role of non-European knowledge in the humanities and social sciences. In this commentary, I take up some lines of inquiry that structure her argument, discussing them in the broader contexts of research on global history and continuing attempts to assess the status of categories deriving from non-European intellectual traditions.

1. Introduction

In 2008, as I was preparing to apply for a PhD position supervised by Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, I came across a published lecture that she had given a year earlier at the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences (Kollmar-Paulenz 2007). In her lecture on the historical development of religion as a discrete field of study in its own right in Asian—and particularly Mongol—societies, Kollmar-Paulenz criticized the then-widespread argument that, since the concept of religion had been a recent European "invention," non-European religions must also be modern constructions. Of course, her critique was spot-on. What appealed to me even more, however, was the fact that Kollmar-Paulenz drew on her mastery of Mongol and Tibetan history to show that the constitution of an autonomous field of religion (*šasin*) in the 17th and 18th centuries happened in interaction with political and economic processes of power, not unlike the establishment of religion in Enlightenment-era Europe. After my undergraduate studies in the early 2000s—a period strongly dominated by post-structuralism and deconstruction theory—I was intrigued to read a scholar dedicated to seeking knowledge at the margins.

Somewhere between my (fortunately successful) application to Bern in 2008 and the completion of my dissertation five years later, Kollmar-Paulenz further developed her lecture into the 2013 book chapter, "Lamas und Schamanen: Mongolische Wissensordnungen vom frühen 17. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert. Ein Beitrag zur Debatte um aussereuropäische Religionsbegriffe," the decennial of which we celebrated last year. While staying true to the original intention to explore the role of *šasin* in Mongol society, the chapter takes much broader aim at the role of non-European

knowledge in the humanities and social sciences. In the following reflections, I take up some lines of inquiry that structure her chapter, discussing them in the broader contexts of research on global history and continuing attempts to assess the status of categories deriving from non-European intellectual traditions. Against this backdrop, Kollmar-Paulenz's chapter is a major contribution to the debate around religion as a universal category, a call for a more serious engagement with theoretical thought outside the context of Western-dominated academia, and a roadmap of how to decenter the concepts we work with.

2. Deprovincializing knowledge

Kollmar-Paulenz opens her chapter with a nod to Dipesh Chakrabarty's book *Provincializing Europe*, which, since its original publication in the year 2000, has accumulated thousands of citations across the humanities and social sciences. She thereby highlights Chakrabarty's critique of the global asymmetry of knowledge in which contemporary social scientists largely draw on a recently "fabricated" entity called "the European intellectual tradition" (Chakrabarty 2008: 5). In contrast, concepts coming out of, for instance, Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic intellectual environments (Chakrabarty is thinking of South Asia here) remain excluded from the discussion. Chakrabarty (2008: 6) views this situation as rooted in the lack of training and motivation on the part of social scientists, which prevents them from inserting these concepts into lineages of theoretical reflection. As becomes clearer later in the book, this asymmetry is embedded in much longer histories of colonialism that have fed into present-day imbalances of power. In short, the asymmetry of knowledge traditions, whereby one tradition is recognized as theoretically sophisticated and vibrant and the other is viewed as an outdated relic whose only value is to be studied as a historical artifact, is alive and kicking. *Provincializing Europe* has served as an important reminder of this inequality. Chakrabarty's work is not, however, unproblematic; ultimately, it cannot escape the specter of Europe. The persistent orientation toward the "European intellectual tradition" as a point of reference, even if for the purpose of biting criticism, also bolsters, highlights, and normalizes the dominance of this particular knowledge. In the preface to the 2008 edition, Chakrabarty makes it clear that *Provincializing Europe* is in fact more about Europe than anything else:

> To "provincialize" Europe was precisely to find out how and in what sense European ideas that were universal were also, at one and the same time, drawn from very particular intellectual and historical traditions that could not claim any universal validity. (Chakrabarty 2008: xiii)

While Chakrabarty invokes Europe as the principal point of reference in his postcolonial critique, Kollmar-Paulenz goes far beyond this approach. She does not, in fact, provincialize Europe. In her chapter, Kollmar-Paulenz *deprovincializes* historically situated Mongol knowledge as it relates to the systematization of religion (2013: 177–191; 2024: 26–36). At its core, this is a process of both teasing out the specificities of this knowledge system and making manifest its universalizing tendencies. This is as much an important intellectual agenda as it is an intervention into the

politics of knowledge. With this underlying ambition, "Lamas and Shamans" implicitly addresses some of the concerns that have since become central to more recent debates revolving around decoloniality in the humanities and social sciences. For instance, Tlostanova and Mignolo (2012) draw on cases ranging from Latin America to the Eurasian borderlands to argue for the establishment of a social theory that becomes increasingly delinked from Eurocentric readings of history, knowledge, and modernity (see also Mignolo 2007). Grosfoguel (2007; 2013) notes that knowledge produced and distributed within a pyramidal university system on a global scale and over hundreds of years requires not only a decentering of concepts, but also a fundamental reassessment of institutions that reverses the established flow of knowledge from North to South. Kollmar-Paulenz's analysis of the systematization of religion in a Mongol context speaks to these concerns in concrete ways. While many theoreticians of decoloniality continue to debate these processes in abstract terms, Kollmar-Paulenz gets down to work. As "Lamas and Shamans" shows, she is not preoccupied with academic buzzwords. And that is precisely why the chapter is a stellar example of decolonizing, i.e., *actually deprovincializing*, concepts before it became widely fashionable to do so. In the chapter, Kollmar-Paulenz builds on postcolonial approaches, carefully deprovincializes religion in the context of Mongol knowledge production and embeds these newly gained insights in broader strands of global history.

3. The power of global history

For Kollmar-Paulenz (2013: 184; 2024: 30), the history of religion—as an integral part of global history—is both an object of critique and a pathway beyond Eurocentric points of view. With reference to Richard King's (1999) study on orientalism and religion in South Asia, she argues that the lukewarm acknowledgment of Asian Buddhists' role in co-constructing modern Buddhism is not sufficient. This perspective, she notes, perpetuates an analytical dichotomy between East and West that attributes proactive qualities to the West and reactive ones to the East. In this asymmetry of knowledge and power, Asians only appear as active agents of history with the commencement of colonial encounters in the 18th century. Before this period, they were presented as timeless. To counter this gaze, Kollmar-Paulenz conceptualizes a global history of religion that explores entanglements of historical agents and geographic areas from multi-centric perspectives. The ambition is to conduct such analyses with equal treatment of different forms of knowledge as the first principle, yet without losing sight of unequal power relations. Emerging from her case study on the conceptualization of religion in the Mongol context, Kollmar-Paulenz identifies three lacunae. First, in the case of the European history of religion, while there has been considerable interest in pluralism and the transfer of knowledge between different domains of society and religious denominations, comparable interest has been lacking with respect to Asian societies and other non-European contexts. Second, analytical categories that derive from outside the European history of religion have not been researched in historical perspective to the same extent as the category of religion. This has prevented an equal treatment of such categories and renders them ahistorical. Third, the untheorized usage of terminology from non-European

traditions and the refusal to connect them to widely theorized concepts (such as religion) create more problems than they solve. While this approach may shield the researcher from accusations of cultural imperialism, it also provincializes non-European concepts and isolates them from global analysis (Kollmar-Paulenz 2013: 185–191; 2024: 31–36).

Kollmar-Paulenz's critique of a Europe-centered history of religion and her call to work toward equal treatment of diverse forms of knowledge resonates with the decolonial turn in a variety of academic disciplines. At the same time, her approach focuses on *šasin* as a comparative category, includes notes on Mongol views of "Christian religion" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2013: 182; 2024: 29), and emphasizes transregional connections. These three points—equal treatment of knowledge, recognizing comparative categories in non-European intellectual traditions, and the transfer of concepts in transregional perspective—connect to a broad range of research pursued in the humanities and social sciences. One example of particular modes of analytical engagement in a given space is Shahab Ahmed's (2016: 81) "Balkans-to-Bengal complex," a concept proposed to amalgamate a multiplicity of societal forms connected by a common paradigm of Islamic life and thought. This focus on the "Balkans-to-Bengal complex" builds on Ahmed's observation that the study of Islam has been disproportionately focused on prescriptive authority, constrained by legalist understandings, and marked by the overuse of binaries. This prescriptive fixation on law, he argues, derives from the emergence of the modern nation-state—both secular and religious— as the "*definitive and constitutive authority* [that] is necessarily vested *in legal discourse*—every law becomes an act of defining and constituting Islam, the state, *and, thereby, the Muslim citizen*" (Ahmed, 2016: 530, emphasis in original). To counter this tendency, Ahmed (2016: 282) proposes "explorative authority" to account for the contradictions, the multiplicity of truths and values, and the hybrid and counter-hegemonic self-expressions and ethics within Islam. Even though Kollmar-Paulenz explores a different historical and geographic territory, Ahmed's proposal resonates with the broader agenda that she puts forward in her chapter. Her analysis of encounters between Tibetan Buddhist monks and Mongol shamans in the late 16th and early 17th centuries emphasizes the importance of taking into account diverse religious economies, the alignment of religious specialists with political power, and tensions between oral and scriptural traditions.

4. The making of discursive traditions

Kollmar-Paulenz's discursive approach to how Tibetan and Mongol elites established a comparative perspective on different religions leads her to assess *šasin* as a multivalent category (2013: 175; 2024: 23–24). In the 18th and 19th centuries, she argues, *šasin* moved beyond its predominantly Buddhist connotations and came to be used to describe the practices of shamans (e.g., *qara šasin*) in contradistinction to *sira šasin*—the form of Tibetan Buddhism widespread among Mongols. She remarks that not only did shamans over time take up *qara šasin* as a category of self-description; other traditions also became integrated into this comparative

understanding of *šasin*, specifically, Islam encountered through interaction with Kazakhs and Uyghurs, and Christianity in the context of missions and missionaries.

Kollmar-Paulenz's analysis shows how *šasin* became the dominant category for describing religious denominations more generally. Yet it is important to note that *šasin* is not simply a recent rendering of the Western concept of religion into Mongolian. Rather, it is a category that has emerged historically and organically and thereby transports knowledges and meanings from a specifically Mongolian context and conceptualization of the world. This is not to suggest, however, that it has not been influenced by interaction with European and North American discourses on religion. The modern conception of shamanism, Kollmar-Paulenz argues, is a case in point, as it has been influenced by discourses on *šasin* and by Western notions of shamanism as a global religious system.

While the discourses on *šasin* and their links to religion as a global category are specific to the Mongolian case, Kollmar-Paulenz's analysis also points to pitfalls in the broader perspective (and ways around them). Decolonial thought over the past two decades has emphasized the locality of knowledge and the importance of unearthing concepts deriving from social contexts beyond Western intellectual traditions. At the same time, this has resulted in a resurgence of cultural relativism, static notions of emic categories, and a neglect of global agency on the part of the colonized. In short, while Europe has been thoroughly provincialized vis-à-vis previously ignored intellectual traditions, the process of deprovincializing those very traditions has not come very far yet.

The social scientific study of Islam is a useful example in this regard, as it has been shaped by a spectrum of approaches ranging from a Eurocentric, secularist frame—particularly in research on diaspora and migration—to textual and legal normativity and stances underlining ontological difference (Llopart i Olivella and Mostowlansky 2023). Meanwhile, Islamic scholars such as Al-Attas (2020) have explicitly engaged with Islamic concepts as alternatives to religion as a comparative analytical category. This has happened in a process that Asad (1993; 2018) describes as the establishment of a "discursive tradition" emerging from polyphony and reformulation. In his view, Islam's internal, historically rooted diversity has enabled Islamic scholars' longstanding, creative, and productive engagement with religion as a universal category in interaction with categories deriving from Islamic contexts.

Kollmar-Paulenz (2013; 2024) attempts a similar balancing act in a clear and structured manner that opens a pathway forward. She emphasizes the depth and complexity of a local concept, *šasin*, and the ways in which this concept has been expanded to serve as a tool of comparison. And yet she also goes beyond the frame of the local by focusing on how the discursive making of *šasin* as a comparative category from Mongolian and Tibetan repertoires connects and interacts with the globalized category of religion. This endeavor, she argues, requires profound linguistic and historical expertise in traditions of thought outside the "European intellectual tradition."

However, political, structural, and practical challenges to such a move toward a more balanced global history (of religion) are enormous. It would require, as Kollmar-Paulenz indicates, recognizing and granting equal status to scholars beyond the bounds of Western-dominated academia. Given the progressing commodification of higher education and research, this is a crucial and urgent endeavor.

Bibliography

Ahmed, Shabab. 2016. *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Al-Attas, Syed Muhammad Naquib. 2020. *Islām: The Concept of Religion and the Foundation of Ethics and Morality*. Kuala Lumpur: Ta'dib International.

Asad, Talal. 1993. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reason of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Asad, Talal. 2018. *Secular Translations: Nation-State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2008. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Grosfoguel, Ramón. 2007. "The Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond Political-Economy Paradigms." *Cultural Studies* 21 (2–3), 211–223.

Grosfoguel, Ramón. 2013. "The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities: Epistemic Racism/Sexism and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides in the Long 16th Century." *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 9 (1), 73–90.

King, Richard. 1999. *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and "The Mystic East."* London: Routledge.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2007. *Zur Ausdifferenzierung eines Autonomen Bereichs Religion in Asiatischen Gesellschaften des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts: Das Beispiel der Mongolen*. Bern: Schweizerische Akademie der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2013. "Lamas und Schamanen: Mongolische Wissensordnungen vom Frühen 17. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert. Ein Beitrag zur Debatte um Aussereuropäische Religionsbegriffe." In *Religion in Asien? Studien zur Anwendbarkeit des Religionsbegriffs*, ed. by Peter Schalk et al. Uppsala: University of Uppsala, 151–200.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2024. "Lamas and Shamans: Mongolian Orders of Knowledge from the Early 17th to the 21st Century. A Contribution to the Debate on Non-European Concepts of Religion." *AЯGOS* 3 (2) Special Issue *Towards a Global History of Religions*, 6–47.

Llopart i Olivella, Pol / Till Mostowlansky. 2023. "Islam's Weight in Global History: A Response to Sidaway." *Dialogues in Human Geography* 13 (3), 382–386.

Mignolo, Walter. 2007. "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-Coloniality." *Cultural Studies* 21, 449–514.

Tlostanova, Madina / Walter Mignolo. 2012. *Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

About the author

Till Mostowlansky is Research Professor in Anthropology and Sociology at the Geneva Graduate Institute. He is the author of *Azan on the Moon: Entangling Modernity along Tajikistan's Pamir Highway* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017) and co-editor of *Infrastructure and the Remaking of Asia* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2023).

Mail: till.mostowlansky@graduateinstitute.ch

Una lezione sciamanica
per la storia delle religioni

Sergio Botta

Pubblicato in data 29.01.2024

Abstract

Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz affronta la sfida della comparazione nel campo dello studio della religione invocando una "provincializzazione dell'Europa". La sua indagine del contesto mongolo decentra lo sguardo occidentale sullo sciamanesimo e lo costringe a osservare inediti processi di contatto che hanno generato forme di classificazione delle "religioni degli altri". In questa prospettiva, l'osservazione di questi processi di definizione offre una decisiva lezione di metodo per le discipline storico-religiose.

Nelle prime pagine del suo saggio, Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz (2024: 7-11) apre la riflessione con una provocatoria affermazione di Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) che lamentava, nel suo *Provincializing Europe*, l'invisibilità di concetti prodotti in Asia che, se adeguatamente valorizzati, potrebbero fornire risorse per il pensiero critico e, in particolar modo, per una rifondazione dello studio comparativo delle religioni. A mio avviso, è anche a causa di questa invisibilità (certamente non limitabile al continente asiatico) se i *Religious Studies* sembrano faticare nello scorgere un terreno comune sul quale impostare oggi la comparazione tra "fatti religiosi" appartenenti a contesti diversi (si vedano Hughes 2017; Freiberger 2019, così come Smith 1971; Detienne 2000). Manca, infatti, non solamente un accordo sullo statuto ermeneutico della disciplina, ma anche un "patto stipulativo" intorno al concetto di religione che permetterebbe di ripensare una vocazione globale del suo studio scientifico.

Dopo le controversie tra scuole fenomenologiche e approcci storicisti che hanno animato il dibattito del secondo Novecento, lo studio delle religioni sembra esser giunto a una sorta di impasse. Da un lato, la fenomenologia delle religioni ha sostenuto un modello comparativo basato su categorie teologiche e/o cripto-teologiche che riproducono, di fatto, una generalizzazione del cristianesimo. Alla ricerca dell'*homo religiosus*, i fenomenologi hanno utilizzato la comparazione come strumento destinato alla ricerca di somiglianze transculturali e hanno tracciato morfologie universali. Dall'altro, gli approcci ispirati allo storicismo, ma anche all'antropologia delle religioni, si sono mossi in contrapposizione alla fenomenologia, invocando una comparazione individuante che mirasse a riconoscere le scelte soggettive delle singole culture. In una prospettiva oppositiva, nelle mani delle correnti storiciste il metodo comparativo diventava uno strumento fondamentale per riscattare, anche politicamente, le differenze, ma

che, in ultima istanza, rischiava di instaurare una sorta di incommensurabilità tra culture. Questa contesa ha prodotto un duplice effetto nel dibattito storico-religioso. Da un lato, alla fenomenologia è rimasto in appalto esclusivo il problema dell'universalità della religione, che continuava a risolvere generalizzando scelte e linguaggi "interni" al religioso stesso. Dall'altro, il terreno di esercizio dello storicismo non è apparso meno ricco di insidie. Esso ha finito, infatti, per enfatizzare quasi esclusivamente la distanza tra culture, praticando una comparazione differenziante e depotenziando il concetto di religione come categoria analitica generale. Se infatti "religione" non serve più a descrivere quegli oggetti plurali che abbiamo definito come "religioni", anche la speranza in una disciplina unitaria sembra vanificarsi. In un contesto accademico in cui la principale categoria analitica si rivela esclusivamente quale prodotto arbitrario e soggettivo della cultura occidentale, la ricerca finisce per ripiegarsi su una storia delle idee o dei concetti.

Il problema di carattere teorico-metodologico sollevato dall'Autrice all'inizio del lavoro permette di affrontare con acume e originalità la *vexata quaestio* relativa allo statuto euristico del concetto di religione. Secondo buona parte degli approcci critici del secondo Novecento, ancora una volta in alternativa alle generalizzazioni della fenomenologia, "religione" sarebbe da intendersi come un'esclusiva invenzione occidentale. Ne conseguirebbe la sostanziale inapplicabilità a quei contesti che non appartengono alla storia europea o che da essa non siano stati toccati in seguito a processi coloniali. Come noto, esiste una corrente che ha risolutamente perseguito questa linea interpretativa e ha sottoposto il campo degli studi sulla religione – portando con sé anche una riflessione critica sulla secolarizzazione – a serrata critica, mostrando, cioè – si pensi ai lavori, tra gli altri, di Talal Asad (1993) e Timothy Fitzgerald (2000) –, il suo carattere ideologico e la sua natura etnocentrica (si vedano anche Borgeaud 2021; Dubuisson 1998; Masuzawa 2005; McCutcheon 1998; 2003).

Mi sono formato in un ambiente, quello della cosiddetta "scuola romana di storia delle religioni" fondata da Raffaele Pettazzoni (si veda Sabbatucci 1990), che può essere considerato affine alle istanze della *Critical Religion* che si sono imposte negli ultimi decenni in ambiente anglosassone; tuttavia, mi sembra sia necessario manifestare anche alcune preoccupazioni riguardo al vicolo cieco nel quale questa prospettiva rischia di condurre lo studio sulla religione. Se, infatti, la *Critical Religion* svela come lo statuto delle nostre categorie analitiche sia fondato su una produzione discorsiva occidentale (e sia largamente influenzato da un'agenda politica), è evidente come non vi sia possibilità per i *Religious Studies* di affermare una vocazione universalista senza ricadere in istanze "coloniali". Non rimarrebbe agli specialisti che dedicarsi a contesti specifici, con l'obiettivo di "liberare" il lessico disciplinare dalle sue incrostazioni coloniali. Tuttavia, del particolare non c'è scienza e lo studio delle religioni finirebbe in questo modo per trasformarsi in una disciplina unicamente autoriflessiva, il cui compito (certamente auspicabile) sarebbe solamente – coerentemente con un orizzonte iperi-storicista e iper-relativista – indagare criticamente la genealogia del concetto di religione (si veda Despland 1979; Feil 1986-2007). Ciononostante, l'attuale condizione dello studio delle religioni sembra rivelare uno scenario più complesso e

ambivalente. Malgrado la decostruzione del concetto di religione, all'interno della disciplina continuano, infatti, a essere salvaguardati sottocampi di indagine, che pure ad esso fanno ancora riferimento; si pensi, cioè, all'uso sistematico nei nostri dipartimenti di un uso plurale del concetto che riproduce artificialmente ambiti autonomi d'indagine (la religione degli Assiri, la religione dei Cinesi, ecc.) in un contesto che appare però del tutto sfiduciato rispetto allo statuto euristico di "religione". Mentre l'uso plurale del concetto è servito, da un lato, a salvaguardare le singole culture dalla pressione di uno sguardo comparativo che cercava e prediligeva l'uniformità dei comportamenti e delle pratiche di un supposto *homo religiosus*, dall'altro, questa postura paradossale ha finito per edificare, e talvolta rivendicare, l'unicità ed eccezionalità dei singoli ambiti di indagine, come se non vi fossero relazioni tra "religione" e "religioni", tra genere e specie.

All'interno di questo contesto complesso, l'approccio di Kollmar-Paulenz appare estremamente stimolante precisamente in ragione del fatto che compare dall'interno di uno di quei "sottocampi" che hanno subito la pressione "coloniale" di una storia delle religioni orientata da categorie occidentali. Malgrado ciò, l'Autrice non rinuncia a un impegno generale per la disciplina e tenta, a partire da una di quelle "periferie", di provincializzare la storia delle religioni e di interrogarsi su quali possano essere i contributi offerti da questi "mondi altri". In questa prospettiva, pur condividendo istanze post-coloniali e al tempo stesso esercitando un'attenzione scrupolosa al proprio contesto di ricerca, l'Autrice ribalta il discorso teorico della *Critical Religion*. Non rinunciando agli strumenti sofisticati della critica e senza cedere a una disinvolta estendibilità del concetto di religione, esplora il terreno per il rilancio di una riflessione comparativa, sfidando gli approcci di stampo "letteralista" o "nominalista" che negherebbero l'applicabilità del concetto di religione a quei contesti dove non sia possibile rilevare il termine (si vedano, ad esempio, Barton/Boyarin 2016; Nongbri 2013). Grazie a una sofisticata teoria dei concetti, l'Autrice invita invece a considerare "religione" come una categoria analitica di secondo ordine, e per questa ragione generalizzabile secondo la prospettiva di Jonathan Z. Smith (1982), a patto cioè di esplicitare gli scopi analitici di studiose e studiosi. Si tratta di riformare gli strumenti disciplinari attraverso i quali la categoria di "religione" può esser pensata come parte essenziale del metalinguaggio di una disciplina che deve necessariamente mettersi a distanza critica dai contesti indagati se ambisce a produrre generalizzazioni falsificabili.

L'Autrice propone quindi un rilancio della categoria analitica di religione, e del metodo comparativo, convocando la prospettiva della storia globale. Ancora una volta facendo uso della proposta di Chakrabarty, Kollmar-Paulenz (2024: 9, nota 11) mostra come nei contatti tra culture si siano generati processi di "ignoranza asimmetrica" che hanno afflitto la storia delle religioni. Invocando una "global history of religion", che sappia cioè concedere la medesima attenzione sia alle prospettive teoriche europee che a quelle non europee, l'Autrice mostra come il caso mongolo sia in grado di mettere in luce originali processi di differenziazione di un ambito autonomo e separato della "religione". Si tratterebbe cioè di un fatto sorprendente che rivela l'esistenza di fenomeni di "secolarizzazione" anche in contesti che una teoria classica della

religione considererebbe di esclusiva pertinenza della cultura e della storia occidentale. In questo senso verrebbe a cadere la critica secondo la quale gli "altri mondi" sarebbero inadatti a pensare e dire la religione, giacché l'Occidente continua a riprodurre l'idea – che si colloca a fondamento dell'impresa coloniale – secondo la quale questi sarebbero capaci di sperimentare questa sfera delle attività umane solamente in forma irriflessa.

Tuttavia, il guadagno fondamentale dell'operazione di Kollmar-Paulenz sta nella capacità di pensare questi processi in una precisa cornice teorica che li rende cioè comparativamente estendibili ad altri contesti. La studiosa mostra, infatti, come nel caso mongolo si realizzi, in seguito al contatto con il buddhismo, la costruzione di un ambito autonomo della "religione" che distinguerebbe coloro che appartengono al Dharma da coloro che ne sono esclusi. La tipologia attraverso la quale i monaci buddhisti tibetani acquisiscono controllo sociale e politico nel territorio mongolo si rivela dunque quale esito di quei processi di classificazione dell'alterità – da cui emerse nel corso della prima Età moderna il "nostro" concetto di religione – che Jonathan Z. Smith (1996) ha definito come "questioni di classe", rivelando il carattere costitutivamente relazionale della categoria analitica che rende unitaria la disciplina. La nozione di religione sembra emergere, infatti, anche dal contesto mongolo come atto immaginativo che permette ai gruppi sociali di costruire tipologie relative a pratiche e credenze di gruppi "altri"; essa sarebbe da considerarsi quindi non tanto come il presupposto quanto come l'esito di contatti interculturali. In questo senso, dunque, la costruzione emica di produzioni discorsive sull'alterità religiosa costringe gli storici delle religioni a fare i conti con la "sorprendente" soggettività della società mongola, costringendo a provincializzare lo sguardo europeo e a ripensare una possibile piattaforma analitica per i *Religious Studies* attraverso un metodo comparativo che sappia andare oltre le secche del letteralismo e si nutra delle "lezioni" che provengono da un'indagine non pregiudiziale di contesti extraeuropei.

L'autonomizzazione della sfera religiosa non deve, dunque, essere considerata esclusivamente come riflesso della speculazione filosofica europea, quanto come risposta – culturalmente soggettiva e declinata in molteplici forme – alle condizioni dinamiche prodotte nei contatti tra sistemi religiosi. Il caso dell'adozione del buddhismo di matrice tibetana da parte dei Mongoli, con il supporto delle élite locali, dimostra come la definizione e delimitazione delle pratiche sciamaniche sia emersa in realtà come conseguenza di complesse dinamiche di ordine sociopolitico. Questa "sorprendente scoperta" svela l'etnocentrismo di quell'approccio al concetto di religione che abbiamo definito "letteralista". In questa prospettiva, infatti, il monopolio della definizione competerebbe esclusivamente all'Occidente che, in seguito all'estensione nella seconda metà del XVI secolo dei domini russi in quell'area che sarebbe stata denominata Siberia, iniziò ad assimilare e classificare le pratiche e le credenze delle popolazioni native attraverso il concetto di "religione", e la sottocategoria di "sciamanesimo" (si veda Botta 2018).

Tuttavia, il problema non può risolversi semplicemente in termini lessicali. Non si tratta più, cioè, di interrogarsi se nel contesto mongolo esistesse un concetto comparabile alla "nostra" categoria

di religione, o di sciamanesimo. Ci troviamo, infatti, di fronte a uno "scandaloso" fatto storico: quelle medesime credenze e pratiche erano già state classificate, prima che la cultura europea vi entrasse in contatto, da una produzione discorsiva composta da testi tibetani e mongoli. Come l'Autrice ha mostrato in precedenti pubblicazioni (Kollmar-Paulenz 2018), uno studio scientifico dello sciamanesimo è oggi impossibile senza rivolgersi, pur dopo aver decostruito la categoria europea, agli archivi documentari che appartengono alle culture asiatiche. Lo sciamanesimo che gli Europei credettero per primi di aver incontrato nel XVI secolo non emerge, infatti, dalla *tabula rasa* immaginata e descritta nei resoconti degli esploratori settecenteschi, ma è testimoniato da almeno quattro secoli di documentazione e produzioni discorsive asiatiche sulle "religioni degli altri". Qualunque storico delle religioni interessato a processi di contatto, non può che rimanere affascinato dalla "invenzione" di una tipologia sciamanica che si articola attraverso un articolato vocabolario analitico che assolveva lo scopo di designare gli avversari religiosi. È in questa fase, infatti, che tradizioni tra loro in competizione hanno elaborato strumenti per reificare un'immagine dello sciamanesimo come ribaltamento dottrinale degli insegnamenti del Buddha. Come nel caso di altri processi di contatto, ad esempio quelli dell'Europa moderna che incontrava "nuovi mondi" (si vedano Keane 2011; Cannell 2006), le pratiche sciamaniche furono pensate a partire da una prospettiva normativa che assolveva anche la funzione di riaffermare un "noi" buddhista (Rubens Urciuoli 2013).

Gli storici delle religioni potranno riflettere intorno a questo caso di studio, scorgendovi una proposta teorica che permette di osservare l'emergere di aspetti strutturali, e dunque comparabili, che regolano i contatti religiosi tra attori sociali all'interno di un medesimo campo. Lo studio del contesto mongolo rivela come la creazione di una idea di religione sia lo strumento attraverso il quale pratiche sciamaniche, precedentemente connesse tra loro in maniera debole, sono state rappresentate in termini omogenei, come espressioni di comunità sovraregionali con un preciso codice di condotta. Al tempo stesso, gli attori sciamanici hanno finito per abbracciare quella terminologia comparativa emersa in ambiente tibetano come un dispositivo identitario che ha concesso loro forme di auto-designazione. Il successo di questa produzione discorsiva emerge quindi nella capacità di istituire distinzioni tra gruppi sociali e, al tempo stesso, di sussumere particolari aspetti di quelle "realtà altre" pensandole, grazie a una terminologia unitaria, come funzionalmente equivalenti.

In conclusione, il caso mongolo mostra come una storia globale della religione non abbia il compito di mostrare gli effetti di una mondializzazione guidata da un'Europa in espansione all'inizio dell'Età moderna (si vedano Bergunder 2021; 2016). Richiede invece una decisa provincializzazione dell'Europa e ha bisogno di trovare gli strumenti per immaginare i modi attraverso i quali questi altri mondi hanno costruito concetti e terminologie proprie per pensare la "differenza religiosa". Si tratta di un caso che rivela anche un aspetto "oscuro" (Mignolo 1995) della modernità occidentale, cioè la sua pretesa di esercitare uno stretto monopolio sull'ambito dei discorsi relativi all'alterità religiosa che manifesta nell'indissolubile connessione tra scrittura, potere e conquista. Mi sembra sia conseguentemente necessario per gli storici delle religioni

distaccarsi dall'asimmetrica ignoranza prodotta dallo sguardo europeo (Pratt 1992; Chidester 2014) e rivolgere attenzione ai processi generati dai contatti interculturali. La storia delle religioni deve compiere una "svolta copernicana" (King 2017) e rinunciare alla convinzione secondo la quale solo l'Occidente è in grado di agire e produrre teoria, mentre agli "altri" spetta solo il compito di subirne gli stimoli. È necessario anche smettere di credere che gli "altri" esistano solo quando sono collocati nella storia europea, e di pensare conseguentemente che i concetti e le categorie non occidentali non possiedano una loro storicità, ma esistano in una sorta di vuoto temporale (Fabian 1983). Per fare ciò, è possibile invocare una "glocalizzazione" del discorso religioso, che sappia tenere insieme una vocazione universalista e un'attenzione filologica al particolare storico. Ciò può avvenire solo a patto di incorporare concetti "locali" nel campo di una rinnovata teoria della religione, di osservare interazioni tra differenti parti del mondo e di tornare a praticare comparazioni di carattere interregionale e transculturale.[1] È evidente che questa prospettiva richiederà una revisione profonda dei fondamenti epistemologici delle discipline storico-religiose. Occorrerà tuttavia anche una radicale revisione dei protocolli di insegnamento e delle strategie pedagogiche orientate alla formazione di una nuova generazione di studiosi della religione: avremo bisogno di teorie, metodi e lessico che siano il prodotto di un decentramento della nostra disciplina e facciano emergere definitivamente una prospettiva polifonica.

Bibliografia

Asad, Talal. 1993. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Barton, Carlin A. / Daniel Boyarin. 2016. *Imagine No Religion: How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Bergunder, Michael. 2016. "Comparison in the Maelstrom of Historicity: A Postcolonial Perspective on Comparative Religion." In *Interreligious Comparisons in Religious Studies and Theology: Comparison Revisited*, a cura di Perry Schmidt-Leukel / Andreas Nehring. London: New York: Bloomsbury, 34-52.

Bergunder, Michael. 2021. "Global Religious History in Theory and Practice." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 33 (3/4), 441-462.

Borgeaud, Philippe. 2021. *La Pensée européenne des religions*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

Botta, Sergio. 2018. *Dagli sciamani allo sciamanesimo. Discorsi, credenze, pratiche*. Roma: Carocci.

Botta, Sergio. 2022. "*Zemi, teotl, huaca*: reconsidering materiality through three emic concepts in the New World." *Religion* 54 (1), 48-66.

---

[1] In questa prospettiva, ho recentemente partecipato a un dossier monografico della rivista *Religion* dedicato al problema di un rinnovamento della terminologia della disciplina con un articolo che proponeva di prendere seriamente in considerazione una teoresi non-europea (Botta 2022).

Cannell, Fenella. 2006. *The Anthropology of Christianity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2000. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Chidester, David. 2014. *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Despland, Michel. 1979. *La religion en occident. Évolution des idées et du vécu*. Montréal: Fides.

Detienne, Marcel. 2000. *Compararer l'incomparable*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

Dubuisson, Daniel. 1998. *L'occident et la religion. Mythes, science et idéologie*. Bruxelles: Éditions Complexe.

Fabian, Johannes. 1983. *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Feil, Ernst. 1986-2007. *Religio. Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffs*. 4 vols. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Fitzgerald, Timothy. 2000. *The Ideology of Religious Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Freiberger, Oliver. 2019. *Considering Comparison: A Method for Religious Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hughes, Aaron W. 2017. *Comparison: A Critical Primer*. Sheffield: Equinox Publishing.

Keane, Webb. 2011. *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

King, Richard. 2017. "The Copernican Turn in the Study of Religion." In *Religion, Theory, Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies*, a cura di Richard King. New York: Columbia University Press, 1-20.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2018. "The Invention of 'Shamanism' in 18th Century Mongolian Elite Discourse." *Rocznik Orientalistycsny* 65 (1), 90-106.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2024. "Lamas and Shamans: Mongolian Orders of Knowledge from the Early 17th to the 21st Century. A Contribution to the Debate on Non-European Concepts of Religion." *AЯGOS* 3 (2) Special Issue *Towards a Global History of Religion*, 6–47.

Masuzawa, Tomoko. 2005. *The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

McCutcheon, Russell. 1998. *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on* Sui Generis *Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McCutcheon, Russell. 2003. *The Discipline of Religion: Structure, Meaning, Rhetoric*. London: Routledge.

Mignolo, Walter. 1995. *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Nongbri, Brent. 2013. *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Pratt, Mary Louise. 1992. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge.

Rubens Urciuoli, Emiliano. 2013. *Un'archeologia del "noi" cristiano: Le "comunità immaginate" dei seguaci di Gesù tra utopie e territorializzazioni (I-II sec. e.v.)*. Milano: Ledizioni.

Sabbatucci, Dario. 1990. *La prospettiva storico-religiosa. Fede, religione, cultura*. Milano: Il Saggiatore.

Smith, Jonathan Z. 1971. "Adde Parvum Parvo Magnus Acervus Erit." *History of Religions* 11 (1), 67-90.

Smith, Jonathan Z. 1982. "In Comparison a Magic Dwells." In *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. Chicago / London: The University of Chicago Press, 19-35.

Smith, Jonathan Z. 1996. "A Matter of Class: Taxonomies of Religion." *Harvard Theological Review* 89 (4), 387-403.

Circa l'autore

Sergio Botta è Professore Associato di Storia delle religioni presso la Sapienza Università di Roma. Si occupa di culture e religioni del Messico antico e di letterature missionarie nella Nuova Spagna. Recentemente si è occupato della storia del concetto di sciamanesimo. È vicedirettore della rivista *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni*.

Sergio Botta is an Associate Professor in the History of Religions at Sapienza University of Rome. His research focuses on the cultures and religions of ancient Mexico, as well as missionary literature in New Spain. Recently, he has been delving into the history of the concept of shamanism. Additionally, he serves as the deputy editor of the journal *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni*.

Mail: sergio.botta@uniroma1.it

Abstract in English

Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz confronts the challenge of comparison in religious studies by "Provincializing Europe." Her examination of the Mongolian context decentralizes the Western perspective on shamanism, compelling it to witness unprecedented cultural contacts that have led to categorizing the "religions of others." From this perspective, observing these defining processes offers a decisive lesson in methods for the historical-religious disciplines.

Global Religious History and Genealogical Critique

Michael Bergunder

Published on 29/01/2024

Abstract

Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz presents an approach to religious studies that combines source interpretation with critical theoretical reflection. She questions European dominance in defining religion and argues for a globalised, multicentric method that includes European and non-European perspectives on an equal footing. However, her approach still faces the challenge of decentralising Europe as the primary conceptual reference in this field.

1. Introduction

In "Lamas and Shamans," Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz (2024) demonstrates an approach to religious studies which combines careful source interpretation with critical theoretical reflection. Her concept of global religious history (*globale Religionsgeschichte*) confronts the Eurocentrism embedded in contemporary religious studies. Her analysis suggests that the "postcolonial debates" on the definition of religion primarily consist of the critique of "the application of the European concept of 'religion' to non-European contexts" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 7; 2013: 152). This critique often presupposes that regions outside Europe have not developed a terminology of "religion" as "an autonomous social sphere," or a "socio-politically significant segment" of society (2024: 10; 2013: 155–156). Simultaneously, she notes a "peculiar timelessness" in the way non-European pre-colonial "knowledge systems" are considered (2024: 30; 2013: 184), which seem to gain their legitimacy only "through their engagement with and incorporation of European ideas" (2024: 30; 2013: 184). Instead, she presents the idea of a global religious history that "challenges European hegemony over the analytical concept of 'religion'" (2024: 32; 2013: 187). Her approach seeks to "globalize theoretical perspectives on 'religion,' relinquish Europe's primacy in favour of a multi-centric viewpoint, and equitably incorporate European and non-European analytical perspectives within the discourse field of 'religion'" (2024: 32; 2013: 186). Though Kollmar-Paulenz attempts to meaningfully decentralise Europe as the primary reference point for conceptualising religion, her approach risks not going far enough.

2. Today's use of "religion"

Kollmar-Paulenz believes that there is currently a universal global concept or use of "religion". She demonstrates this through the example of the use of "religion" in the Mongolian language. She highlights that in today's Mongolian language there is a "widely accepted" use of "šasin" ("religion") in contemporary Mongolian "academic discourse" and society. This includes "Buddhism", "shamanism", "Russian Orthodoxy" and "Protestantism" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 29; 2013: 181–182). According to Kollmar-Paulenz, "religion" has come to be used as a universal, globally applicable concept due to "glocalization", which is a merger of global and local linguistic usages. Her approach, however, is open to criticism for several reasons. Firstly, she conflates "global" with "Western" therefore presumes a "globalized, primarily Protestant-influenced 'Western' religious discourse" (2024: 26; 2013: 178). Secondly, in her view, what is deemed global is essentially local because it is "Western." Therefore, her interpretation does not portray glocalisation in its literal sense; instead, it represents the fusion of two distinct local contexts, whereby "Western" and Mongolian interpretations reflect their "respective orders of knowledge and conceptions of the world" (2024: 26; 2013: 177). Kollmar-Paulenz emphasises the "simultaneity and equivalence of various particular cultures of knowledge" (2024: 9; 2013: 155). Accordingly, she differentiates between "Western" and Mongolian aspects in the use of *šasin*, whilst accounting for the fact that "[t]oday, European-American discourses on 'religion' have been incorporated into Mongolian epistemic systems" (2024: 11; 2013: 157). On the one hand, she attributes the current categorisation of "shamanism" as a full-fledged "religion" predominantly to "Western" influence:

> The uniquely Mongolian "shamanism" discourse, which had established a "teaching of the shamans" long before the European construction of "shamanism" as a distinct religious category, has merged with the European-American "religion discourse" that integrates everyday religious practices into its concept of shamanism. (2024: 28; 2013: 181)

Accordingly, she writes that "in many contemporary Mongolian accounts, the Mongols possess two religions, shamanism and Buddhism" (2024: 29; 2013: 181). On the other hand, she attributes today's characterisation of Buddhism as *šasin* primarily to developments within Mongolia, to which she devotes a large part of her article. Arguably, it is Kollmar-Paulenz, and not the Mongolians, who distinguish between these two systems of knowledge—a "Western" and a "Mongolian" one—and who projects this distinction onto the contemporary Mongolian understanding of *šasin*. As a result, she appears to refute the existence of a general Mongolian term for "religion" suitable for the present context. This perspective denies Mongolians the opportunity to authentically engage with a global discourse, as the global discourse remains inherently foreign and "Western." Only the "West" is regarded as capable of merging the local with the global, since the global is simply a reiteration of the Western local. This seems to suggest that non-European religious studies, such as those in Mongolia, are lacking agency in their current application of the concept of religion in their respective contexts, while European religious

studies, as the seeming originator of the concept, can maintain its usage without challenge. Thus, Kollmar-Paulenz implicitly acknowledges that the "European concept of religion" remains the foundation of religious studies, serving as the prototype for integrating non-European "knowledge systems" into the discipline.

3. The European concept of religion as a prototype for the point of comparison

Through the way that Kollmar-Paulenz frames her comparison of the concept, usage, and evolution of religion, she risks perpetuating Eurocentrism. Kollmar-Paulenz's articulation of what constitutes the "European concept of religion" remains ambiguous. In an earlier work, she vaguely refers to the religion's "entire spectrum of meaning," which ranges from "ritual practices to an individual's personal relationship with a transcendent counterpart" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2007: 3). Generally, she posits that we are dealing with "a particular concept that has been universalized from a specific historical tradition" making it a "a futile endeavor" to "strip the concept of its historical particularity" (2014: 9; 2013: 154). In other words, "religion" is a term that originated in Europe, it is a "'child' of Europe, the European Enlightenment, and Protestantism" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2007: 3). Subsequently, religion, as a "European" concept, was imposed upon the rest of the world through colonialism. However, asserting a European origin and content of the term "religion" implies that its meaning has remained unchanged from the 18th century to the present day. Kollmar-Paulenz primarily challenges the Eurocentric assertion that no "analogous" notions akin to "religion" have evolved outside of Europe. In her work, she posits a novel paradigm in comparative religious studies, the existence outside of Europe of pre-colonial terms demonstrating, "functional equivalence to the European category of 'religion'" (2014: 15; 2013: 162), as attested by the Mongolian example.

However, this approach may inadvertently perpetuate the form of comparison which, as Joachim Matthes (1992) and Dipesh Chakrabarty (2008) argue, privileges and reifies Europe. To understand this problem, it is important to note that every comparison operates in two phases (Bergunder 2016). First, we must establish the point of comparison (*tertium comparationis*); this enables us, in a second step, to proceed with the actual comparison. The validity of a comparison depends on the justification of the point of comparison, which itself cannot be critiqued through the comparison but is, instead, affirmed by it. By adopting the European concept of religion as the point of comparison, both the concept and its historical context become the prototype from which this comparative framework is developed. As Chakrabarty contends, the consequence is that all non-European elements of the comparison are inevitably addressed only "in terms of a lack, an absence, or an incompleteness that translates into 'inadequacy'" (2008: 32).

In other words, non-European comparative elements, such as those in the Mongolian context, are inherently unable to fully conform to the European prototype. History in Asia and elsewhere has unfolded differently than in Europe, with each historical event being distinct and uniquely differentiated from all others. For instance, the European debate in the 19th century, which

Kollmar-Paulenz believes shaped the European concept of religion, is a singular event, defined by its specific historical context. This event could not have possibly repeated itself identically elsewhere. Therefore, if the content of a general term is abstracted from a specific European debate of the 19th century, then all specific non-European elements—which must inherently exist in the light of the different historical context—automatically become deficiencies. This renders the quest for "analogies" problematic in two ways: First, the comparison affirms the point of comparison, thereby solidifying the European concept of religion as its prototype. Second, all non-European elements, when compared to this European prototype, inherently carry a pre-existing deficiency.

4. Thinking in terms of regionalised origins

Kollmar-Paulenz risks essentialising and de-historicising pre-colonial history. Against the backdrop of her stated assumption that a European concept of religion was imposed on the rest of the world since the era of colonialism, Kollmar-Paulenz seems to believe that non-European "knowledge systems" can only be adequately understood through pre-colonial sources. Consequently, she repeatedly criticises postcolonial approaches that attribute contemporary global discourses solely to colonialism (Kollmar-Paulenz 2023), viewing this as a fundamental misdirection. She argues that such perspectives serve only to recount and thereby affirm the colonial spread of a "Western" concept of religion. However, her alternative proposal may risk reconstructing contemporary non-European "knowledge systems" directly from pre-colonial sources, paralleling the derivation of the "Western" concept of religion from the European 19th century. In doing so, Kollmar-Paulenz potentially traces each present-day "knowledge system" back to a specific regionalised origin—for instance, the "Western" knowledge system from the European 18th century and the Mongolian system from the Mongolian 16th to 18th centuries. However, if this were the case, the global colonial and postcolonial discourse on religion would have taken place—and still takes place—between pre-colonial established concepts of religion which, due to their different historical origins, exhibit a difference that cannot be mediated. This approach risks reviving, in a revised form, the "chimeras of the origin" (Foucault 1977: 144), which Kollmar-Paulenz aims to surpass.

5. Genealogical critique

It is paramount to emphasise that the future direction of religious studies should aim to redirect contemporary religious discourse away from its Eurocentric tendencies, ensuring the inclusion and anchoring of previously marginalised non-European voices. Additionally, there is a necessity to historicise the present-day global religious discourse in a manner that integrally recognises pre-colonial non-European sources. The criticisms of Kollmar-Paulenz's approach in addressing the issue of Eurocentrism stems from her leaning towards a specific strand of postcolonial historiography, which posits that today's world is the result of a "Western" knowledge system, presumably solidified by the 18th century or even earlier. However, though this assertion has been

presented as self-evident it has not been historically substantiated. Firstly, this is evidenced by the fact that on a global scale, the term "religion" is established not only in Europe but also in all non-European languages and regions (Peterson/Walhof 2002). By capturing the contemporary usages of "religion" as it is actually practised worldwide, without tracing it back to a supposedly pre-existing specific regional origin, effectively already decentralises Europe. A contemporary understanding of the concept of religion should encompass its current usage across both European and non-European contexts, without any region claiming interpretative supremacy. More specifically, the contemporary Mongolian-language religious discourse is a constitutive part of the global discourse on religion and its inclusion is vital for any current discussion about religion. On closer inspection, Kollmar-Paulenz appears to align with these views, as she explicitly bemoans the lack of empirical studies on this subject (2014: 11, FN 20; 2013: 157, FN 20).

If we posit a global discourse on religion for the present day, then the notion of a "European concept of religion" must also be situated in the here and now. Such an assertion implies one of two possible scenarios. First, labelling a phenomenon as "European" might suggest its exclusivity to Europe in a given context. This claim, however, presupposes a global perspective for its validation. Given that the central terms of religious studies, including "religion," are not regionally confined, this perspective may not warrant further exploration at this point. If purely regional confines do not apply, a second interpretation arises: Within the current global discourse, any regional designation signifies a claim to hegemony that aspires to epitomise a general concept, essentially becoming its prototype. For example, "German beer," transcends the notion of being merely a product of Germany. Instead, it represents a commercially driven assertion by certain German breweries who claim to produce the world's finest beer, an assertion usually rooted in regional German origins and German Purity Law (*Deutsches Reinheitsgebot*). This notion, equating authentic beer with German beer, while globally acknowledged, is vigorously contested by non-German breweries.

In the same way "German" in "German beer" implies a claim of superiority or prototypicality, the "European" in "European concept of religion" suggests that the European interpretation of religion is seen as either superior or the prototype for other forms of religion. It is, therefore, imperative to critically examine the discourse surrounding the "European concept of religion" as a manifestation of Europe's contemporary hegemonic stance over the global understanding of religion (Bergunder 2021). In this reflection, we should also include the role of religious studies in Europe and North America, whose current hegemony is clearly reflected in their considerable resources (research funds, institutions, publishers, journals, etc.) and which thus exert a greater interpretative influence than the rest of the world. Second, the historicisation of religion can only be carried out after its present global usage has already been established. This approach prevents the present from being derived from an assumed prior origin, which aligns with Michel Foucault's genealogical theory of history, wherein genealogical critique subverts the traditional chronological timeline by starting the historicisation of today's general terms from the present.

The objective is, therefore, to determine the extent to which the contemporary global usage of "religion" can be traced back through history, that is, a genealogical tracing back from the present to the past. Crucially, the immediate history of religion must necessarily be conceived as a global history (Bergunder 2020; 2021). If "religion" is used globally today and this current global use is seen as a key characteristic, then religion must by definition have a global pre-history. As soon as this global pre-history—understood as the genealogical tracing back from the present to the past—transitions into different regional ones, it is a decisive historical discontinuity, because a key characteristic is then lost. The length of the genealogical tracing of a term's pre-history depends on the point of discontinuity identified with the past, which varies according to specific research interests. This retracing often culminates in the 19th century with the establishment of global entanglements through colonialism. Contrary to Kollmar-Paulenz's assumption, recent historical research on global religious history suggests that there was hardly a linear dissemination of a religious concept rooted in Europe until the 19th century. Instead, we are dealing with a globally intertwined history in which the colonised were active agents, significantly influencing Europe in return (Bergunder 2020). In this vein, Kollmar-Paulenz's own depiction of Mongolian and Tibetan religious discourses since the 19th century does not represent passive, enforced adoptions of a prior European understanding of religion (Kollmar-Paulenz 2013; 2023; 2024). Her own research, therefore, somewhat contradicts her own assumption.

From this perspective, the pre-colonial era before the 19th century emerges as a series of regional pre-histories of what would become today's religious discourse. Tracing back beyond the 19th century is indispensable, even if it is argued that a contemporary global discourse can only be traced to the colonial era. Only through such a historical examination can a decisive discontinuity relative to the pre-colonial period be empirically validated. Typically, we encounter numerous regional discourses that refute the notion of a single regional origin of religion in Europe, even though these regional contexts may have already been interconnected beyond their geographic confines. The crucial insight, which cannot be emphasised enough, is that all regions of the world must be equally considered in exploring these regional pre-histories. Europe, therefore, holds just one of many regional pre-histories, and is formally on an equal footing with, for instance, Mongolian history. This genealogical approach categorically opposes any prior privileging of a European origin. The most significant, and perhaps under-acknowledged, outcome of this approach is that even today's use of "religion" within European Christianity can be traced back only to the 19th century and must also be understood as a result of a global negotiation process. This claim is well-supported by historical sources (Thurner 2024).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that genealogy, in the sense of Michel Foucault, represents a categorical rejection of any positivist view of history. Here, history is always a function of the present, and from an epistemological standpoint, the 20th and 19th centuries are no closer to us than the 9th or 8th centuries. There is no "new" origin of contemporary global religious discourse in the 19th century, as a discontinuity must be reassessed for each research topic. For certain research questions, other discontinuities might be more relevant. At any rate, reverting to a

mindset focused on historical origins, which genealogy fundamentally aims to transcend, should be diligently avoided. Therefore, genealogical critique does not privilege recent history but is interested in all historical assertions used to legitimise hegemonic claims in the present (Bergunder: forthcoming).

All the considerations presented here are intended to serve as impulses for further discussion on a global religious history, which Kollmar-Paulenz initially sparked. I am confident that she herself will continue to shape this debate substantively.

Bibliography

Bergunder, Michael. 2016. "Comparison in the Maelstrom of Historicity: A Postcolonial Perspective on Comparative Religion." In *Interreligious Comparisons in Religious Studies and Theology*, ed. by Perry Schmidt-Leukel / Andreas Nehring. London: Bloomsbury, 34–52.

Bergunder, Michael. 2020. "Umkämpfte Historisierung. Die Zwillingsgeburt von 'Religion' und 'Esoterik' in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts und das Programm einer globalen Religionsgeschichte." In *Wissen um Religion*, ed. by Klaus Hock. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 47–131.

Bergunder, Michael. 2021. "Global Religious History in Theory and Practice." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 33, 441–462.

Bergunder, Michael. forthcoming. "Encounters of the Brahmanical Sanskrit Tradition with Persian Scholarship in the Mughal Empire. Genealogical Critique and the Relevance of the Precolonial Past in a Global Religious History." *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 9.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2008. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1977 [1971]. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." In *Michel Foucault: Language, Counter-Memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. with an introduction by Donald F. Bouchard, transl. by Donald F. Bouchard / Sherry Simon. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 139–164.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2007. *Zur Ausdifferenzierung eines autonomen Bereichs Religion in asiatischen Gesellschaften des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts: Das Beispiel der Mongolen*. Bern: Schweizerische Akademie der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2013. "Lamas und Schamanen: Mongolische Wissensordnungen vom frühen 17. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert. Ein Beitrag zur Debatte um aussereuropäische Religionsbegriffe." In *Religion in Asien? Studien zur Anwendbarkeit des Religionsbegriffs*, ed. by Peter Schalk / Max Deeg / Oliver Freiberger / Christoph Kleine / Astrid van Nahl, Uppsala: University of Uppsala, 151–200.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2023. "Nga Rang Gi Chos Khyod Rang Gi Chos: 'My Religion and Your Religion'? About Some Fundamental Issues in the Global History of Religion." *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society*, 1–20 (online ahead of print). https://doi.org/10.30965/23642807-bja10082.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2024. "Lamas and Shamans: Mongolian Orders of Knowledge from the Early 17th to the 21st Century. A Contribution to the Debate on Non-European Concepts of Religion." *ARGOS* 3 (2) Special Issue *Towards a Global History of Religion*, 6–47.

Matthes, Joachim. 1992. "The Operation Called 'Vergleichen.'" In *Zwischen den Kulturen?*, ed. by Joachim Matthes. Göttingen: Schwartz, 75–99.

Peterson, Derek R. / Darren R. Walhof, eds. 2002. *The Invention of Religion*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Thurner, Mathias. 2024. "The Indian Challenge: Indology and New Conceptions of Christianity as 'Religion' at the End of the Nineteenth Century." In *Religious Entanglements Between Germans and Indians, 1800–1945*, ed. by Isabella Schwaderer / Gerdien Jonker. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 59–87.

About the author

Michael Bergunder is a Professor of Religious Studies and Intercultural Theology at the University of Heidelberg. His areas of interest include theories and methods in religious studies, Tamil religious history, the history of esotericism, and the study of global Pentecostalism.

Mail: michael.bergunder@uni-heidelberg.de

Acknowledgement

Why *Global History of Religion*? A Response to Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz

Hubert Seiwert

Published on 29/01/2024

Abstract

The contribution discusses Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz's programme for a global history of religion. Her approach aims to challenge European hegemony over the analytical concept of 'religion' by incorporating non-European realms of experience into theories of religious studies. This provokes the question which epistemological interest is associated with this objective. Why should an academic discipline, whose theories and concepts are shaped by European discourses, integrate non-European perspectives? Several possible answers to this question are examined.

The programme of a global history of religion (*globale Religionsgeschichte*, also translated as *global religious history*), as formulated by Kollmar-Paulenz and other predominantly German-speaking scholars, combines a historical perspective specific to the discipline since its inception with theoretical impulses that have shaped methodological debates in recent decades. From the outset, religious studies, unlike most other historical and social science disciplines, has understood its subject, religion, as a global phenomenon, transcending the confines of European history. A global perspective has been integral to the tradition of the field, sometimes referred to as *comparative religion*. However, historical research has traditionally focused on a segmental history of religions, centring on the religions of specific regions or peoples, or the history of individual world religions. Even though the mutual influence of religious traditions was not overlooked, it was only with the growing interest in the religious history of modernity towards the end of the last century that increased attention was given to the global interdependence of developments.

Simultaneously, theoretical debates in religious studies have fundamentally questioned the traditional understanding of religion as a universal phenomenon, identifying the concept of religion as a construct of modern European discourses. From this perspective, the global use of the term 'religion' could be interpreted as a result of the hegemony of European knowledge orders initiated by colonialism. Kollmar-Paulenz does not dispute this view, especially concerning the word 'religion' in global discourses conducted in English. However, she argues that in non-European Asian societies, independently of the influence of European taxonomies, terms were

developed that can be translated as 'religion.' She supports this argument by examining the development of Mongolian knowledge orders from the 17th century onwards and the genealogy of words whose meanings overlap significantly with that of the word 'religion' in modern discourses. In particular, the word *šasin* underwent a broadening of meaning during this time as a generic term, initially encompassing only Buddhism but later incorporating Mongolian shamanism, Christianity, and other religions.

What significance does this finding have for a global history of religion? Two of the points mentioned by Kollmar-Paulenz seem particularly important to me, as they indicate possibilities for the emancipation of religious studies from the predominance of Western discourses and taxonomies. The first point concerns the observation that the modern Mongolian word *šasin*, used to translate 'religion,' was not formed in reaction to the confrontation with Western notions and knowledge but has its own independent history. The genealogy of this word, and this is the second point, shows that its meaning, much like the European word 'religion,' underwent changes. This transformation was not triggered solely by Western influences but was conditioned by endogenous factors of Mongolian society, the interdependence of Mongolian and Tibetan knowledge orders, and the dynamics of power relations. In this context, Kollmar-Paulenz criticises the widespread view that the knowledge orders of Asian societies lacked dynamic development before the colonial encounters with Europe.

From this well-founded finding based on philological analysis, one can conclude that there were discourses about religion *avant la lettre* in the Mongolian and Tibetan language areas. For a global history of religion in Kollmar-Paulenz's understanding, this means that Mongolian and other Asian discourses about religion deserve as much attention as European ones:

> Consequently, a global history of religion challenges European hegemony over the analytical concept of 'religion.' It adopts a multi-perspectivity that relates European and non-European analytical perspectives within the discourse field of 'religion'. (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 32; 2013: 187)

I understand this formulation as a programme outlining the objectives of global religious history. It seems that it is not about examining historical phenomena classified as 'religion' in global discourses but rather about investigating the discourses in which religion as a subject is constructed and discussed. Given the fact that the worldwide use of the word 'religion' (and its translations) was initiated by European discourses and thereby, a specific, mostly Protestant-influenced understanding of religion became predominant, the call is made to overcome this lopsidedness in religious studies by paying attention to non-European knowledge orders and their understanding of religion. Only then, one could argue, can the academic discourse on religion become a global discourse.

This argument is coherent and offers little reason for criticism. Perhaps one could argue that the genesis of religious studies occurred within the context of European knowledge orders and, therefore, both the understanding of religion and of science are fundamentally shaped by

European discourses. One might question whether it is possible to participate in the academic discourse on religion without simultaneously accepting the rules to which religious studies discourses are subjected. If the integration of Asian or African perspectives on religion is carried out by European or Western scholars, global dominance of the European understanding of religious studies is maintained. Under these conditions, global religious history would continue to be a research approach dependent on Western discourses, and Asian or African knowledge orders would gain global significance only by being integrated into a Western knowledge system. I am not sure if Kollmar-Paulenz understands the programme of global history of religion in this sense. An alternative interpretation could be to understand it as a more radical enterprise, challenging not only European hegemony over the concept of religion but also over the concept of religious studies.

However, Kollmar-Paulenz emphasises that the European imprint of the notion of religion and religious studies cannot be abolished (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 9; 2013: 154). The question of whether and how semantic, functional, or structural equivalents of religion are addressed in non-European discourses is necessarily posed against the backdrop of religious studies discourses. The fact that their central concepts are of European origin:

> [...] should not lead to a rejection of a common academic vocabulary. Instead, we should use it in a controlled and reflective manner to ensure that we do not lose sight of the nuances and complexities of our subject matter. (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 9; 2013: 155)

It is not entirely clear what is meant by 'subject matter' in this context. The subsequent elaborations suggest that the subject matter of global religious history comprises discourses about religion and discourses about words whose meanings overlap with that of 'religion' or are used as translations of 'religion.' *Global religious history* could then be understood as *global discursive study of religion*.

I suspect that Kollmar-Paulenz would only partially agree with this interpretation. A central concern of her approach is to emphasise that in non-European knowledge orders, there were discourses about religion before the European word was known. On what basis can one claim that, for example, Mongolian discourses in which the words *šasin* or *nom* acquired their meanings can be interpreted as discourses about 'religion'? Perhaps it suffices that *šasin* is used today as a translation of 'religion.' However, the genealogy of the usage of this word can only provide insight into the nuances of the meaning of *šasin.* Only when Mongolian actors are heard in the global discourse on religion would the genealogy of *šasin* become part of the genealogy of a globalised understanding of *religion*. I doubt that Western historians of religion can take on this task on behalf of others, and I see no reason why they should.

Kollmar-Paulenz's concern is different. She aims to broaden the perspective of religious studies, seeking to overcome its limitation by the hegemony of European knowledge orders. In a later publication, the focus on academic discourses becomes apparent:

> If we do not want to abandon the use of a common scientific language from the outset, we need to explore whether there is a possibility to develop transculturally applicable analytical concepts that include different worlds of experience beyond the privileged taxonomies of Anglo-American knowledge cultures. (Kollmar-Paulenz 2023: 14–15)

Global religious history considers that "secondary orders of knowledge" and classification systems were developed outside Europe. Despite the differences in content that may exist compared to European knowledge orders, "these systems can be brought into functional and structural analogy with each another and in this way, explored comparatively" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 32; 2013: 187). Of particular interest is, of course, a functional and structural analogy between the meanings of the word 'religion' and conceptually similar notions in pre-modern non-European discourses. By considering these concepts, European and non-European perspectives should be equally included in the "discursive field of 'religion'" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024:32; 2013: 187). In this way, "[o]ur European conceptualisations are thus adapted and modified by the inclusion of non-European worlds of experience" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2023: 15).

For Kollmar-Paulenz, global history of religion aims to integrate non-European understandings of religion into the theories of religious studies. Referring to Richard King, she asks, "Why should theorists be limited by the Western framing of the debate?" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 31; 2013: 186). There is no compelling reason for this, aside from the fact that most social science theorists have little knowledge of non-Western debates. However, one could also ask in reverse: Why should theorists not limit themselves to the Western framing of the debate on religion? In other words, what epistemological interest is behind the demand to expand and modify religious studies discourses or theories about religion by integrating non-European perspectives? Is there something that can only be recognised under this condition?

The question of epistemological interest concerns the programme of global religious history and religious studies as a whole. What do we want to recognise, and for what purpose? The question is fundamental, and it would be too much to ask for an answer from Kollmar-Paulenz. However, the programme of global religious history provokes the question of why we want to integrate non-European perspectives into religious studies discourses and "relinquish Europe's primacy in favor of a multi-centric viewpoint" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 32; 2013: 186). After all, most social sciences are quite comfortable with the fact that their theories are guided by Western perspectives. What are the arguments for integrating non-Western perspectives?

One could point out that post-colonial approaches are nowadays part of the standard repertoire of religious studies and do not require further justification. It is commonplace that European knowledge orders (like all others) emerged under specific historical conditions and their hegemonic position in global discourses is based on the political and economic power of the West, if not on its colonial expansion. Therefore, considering European knowledge superior to

other knowledge cultures is unfounded, and giving the latter equal attention is a matter of fairness. This would be a moral argument.

Theoretically more challenging is the further argument that religious studies, dominated by European concepts and theories, is methodologically naïve by reifying words like 'religion' and treating religion as something existing outside of discourses. Considering non-European knowledge cultures can show us that the European understanding of religion lacks universal validity. In this context, a goal of global religious history could be to criticise the hegemonic claim of the Western understanding of religion with the epistemological interest to explore "the historical conditions (power relations, implicit exclusions, claims of equivalence, etc.) that make hegemonic claims in today's knowledge production possible" (Maltese/Strube 2021: 244).

Critique of established knowledge is undoubtedly one of the core tasks of any science, at least according to modern Western understanding. As far as criticism of a naïve understanding of religion as an identifiable universal thing is concerned, this does not require a global history of religion. This criticism has been firmly established in methodological debates in religious studies for several decades. This should not prevent anyone from proceeding with exposing the colonial entanglements of religious studies and its concepts. Still, it seems to me more pressing to ask what epistemological interest religious studies can pursue after the dependency of the concept of religion on Western discourses and power relations has been recognised.

Kollmar-Paulenz's contribution stimulates a possible answer to this question. According to her understanding of global religious history, the analysis of discourses about religion does not need to be limited to those discourses that occurred under the influence of European global hegemony since the 19th century. She shows that even before the spread of the originally European notion of religion, Mongolian and Tibetan actors organised knowledge about social formations conceptually in a similar way to European actors in the modern era. Like in Western discourses, these concepts underwent changes in meaning and were disputed. They were not shaped in discourses about 'religion' because the word 'religion' was unknown. But words were used that, according to the understanding of the speakers and writers, referred to social formations that are labelled as 'religion' by modern Western observers. This could be a coincidental parallel.

It is part of Kollmar-Paulenz's programme of global religious history to examine non-European and non-modern knowledge orders to see if knowledge was or was not organised similarly. But even if there were only this single parallel, it can be compared with European classifications, and it can be asked under what conditions this form of conceptualisation occurred. Since factors other than colonial interests played a role in Mongolia, a comparison can provide new insights into the social conditions and genesis of interpretations of the social world associated with the word 'religion.' As a result, prevailing theories in religious studies that focus on the emergence and genealogy of the modern Western understanding of *religion* and its global impact would be expanded and modified.

Accordingly, a possible epistemological interest of a global history of religion would be to gain insight into how human knowledge systems are formed and organised, asking for the conditions under which similar classifications were developed or not in different cultures.

At the same time, research focusing on religion can help build religious studies theories that are not limited by concentrating on modern discourses about 'religion.'

Bibliography

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2013. "Lamas und Schamanen: Mongolische Wissensordnungen vom Frühen 17. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert. Ein Beitrag zur Debatte um Aussereuropäische Religionsbegriffe." In *Religion in Asien? Studien zur Anwendbarkeit des Religionsbegriffs*, ed. by Peter Schalk et al. Uppsala: University of Uppsala, 151–200.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2023. "Nga Rang Gi Chos Khyod Rang Gi Chos: 'My Religion and Your Religion'? About Some Fundamental Issues in the Global History of Religion." *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society*, 1–20 (online ahead of print). https://doi.org/10.30965/23642807-bja10082.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2024. "Lamas and Shamans: Mongolian Orders of Knowledge from the Early 17th to the 21st Century. A Contribution to the Debate on Non-European Concepts of Religion." *AЯGOS* 3 (2) Special Issue *Towards a Global History of Religion*, 6–47.

Maltese, Giovanni / Julian Strube. 2021. "Global Religious History." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 33 (3–4), 229–257. https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-12341517.

About the author

Hubert Seiwert is an emeritus professor of General and Comparative Religious Studies at the University of Leipzig. His research areas include the history of religions in China, the relationship between religion and politics, and methodological issues.

Mail: hubert.seiwert@uni-leipzig.de

Seeing Through One: Kollmar-Paulenz's Contributions to the Mongolian and Global Study of Religion(s)

Piotr Sobkowiak

29/01/2024

Abstract

The paper discusses the works by Professor Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz on Mongolian shamanism and Buddhism, embedded within the concept of a global history of religion. Contextualised within the debate on the existence of emic terms for "religion" outside of European epistemological traditions, the paper examines the disputes that Kollmar-Paulenz's approach has engendered among scholars engaged in post-structural paradigms and presents an argument for their theoretical reconsideration.

> " The obstinacy with which the particularity, and at the same time the incomparability, of cultures is asserted in postcolonial discourse is astonishing. The implications of such culturally relativistic obstinacy are grave. Contrary to the claim that Asian cultures should no longer be described in terms of deficiency but should be taken seriously in their culture-specific singularity, the postcolonial discourse moves straight towards a renewed confirmation of the exclusivity of European intellectual history. The development of an intellectual terminology remains Europe's achievement. (Kollmar-Paulenz 2007: 17–18)[1]

Lamas and Shamans belongs to a series of papers (Kollmar-Paulenz 2007; 2008; 2012a, 2012b, 2012c; 2013; 2014; 2017) spanning a decade of Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz's research on the history of the emic discourse on two Mongolian religious traditions—Buddhism and Shamanism. My commentary is therefore placed in the context of her other papers relating to the same topic. This contextualisation crucially clarifies that "Lamas and Shamans" is neither a single paper nor the final outcome of her works on the topic.

---

[1] "Die Hartnäckigkeit, mit der im postkolonialen Diskurs die Partikularität und zugleich die Unvergleichbarkeit der Kulturen behauptet wird, erstaunt. Die Implikationen solch kulturrelativistischer Hartnäckigkeit sind schwerwiegend. Entgegen dem Anspruch, asiatische Kulturen nicht mehr in Defizienzkategorien zu beschreiben, sondern in ihrer kulturspezifischen Singularität ernst zu nehmen, führt der postkoloniale Diskurs geradewegs zu einer erneuten Bestätigung des europäischen geistesgeschichtlichen Sonderwegs. Die Herausbildung einer reflexiven Terminologie bleibt die Errungenschaft Europas" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2007: 17–18).

The paper presented in English translation in this special issue was published in German[2] in the collected volume *Religion in Asien?* (Schalk et al. 2013). In this work, scholars specialising in the Asian history of religion(s) ask whether it is possible to prove that semantic and functional equivalents of the term "religion" existed in pre-modern Asian history (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 15; 2013: 162). This stance was to challenge the claim that before the colonial encounters between the "West" and the "Rest," the Asian cultures, albeit having produced a vast range of religious texts, had not developed any term that could be translated as "religion" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2013: 2024: 7–9; 152–154). Approaching this problem, Kollmar-Paulenz noticed that first of all, the claims that Asian languages had no term(s) corresponding to "religion" was often made by authors who do not have the necessary philological competence and mostly work in the field of European history of religions (2007: 2). She also observed that "the few religious studies works that examine non-European analytical terminologies often lack historicization and contextualisation" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 11, FN 20; 2013: 157, FN 20).

In tune with the German tradition of *Begriffsgeschichte* (conceptual history), Kollmar-Paulenz advocated for research into the Mongolian and Tibetan intellectual traditions early in her works on Mongolian religion(s) (2007: 16). She later called it "the most urgent methodological desiderium of a study of religion that claims a global scope for its subject matter" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 10–11; 2013: 157). The philologically based methodology Kollmar-Paulenz employed is theoretically anchored in the post-structural socio-linguistic theories that frame the discursive study of religion(s) as it is practised nowadays.

Applying her profound knowledge of classical languages—Mongolian, Tibetan, and Sanskrit—Kollmar-Paulenz conducted an in-depth philological analysis of a wide range of texts that cover over four hundred years of Tibetan and Mongolian textual traditions. She first focused on the umbrella terms (*Oberbegriffe*) which, by bundling together other concepts (practises, rituals, ideas, concepts, and persons), differentiate and organise them in a distinct area of knowledge (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 7–8; 2013: 151). In the Mongolian language, she identifies two such terms: *nom* and *šasin*. She explains that *šasin* is a borrowing from Sanskrit and historically refers to teachings of the Buddha as introduced to the Mongols by the Tibetan monks, especially those of the *dGe lugs pa* school (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 15–16; 2013: 163). She also notes that the meaning of *šasin* shows similarities with *religio* in the Christian Late Antiquity (Kollmar-Paulenz 2007: 16). *Nom*, in turn, is also a borrowing; it came into the Mongolian language, through Sogdian, from Greek (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 15–16; 2013: 163). Kollmar-Paulenz explains that *šasin* and *nom*, first, translate Tibetan terms (Tib. *bstan pa* and *chos*), second, were used as self-identification markers for Buddhism in Mongolia and, third, were applied in comparisons, as in the oppositions "yellow religion" (Mn. *sir-a šasin*; i.e., Buddhism) and "black religion" (Mn. *qar-a šasin*; i.e. Shamanism) (Kollmar-Paulenz 2007: 15).

---

[2] Whenever philologically reasoned, I refer to the German original (Kollmar-Paulenz 2013).

Moving to terms that can also be translated as "religion" but etymologically refer to body-related practises, Kollmar-Paulenz deconstructs the term *mörgöl*, which denotes the act of bowing (2024: 21–22; 2013: 171–172). She draws attention to the shift in meaning of Mongolian terms from the religio-philosophical domain, as in *šasin*, to religio-pragmatic one, as in *mörgöl*. Discussing the Mongolian term *üjel*—"view" or "views"—which denotes the act of seeing, she relates it to "the actors and their performance, as well as their emotional and intellectual responses to seeing and being seen" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2012c: 12). The "wrong views" (Mn. *buruyu üjel*) of the Mongolian shamans, in turn, denotes polemics against religious outsiders and their non-Buddhist world-view (*Weltsicht*) (Kollmar-Paulenz 2007: 13). Furthermore, Kollmar-Paulenz analyses the Buddhists' inclusion-exclusion and derogatory terminology for naming shamans (2024: 18–22; 2013: 167–171).

Embedding her research in Bourdieu's field theory (Kollmar-Paulenz 2012c: 8), Kollmar-Paulenz explores the missionary strategies of Buddhist monks in Mongolia between the 17th and 19th centuries. Framed in this way, the history of Mongolian religion(s) appears interwoven with questions of political power and social status. Investigating the history of the dissemination of Buddhism in Mongolia, Kollmar-Paulenz points to its legislative implications reflected in the local laws: the ban of animal sacrifices, the confiscation and burning of representations of ancestral and shamans' helping spirits (Mn. *ongyod*) (Kollmar-Paulenz 2012b: 240), the financial penalties for employing shamans, and the orders permitting their public humiliation (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 13–14; 2013: 160). On the other hand, Kollmar-Paulenz discusses the gratifications for those who memorised Buddhist mantras as well as other forms of economic competition between the shamans and the lamas (2012a: 92–95). In addition, she touches upon the Qing legislation, in which shamans and lamas were mentioned (2012a: 100; 2024: 22–23; 2013: 173). All these aspects emphasise that shamanism did not develop in a legislative vacuum, and Buddhism influenced the introduction of new laws in order to establish its position.

Against the backdrop of this in-depth socio-historical contextualisation, Kollmar-Paulenz's focus is not so much philological but rather historic-anthropological and is clearly predicated on the analysis of specific practises that the Buddhists contested (2007: 18). Kollmar-Paulenz elaborates on the emphasis put on the physical performance of religion in a separated paper, which relates the history of Mongolian religion(s) to the discourse of the body, with added focus on gender aspects (2012b). These approaches shift Mongolian shamanism away from its previous "ahistorical" and rigid space of cosmology, mythology, and "ritualogy," placing it instead in the framework of intellectual-textual, political-economical, and body-related history. The theories and methodology that Kollmar-Paulenz introduced and applied to the study of Mongolian shamanism were innovative and much needed in the field of Tibetan and Mongolian studies.

From the outset of the project on Mongolian Buddhist intellectual tradition, Kollmar-Paulenz stressed that her topic is related to the discourse of the Buddhist elites (2007: 18; 2024: 30–31; 2013: 184). Consequently, Mongolian shamanism, as deconstructed by Kollmar-Paulenz, is bounded to the reality of the (dominant) texts and leaves the question of social "reality" open.

The voices "from below," including those of the shamans, are absent outside of Buddhist-Mongolian historiography. In these narratives, they merely fit into their historical role as the conquered. In this respect, scholars who follow post-colonial premises might well have expressed their critique of Kollmar-Paulenz's studies. However, seemingly the most problematic concept that emerged from *Lamas and Shamans* as well as from other papers on neighbouring topics is the idea of the global history of religion(s), which, in Kollmar-Paulenz's words, "challenges European hegemony over analytical concept of 'religion'" (2024: 32–33; 2013: 187).

Several scholars, who also follow the premises of a discursive and post-colonial study of religion(s), have expressed their scepticism towards Kollmar-Paulenz's studies. Adrian Hermann criticises the search for equivalents of the term "religion" in non-Christian cultures and opts for focusing on translations, where "meaning itself becomes a phenomenon under investigation" (Hermann 2016: 107). In his opinion, a "focus on translingual practice makes it possible to conceptualise equivalent signifiers for 'religion' in different languages without necessarily grounding them in a shared signified 'phenomenon'" (Hermann 2016: 107). Instead, Hermann opts to focus on contradictions that can aid to build "hypothetical equivalents of 'religion'" (Hermann 2016: 111). On a more fundamental theoretical level, Frank Neubert points out two aspects that, in his view, run contrary to the discursive approach to the study of religion(s): the *will to see* and find a non-European equivalent of "religion" which, in turn, implicates the existence of a "definable field" (*abgrenzbarer Teilbereich*) of religion (Neubert 2014: 183). Both Neubert's and Hermann's remarks question the implied pre-existence of an object of investigation, since such postulation would contradict a "pure" discursive approach (assuming that such a pure approach exists).

Expressing their opinions on the "problem" of the emic term(s) for "religion," Neubert and Hermann both refer to Kollmar-Paulenz's works. Neubert's assessment of her approach as "not-orthodox-enough" in terms of what "discursive" means or should mean, is seconded by Hermann's explicit critique of the search for one-to-one correspondence with the term "religion" in non-European contexts and by his call for a narrow investigation into the translation processes preceded by the establishment of hypothetical binaries. Regarding Hermann's critique, such hypothetical binaries—for example, religion-non-religion, religion-or-superstition, our-religion-your-religion—are not to be found in the Mongolian context, because these hypothetical equivalents are, once again, deeply rooted in the European history of religion(s). They can be established only as the *result* of discourse and cannot be used as its premises, as Kollmar-Paulenz showed in the paper concluding her work on the topic (Kollmar-Paulenz 2017). Regarding Neubert's point, the *will to see* "religion" in a particular language is necessary for one reason: to mark the initial area of investigation. In other words, the emic terms serve to approximately mark *where* to look for certain practises that formed religion(s) in non-European contexts. Hence, the question is not whether there were "religion(s)" outside of Europe but rather whether they were outside of textual tradition(s).

Hermann's and Neubert's stances have one thing in common: They are framed by a definition of discourse that is rigidly tied to language. However, to quote Foucault, in the discourse analysis, "words are as deliberately absent as things themselves" (Foucault 2002: 53). Consequently, discourse analysis must be placed *outside* the language milieu. In Kollmar-Paulenz's study, it surely is. For her, the discursive approach to the global study of religion(s) is not a search for term(s) that can be translated as "religion"; rather, it is the contestations of various practises within the field marked by such terms. In my view, this is the crucial point of her works, which surely can be extended to the programme of a global history of religion: to place a historical discourse analysis *outside* the textual marker and outside of rigid frames of philology. Instead, as Kollmar-Paulenz shows, the understanding of "religion" applied to emic contexts should be framed as a history of body-related practises (2017: 244). Framed in such a way, "religion" becomes a marker for image(s) animated by practises that stand *outside* of "religion"—perhaps even outside of language itself.

As part of this Western discourse on "religion," Kollmar-Paulenz argues that "shamanism" owes its existence on a global scale to the hegemonic dominance of the European protestant model of "religion" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2012a: 91). What she showed, however, was that shamanism in Mongolia was *also* constructed—but on the Buddhist model instead. It was "Buddhism gone wrong" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2012c: 12; 2024: 17–18; 2013: 166), emerging due to the contact of Buddhists with the "religious others," the shamans. Consequently, in the author's words, "the notion of 'shamanism,' however, exists not only in the Western anthropologist's imagination, but already existed in the imagination of Mongolian Buddhist intellectuals of the 17th to 19th centuries" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2012: 16). Kollmar-Paulenz's works and those of other scholars published in *Religion in Asien?* show that

> [...] contrary to the [dominant] thesis, Asian cultures did indeed identify, sometimes in very specific ways, segments of culture that we would classify as 'religion' [...] in situations where religious agents see themselves confronted with a certain 'Other' with which they are competing. (Deeg/Freiberger/Kleine 2013: xviii–xix)

One outcome of Kollmar-Paulenz's project on Mongolian shamanism was also my own work on Buryat shamanism (Sobkowiak 2023), in which I focus on the micro-histories in Transbaikalia and relate them to the Buryat-Buddhist and Russian elite-discourse. My work confirmed Kollmar-Paulenz's research, though it also showed that the reality of the Mongolian elite discourse is perhaps too rigidly placed in the semantic unity (*Bedeutungsgebundenheit*) of the Mongolian language (Kollmar-Paulenz 2007: 17). The unifying concept of "religion" thus sometimes runs independently of the historical and geographical spaces. Notwithstanding these remarks, my study showed that—through the power of dominant histories (for which I coined the term "histonomy")—Buryat shamanism was indeed "created" and emerged as a unified entity in 19th-century Transbaikalia. It emerged in the process of partial "othering" of material objects, practises, and people, on the one hand, and their appropriation in new historical circumstances,

on the other. Surprisingly, it turned out that the shamans played a marginal role in this process but eventually emerged as leaders of a full-fledged religion with its own history.

In my opinion, one of Kollmar-Paulenz's crucial observations on the history of (Mongolian) religion(s) concerns the emphasis on *lack* that underpinned the (Buddhist) perspective on their religious "Others": the lack of books, the lack of knowledge, the lack of religion and, consequently, the lack of civilisation (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 17–18; 2013: 166; 2014: 125), enhanced, in turn, by the images of (non-Buddhist) "barbarity" of "people who eat and drink the flesh and blood of living beings" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 12–13, FN 26; 2013: 159, FN 26). This image is ostensibly familiar—the religion of the book(s) creates its non-religious others through the negative image of "barbarous illiterates." If the history of the colonial "Other(s)" can be expressed in terms of *lack* and *will*, then the historical will to see non-European cultures in terms of a deficiency of religion might perpetuate the will to see them deprived of religion in the future global world. If it was so, the colonial will to see non-European cultures "through" religion turns nowadays into the will to see the absence of religion in the future world animated, once again, by the achievements of the "West." However, as the Mongolian case proves, every loss of the previous familiarity of objects and practises is preceded by the recognition of this familiarity in the first stance. The "achievements" of the Western world might thus not necessarily be accepted elsewhere.

In most regions of the world, including Europe, religion has played, and still plays, a vital socio-political role. Religion is a historical entity, so it cannot exist without or outside of history. Consequently, the global study of religion(s) needs to study the images and practises that still perpetuate socio-political power relations in European and non-European cultures. The studies of the latter, however, should not rely on the imposition of apparently universal concepts; nor should concepts created outside of European epistemological tradition be introspectively applied to enrich the Western, already quite rich, world. While Hermann calls a decade of Kollmar-Paulenz's work a "fruitless and tautological search for the existence of equivalents" (Hermann 2016: 106), Wittgenstein reminds us, "Tautology leaves to reality the whole infinite logical space; contradiction fills the whole logical space and leaves no point to reality" (Wittgenstein 1922: 98, no 4.463). Indeed, the implicit tautology is what underlines the search for equivalents of the term "religion" in cultures that developed their traditions independently from Christianity. Tautology facilitates an image of intellectual, cultural, and even diachronic oneness, as Kollmar-Paulenz illustrates in the last sentences of *Lamas and Shamans* (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 35–36; 2013: 191). Framed in such a way, the study of religion(s) can very well drop its "s" and become an object of global study in human epistemology seen as one.

Bibliography

Deeg, Max / Oliver Freiberger / Christoph Kleine. 2013. "Einleitung." In *Religionen in Asien? Studien zur Anwendung des Religionsbegriffs*, ed. by Peter Schalk / Max Deeg / Oliver Freiberger / Christoph Kleine / Astrid van Nahl. Uppsala: Uppsala University, ix–xix.

Foucault, Michel. 2002. *Archaeology of Knowledge*. London / New York: Routledge.

Hermann, Adrian. 2016. "Distinctions of Religion: The Search for Equivalents of 'Religion' and the Challenge of Theorizing a 'Global Discourse of Religion.'" In *Making Religion: Theory and Practice in the Discursive Study of Religion*, ed. by Frans Wijsen / Kocku von Stuckrad. Leiden: Brill, 97–124.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2007. *Zur Ausdifferenzierung eines autonomen Bereichs Religion in asiatischen Gesellschaften des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts: Das Beispiel der Mongolen*. Bern: Schweizerische Akademie der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2008. "Forming A Mongolian Buddhist Identity: The Biography of Neichi Toin." In *Biographies of Eminent Mongol Buddhists*, ed. by Johan Elverskog. Halle: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 13–28.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2012a. "The Invention of 'Shamanism' in 18th–Century Mongolian Elite Discourse." *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* LXV/1, 90–106.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2012b. "Embodying the Dharma. The Buddhist Way into Mongolia." In *Transformations and Transfer of Tantra in Asia and Beyond*, ed. by István Keul. Berlin: De Gruyter, 239–261.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2012c. "A method that helps living beings: How the Mongols created 'shamanism.'" *Mongolo-Tibetica Pragnesia* 12 (5/2), 7–19.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2013. "Lamas und Schamanen: Mongolische Wissenordnungen vom frühen 17. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert. Ein Beitrag zur Debatte um aussereuropäische Religionsbegriffe." In *Religionen in Asien? Studien zur Anwendung des Religionsbegriffs*, ed. by Peter Schalk / Max Deeg / Oliver Freiberger / Christoph Kleine / Astrid van Nahl. Uppsala: Uppsala University, 151–200.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2014. "Systematically Ordering the World: The Encounter of Buriyad-Mongolian, Tibetan and Russian Knowledge Cultures in the 19th Century." *Études de lettres* 2–3, 123–146.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2017. "Of Yellow Teaching and Black Faith: Entangled Knowledge Cultures and the Creation of Religious Traditions." In *Dynamics of Religion. Past and Present. Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten* 67, ed. by Christoph Bochinger / Jörg Rüpke. Berlin / Boston: de Gruyter, 231–250.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2024. "Lamas and Shamans: Mongolian Orders of Knowledge from the Early 17th to the 21st Century. A Contribution to the Debate on Non-European Concepts of Religion." AЯGOS 3 (2) Special Issue Towards a Global History of Religion, 6–47.

Neubert, Frank. 2014. *Die diskursive Konstitution von Religion*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Schalk, Peter / Max Deeg / Oliver Freiberger / Christoph Kleine / Astrid van Nahl, eds. 2013. *Religionen in Asien? Studien zur Anwendung des Religionsbegriffs*. Uppsala: Uppsala University.

Sobkowiak, Piotr. 2023. *The Religion of the Shamans: History, Politics, and the Emergence of Shamanism in Transbaikalia*. Paderborn: Brill Schöningh.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1922. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London: Routledge & Kegan.

About the author

Dr. **Piotr Sobkowiak** serves as a research assistant at the Institute for the Science of Religion of the University of Bern. His research areas include the socio-political history of religions in southern Siberia and Mongolia, with an analytical focus on "bookless" religious traditions examined through the lens of post-structural theories of history.

Mail: piotr.sobkowiak@unibe.ch

Deviation from the System of "Nourishing Life": Religious Innovation in Japan

Katja Triplett

Veröffentlicht am 29/01/2024

Abstract

In this response to Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz's celebrated essay on non-European concepts in the global study of religion, I discuss the possibility for religious innovation in a socio-religious situation stabilised by objectified elite perspectives by reference to formative teachings and practices in Tenrikyō, a religion founded by Nakayama Miki in 1838. Nakayama Miki's deviation from the knowledge system of "nourishing life" (*yōjō*), especially in regard to perinatal food taboos, analysed here on the basis of hagiographical accounts of the foundress, aimed to free humans from all food restrictions. By concentrating on the traditional Japanese "nourishing life" system and its food regulations as an identity marker of the "other", proponents of freedom from them, as taught by the foundress, contributed in some way, paradoxically, to the stabilisation of the norms.

1. Introduction

Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz encourages all scholars of the study of religion to participate in the project of writing a global history of religion. She proposes to start by historicising descriptive and analytical terminologies and concepts developed in regions outside of Europe. In her celebrated chapter, she observes reification processes in early modern Mongolian discourses that led to the othering of those non-Buddhist religious groups whom the ruling elite perceived as being in competition with the newly introduced Buddhist religion. As Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz points out, the available textual sources make us, however, aware of "only one side of the dispute between indigenous and Buddhist actors" (2024: 14), since the indigenous actors used to pass on their knowledge orally and were not involved directly in the production of texts. Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz invites us scholars to look at the 'other' side, an approach reflected in my own work on premodern and early modern Japan. I seek to make the voices of the othered side audible by, for example, looking at the material culture of religious actors read as non-elite. As noted by Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz: "the perspectives held and socially enforced by the elites" means that they "were objectified in the historical process and became constitutive of the significant changes in the socio-religious field" (2024: 10). The othered side might, in consequence, appear as forever muted by the ensuing elite discourses and laws and regulations, and the religious field as a whole seemingly lapsing into stagnation.

How is it at all possible for something new to arise in a socio-religious situation stabilised by objectified elite perspectives? In this short essay, I will develop the question further by reference to the case of a religion that emerged in nineteenth-century Japan, as a critical appraisal of Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz's approach.

2. The problem of religious innovation

External factors may force changes in the social field of religion and lead to new cultural expressions. This in itself is not the only case of the emergence of more fundamental changes as resistance from individuals and groups against internal objectified elite perspectives is not always futile: One way to observe religious innovation is to shed light on breaks away from orthodox tradition and on charismatic individuals' and their followers' conscious formation of something new. Such breaks with tradition, or perceived breaks with tradition, do not necessarily result in the formation of a new religion, they can also be seen as reforms or revitalisation of existing doctrine, social structures, and material culture. A useful term to academically describe the more radical changes within the social field of religion is to refer to them as innovations.[1]

Whereas most studies on new religions and innovation in religious traditions consider religious doctrine, it may be fruitful to shift the view to social fields that at first glance are not primarily connected with religious innovation. Considering "possible connections, interdependencies and transfer processes between various knowledge cultures […] in both non-European and European societies" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 32) is one of the research topics that according to Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz belong to writing a global history of religion. I will, therefore, in my appraisal of her work, focus on linkages between the knowledge systems of nutrition, physical and social hygiene, and religion in nineteenth-century Japan.

Deviation from the knowledge system of "nourishing life": the case of Tenrikyō

In nineteenth-century Japan an intricate system of prescribed and prohibited foods appears to have been quite stabilised. It formed part of a larger knowledge system of "nourishing of life" (*yōjō* 養生), meaning health maintenance by right moral conduct, originally adopted from China. The system prescribed adherence to traditional customs and rites including the correct diet for all members of human society. We find special prescriptions for age groups, gender, the sick or dying, and special occasions such as weddings. The regulations about food intake concerned especially pregnancy and birth.

The break with the century-old tradition that had been shaping human society is one of the key moments in the establishment of the Japanese religion Tenrikyō, the "Teaching of the Divine Principle", founded by the charismatic Nakayama Miki[2] (1798–1887) in a small village in the

---

[1]   For a critical evaluation of interpretative venues in regard to religious innovation, see Williams et al. 1992, 7–10.

[2]   Nakayama is the family name, Miki the given name.

Yamato basin in Japan.[3] Nakayama Miki was a married farmer with several children and owner of a stately homestead. As a pious lay Buddhist, she had a deep understanding of traditional Japanese religion. After becoming a religious leader of an independent religion that was later called Tenrikyō, she famously wrote down some of her teachings (*Ofudesaki*) in the form of waka poetry. Among her many teachings is the encouragement to deviate from the traditional pattern of perinatal food taboos.[4]

Perinatal food taboos in Japan were also part of a complex arrangement of health maintenance rules linked with Japanese esoteric Buddhist and local *kami* (gods) rituals. The tradition of perinatal regimen in Japan were (and are, outside Tenrikyō, to some extent) part of a whole range of prescriptions for pregnant women and young mothers. From the late 17th century onward, in early modern Japan main-stream ideology "[t]o safely deliver a healthy child was portrayed as an ethical achievement that was of profound social significance" (Burns 2002: 179). This concerned especially the idea of a contagion moving from mother to foetus called "womb poison" (*taidoku* 胎毒") and the fear connected to it of pollution by life-harming things (*kegare*). The pregnant woman was to turn to life-affirming things (*hare*) and carefully learn about risky and beneficial foodstuffs. The knowledge about well-being of mother and foetus was found in more or less fixed formulations of "womb education" (*taikyō* 胎教) passed on orally within the family and the circle of caretakers as well as in printed manuals.

Womb education in 19th-century Japan

19th-century "womb education" included wrapping the pregnant belly with a binder (*hara obi*) in the fifth month and taking particular birthing positions. Much attention was paid to postnatal prescriptions such as remaining in an upright position, called "high pillow" (*takamakura* 高枕), for many days after giving birth and to food taboos (*imi* 忌み). The custom of spending many weeks in a tiny parturition hut or maternity house, referred to as *ubuya* 産屋, was thought to guarantee an easy and safe birth (see Tonomura 2007). The custom was so widespread that by the 19th century, people used the word *ubuya* as a synomym for "childbirth".

Food regimen included not just single food items but specific combinations of foods. In the popular etiquette manual "A Record of Treasures for Women" (*Onna chōhōki* 女重宝記, 1692) written by the physician Namura Jōhaku 苗村丈伯(?–ca. 1748), perinatal food taboos are divided into several categories. Ignoring restrictions was believed to have both immediate and long-term consequences for the child such as impairments, an immoral character, affliction with childhood diseases including the feared smallpox. Looking more closely at the foods to be avoided, we see

---

[3] In 1896, Tenrikyō had over 3 million followers in Japan, amounting to about 7 % of the population. The high success of the religion led to state repression of the followers and their activities. Today, there are about two million followers worldwide.

[4] I developed parts of the following discussion at the workshop "Nourishing Values, Feeding Differences, – (Religious) Foodways Compared," organised by Jörg Albrecht, Thomas Krutak, Bernadett Bigalke and Nikolas Broy and held at the Institute for the Study of Religions, University of Leipzig, 2–4 March 2023.

that the shape or colour of the food item was believed to be linked with the affliction. For example, consuming crab can lead to lateral birth because a crab moves sideways (Lindsey 2007: 128–131). When a pregnant woman would eat persimmon, a yellow-orange fruit, the child was believed to suffer from jaundice after birth. The sources of this kind of knowledge in the early and mid-19ᵗʰ century were, apart from etiquette manuals and medical writing by midwifes who were female as well as physicians who were predominantly male, family members and other caretakers.

Interlinked with the health-maintenance system of nourishing life which often amounted to medical prescriptions, the well-being and protection of the mother-to-be and the unborn child was held to be ensured by Buddhist deities. The etiquette manual "A Record of Treasures for Women" introduced above, that the foundress of Tenrikyō may have known since it circulated as a mass-printed book, shows charts of Buddhist deities in charge of the unborn child by month of pregnancy.

Bodhisattva Jizō was believed to be the protector of the unborn baby in the fifth month of gestation. This was the month the child was believed to have a human form and no longer the form of Buddhist ritual implements like the vajra or a monastic's ringed staff, as during the first to forth months. The fifth month was also when the special binder (*hara obi*) was ceremonially wrapped around the mother's belly. She then counted as ritually impure and was not supposed to visit a Shinto shrine for some time. The wrapping visibly marked the social, physical and also religious liminality of the mother-to-be. Despite the pregnant woman's ritual impurity, there were some *kami* believed to protect young mothers, and a set of rituals to ensure safe childbirth (*anzan kigan* 安産祈願) (Göhlert 2014).

Perinatal prescriptions can be characterised as remarkably consistent throughout the centuries. The knowledge imparted in etiquette manuals was intended for the general public, meaning lay Buddhists who were also attending services at Shinto shrines or had someone do on their behalf. Apart from Buddhist monastics, other groups of religious virtuosi offered healing services as well. The cured often revered the more successful male and female healers as living deities (*ikigami* 生き神).

To sum up we can state that the system of health maintenance, interlinked with religion and ritual, was all-encompassing and determined much of the social life of people in Japan. Nakayama Miki, the foundress of Tenrikyō, however, is reported to have forcefully dismissed the conventional ways when assisting in births, proclaiming that the single creator god, Tenri-Ō-no-mikoto 天理王命, also referred to as Oyagamisama 親神様 ("God the Parent"), who spoke through her, permitted a departure from the tradition. Followers of the religion state that Tenrikyō was founded in 1838 when Nakayama Miki first had the revelation that she was the "Shrine of God", but the religion started to spread after she had abolished all prescriptions and traditional customs around and during childbirth in her social context. She referred to this as *obiya yurushi* をびや許し: *obiya* from *ubuya* ("childbirth"), and *yurushi* meaning "to free,

permit". The official Tenrikyō translation of the term into English is "Grant for Safe Childbirth" (Oyasato Institute for the Study of Religion 2010: 118–120).

Obiya yurushi – the grant for safe childbirth – according to the Hagiographic accounts

The hagiographic account of the foundress' life state that Nakayama Miki, affectionately referred to as Oyasama ("Parent"),[5] first granted it in 1854 to her pregnant daughter Oharu, who had to urgently leave her maternity hut because of an earthquake and went to her mother's homestead to give birth to her first child. Although another earthquake severely damaged the birthing chamber at Miki's homestead on the day Oharu gave birth, Oharu delivered the child without any problems. The final episode of the introduction of the *obiya yurishi* in the hagiography introduces Yuki, the pregnant wife of one of Oyasama's followers. In the hagiography, the cases of Oharu and Yuki are juxtaposed: Whereas Oharu recovered immediately from childbirth, Yuki, who as it turns out had adhered to traditional food taboos, did not. Yuki became very ill but was, in the end, cured by Oyasama (Tenrikyō kyōkai honbu 1986: 36–38). The stories emphasise that the crucial point is submission to God the Parent who created humankind. Humans were supposed to be free from worry. The message is: People should see women's reproductive bodies not as problematic and should not emphasise the danger of pregnancy, birthing, and puerperium. Instead, they should follow Miki's teachings, rely on God, and not have any doubts or fears.

Miki first bestowed the Grant by stroking and blowing on the belly of the pregnant women. Later, Miki imparted the Grant by placing sugar candies into small paper envelopes. This is related in an episode of Miki's life recorded by her followers. The episode, listed as no. 151 in *Anecdotes of Oyasama*, reports on an *obiya yurishi* ceremony that took place when Miki was 87 years old and widely revered as an *ikigami*, a living god with healing powers. The anecdote relates:

> " One of the attendants handed a pair (of scissors) to Her, and Oyasama cut the paper squarely. Then She brought out about one hundred and fifty grams of small sugar candies. She put three candies on each of the three sheets of paper and wrapped them, saying:
>
> 'This is for the Grant for Safe Childbirth. A high pillow or a binder is not necessary. And, as this is the season of persimmons, do not be afraid to eat them.' (Tenrikyo Church Headquarters 1976: 123)

The Grant for Safe Childbirth with using sugar candies (*konpeitō*), as well as other "sacred food" (*goku*) bestowed by Tenrikyō followers, was eventually, in 1904, replaced by uncooked rice. The reason for replacing sugar with rice kernels is not entirely clear. However, it seems that at the time state authorities prohibited the distribution of "sacred food" and the Grant for Safe Childbirth in the form of sugar candies as they suspected illicit ingredients in them

---

5   The characters used to write "Oyasama" are interestingly 教祖, which literally mean "founder/foundress of a religion".

(Forbes 2005: 55–80). Apparently, distributing regular rice kernels seems to have been in line with the state regulations although state repression of Tenrikyō continued to impact the life of the Tenrikyō followers.

Tenrikyō believers placed rice kernels on the most sacred place of the main Tenrikyō sanctuary to make the Grant and then packaged and distributed it. Today, those requesting the *obiya yurushi* service from Tenrikyō Headquarters in Tenri, Japan, will receive three small packets of blessed rice that the mother-to-be consumes in three stages through the birthing process and after.

3. Religious innovation and the stabilisation of norms

From the point of view of Tenrikyō, the deviation from the traditional health-maintenance system that includes food taboos was a complete break with the taboo tradition; the break was held to be required by God the Parent and adhering to the taboo tradition was believed to be a sign of not trusting the true God. The establishment of the *obiya yurishi* is undoubtedly seen as one of the decisive, if not defining, moments in the establishment of Tenrikyō. Does this mean that Nakayama Miki and her followers destabilised objectified elite perspectives and managed to have a novel impact on the socio-religious situation, for example by empowering women and enabling their bodily autonomy? In other words: Did Nakayama Miki's rather radical views have a lasting impact on Japanese society, given that many women and families seem to have suffered from the stringent food regimen and birthing practices?[6]

One could also suggest that the ingestion of blessed rice with the full trust in God the Parent could be interpreted as a mere replacement of the traditional "nourishing life" system. The system itself continued to play an important role as the emphasis of the freedom from it only worked with contrasting the new practice commanded of the foundress by the true God, with the 'superstitious' food and birthing practices prevalent at the time (and, to some extent, persisting to this day; see Seaman 2009). Because the access to the ritual service of producing and distributing the *obiya yurushi* is highly controlled it remains successfully part of a strategy of self-assertion and management of the religion Tenrikyō in a multireligious environment. Tenrikyō followers emphasise that the freedom from religiously motivated food restrictions is one of the unique characteristics of their religion. However, by concentrating on the traditional Japanese norms as well as on food regulations as an identity marker of the 'other' religions in the world, they contribute to the stabilisation of these 'other' norms.

To conclude, I argue that part of a global history of religion must address not only contentions within the circle of the intellectual elite and among adherents of different religions but also in commensality and its material culture.

---

[6] For a discussion of the related question of women's social empowerment, see Ambros 2013.

Bibliography

Ambros, Barbara. 2013. "Nakayama Miki's Views of Women and Their Bodies in the Context of Nineteenth Century Japanese Religions." *Tenri Journal of Religion* 41, 85–116.

Burns, Susan L. 2002. "The Body as Text: Confucianism, Reproduction, and Gender in Early Modern Japan." In *Rethinking Confucianism: Past and Present in China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam*, ed. by Benjamin Elman / John B. Duncan / Herman Ooms. Los Angeles: University of California, 178–219.

Forbes, Roy Tetsuo. 2005. *Schism, Orthodoxy and Heresy in the History of Tenrikyō: Three Case Studies*, M.A. Thesis, University of Hawai'i.

Göhlert, Christian. 2014. "*Anzan kigan*: Rituelle Geburtspraktiken in Japan im Wandel der Zeit." *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 68 (1), 189–232.

Jōhaku, Namura 苗村丈伯. 1692. *Onna chōhōki* 女重宝記, n/a.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2024. "Lamas and Shamans: Mongolian Orders of Knowledge from the Early 17th to the 21st Century. A Contribution to the Debate on Non-European Concepts of Religion." *AЯGOS* 3 (2) Special Issue *Towards a Global History of Religion*, 6–47.

Lindsey, William R. 2007. *Fertility and Pleasure: Ritual and Sexual Values in Tokugawa Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Oyasato Institute for the Study of Religion, ed. 2010. *A Glossary of Tenrikyo Terms*. Tenri: Tenrikyo Overseas Department.

Seaman, Amanda C. 2009. "The Ties that Bind: Pregnancy and the Persistence of Tradition in Contemporary Japan." *Asian Medicine* 5 (1), 39–56.

Tenrikyo Church Headquarters, ed. 1976. *Anecdotes of Oyasama, the Foundress of Tenrikyo*. Tenri: Tenrikyo Church Headquarters.

Tenrikyō kyōkai honbu 天理教教會本部, ed. 1986. *Kōhon Tenrikyō oyasama den* 稿本天理教教祖傳, Tenri: Tenri dōyūsha.

Tonomura, Hitomi. 2007. "Birth-Giving and Avoidance Taboo: Women's Body Versus the Historiography of Ubuya." *Japan Review* 19, 3–45.

Williams, Michael A. / Collett Cox / Martin S. Jaffee. 1992. "Religious innovation: An introductory essay." In *Innovation in Religious Traditions: Essays in the Interpretation of Religious Change*, ed. by Michael A. Williams / Collett Cox / Martin S. Jaffee. Berlin / New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1–17.

About the author

Dr. phil. habil. **Katja Triplett** is Affiliate Professor (*Privatdozentin*) for the Study of Religions at the University of Marburg and currently Senior Research Fellow at the University of Leipzig. Among her publications is *Buddhism and Medicine in Japan: A Topical Survey (500-1600 CE) of a Complex Relationship* (Berlin 2021).

Mail: katja.triplett@uni-leipzig.de

The Western Concept of Religion seen through Asian Alternatives: Remarks on the Epistemic Exercise of "Inversed Hermeneutics"

Jens Schlieter

Abstract

In this contribution, I discuss under the heading "inversed hermeneutics" a process wherein the conceptual, classificatory terms of a foreign knowledge system are used to interpret one's own concepts and their underlying assumptions. A key function of "inversed hermeneutics" is to induce a deliberate alienation and thus momentarily placing the cognizing subject into a liminal state of "unfamiliarity." This method should help to introduce and probe new ways of classifying things.

1. The need for "inversed hermeneutics"

In the contribution presented in this special issue, Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz demonstrates how the evolution of indigenous classificatory systems in Buddhist Central Asia allows us to assume that for Mongolians of the 17th century there was, indeed, an autonomous "religious" field. In this field, single traditions, worldviews, and practices could be identified, delineated, and addressed in Mongolian as *üjel* (translating the Tibetan *lta*), meaning a "view," or as *nom* and *šasin* (both translating Tibetan *chos*, on its part translating both Sanskrit *dharma* and *śāsana*, see Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 16–21; 2013: 164–170).

Kollmar-Paulenz moves on to show how especially the concept of *šasin* has been successfully developed by Mongolian intellectuals over the last three centuries to identify indigenous epistemic equivalents of "religion(s)," allowing, for example for the "reification" of shaman teachings into "shamanism" (*böge-yin šasin*, see Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 28–29; 2013: 181). Furthermore, she makes important remarks on the potential of knowing "the influences of emic analytical concepts on the discourse field 'religion'" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 31; 2013: 185) for the systematic study of religion.

First of all, scholars of religion working on religion at large, or on European traditions, should become aware of their own tendency to "de-individualize" and "de-historicize" Asian knowledge cultures (see Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 31; 2013: 185). Secondly, as Western, and non-Western scholars meet and collaborate in international academia, she expresses the strong hope that "non-European knowledge systems will influence our own conceptualizations over time"

(Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 31; 2013: 185). This is an important hope that she shares with other scholars who not only want to study Asian traditions, but also advocate for the recognition of non-Western indigenous worldviews not only as mere objects of study, but as instruments that will help us understand our epistemic objects.

In her conclusion, Kollmar-Paulenz formulates a specific desideratum: Asian concepts should no longer be construed as "a-historical," static, timeless views that lack the complexity of their respective Western counterparts (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 34–35: 2013: 190–191). Instead, they should be regarded as means to describe not only Asian but more general exempla of "religion(s)." This would allow calling into question the looming "cultural imperialism" of the West in an experimental fashion, for example, by *deliberately historicizing* certain Western concepts before employing them for the analysis of other cultures, as epitomized by the example of Kurtis Schaeffer's "medieval" and "early modern" analysis of the Tibetan "medieval" and "early modern" culture of scholarship (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 35–36; 2013: 191; Schaeffer 2009).

The aims of contextualizing and historicizing the Western concept of religion are obvious. Many proponents of this move claim that the Western, post-Enlightenment use of the concept "religion" reproduces an exclusive approach to identifying "religion" and classifying "religions" that was largely unknown in non-Western contexts. Certainly, the concept of "religion" seems to have been one of the most prominent "conceptual exports" of the West. It has found entrance in many non-Western languages and is in use in almost all national constitutions. Furthermore, an innumerable number of documents name "religion" or "religions," from passports and legal acts to vernacular literature, newspapers, and, not least, fiction.

Without question, the concept with all its specific "baggage" has shaped Western and non-Western life-worlds alike. Indeed, this fact is no longer controversial. But does this import show that non-Western societies lacked any equivalent for classifying "religion(s)"? Indeed, the question of knowing whether pre-modern Asian societies had brought forth classificatory systems able to address certain indigenous teachings, practices, or communities as "religious," and to pit these as "religions" against each other, or against other systems in society (e.g., the state, art, or philosophy—to take some different classificatory examples), has found a less homogenous answer.

Still, most systematic contributions on equivalent non-Western ways of classifying "religion(s)" are interested in determining whether the Western term of "religion" is applicable to them or not. These inquiries delve into the existence of both the classificatory term (do they have one or many terms for "religion"?) and the classified units (does a term like Chinese *zongjiao* subsume in pre-modern times elements corresponding to our "religion(s)"?). For instance, the volume in which Kollmar-Paulenz's contribution originally appeared (*Religion in Asien?*) intended to present *Studies on the Applicability of the Concept of Religion*.[1] The pragmatic solution provided by

---

[1]   Ger.: *Studien zur Anwendbarkeit des Religionsbegriffs* (see Kollmar-Paulenz 2013).

polythetic definitions of religion (a set of typical dimensions, in which each element is, however, optional) can also be regarded as an attempt to defend the Western concept of religion as *the* classificatory system against potential challenges coming from non-Western terms.

In a more radical fashion, some postcolonial scholars of religion actually argue that in India there was no "religion," and that there were no "religions," respectively, before European powers and their scholars started to impose their classificatory system. What can we then say about non-Western classifications? In contrast to these postcolonial views, Kollmar-Paulenz asks for these classificatory systems to be brought into the global discourse, and, more precisely, to be regarded as valid tools to analyze Western traditions *and* Western classificatory concepts. But who should do this? Interestingly, Richard King (see the quote below) does not specify that the introduction of "indigenous epistemic" perspectives on religion should be championed predominantly by Asian scholars in their own languages. On the contrary, it seems to me that his implicit division of labor primarily tasks Western scholars with this duty, beginning with his own introduction of Indian Buddhist categories and modes of thought as means to undo the "epistemic violence of the colonial encounter" (King 1999: 199; Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 32; 2013: 186).[2]

More often, however, scholars have asked questions such as, "What would mainstream Western discourse resemble if it had adapted, say, a moral concept of karma and rebirth, a non-speciesist succession of lives, Confucian ethics, or Daoist concepts of nature?" When looking at conceptual imports from Asia, we find, for example, "nirvana," as an operational term. However, there is no trace of a term like "dharma" *in its classificatory sense*. A sentence like, "The dharma has come to the West," usually signifies that Asian religious communities following Buddhist or Hindu traditions—or converts adhering to these traditions—are present in the West. Similarly, in publications on "dharmic" and "non-dharmic traditions," the concept is usually confined to name the Indian context. Dharmic traditions, in this sense, encompass Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism (see, for instance, Nanda 2016), that is, traditions originating from Indian soil as opposed to Zoroastrianism, Islam, Christianity, and others. Dharmic and non-dharmic are also used to describe the Indian traditions that side for or against Vedic authority (āstika/nāstika; see Nicholson 2010: 168–170). Lastly, neo-Buddhist or neo-Hindu traditions, employ this distinction to contrast their own "dharmic" tradition with the "a-dharmic" others.

2. "Inversed hermeneutics"

The approach that Schaeffer advances in his book on "book culture" already presents some interesting heuristic aspects. However, for the remainder part of this contribution I would like to focus on a considerably more "experimental," but, admittedly, also problematic enterprise. In her discussion of postcolonial approaches to the study of religion in Asia, Kollmar-Paulenz considers the following remark by Richard King:

---

[2] King mentions the famous Indologist Bimal Krishna Matilal. In the latter's published work, however, I could not find an attempt to reframe Western classificatory schemes by introducing Indian concepts.

> " The introduction of a variety of indigenous epistemic traditions is […] the single most important step that postcolonial studies can take if it is to look beyond the Eurocentric foundations of its theories and contest the epistemic violence of the colonial encounter. This challenge requires engagement with the knowledge-forms and histories of those cultures that have been colonized by the West […]. (King 1999: 199)

Indeed, from this I conclude that one way to really engage with non-Western, indigenous concepts for "religion" and relevant cognates would be to begin with those concepts and explore what they may contribute to our understanding of past and present Western traditions—including of our past and present conceptual tools. I am uncertain whether such a form of hermeneutics of one's own context and intellectual history has already found an elaborate theoretical expression in comparative disciplines beyond the systematic study of religion. Hence, I will tentatively call this approach, "inversed hermeneutics." An exercise in "inversed hermeneutics" will consist of using indigenous classificatory concepts devised by the "remote" (often Asian) "other" as self-sufficient analytical tools to analyze one's own tradition. This procedure will only yield results if the understanding of the "other" is secured, and a sufficient understanding of their emic concepts has been achieved. An indicator that these premises are met could be the ability of using an analytic concept in a context far removed from its original source while leaving it untranslated. The obvious fact that this procedure entails encountering various hermeneutic circles is not a major concern, as these are unavoidable anyway.

In its core, I define "inversed hermeneutics"[3] as a process wherein the conceptual, classificatory terms of a foreign knowledge system are used to interpret one's own concepts and their underlying framework and basic assumptions. As such, a key function of "inversed hermeneutics" is to induce a deliberate alienation and thus momentarily placing the cognizing subject—as far as possible—into a liminal state of "unfamiliarity." This method aims to create a distance between one's own conceptual convictions and their established use, in order to introduce a new way of classifying things. The first part of this process may enact this "unfamiliarity," akin to Michel Foucault's famous reference to José L. Borges's fictional classification of a "certain Chinese dictionary".[4] However, the ultimate goal is to transcend this preliminary step and use these concepts as analytical tools.

---

[3] The concept of "reverse hermeneutics" has been introduced in classical phenomenology as well as in post-structuralist literary criticism to designate the process of reading a text backwards, from its end to the beginning (e.g., Caputo 1986). As this is not what I have in mind, one could name this process and method "reversed hermeneutics." However, this concept is also already in use, particularly within African Theology where it denotes the reading the Biblical text in light, for example, of the contemporary African lifeworld (Magezi/Igba 2018). Thus, it seems that "inversed hermeneutics" might be the most fitting name for my intended approach. Thanks to Bastiaan van Rijn for suggesting replacing "reversed" with "inversed."

[4] In this, Foucault (1970: xv) quotes, "animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification," and so forth.

How, then, should such a process, which bears certain elements of a simulative thought experiment (Koch 2003), look like?

Without question, scholars of Asian traditions engage with Western texts and offer their analysis, using emic terms in various modern vernacular languages. Their contributions, however, are rarely translated into Western languages and are exceedingly infrequently integrated into Western discourse. The reasons are obvious. Until recently, few Asian scholars had full access to Western libraries, and if so, they often wanted to become part of Western academia, lived in the West, and sought—or were induced to—comply with Western academic knowledge systems. The approach of "inversed hermeneutics" challenges the intellectual predominance of the "Western role model." Such a change of perspective is still largely discouraged by Western academia. Indeed, a significant presence of translated Asian works analyzing Western taxonomies of religion would have made a difference in the intellectual trajectory of the West.

But if it is Western scholars of both Western *and* Eastern traditions who will, for the time being, assume the task of "inversed hermeneutics", how could such an attempt look like regarding Asian classificatory concepts in the field of "religion(s)"?

One could, for example, start with the concepts of "*dharma*"/"*chos*" and see how the conceptual systems of "religion" and "religion(s)" would look like through such an analytical lens—and similarly for other Western terms for conceptualizing the religious field, such as the Latin terms *lex* (for example, *lex mosaica*), *secta*, *sectae*, and *fides*. But the moment one has taken the decision to start using "dharma" as the preferred tool for "inversed hermeneutics," one encounters the first problem. Which concept of "dharma"? Given the dominant meanings of *dharma* which include such diverse referential objects as cosmic "truth," (fundamental world-) "order," universal "law," "duty" and "norms" (of a caste), "virtuous behavior," "teaching," and, finally, "religion" or a (specific) "religious tradition," one will quickly become aware that using the concept would just amount to picking a certain pre-selected meaning to attempt a specific and meaningful "inverse hermeneutics."

Using the terms "*dharma*" or "*chos*" in an ahistorical way would, however, fall under Kollmar-Paulenz's above-mentioned criticism (see also her recent discussion on the Tibetan concept *chos* as used in premodern Christian-Tibetan encounters in Tibet, Kollmar-Paulenz 2023). Furthermore, historicizing concepts should be a process relevant to both sides. Throughout the centuries, the Western concept of religion also served to designate a wide array of different referential objects. Many of these meanings are usually unknown and inaccessible, because even our "own tradition" possesses elements which are "alien" to us. In this way, using the neo-phenomenological terms and ideas of Bernhard Waldenfels (2011), one could consider "inversed

hermeneutics" as building on "intercultural alienness" to raise our awareness of "intracultural alienness."[5]

The "inversed hermeneutics"-approach shares some aspects of James Spickard's idea of "alternative sociologies" of religion (Spickard 2017). Spickard asks in his work:

> " If Euro-American sociology of religion developed its core concepts out of a particular culture and history, what happens if we set that history aside? What if sociology had arisen in another civilization, with a different religion and culture? (Spickard 2017: 15)

Along these lines, Spickard sketches a sociology of religion departing, for example, from Confucian notions of "ritual" (lǐ) and "virtue" (dé), or from ancestor worship. However, he does not use these tools to analyze Western conceptual schemes. Somewhat disappointingly, he does not historicize the West either. Instead, he draws on an abstract and more or less decontextualized "default view" of Western sociology of religion, with "church, belief, and morality as central to the religious enterprise" (Spickard 2017: 5). Given his interest in alternative forms of non-Western sociology, for example, of "Confucian sociology," dealing on their part with non-Western religion, this is understandable, but sets his project on a different track.

Similarly, projects such as Wilhelm Halbfass's attempt to clarify the hermeneutic preconditions of mutual understanding between India and Europe can be called more properly an exercise in "intercultural hermeneutics" (Halbfass 1988: 34, 160–170). Halbfass describes in a very illuminative way the modern hermeneutic situation of Indian scholars dealing with, for example, the Western concept of "philosophy" and asks about "the role of the *alien* concept [...] in modern Indian self-*understanding*" (1988: 292). Occasionally, however, he also points to the "hermeneutic interplay" of Eastern and Western concepts such as *darśana* / philosophy in works of scholars like Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975) (Halbfass 1988: 300–303). Yet, Halbfass, writing in the 1980s, made clear that the time for Indian scholars to bring their categories into play with Western concepts had not yet come, since the whole setting of the dialogue was ruled by the laws of Western Eurocentric academia (Halbfass 1988: 372–375). The situation today is probably slightly better.

But how can we solve the need to historicize Asian concepts before using them as instruments to analyze Western knowledge systems? To me, the best possible way consists in embedding concepts in their original textual contexts. If one wants to employ them as analytical tools, they must be specific enough for this purpose. In particular they need to be defined in regard to a variety of indigenous reference traditions, a plurality of practices, of ethical dimensions, and so forth.

---

[5]   "Alien experience [...] reaches its high point as our experience itself becomes alien. [...] As interpersonal alienness begins from intrapersonal alienness, so too does *intercultural* alienness begin from *intracultural* alienness" (Waldenfels 2011: 77).

In her recent contribution, on the *Global History of Religion*, Kollmar-Paulenz (2023) touches upon exactly these questions. Following the approach of Margrit Pernau (2016), she argues that our final goal should be to integrate in our concepts the experiences condensed in indigenous taxonomies. On the one hand, this seems to a certain extent in line with the methodology of "inversed hermeneutics" that I am suggesting here. On the other hand, it preserves the idea of maintaining Western categories, although transformed and enriched:

> " Once these taxonomies are identified, the tedious and lengthy work of the third step begins, namely the transformation and reconfiguration of existing Eurocentric concepts through the integration of non-European experiences configured in their own taxonomies. (Kollmar-Paulenz 2023: 15)

To use Asian classificatory concepts as analytical tools in "inversed hermeneutics," I would like to suggest starting with keeping to the terms in their original language.[6]

Terms analyzing indigenous religious fields are most likely to be found in scholarly works, which aim to review "religion(s)" from a certain external vantage point. Within global epistemic cultures, these works are often written by philosophically minded individuals, for example, the Indian and Tibetan authors who wrote comparative compendia of *darśana*-s, "philosophical-religious worldviews," (see Schlieter 2021) or "presentation of tenets" (Tib. *grub mtha'i rnam bzhag*; see Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 10–11). In my view, one promising example of "inversed hermeneutics" could be to use the concept of *darśana*-s to analyze the history of the relationship between "philosophy" and "religion" in the West—hopefully, through the collaboration of Eastern and Western scholars within an emerging shared space of decolonized encounter.

Bibliography

Caputo, John D. 1986. "Heidegger and Derrida: Cold Hermeneutics." *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 17 (3), 252–274.

Foucault, Michel. 1970. *The Order of Things*. New York: Pantheon.

Halbfass, Wilhelm. 1988. *India and Europe. An Essay in Understanding*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

King, Richard. 1999. *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and "The Mystic East."* London: Routledge.

Koch, Anne. 2003. *Das Verstehen des Fremden. Eine Simulationstheorie im Anschluss an W.V.O. Quine*, Darmstadt: WBG.

---

[6] This project should not be confused with essentialist attempts to position certain terms as "non-translatables" (which immediately becomes a paradoxical, if not a dogmatic, claim), or nationalist agendas to declare a certain language as "superior" (Malhotra/Babaji 2020).

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2013. "Lamas und Schamanen: Mongolische Wissensordnungen vom Frühen 17. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert. Ein Beitrag zur Debatte um Aussereuropäische Religionsbegriffe." In *Religion in Asien? Studien zur Anwendbarkeit des Religionsbegriffs*, ed. by Peter Schalk et al. Uppsala: University of Uppsala, 151–200.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2023. "Nga rang gi chos khyod rang gi chos: 'My Religion and Your Religion'? About Some Fundamental Issues in the Global History of Religion." *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society*, 1–20 (online ahead of print), https://doi.org/10.30965/23642807-bja10082.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2024. "Lamas and Shamans: Mongolian Orders of Knowledge from the Early 17th to the 21st Century. A Contribution to the Debate on Non-European Concepts of Religion." *ARGOS* 3 (2) Special Issue *Towards a Global History of Religion*, 6–47.

Magezi, Christopher / Jacob T. Igba. 2018. "African Theology and African Christology: Difficulty and complexity in contemporary definitions and methodological frameworks," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74 (1), 4590.

Malhotra, Rajiv / Satyanarayana Dasa Babaji. 2020. *Sanskrit Non-Translatables: The Importance of Sanskritizing English*. New Delhi: Manjul Publishing.

Nanda, Ved P., ed. 2016. *Compassion in the 4 Dharmic Traditions. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism*. New Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan.

Nicholson, Andrew J. 2010. *Unifying Hinduism. Philosophy and Identity in Indian Intellectual History*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Pernau, Margrit. 2016. "Provincializing Concepts: The Language of Transnational History," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 36 (3), 483–499.

Schaeffer, Kurtis R. 2009. The *Culture of the Book in Tibet*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Schlieter, Jens. 2021. "The Indian Origins of 'Comparative Religion'. Compendia of Religious-Philosophical Worldviews of 'Cosmovisions' (darśana-s)." In *Das alles hier*, ed. by Ulrike Niklas / Heinz W. Wessler / Peter Wyzlic / Stefan Zimmer. Heidelberg / Berlin: Cross Asia, 341–372.

Spickard, James V. 2017. *Alternative Sociologies of Religion. Through Non-Western Eyes*. New York: New York University Press.

Waldenfels, Bernhard. 2011. *Phenomenology of the Alien. Basic Concepts* [Grundmotive einer Phänomenologie des Fremden]. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

About the author

Jens Schlieter, PhD in Philosophy (1999), Habilitation in Science of Religion (2006), is professor and co-director of the Institute for Science of Religion, University of Berne (Switzerland). His work focuses on Indian Buddhism, theories of metaphor, language, and religion; near-death experiences and the discourse on religious experience.

Mail: jens.schlieter@unibe.ch

Even When Historical Texts Are Not an Option: Extending Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz's Approach to a Global History of Religion

Marion Wettstein / Michaela Wisler

Published on 29/01/2024

Abstract

Seeking to extend Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz's (2024) methodology for overcoming Eurocentric perspectives in the global history of religion, this commentary evaluates the challenges and alternatives for historiography when textual sources for religious practices are absent. Drawing on research into artistic, visual, and oral practices in Mongolia and the Himalayan region, the authors propose a critical reassessment of the foundational notions of globality, history, and religion.

In her plea to finally implement what thinkers of post-colonialism have been advocating for decades—namely "to de-Europeanise the theoretical perspectives on 'religion'"—Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz suggests, in the contribution translated for this special issue, that

> the concept of a "global history of religion" relies on the premise that the development of secondary orders of knowledge is not exclusive to Europe. Rather, various regions worldwide have developed distinct analytical instruments and knowledge classification systems. Despite differences in content, these systems can be functionally and structurally analogous to one another, enabling comparative exploration. Consequently, a global history of religion challenges European hegemony over the analytical concept of "religion." It adopts a multi-perspectivity that relates European and non-European analytical perspectives within the discourse field of "religion." (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 32)

Through a detailed analysis of the discourse on the concept of "religion" as found in Mongolian and Tibetan texts spanning from the 17th to the 21st century, Kollmar-Paulenz demonstrates how such a non-Eurocentric approach can be successfully implemented. Drawing on these texts, she highlights statements that not only confirm the existence of such a discourse but also its culture-specific characteristics.

Corresponding authors: Marion Wettstein, University of Heidelberg; Michaela Wisler, University of Bern.

She suggests that

> " within this specific historical and local context, it is important to recognize that we are dealing with an understanding of religion that accentuates particular aspects, which often do not take precedence in our everyday understanding of religion and in the conceptual framework of the academic study of religion. "Religion" (*mörgöl*) refers here to the performance, the bodily enactment, of practices and rituals. However, to my knowledge, *mörgöl* is employed in the sources solely in direct reference to "shamanism" and—more rarely—to "Buddhism." (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 22)

Her textual analysis concludes that "Throughout the centuries, Tibetan intellectual elites have developed a nuanced terminology to name their own doctrine or teaching system, as well as to identify both intra-Buddhist adversaries and non-Buddhist teaching systems" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 24). However, "The carriers of these discourses, the local intellectuals, are all too often perceived [by "Western" observers] as representatives of a tradition that they merely substantiate and perpetuate, rather than as individual personalities" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 31).

Analysing discourses from a global history of religion perspective, particularly those outside the European or "Western" setting, necessitates a thorough understanding of local languages and cultural contexts. This is often presumed to enable translations that do justice to the original texts and concepts. Yet, Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz also cautions elsewhere: "Translators do not just pick out equivalents between languages, they actively invent them, and thus contribute to the transformation of the languages they work with." (Kollmar-Paulenz 2023: 11) While Kollmar-Paulenz's primary sources are Tibetan and Mongolian texts, her insights extend beyond these specific contexts. She notes a consensus among scholars specialising in the global history of religion, predominantly within German-speaking religious studies, that "methodological procedure should be genealogical. This entails that the present categories we use in the analysis do not have stable meanings reaching back into history," and it is required to employ a "careful study of the historical semantics of non-European analytical conceptualizations" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 7).

We suggest that such an approach to a global history of religion should also be attempted when historical texts are not an option as sources, as in cases of oral traditions, or when alternative types of sources provide more compelling evidence, which is often the case in visual, material, and performative artistic contexts. In the following, we will introduce two exemplary fields of research of this kind: one from the context of Mongolian art examined by Michaela Wisler, and another from the context of Himalayan oral traditions studied by Marion Wettstein. Given the scope of this commentary, these two cases cannot be explored in depth, but we hope they can serve to encourage fellow anthropologists of religion to join the debate about a global history of religion.

Through her research, Michaela Wisler aims to encourage scholars to focus on visual art as a lens for exploring a global history of religion, suggesting that the field would significantly benefit from

this approach. The entanglements between religion and art are complex and multilayered, and discussing their details is beyond the scope of this commentary. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that visual and material representations of religion are generally crucial in artistic contexts. As Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz notes, religion is a "key concept" and an "order of knowledge" which can manifest in various forms, including visual art. Mongolian art, especially the visual arts such as painting, drawing, or sculpting, is closely intertwined with the field of religion. The following examples will illustrate how these connections can be fruitfully examined as contributions to a global history of religion and how they can be employed to reflect on its approaches.

The Buddhist-dominated regions of Tibet and Mongolia have a long, vibrant, and entangled history of distinct religious art. Explicit religious expressions of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and deities in Thangkas and sculptures are numerous and exhibit many distinct styles. Historically, Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhist art developed in a context of intense exchange among artists, sponsors, and religious institutions throughout Central Asia and other parts of the world. Such entanglements continue to be constitutive of the Buddhist religious art context today. Furthermore, Mongolia is engaged in the global art market, with traditional Buddhist Thangka painting remaining a vibrant component of both art and religious practice in the country (Uranchimeg 2019).

Academics, both Western and Mongolian, have extensively researched Mongolian religious paintings. However, the perspectives of such research are mainly confined to the domain of art history. From the standpoint of religious studies within the framework of global religious history, a crucial question arises: Would an interpretation of Mongolia's religious history grounded in visual art sources necessitate a significant revision of current historiography?[1] How would this history differ from the findings Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz has derived from her textual sources? Could this approach potentially yield a novel understanding of Mongolian religion, or of the Mongolian "order of knowledge"?

One of the most famous and celebrated artists in Mongolian art history is Zanabazar (1635–1723), who continues to be a role model in Mongolian art to this day. He is often referred to as "da Vinci of Asia," a label that problematically reflects the prevalence of Western-centric interpretations and definitions of art. Notwithstanding, Mongolian scholars, most notably Nyam-Osoryn Tsultem, have provided an art historical review and interpretation of Zanabazar's oeuvre. Tsultem published five volumes on various artistic expressions: architecture (1988), Mongol Zurag (1986), arts and crafts (1987), Zanabazar (1982), and sculpture (1989). Through these works, he aimed not only to categorise the arts of his home country from a vernacular perspective but also to preserve Mongolia's cultural heritage. During the socialist era (1924–1990), many artworks, particularly those with religious significance, were destroyed or removed. The purges were so

---

[1]   Using the example of Zanabazar, Orna Tsultem demonstrated how textual and visual sources can differ, and how these differences lead to illuminating results regarding the historiography of religion (Uranchimeg 2015).

extensive that Mongolia lost a significant portion of its religious cultural heritage that Tsultem sought to help restore. While the implications of Tsultem's research for religious studies are yet to be fully discussed, his work provides a salient example for Kollmar-Paulenz's critical approach. She maintains that discourses on art and religion should extend beyond Western intellectual thought and become part of a global history of religion.

Also in present-day Mongolia, artists and intellectuals actively discuss their art history and their religion. Contemporary art is now globally entangled, fostering a lively exchange among different cultural traditions worldwide. While Mongolia participates in these exchanges, certain styles of art are locally perceived as distinctly Mongolian, particularly the "Mongol Zurag" style.[2] This style depicts scenes from everyday life, including religion, and is strongly promoted and widely taught in Mongolian art education. The motifs of this style are mostly historical, portraying the glorious past of the Mongol Empire, which aligns well with the political and social agenda of the Mongolian establishment. In this manner, history is not only rewritten but also repainted. The emphasis on the past over the present in current Mongolian society is also reflected in contemporary art.[3] In this context, religion is often seen as a crucial part of Mongolian culture, a "natural" component of the country and its people.

While art schools in Mongolia focus on teaching Mongol Zurag, traditional Buddhist Thangka painting, which had disappeared for decades due to socialist repression, is now being revived. New Thangka painting schools accept students from all backgrounds, including women, who were previously excluded. Many contemporary artists study Thangka painting techniques not for religious reasons but to honor the traditional cultural heritage. This reflects a "multiperspectivity" in the Mongolian approach to art and religion. Since the early 20th century, religious motives, their usage, and the discourse around religion and art have been highly diverse in Mongolia. Furthermore, this approach is quite different from European art discourse and practice. In Mongolia, multiple perspectives on how to use religious motifs in art are valid, and it is considered self-evident that painters may have different religious stances and identifications. Conversely, in European art discourse and practice, religion is often a highly controversial and provocative topic.

This example illustrates how a global history of religion, when it expands beyond textual sources to incorporate non-Western approaches, can benefit significantly from a focus on artistic expression. For anthropologists of religion, one of the challenges is the fact that historical sources approved by historians—typically written sources or at least datable artwork, as discussed above—are lacking in many parts of the world. Assessing local discourses on "religion" that provide historical depth extending before the era of colonial intervention is particularly challenging in cases of small local societies that traditionally do not employ writing and that were

---

[2]   This style originated in the 1920s with Baldugiin Sharav's prominent painting "One Day in Mongolia" and served as a counterpoint to socialist realism, the dominant artistic style at that time.

[3]   It is important to note that not all contemporary art follows this trend. There are numerous new und state-independent projects that diverge from this political and historical agenda, aiming to introduce new themes and techniques to the Mongolian art scene.

not deemed significant enough to be described or even mentioned by surrounding written traditions. And when these societies are mentioned, as Kollmar-Paulenz aptly notes, the accounts are likely to be biased and generalised.

A history of religion can truly be deemed "global" only if it succeeds in including the perspectives and views of all local traditions, practices, and groupings, not just those based on writing. These may also encompass artistic expressions, as discussed above, or oral accounts. Thus, for a project aiming at a comprehensive global history of religion that includes such societies, there needs to be a conceptual and methodological reframing, not only of the approach to "religion" but also to "history."

Societies without written traditions, for instance, are found in great numbers in the extended Himalayas. The first generation of anthropologists permitted to travel to Nepal in the 1960s and 1970s encountered many small local societies that, while practicing their own religious traditions and rituals independent from Buddhism or Hinduism, had never used writing. Many of them also lacked traditions of painting or sculpture and were not deemed significant enough by neighbouring Tibetan or Sanskritic traditions to be described in detail. In anthropological literature, these local traditions are often subsumed under the now contested umbrella term "shamanism," for lack of a more suitable concept. In these societies, ritual recitations were memorised by heart by local specialists. Religious worldviews or relations to neighbouring traditions were preserved—sometimes explicitly, sometimes subtly, or "between the chants"— in what is commonly called "mythology."

In only exceptional cases have researchers encountered script traditions in Himalayan shamanic societies that predate colonial intervention. One such case, studied by Toni Huber (2020), allowed him to trace the development of religious traditions and concepts over approximately 1000 years. However, this is a rare example in the Himalayas, where the influence of neighbouring written traditions—Tibetan Buddhism and Bon, in this case—led to an early adoption of script.

Retracing the history of societies without script, and often without a tradition of painting, necessitates including a broad range of data and methodological approaches. These are often dismissed as ineligible sources by historians (of religion): mythological narratives and "folklore," ritual practices, or everyday material culture. Such data is predominantly collected by ethnographers through in-depth and long-term field research. Certainly, one of the most challenging aspects of the ethnographic approach to historical retracing is the question of dating events or discourses. To illustrate this problem, consider the following anecdote from the field.

Together with her partner Alban von Stockhausen, Marion Wettstein conducted field research among the Dumi Rai of Eastern Nepal. In the early 2000s, von Stockhausen learned about a renowned *nakcho* (local ritual specialist or "shaman") who had recently passed away, precluding any possibility of meeting him. The *nakcho*'s fame extended far beyond the Dumi Rai community; he had even been invited by the King of Nepal. The king's daughter was very ill, and no one could heal her—not the Brahmins, *sadhus*, or astrologers. After healers from all over Nepal had failed,

the Dumi Rai *nakcho* succeeded. To express his gratitude, the king offered the *nakcho* a choice of any item from the palace treasury. Despite the array of precious golden artifacts, the *nakcho* was most interested in a large buffalo horn, which he chose as his reward. The horn is still with his family, and Alban von Stockhausen was even given the opportunity to try playing it. Some time after returning from the field research, von Stockhausen attended a lecture by Michael Oppitz about the mythology of the Naxi (also known as Nakhi) in China's Sichuan province. Intriguingly, one of the myths he heard there was nearly identical to the one described above. However, this version was set several hundred years earlier in the royal Chinese court, with a Naxi *dongba* (also known as *tomba/dtomba*) priest in the main role.

This anecdote exemplifies that time in "shamanistic" Himalayan societies is often perceived non-chronologically and non-linearly. Mythology from the past and events of the recent past sometimes overlap during current recitations or narrations. However, this does not imply that such societies lack an understanding of time or history—or, within the context of this discussion, a history of religion. Nor does it indicate a weakness in the ethnographic method. Rather, it reveals that the Western academic concept of "history" struggles to encompass such nonlinear approaches to time. If history aims to be truly global—and thus necessarily includes societies globally on an equal footing—this limitation in the academic concept of history must be addressed and overcome.

The two fields of research exemplified in this commentary suggest that addressing these challenges requires an interdisciplinary approach that integrates a multitude of facets. This necessitates a comprehensive debate on all three key concepts: the "global" aspect, the understanding of "history," and the interpretation of "religion." Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz has made a significant contribution to this endeavour. However, many more steps must be taken by the academic community if the project of a global history of religion is to be realised successfully.

Bibliography

Huber, Toni. 2020. *Source of Life: Revitalisation Rites and Bon Shamans in Bhutan and the Eastern Himalaya*s. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2023. "Nga rang gi chos khyod rang gi chos: 'My Religion and Your Religion?' About Some Fundamental Issues in the Global History of Religion." *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* (online ahead of print), 2023. https://doi.org/10.30965/23642807-bja10082.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2024. "Lamas and Shamans: Mongolian Orders of Knowledge from the Early 17th to the 21st Century. A Contribution to the Debate on Non-European Concepts of Religion." *AЯGOS* 3 (2) Special Issue *Towards a Global History of Religion*, 6–47.

Tsultem, Nyam-Osoryn. 1982. *The Eminent Mongolian Sculptor – G. Zanabazar*. Ulan-Bator: State Publishing House.

Tsultem, Nyam-Osoryn. 1986. *Development of the Mongolian National Style Painting "Mongol Zurag" in Brief*. Ulan-Bator: State Publishing House.

Tsultem, Nyam-Osoryn. 1987. *Mongolian Arts and Crafts*. Ulan-Bator: State Publishing House.

Tsultem, Nyam-Osoryn. 1988. *Mongolian Architecture*. Ulan-Bator: State Publishing House.

Tsultem, Nyam-Osoryn. 1989. *Mongolian Sculpture*. Ulan-Bator: State Publishing House.

Uranchimeg, Tsultemin. 2015. "Zanabazar (1635–1723): Vajrayāna Art and the State in Medieval Mongolia." In *Buddhism in Mongolian History, Culture and Society*, ed. by Vesna A. Wallace. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 116–136.

Uranchimeg, Tsultemin. 2019. "Introduction to 'Buddhist Art of Mongolia: Cross-Cultural Connections, Discoveries, and Interpretations.'" *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 31, 1–6.

About the authors

Dr. **Marion Wettstein** is an anthropologist and scholar of religious studies specialising in the extended eastern Himalayan region. Having primarily conducted empirical field research among communities in Northeast India and Nepal which previously lacked writing systems, her research interests include visual anthropology, ritual and performance studies, anthropology of religion, material culture, mythology, and gender studies.

Mail: marion.wettstein@hcts.uni-heidelberg.de

Michaela Wisler, M.A., has studied religious studies and anthropology and specialises in the intersection of contemporary Mongolian art, religion, and gender. She has conducted fieldwork in Mongolia and spent several months in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar, where she interviewed local female artists to explore how they incorporate religious elements into their art.

Mail: michaela.wisler@unibe.ch

Amy Heller

Publié le 29.01.2024

Abse : histoire d'une divinité protectrice tibétaine

Abstract

En complément au défi posé par Nina Kollmar-Paulenz à la rhétorique dominante de la supériorité de l'historiographie européenne, cet essai apporte une perspective tibétaine sur l'historiographie religieuse. Présenté dans le contexte dual des traditions religieuses bouddhiste et Bon, cet essai propose la traduction et l'analyse d'une étude généalogique sur une divinité protectrice masculine, Abse, profondément enracinée dans les sources littéraires tibétaines.

1. Introduction

Dédié à Nina Kollmar-Paulenz dans un esprit de gratitude et avec la plus haute estime, cet essai aborde le sujet de l'entrelacement multiple des traditions historiques tibétaines d'une divinité protectrice spécifique, vénérée à la fois dans les traditions bouddhique et *bon*. Dans son article fondateur intitulé « Lamas et Chamans », Kollmar-Paulenz a attiré l'attention sur une attitude répandue dans le monde universitaire, affirmant :

> We treat non-European categories as though they possess no historicity, but rather exist within a temporal void. Consequently, they appear timeless and, thus, static, and rigid. Yet, non-European terminologies look back on a longstanding written tradition and feature complex historical semantics. Only by considering these terminologies as historical terms, instead of timeless, ahistorical entities, can we begin to challenge the prevailing rhetoric of European superiority. (2024 : 35)

En *contrapunto*, cet essai propose une traduction et une présentation d'un texte du XVIIIe siècle intitulé *A bse lo-rgyus*, « l'histoire d'Abse », composé par Dre'u lhas grub dbang 02 Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje (1721-1769).[1] Ce texte a été copié par E. Gene Smith et m'a été donné pour étude dans le cadre de ma thèse à l'École Pratique des Hautes Études, « Les origines du culte et de l'iconographie de Beg tse, divinité protectrice tibétaine ». Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje était le fils du célèbre enseignant bouddhiste, Sle lung bzhad pa'i rdo rje (1697-1740), un auteur prolifique

---

1   Voir A bse Lo-rgyus dans l'archive Buddhist Digital Resource Center : http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW8722.

particulièrement renommé pour ses pratiques éclectiques, suivant à la fois les traditions Dge lugs et Rnying ma.

Notre examen de ce texte permet de regarder de près une perspective tibétaine de l'historiographie religieuse. C'est un texte généalogique, reflet tibétain du monde conceptuel de l'Inde antique, où prévaut la notion fondamentale de naissances successives inhérente à tous les êtres vivants. Ici, cependant, ce sont les divinités qui ont, elles aussi, leur cycle de naissances successives. La généalogie donne ici un modèle d'histoire qui montre une grande fluidité au fil des générations. Suivant l'analyse de Nina Kollmar-Paulenz, il s'agit bien d'une histoire « *timeless* », mais c'est tout le contraire d'un modèle « *static and rigid* ». Cela démontre précisément l'évolution d'une longue tradition écrite et orale, dans le contexte tibétain. D'un côté, il y a la filiation de l'auteur, qui est ancrée dans la transmission des textes de son père, qui a puisé ses sources parmi des ouvrages de différentes écoles du bouddhisme tibétain. Dans une démarche atypique, l'auteur puise aussi bien dans des sources bouddhiques que *bon-po*, l'autre grande tradition religieuse non-bouddhique du Tibet. Cela témoigne d'un éclectisme religieux personnel qui est extrêmement riche et intéressant.

Le récit de Sle-lung, père de Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje a notamment fait l'objet d'une thèse par Cameron Bailey (2017) : *A Feast for Scholars. The Life and Works of Sle lung bzhad pa'i rdo rje*.[2] Ici il est temps de jeter un coup d'œil à sa répercussion la plus importante, le récit de son fils, qui représente le prolongement des enseignements de Sle-lung et de son style de rédaction. Déjà, la diversité des noms qui nous sont parvenus pour ce maître indique son éclectisme : 'Gro-'dul rdo-rje et G.yung-mgon rdo-rje. Son orientation religieuse personnelle est donc possiblement double : bouddhiste et *bon-po*.[3] Le titre abrégé de son essai sur les protecteurs est « L'histoire du protecteur A-bse ». Avant de voir la prochaine multitude de protecteurs avec lesquels Beg-tse sera ou associé ou identifié dans ce récit, il nous faut examiner d'abord le personnage du protecteur A-bse, afin de voir comment les liens seront tissés.

Le dieu A-bse est surtout connu par la tradition *bon*. Pour les sources *bon-po*, il y a trois principaux protecteurs de la religion, les *ma*, *bdud* et *btsan*. Ma signifie Ma-mchog (Mère suprême) Srid-pa'i rgyal-mo, Reine du monde. Bdud signifie dans ce contexte Du-bdud 'byams-pa khrag-mgo. Btsan

---

[2]   Sle-lung bzhad pa'i rdo rje, Dam can rgya mtsho'i rnam par thar pa.

[3]   Bien qu'il nous manque une biographie pour cet homme, il est possible que l'on doive comprendre une relation avec Gter-bdag gling-pa, un des maîtres de Sle-lung, cité dans le récit de ce dernier ainsi : Chos-kyi rgyal-po 'gro-'dul gter-bdag gling-pa. Par ailleurs, Gter-bdag gling-pa s'appelle 'Gyur-med rdo-rje. Le nom 'Gro-'dul (…) rdo-rje serait peut-être le reflet d'une relation de maître et disciple entre Gter-bdag gling-pa et le fils de Sle-lung. Par ailleurs s'il est vrai que le nom G.yung-mgon rdo-rje n'est pas forcément à comprendre comme un nom *bon-po*, la tendance *bon-po* est accentuée par la mythologie et la littérature *bon-po* dédié à A-bse d'où cet auteur a puisé certaines idées.

signifie Btsan-rgyal Yang-ni-ver, le roi des *btsan* Yang-ni-ver, ou A-bse Rgyal-ba.[4] Le démon (*srin*) Ag-se rgyal-ba est déjà attesté dans un manuscrit de Dunhuang qui reflète certains aspects de mythologie *bon-po*, tel le nom Gshen-rab kyi myi-bo.[5] Les anciens textes *gter-ma* le nomment A-bswe brag-btsan.[6] De nos jours, seuls quelques textes rituels plus modernes (XVIIe-XVIIIe) sont accessibles.

D'après ceux-ci, le nom entier du protecteur est A-bswe brag-btsan g.yung drung dgra 'dul rtsal ou A-bse rgyal-ba ; ses noms alternatifs sont : Btsan ne-ne wer, Brag-btsan dmar-po et Brag-btsan dmar-po g.yung-drung dgra'-dul rtsal. C'est un protecteur masculin rouge, pourvu d'une lance, monté sur un cheval rouge. Il porte un casque de *bse* avec aigrette de plumes, et une longue robe rouge. Il a des étuis d'armes en peaux de tigre et de léopard. Il tient aussi un lasso et la bannière de victoire. Il est associé avec une forteresse de *bse* dans la direction nord-est. Comme supports, il a des flèches de *bse* empennées de plumes de hibou. Il est invoqué en tant que *srog-gcod shan-pa*, le bourreau qui coupe la force vitale. Bien que les textes soient d'orientation *bon-po*, il a aussi un rôle de protection de la doctrine du Buddha. On lui associe un entourage composé d'une épouse, Sa-srin ma-mo, d'une sœur, Btsan lcam srog-len, d'une tante maternelle Klu-lcam sha-

La divinité protectrice Abse brag-btsan, peinture portative (thangka), pigments sur coton, ca. 70 x 50 cm, monastère de Bon brgya, photographie de Mori Mahaside (1998), avec permission de l'auteur.

---

[4] Karmay (1972 : 48), cite le groupe des trois principaux protecteurs *bon-po* comme Ma, Bdud et Btsan avec btsan identifié comme A-bse, tandis que Karmay (1975 : 200) identifie Ma, Bdud et Btsan avec btsan = Btsan rgyal Yang-ni-ver. Ceci n'est pas contradictoire car le nom entier du protecteur comprend les deux noms (cf. infra).

[5] P.T.1194 l.6 Srin Ag-se rgyal-ba. Cette lecture a déjà était signalé par R. A. Stein (1971, note 86), où il renvoie à l'index de *Recherches sur l'Épopée et le barde au Tibet* (v.sous *a-bse*). Donc, pour M. Stein, l'équivalence Ag-se/ A-bse était valable.

[6] Karmay (1972 : 178) décrit A-bswe brag-btsan sgrub skor, découvert à Bsam-yas par Sprul-sku bu-kyi bu-nam, date à déterminer, et Sprul-sku La-byi rDa-rma, a découvert A-bswe thugs sgrub las-tshogs drug-pa.

zan, et d'un millier de guerriers *btsan*.[7] Un autre texte *bon-po* décrit A-bse ayant, outre l'arc et la flèche de *bse* sur lui, un bouclier de *bse* posé au-dessus de sa robe.[8] Nous n'avons pas trouvé de récits étiologiques à propos d'A-bse.

À certains égards, il y a des éléments communs entre Beg-tse et A-bse : leur couleur, leurs attributs guerriers, les symboles-supports, la direction nord-est, la fonction double de *btsan* et *bshan-pa*, tout en étant protecteur de la doctrine. Ce qui est aussi à retenir est la fidélité du noyau du récit de Sle-lung où A-bse (alias Ag-se) avait l'épouse Sa-srin ma-mo. Pourtant Sle-lung ne semble pas citer de sources *bon-po*, ni directement, ni indirectement. On peut émettre l'hypothèse d'un emprunt antérieur, très possiblement d'un *gter-ston* qui travaillait dans un domaine de syncrétisme *bon*/bouddhisme (cf. Blondeau 1992).

2. A-bse Lo-rgyus

Ce récit décrit au préalable la propitiation du dieu Hayagriva, puis entame un récit cosmologique qui traite de la création du monde, puis du panthéon. Nous proposons de résumer les éléments pertinents et de l'analyser ci-après.

Introduction

Après les stades initiaux de la création, Hayagriva a été émané par le Buddha de la lumière infinie ('Od dpag-med) pour maîtriser les êtres difficiles à convertir. Parmi la multitude de ses émanations pour effectuer cette tâche, à une époque antérieure, Legs-ldan Dbang-phyug-chen-po (Mahakala/Mahadeva) et son épouse Vajravarahi, ou Sri Devi Uma-Devi ont engendré deux principaux enfants, Mahakala et Dpal-ldan Lha-mo Srid-gsum gyi bdag-mo Dud gsol-ma (alias Tsa-mundi…) qui ont produit toutes sortes d'émanations de leur corps, de la parole, de l'esprit, des qualités, et des activités rituelles. Cette forme de Mahakala est la forme exotérique de Bhagavat Yamantaka. Ils s'unirent à leur tour, tel qu'il est décrit dans le *Me-lce-'bar-ba'i rgyud*.[9]

Ancêtres et origines d'Abse : La naissance de Beg-tse comme modèle

Alors, le fils de Mahadeva-Yamantaka, afin de soumettre les *naga*, se manifesta en tant que 'Jam-dpal rdo-rje klu'i gshed naga raksa-pa (Glorieux Vajra-exterminateur des *naga*) également nommé Raksha Yaksha Dzwa-la, qui prit Tsamundi comme épouse. Leurs enfants sont Khyab-'jug Rahula et quatre sœurs. Ce même Khyab-'jug bza'i rgyal-po Rahula a émané Yaksha 'bar-byed (Yaksha embraseur), le yaksha roi de la création. Le nom alternatif de celui-ci est Gnod-sbyin zangs-kyi ral pa can (Yaksha aux cheveux de cuivre). Il se trouvait en compagnie de Rakshasa Dmar-sham snying-'phrog ma (Rakshasa vêtue de rouge qui vole le cœur) ou sring-mo Khrag-gi

[7] *Bon-skyong sgrub thabs*, vol.I : 447–480 : Bstan srung a-bsve brag-btsan g.yung-drung dgra 'dul rtsal gyi gsol-mchod rin-chen phreng-ba'i phrin las, auteur: Skyang Nam-mkha' rgyal-mtshan.

[8] *Bon-skyon sgrub thabs*, vol.II : 521–530 : A-bse brag-btsan rgyal-ba'i mngon-rtogs, et 531–542 : Btsan-bsrungs a-bse'i skang-mdos : 536.

[9] Nous remercions le Professeur R. A. Stein, de nous avoir fourni un exemplaire de l'annuaire 1973-1974 de Collège de France ou il résumait ce tantra.

ral-pa can (Sœur aux cheveux de sang) dans le charnier Ma-ru-rtse au-delà des plaines désertiques dans la direction nord-est… (Leur résidence est décrite en grand détail).

Par le chant (*mgur*) joyeux de leur copulation, au bout d'une année, deux œufs, l'un de *bse* et l'un de corail, apparurent.

À l'intérieur de ceux-ci se trouvaient : Yab shud dmar-po'i Skyes-bu dbang gi mdog can (Fils du Père rouge à la couleur des rites violents),[10] aussi appelé Gnod-sbyin zangs-kyi beg-rtse can (Yaksha à la cuirasse de cuivre), et la sœur Srid-pa'i bu-mo gDong-dmar-ma (Fille de la Création au visage rouge) appelée Rigs-pa'i Lha-mo (sic). Mahadeva et Ekajati les ont établis comme messagers de la doctrine en les liant par serment. Ce grand yaksha est une émanation de la parole de Yamantaka.

Progéniture d'A-bse rgyal-ba et Gdong-dmar-ma

Ainsi, le père et le chef des btsan Zla-ba thod-dkar ou Gnam-gyi A-bse rgyal-ba, aussi appelé Srid-pa'i glog-dmar ou le roi des btsan Ang-ling-gter, est devenu l'ancêtre (*mes-po*) de tous les *btsan* sauvages, ayant comme épouse la sœur, fille des Yaksha, Gdong-dmar-ma, aussi appelée Sa-sring-mo, Klu-mo zangs-mgrin-ma (Nagini au cou de cuivre), et reine des *btsan* (Btsan gyi rgyal-mo) Shel-mig-ma (Celle aux yeux cristallins).

Dans leur palais à la direction ouest… (il y avait) le *yaksha* couleur de cuivre rouge-foncé tenant un rasoir (*spu-gri*) d'or et une lance de *bse*, la mère au visage de *bse* (*bse-gdong*), pourvu d'un cou de cuivre rouge foncé, tenant un sac de maladies et une corde (*byad-thag*) de soies couleurs d'arc en ciel ; Au bout du nombre de mois nécessaire, un œuf de cuivre rouge est né. De l'intérieur est venu Brag-btsan dmar-po, émané de l'esprit de Hayagriva.

La description de ce *brag-bstan* comporte une longue robe de soie rouge, avec détails de *bse*, le cheval des *btsan* comme monture. Dans ses mains il tient comme attributs la lance, le lasso, et un cœur frais. Parfois, il tient le lasso des tripes et un hibou. Il a trois assistants pourvus de bouclier de *bse*.

A-bse dmar-po, fils d'A-bse rgyal-ba

Ainsi ce grand *btsan* sauvage, brûlant comme le feu flamboyant, est le roi des dieux qui protègent contre les ennemis (*dgra-lha'i rgyal-po*), appelé aussi Gdug-pa snying-'byin (celui qui donne l'essence de la souffrance), A-bse dmar-po ou Srog-zan dmar-po. Il émane cinq sortes de *btsan*, chacun ayant aussi une sœur-épouse, Sman-mo mched-lnga. A ce moment dans le paradis Akanishtha, Hayagriva se trouve avec ses émanations et le nom secret Rdo-rje dgra-'dul mgyogs-

---

[10] Nous avons constaté ailleurs, dans le *Gsan-yig* du Cinquième Dalaï Lama, le nom Yab-shud dmar-po au lieu de Yam-shud dmar-po et il a semblé soit une erreur de scribe, soit une variante dépourvue de signification propre. Cependant, ici, la phrase est rédigée en fonction de la signification *yab* = père, donc le nom est à retenir tel quel.

byed rtsal lui est donné. En faisant les rites violents, puis les louanges, il est devenu l'arme de protection de la doctrine.

Sources

Quant à l'histoire de la transmission du *Brag-btsan srog-zan dmar-po ri-dmar 'dzoms-pa'i rgyud*, il a été caché par la *dakini* de sagesse Rdo-rje bde byed ma, sur la rive du lac des *raksha* devant la montagne rouge foncé du charnier indien Me-ri-'bar-ba.[11] Padmasambhava l'a caché à nouveau. Gnubs-ston ro-rje 'bar-ba alias Rgya-zhang-khrom l'a redécouvert et il s'agit du cycle de Srog-bdag Yam-shud dmar-po. Padma las-'brel-rtsal a trouvé le cycle pour Gnod-sbyin shan-pa dmar-nag, Rat-na glin-pa a trouvé le cycle de propitiation du *yaksha* (*Gnod-sbyin gyi sgrub skor*) et Kun-skyong gling-pa a trouvé le récit de Gza' rgod mig-dmar. Kun-dga' Seng-ge a amené ce protecteur au Bhutan où le Zhabs-drung Ngag-dbang chos-rgyal et son fils ont composé des rituels, se basant notamment sur le *gter-ma Gshan-dmar me'i spu-gri* de Gu-ru Rin-po-che Dpang-ston chos kyi dbang-phyug (= Guru Chos-dbang, 1212-1270).

Noms et fonctions en circonstances diverses

Au Bhutan, ce protecteur est appelé 'Brug-pa'i chos-skyong Jag-pa me-len […]

Parfois prenant l'apparence d'un btsan, il est appelé Gnod-sbyin chen-po Tsi'u dmar-po.

Parfois habillé d'un casque et d'une cuirasse de *bse* il est appelé Bse-khrab-pa, étant la forme exotérique de Gter-bdag rdzong-can dmar-po ou les Btsan rgod 'bar-ba spun bdun.

Parfois, il a la forme de Yama (*gshin-rje*).

Parfois, de couleur jaune foncé, il est dieu des richesses […].

Parfois, ayant la forme d'un *srog-bdag* ou upasaka, il est Rdzong-btsan, manifestation ésotérique de Pehar gyi rgyal-po.

Parfois, en tant que général des dieux, il est Tshangs-pa dud (sic- *dung*) gi thod-can ou Brgya-byin g.yul las rgyal-ba…

D'après les textes de Las 'brel rtsal, il s'agit de Tshangs-pa'i dmag-dpon Ma-ru-rtse,

Ésotériquement Srog-bdag Beg-rtse.

Secrètement : Gu-lang ou Mahadeva et le yaksha monté sur le *khyung*, Gnod-sbyin khyung-gzhon Gshan-pa dmar-nag.

Ultra-secrètement (*yang-gsang*), c'est Vaishravana maître des richesses pourvu d'un cheval bleu et encore des formes infinies.

---

[11] Parmi les sources de Sle lung, il y a un tantra *Brag-btsan srog-zan rgyud*, qui n'a pas pu être identifié. On ne peut pas affirmer que ces deux tantras seraient identiques.

Lorsque vient le moment d'expliquer la lignée de manifestations, c'est Beg-tse qui est désigné comme père de ce même protecteur, et quant à la signification, en faisant les rituels pour le père et le fils ensemble, selon la manière de voir de chacun des êtres à convertir, les contradictions apparentes sont réconciliées.

3. Analyse du récit A-bse Lo-rgyus

Ce récit, qui présente une version relativement succincte de la généalogie d'A-bse, est remarquable surtout pour sa cohérence. L'auteur a su affiner son regard sur des sources hétéroclites de telle manière qu'il a lui-même réconcilié les contradictions inhérentes et a pu parvenir à un récit tautologiquement possible. Certains éléments de ce récit nous sont déjà familiers par le récit de Sle-lung, et l'analyse de ses sources. Mais tel que 'Gro-'dul rdo-rje les raconte, leur compréhension est facilitée.

Parmi les aspects les plus intéressants de l'A-bse Lo-rgyus sont les sources, qui sont presque toutes les mêmes que Sle-lung a utilisées, bien que le récit de Sle-lung ne soit pas cité comme source. Sle-lung avait cité Gter-bdag gling-pa parmi ses sources d'inspiration, sans citation d'œuvre précise. Chose étonnante, 'Gro-dul rdo-rje ne mentionne point Gter-bdag gling-pa mais son récit comprend une citation verbatim de cet auteur, que nous avons également pu repérer dans le récit de Sle-lung.

Ce passage intervient au moment de la description du couple A-bse rgyal-ba et Gdong-dmar-ma, avant la naissance de Brag-btsan dmar-po. Chez Gter-bdag gling-pa, dans un rituel adressé à tous les protecteurs de Lho-gter (sa lignée d'enseignements), il décrit l'apparition des protecteurs qui formeront un mandala des points cardinaux. Au sud de Legs-ldan Mgon-po il décrit Gnod-sbyin zangs-mdog dmar-nag et son épouse Bse-gdong zangs-mgrin can dmar-nag. La citation s'achève avec l'entourage de 42 hommes rouges qui sont les bourreaux (*gshan-pa*). Il n'y a pas de progéniture dans la source mais chez 'Gro-'dul rdo-rje, c'est ainsi qu'il prépare le lecteur pour la naissance de Brag-btsan dmar-po. C'est un exemple graphique du processus de « détournement de sources » pratiqué par Sle-lung et 'Gro-dul rdo-rje.[12]

En général, chez Sle-lung, le processus de citations insérées selon l'interprétation de l'auteur ou son inspiration divine (*dag-snang*) ne s'écarte pas autant de la source initiale. Tandis que le récit d'A-bse, qui est la deuxième génération directe, montre plus de désinvolture par rapport à la version vulgate. Sans faire une étude biographique complète de Sle-lung ou 'Gro-'dul rdo-rje, il est impossible de tracer le rôle véritable de leurs visions dans l'élaboration de ces récits. On ne peut qu'en deviner la trace quand une source précise fait défaut.

---

[12] Le passage en question, fol 7a est cité par Sle-lung, bzhad pa'i rdo rje, Dam can rgya mtsho'i rnam par thar pa (dbu-med, vol.II : 196 , tandis que 'Gro-'dul rdo-rje le cite fol-4 recto). Nous avons consulté le texte de Gter-bdag gling-pa dans la réédition intitulée *Lho-gter rituals*, Library of Congress no. d'accès 76.914961.

Néanmoins, l'intérêt d'A-bse Lo-rgyus est considérable. Ce récit trace l'histoire de la transmission en présentant plusieurs nouvelles données. Surtout, la mention de Gnubs-ston rdo-rje 'bar-ba alias Rgya-zhang-khrom comme source du premier cycle sur Yab-shud dmar-po est à reprendre. Sans citation de ce cycle, il est impossible de déterminer si 'Gro-'dul rdo-rje signifiait les *gter-ma* de Gnubs du Beg-tse Be'u Bum par cette remarque. La chronologie pour Rgya-zhang khrom est peu claire, probablement fin XIe-XIIe siècle[13] ; il est surtout connu actuellement pour les cycles sur Yamantaka. Il existe toutefois plusieurs raisons qui tendent à démentir l'attribution de Gnubs Sangs-rgyas ye-shes établie par la tradition historique tibétaine dans le Beg-tse Be'u Bum. Il serait bien plus raisonnable de situer chronologiquement le cycle de Yam-shud dmar-po à l'époque de Rgya-zhang khrom. En outre, le Cinquième Dalaï-Lama a mentionné Rgya-zhang-khrom comme *gter-ston* du cycle pour Srog-bdag Yab-shud dmar-po, dans une lignée de transmission qui passa par le maître de Byang-gter, puis via Zur chos-dbyings rang-grol, maître rNying-ma-pa du Cinquième Dalaï-Lama.[14] C'est précisément dans l'*A-bse Lo-rgyus* que le double emploi Yam-shud dmar-po ou Yab-shud dmar-po est attesté pour la première fois.[15] Autre point intéressant, le texte que Rgya-zhang-khrom révéla – le tantra pour Brag-btsan srog-zan dmar-po – comme une source où Gdong-dmar-ma est la fille et l'épouse de Btsan-rje Ag-se.[16] Comme tant de tantra apocryphes, ce tantra n'est pas repérable d'après ce titre dans les catalogues canoniques.

On pourrait s'attendre aux mentions de Padma las 'brel rtsal et Rat-na gling-pa comme *gter-ston* car tous deux sont repérés d'après le récit de Sle-lung. Les emprunts d'après leurs *gter-ma* seraient très proches de ceux de Sle-lung. En revanche, Kun-skyong gling-pa est un nouveau personnage en tant que *gter-ston*. Il est la réincarnation immédiate de Rdo-rje gling-pa (1346-1405).[17]

La transmission bhoutanaise mérite un regard particulièrement attentif. Le maître Kun dga' seng-ge (1314-1347) est crédité pour l'introduction du culte au Bhoutan. C'est un maître tibétain très célèbre dans la tradition historique bhoutanaise, car c'est le premier maître de Ra-lung, siège des 'Brug-pa bka'-brgyud-pa, qui s'installa au Bhoutan, à Thim-phu bde-chen phug. Selon une tradition décrite par Dr Michael Aris, on reconnaît en Kun-dga' seng-ge le dompteur du protecteur Dge Bsnyen Chen-po Jag-pa me-len ; il aurait attribué au protecteur le nouveau nom Srog-bdag Gshan-pa dmar-po, suite à cette subjugation lors de son arrivée au Bhoutan (Aris 1979 : 176). Or, ici l'*A-bse Lo-rgyus* atteste le nom Jag-pa me-len comme celui utilisé au Bhoutan, tandis que Srog-bdag gshan-pa dmar-mo est un nom que nous avons souvent vu pour Beg-tse.

---

[13] Cf. Kong sprul, Gter-ston rgya-brtsa (106–109). D'après Kong-sprul, Rgya zhang khrom était dans la lignée de réincarnations de Gnubs-chen sangs-rgyas ye-shes, mais Kong-sprul ne mentionne pas le nom Gnubs ston rdo-rje 'bar attribué dans l'*A-bse Lo-rgyus*.

[14] Cf. DL V, Gsan-yig, vol.III : 98.

[15] Cf. rubriques 2 pour les noms Yab shud dmar-po alias Gnod-sbyin zangs-kyi beg-tse can et rubrique 7, sources pour le nom Yam-shud dmar-po.

[16] La citation précise de ce tantra se trouve chez Sle-lung, bzhad pa'i rdo rje, Dam can rgya mtsho'i rnam par thar pa : 462.

[17] Nous devons ce renseignement à Mme A.-M. Blondeau.

En outre, d'après l'*A-bse Lo-rgyus*, Zhabs-drung Ngag-dbang rnam-rgyal (1594-1651), le fondateur de l'état bhoutanais, est censé avoir composé des rituels pour ce protecteur.[18]

Bien qu'il n'y ait pas d'anthologie d'œuvres réunies pour le Zhabs-drung, une source corroborative de ce récit est antérieure à la rédaction de l'*A-bse Lo-rgyus*. Dans la biographie du Zhabs-drung, on lit que lors de son arrivée au Bhoutan en 1616, il ordonna l'exécution de rituels pour contraindre le Btsan Jag-pa Me-Len à le servir et ceux-ci l'ont totalement soumis.[19] Ce serait là le début de la propitiation par le Zhabs-drung, et sans doute l'origine − relativement vraisemblable, du reste − de lui attribuer une composition rituelle. Quant à l'identité de Jag-pa me-len, d'après cette biographie antérieure au récit de Sle-lung, Thim-phu bde-chen phug est le lieu de Shen-pa'i rgyal-po Ma-ru rtse bse'i skyes-bu, le général des huit catégories des dieux et démons, qui est aussi appelé Jag-pa me-len.[20] C'est la conjonction du nom Ma-ru-rtse et bse'i skyes-bu qui tend à indiquer une relation avec Beg-tse et sa mythologie. Dans un texte contemporain de la rédaction de l'*A-bse Lo-rgyus*, le *Lho'i chos-'byung*, l'auteur désigne Thim-yul bde-chen phug comme le lieu attaché à Gshan-dmar (= Gshan-pa dmar-po) qui est connu d'après les *gter-ma* de Rgya-zhang-khrom et Padma las 'brel-rtsal.[21] La corrélation est étroite, pour ainsi dire parfaite. Force nous est donc de constater que Sle-lung et son fils ne travaillaient pas dans le vide et que les éléments pertinents de relation étaient acceptés par certains contemporains, au moins.

Cela amène à considérer aussi l'importance de ce protecteur au Bhoutan. D'après Aris, Thim-phu bde-chen phug est reconnu comme le siège des divinités protectrices chargées du Bhoutan et d'après le *Lho'i chos-'byung* c'est le siège de Jag-pa me-len. Il serait donc le dieu protecteur du pays. Son nom est en fait une épithète, le voleur (*jag-pa*) qui dérobe comme le feu (*me-len*) la force vitale et le souffle de ceux qui rompent leurs vœux et des ennemis nuisibles.[22]

Enfin, il nous faut regarder la description physique du protecteur d'après l'*A-bse Lo-rgyus*. La description la plus complète intervient au moment de la naissance de Brag-btsan dmar-po. La description s'accorde à bien des égards avec celle d'A-bse selon les *sadhana bon-po*. Un seul

---

[18] Les dates de vie pour Zhabs-drung Ngag-dbang rnam-rgyal sont celles de M. Aris (1979 : 203 passim).

[19] Gtsang Mkhan-chen (1610-1684) : Dpal 'brug-pa rin-po-che ngag dbang bstan-'dzin rnam-rgyal gyi rnam-par thar-pa rgyas-pa chos kyi sprin chen-po'i dbyangs (351). C'est le moment de l'arrivée de Ngag-dbang rnam-rgyal au Bhoutan ; il est arrivé au lieu Spang-ri zam-pa qu'il a vu dans une vision prophétique de son invitation au Bhoutan par Mgon-po Bya-rog gdong-can, puis « Il fit de grandes offrandes de fumigations (à l'assemblée des lha-srin sde brgyad, à Mgon-po lcam-dral, et Las-mgon – cf. ci-dessus). En particulier parce qu'il ordonna avec violence l'obligation de la réalisation sans obstacle des activités du messager de la parole comme un homme qui parlait à Btsan Jag-pa me len, il l'a totalement effrayé (pour qu'il soit) le serviteur et ainsi est apparu la réalisation sans obstacle de toutes les activités ».

[20] Gtsang Mkhan-chen (1974 : 357).

[21] *Lho'i chos-byung* (143–144), pour les passages de ce texte sur Jag-pa me-len, d'après le tableau fourni par Aris (1976 : 141b–144b).

[22] Aris (1976 : 634), traduction, « The Red Killer together with his attendant concourse of one hundred thousand who takes away like fire the life and breath of oath-breakers and harassing enemies ». A la lumière des passages du Lho'i chos-'byung et de la biographie du Zhabs-drung, il nous paraît clair que Gshan-dmar est utilisé ici comme nom altérnatif de Jag-pa Me-len.

détail diffère : le cœur frais tenu à la main d'après l'*A-bse Lo-rgyus*. Ce serait là l'élément clé qui rejoindrait les descriptions de Beg-tse. Un portrait bhoutanais de Jag-pa me-len le montre pourvu du cœur tenu contre la poitrine dans la main gauche, tandis que la main droite tient une flèche.[23] Pourtant la ressemblance avec A-bse est telle qu'il y a tout lieu de croire que 'Gro-'dul rdo-rje a dû s'appuyer sur un texte *bon-po*, sans citer sa source. La raison d'une telle réticence nous échappe.

En guise de conclusions, on remarquera à la fin de cet examen de l'Histoire d'A-bse, que la multitude d'imbrications est foisonnante. Cela incite à la plus grande prudence dans l'établissement d'un bilan de classifications des aspects et des rôles attribués à ce dieu protecteur. Force nous est de constater la grande ouverture des classifications divines tibétaines dont la souplesse permet des remaniements constants, tout en respectant la tradition historiographique écrite et orale.

Bibliographie

Sources tibétaines

(Anonyme). Pelliot Tibétain 1194. Manuscrit tibétain de Dunhuang conservé à la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris.

Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho. Gsan-yig gangha'i chu rgyun, vols. I-IV. Delhi, 1970. http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW30183

'Jam mgon Kong sprul. Gter ston brgya rtsa 'i rnam thar. Tibetan Nyingmapa Monastery, Arunachal Pradesh, 1973. http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW20539

Bon skyong sgrub thabs. Vols. 1-2. http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW8LS67577

'Brug rje mkhan po 10 bstan 'dzin chos rgyal. Lho'i chos 'byung. http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW1KG9413

Gtsang Mkhan-chen. 1974. Dpal 'brug-pa rin-po-che ngag dbang bstan-'dzin rnam-rgyal gyi rnam-par thar-pa rgyas-pa chos kyi sprin chen-po'i dbyangs. Thobten Tsering, Delhi, 1974. http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW30164

G.yung-mgon rdo-rje. Bstan gyi rgyal-po srog-bdag a-bse chen-po gdug-pa snying 'byin gyi byung khungs lo-rgyus mdo tsam snying-por dril ba gcig shes kun grol, ff. 17 (titre abrégé : A-bse lo-rgyus). Manuscrit de la bibliothèque de 'Brug-pa thugs-sras Rin-po-che, au monastère de Mim, Darjeeling. http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW8722

Sle-lung bzhad-pa'i rdo-rje. Dam-can rgya-mtsho'i rnam-par thar-pa cha shas tsam brjod-pa sngon med legs bshad. Thimphu, 1979. http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW27414

---

[23] Musée d'Ethnographie, Neuchâtel, inv. 78.15. Nous remercions Mme Marceline de Montmollin de nous avoir signalé cette référence.

Autres sources

Aris, Michael. 1976. « The Admonition of the Thunderbolt Cannon-ball and its place in the Bhutanese New Year Festival ». *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 39, 601–635.

Aris, Michael. 1979. *Bhutan, The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*. Warminster : Aris & Phillips Ltd.

Bailey, Cameron. 2017. *The Feast for Scholars: The Life and Works of Sle lung bzhad pa'I rdo rje*. Thèse de doctorat, Wolfson College, Oxford University Research Archive. https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:c8de47c2-98b2-4b3c-8bcb-3e93ca668722

Blondeau, Anne-Marie. 1992. « ‹ découvreur › du Maṇi bka'-'bum était-il bon-po ? » Dans *Tibetan and Buddhist Studies Commemorating the 200th Anniversary of the Birth of Alexander Csoma de Kőrös*, vol. I, édité par Louis LigetiBudapest : Akadémiai Kiadó, 77–123.

Heller, Amy. 1992. *Les origines du culte et de l'iconographie de Beg tse, divinité protectrice tibétaine*, thèse présentée à l'École Pratique des Hautes Études, IVe section, sous la direction de Mme Ariane Spanien.

Karmay, Samten. 1972. *Treasury of Good Sayings: A Tibetan History of Bon*. Oxford : Oxford University Press.

Karmay, Samten. 1975. « A General Introduction to the History and Doctrines of Bon », *Memoires of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 23, 171–218.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2024. « Lamas and Shamans: Mongolian Orders of Knowledge from the Early 17th to the 21st Century. A Contribution to the Debate on Non-European Concepts of Religion ». *ARGOS* 3 (2) Special Issue *Towards a Global History of Religion*, 6–47.

Stein, Rolf A. 1971. « Du récit au rituel dans les manuscrits tibétains de Touen-Houang ». Dans *Études tibétaines dédiées à Marcelle Lalou*, éd. par Ariane Macdonald. Paris : Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient Adrien Maisonneuve, 479–547.

A propos de l'auteur

Dr. **Amy Heller** est chercheuse affiliée avec les équipes Tibet-Bhutan-Aire Culturelle Tibétaine du Centre de recherche sur les Civilisations de l'Asie Orientale (CRCAO, Paris) depuis 1986, et affiliée à l'Institut de Sciences de la Religion de l'Université de Berne depuis 2017. Depuis 2021 elle collabore en tant que « senior research fellow » pour la Margot and Thomas Pritzker Art Collaborative (Chicago, USA) Elle a notamment publié *Hidden Treasures of the Himalayas: Tibetan manuscripts, paintings and sculptures of Dolpo*. Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2009. *Early Himalayan art.* Oxford : The Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, 2008, et *Tibetan Art Tracing the Development of Spiritual Ideals and Art in Tibet, 600 - 2000 A.D.* Milano Book and Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 1999.

E-mail : amy.heller@unibe.ch

Abstract in English

As a complement to Nina Kollmar-Paulenz's challenge of the prevailing rhetoric of the superiority of European historiography, this essay brings the focus of a Tibetan perspective of religious historiography. Presented in the dual context of Buddhist and Bon religious traditions, this essay provides the translation and analysis of a genealogical study of a male protective deity, Abse, firmly grounded in Tibetan literary sources.

Religion and Folklore: Conceptual Comparisons and Current Developments

Ülo Valk

Published on 29/01/2024

Abstract

The article reflects on religion both as a concept and as a field of studies from a transcultural perspective, linking it to current developments in folkloristics. It sheds light on the methodology of vernacular religion, a concept introduced by Leonard N. Primiano in the 1990s, which gained momentum in the 21st century with attention shifting from the institutional and scriptural forms of religions to vernacular beliefs, narratives, and practices in daily life.

The article by Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, "Lamas and Shamans," initially published in German in 2013, is a contribution towards liberating scholarship on religion from its conceptual confines within the disciplinary discourse forged in Europe. We are bound by the dominant vocabulary, the power of words that frame and limit the field of studies and direct our perspectives. Critical reflexivity on the formation of theories and a sensitive examination of the abstractions formed by the Western tradition are essential, although they are unlikely to break up the enclosure of our field of vision, confined by the concepts with which we think. Kollmar-Paulenz demonstrates that the term religion, often perceived as a Western invention, finds a parallel in Mongolia, having been conceived and evolved independently from European thought. The abstract terms *nom* and *šasin* appear in 17th-century Buddhist sources to signify dharma and Buddhist teachings, and their related rules and scriptures. Over time, these concepts were developed and processed in Mongolia, in the confrontation between Buddhism and indigenous religious practices, which were labelled as "false views" or, later, as the teachings of the shamans. The Western counterpart to these so-called false views is strikingly similar—superstition and idolatry, i.e. beliefs and practices that either opposed Christianity or appeared as remnants of a pagan era, becoming harmful or irrelevant to clerical doctrine. From a different angle, the religious conflict in Mongolia can be characterised as the confrontation between Buddhist writing and shamanic orality. The written word, bolstered by Tibetan scriptural authority, overcame, and replaced the dubious and weaker orality, the uttered word, which, in its endless variation, sounds unruly and undisciplined. In order to confront local traditions in Mongolia, lamas had to construct the image of an enemy: shamanism, which had not existed as a unified religion until Buddhism gave it definition.

The concept of "religion" carries a strong connotation of institutional power and authority. It has often been distinguished from some related beliefs and practices, considered as problematic or erroneous, such as magic, witchcraft, fortune telling, astrology, necromancy, or other practices not controlled by the church. Now, religion itself has become a challenged, culturally mis-constructed, and colonial concept (see, for example Forum 2017). It is reasonable to ask what might replace it, or what could be an appropriate key to understanding human and cultural phenomena "deemed as religious" (Taves 2009). Should we instead proceed from the notion of discourse, cultural practice, worldview, cognitive modelling? What other perspectives might we consider? Kollmar-Paulenz's article is a strong argument for preserving "religion" as a valid transcultural concept. We can hardly avoid our intellectual roots in Western scholarship, and that's acceptable as long as we maintain a self-critical and reflexive sensitivity towards our conceptual apparatus. There is room and potential for new and re-evaluated approaches rooted in non-Western patterns of thought. Like any living tradition, Western thinking is not isolated or bound to itself. It is likely that new perspectives arise at the intersections of autonomous disciplines and culturally liminal areas, as well as among scholars who are skilled in diverse traditions, both academic and non-academic.

More problematic than the concept of religion appears to be what lies outside its semantic core, i.e., the "superstitious" and folkish residues that the term inevitably evokes by implying or suggesting institutional structures. As Kollmar-Paulenz illustrates, in Mongolian academic traditions the term shamanism has its origins in Buddhist discourse. It has become an umbrella term encompassing various local beliefs and practices, such as the cult of the hearth divinity, the cult of the "White Old Man," and the worship of mountains and water bodies (Kollmar-Paulenz 2024: 28–29; 2013: 181).

Buddhism's encounter with Mongolian indigenous traditions created a hierarchical dichotomy and distinction, which in many cultures has been outlined as a two-tiered model: the co-existence of high religion and folk religion. In Europe, high religion was the domain of theologians and scholars of religion, while folk religion was entrusted to folklorists for documentation and research. Folk beliefs provided a solid, substantial, and inexhaustible body of material, underpinning both the development and credibility of academic folklore studies. During the 19th century, folklore studies developed hand in hand with the study of religion. The Grimm brothers identified ancient Indo-European deities that appeared as "belittled" figures in folklore, remnants of pre-Christian Teutonic "low mythology." Edward B. Tylor developed his notion of animism as the foundational form of religion, and James G. Frazer identified survivals of ancient beliefs and rituals among "civilised" societies. These and other scholars have contributed to both the establishment of folklore studies and religious studies, and they solidified the binary and hierarchically constructed distinction between religion and folk belief.

During the 20th century, interest in fieldwork grew among folklorists, which led the discipline away from retrospective speculations to the study of contemporary, living traditions within social contexts. Yet, the problematic opposition between clerical vs. folk, institutional vs. non-

institutional, and literary vs. oral persisted until recent times. How should we categorise practices like the magical application of the Lord's prayer in healing, the utilitarian use of the consecrated hosts as magical crop enhancers, or the manipulation with the Lutheran hymnal during night-time divinations in a bathhouse? Do these phenomena signify religion, folk belief, a blend of the two, or something else? Christianity, both in Europe and globally, is interwoven with such local beliefs and practices. Though they might seem misaligned from a clerical perspective, they epitomise the same Christian culture, shaped by mutual values, beliefs, and traditions.

Leonard Norman Primiano (1957–2021) was the pioneering folklorist who effectively questioned the two-tiered binary model of high and low religion that separated clerical orthodoxy from folk belief. He coined the term vernacular religion and stressed the significance of ethnographic methodology, defining it as the study of religion "as it is lived: as human beings encounter, understand, interpret, and practice it" (Primiano 2022: 6). Primiano began developing the vernacular approach in the mid-1980s while he was a graduate student under Don Yoder in the University of Pennsylvania's folklore program. The concept first appeared in Primiano's article "Feminist Christian Songs: Occasions of Vernacular Religious Belief" (1985) and was further elaborated in his dissertation, "Intrinsically Catholic: Vernacular Religion and Philadelphia's 'Dignity'" (1993). Primiano's seminal article "Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife" was published in 1995. The new approach, offered as an alternative to studying "popular" or "folk" religion, preceded the rise of "lived religion" research and has since become well established in folkloristic scholarship and beyond (see Illman, Czimbalmos 2020; Bowman 2022). As Primiano emphasised, vernacular religion "is not the dichotomous or dialectical partner of 'institutional' religious forms" (2012: 384). It does not replace older concepts, like folk religion, but signals a shift in the study of religion "with the people becoming the focus of study and not 'religion' or 'belief' as abstractions" (Primiano 2012: 384).

Epistemological models that differentiate between two binary concepts, such as low and high, literary, and oral, or great and little, inherently prescribe binary focuses and divisions of empirical material. The vernacular religion approach has enabled folklorists to centre their research on areas previously situated in the liminal space between the two poles of the conventional conceptual scale defined by "folk" and "official" religion. Since concepts direct our perspectives and design mental maps of research, modified and new categories allow us to see data in new constellations, and discern the connections between phenomena and expressive forms that have been segregated by former classification schemes. Recently, the term belief narrative has emerged in folkloristics as an integrative genre label that has brought attention to the role of folklore in the formation of beliefs, attitudes, and values. It has brought together narratives of supernatural encounters, such as legends and memorates, and other stories that convey, solidify, challenge, or debunk beliefs without a supernatural implication. These narratives might concern topics like health, political convictions, conspiracies, climate change, or something else (Valk 2021). Eviatar Shulman has applied the "belief narrative" concept beneficially in Buddhist studies, when analysing discourses linked to the Buddha in the Pāli canon. As he writes, "Folklore and

religion are related to each other so intensely that they constitute continuous and, in many ways, overlapping realms of human action and experience" (2021: 187).

Another folkloristic attempt to dissolve conceptual dichotomies and perceive dialectical counterparts as intrinsically intertwined pertains to the age-old pairing of knowledge and belief. Anthropological discourse often dismissed belief as an analytical category due to definitional challenges and its perceived inferiority when juxtaposed with knowledge (Needham 1972). However, Jason N. Blum recently scrutinised the critique of belief in the study of religion. While he acknowledged many criticisms as valid, he considers "belief" a sensible and even inevitable concept in the study of religion given its pivotal role in human existence (Blum 2018). Folklorists have appreciated "belief" both abstractly and as a genre category, when referencing its casually formulated manifestations. Attitudes toward beliefs have gradually changed from negative to neutral, coinciding with the waning influence of cultural evolutionary thought and the historical disparagement of belief as irrational. Viewing belief as a fundamental form of cognition, inseparable from knowledge, has birthed the new conceptual framework of "vernacular knowledge." This idea extends from "vernacular religion" but broadens the religious connotations of belief to its secular manifestations, influencing our grasp of reality (Valk 2022: 8). Consequently, knowledge does not contradict belief; it leans on belief as an essential comprehension tool.

The theoretical and methodological shifts in folkloristics, as a discipline closely related to the study of religion, illustrate the need to resist the solidification of concepts, which can occur due to the authority of an academic tradition. As the article by Kollmar-Paulenz demonstrates, useful concepts are always in the making and inherently possess both inclusive and exclusive qualities. While they establish epistemological boundaries, they also delineate conceptual counterparts, such as the relationship between religion and folklore. While religion is deeply entwined with its institutional implications, folklore remains non-institutional. However, folklore has been utilised for ideological and political purposes, such as laying the groundwork for national cultures in instances of weak or absent literary traditions (Ó Giolláin 2014). Folklore might draw from authoritative, institutionally anchored discourses and practices, often by challenging them, but as a dynamic cultural phenomenon, it generally evades institutionalisation. Hence, the folkloristic approach can be applied to religious phenomena on the fringes of institutionalised traditions, edges that are quickly expanding today in the context of the growth of beliefs and practices under the conceptual umbrella of New Age or New Spirituality.

Given that folkloristics and the study of religion emerged from the same academic traditions and even boast some shared foundational figures, it is unsurprising that there is a parallel in how they position and perceive their primary subjects: folklore and religion. Historically, scholars sought the origins of both within the "childhood" of humanity, and neither seemed destined for endurance in the rational, secular, and "disenchanted" world of modernity. Yet, contemporary understanding proves that prediction inaccurate, invigorating both academic fields, widening their scopes, and drawing scholars to investigate religion, folklore, and their entanglements in

today's living cultures. A significant portion of this research targets the non-institutional and non-scriptural facets of religious traditions, with insights stemming from various angles, including the folkloristics of religion. As empirical research and theoretical thought go hand in hand, religion, and folklore—as the basic categories of these related disciplines—have been conceptualised in tandem. Admittedly, distinctions exist in the semantic breadth of religion and folklore. Yet, both can today be understood and studied as creative practices anchored in tradition. Both exist not only as transcultural theoretical constructs, but also as cultural manifestations—even if the cultures in question might lack a systematic lexicon for analytical introspection. Kollmar-Paulenz provides compelling evidence of "religion" as a category sprouting and evolving in diverse cultural and historical settings. This insight resonates with folkloristics, which has been struggling with its colonial history and the hegemonic uses of folklore as a term (Naithani 2010; Briggs/Naithani 2012). Within European tradition, the term folklore was coined as late as 1846. However, this surely isn't the first emergence of folkloristic thinking and folkloristic discourse in the world culture. We can find traces of such thought in countries with ancient literary and philological traditions, like India and China. In Indian tradition, the age-old typological binary of "classical" versus "folk" is evident in the conceptual divide between two styles: *mārga* (highway) and *deśī* (byway) (Korom 2006: 13–14; Korom 2023). In South Indian, Dravidian poetic traditions we find the categories of *puṟam* ("exterior," public) and *akam* ("interior," domestic) styles of oral storytelling (Ramanujan 1999). Ancient China reflects a "strong, reiterated pattern of dialectical entanglement between writing and oral literature" (Liu 2012: 191). Such discussions and conceptual distinctions, remarkably, resonate with current folkloristic debates.

One of the lessons of Kollmar-Paulenz's article for folklorists is the need for a more nuanced exploration of the emergence of folkloristic ideation, and even the concept folklore itself, across diverse cultures. As we can find independent emergences of folkloristic thought in multiple cultures, perhaps it is not always fitting to follow the standard narrative of chronicling the history of folkloristics in Asia and worldwide with a (post)colonial perspective, commencing with the discussion of European influences from the 19th and 20th centuries (see for example Naithani 2012; Mori 2012). The time is ripe to re-evaluate the conceptual histories of both religion and folklore on a global scale. Both categories can be used without the post-colonial unease that arises from always accusing ourselves of Western cultural imperialism.

Bibliography

Blum, Jason N. 2018. "Belief: Problems and Pseudo-Problems." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 86 (3), 642–664.

Bowman, Marion. 2022. "Afterword: 25 Years of Vernacular Religion Scholarship." In *Vernacular Knowledge: Contesting Authority, Expressing Beliefs*, ed. by Ülo Valk / Marion Bowman. Sheffield: Equinox, 405–418.

Briggs, Charles, Sadhana Naithani. 2012. "The Coloniality of Folklore: Towards a Multi-Genealogical Practice of Folkloristics." *Studies in History* 28 (2), 231–270.

Forum 2017. "Religion, Anthropology, and the 'Anthropology of Religion.'" *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* 13, 11–137.

Illman, Ruth / Mercédesz Czimbalmos. 2020. "Knowing, Being, and Doing Religion: Introducing an Analytical Model for Researching Vernacular Religion." *Temenos – Nordic Journal for the Study of Religion*, 56 (2), 171–199.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2013. "Lamas und Schamanen: Mongolische Wissensordnungen vom frühen 17. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert. Ein Beitrag zur Debatte um aussereuropäische Religionsbegriffe." In *Religion in Asien? Studien zur Anwendbarkeit des Religionsbegriffs,* ed. by Max Deeg / Oliver Freiberger / Christoph Kleine / Astrid van Nahl. Uppsala: Uppsala University Library, 151–200.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karénina. 2024. "Lamas and Shamans: Mongolian Orders of Knowledge from the Early 17th to the 21st Century. A Contribution to the Debate on Non-European Concepts of Religion." *АЯGOS* 3 (2) Special Issue *Towards a Global History of Religion*, 6–47.

Korom, Frank J. 2006. *South Asian Folklore: A Handbook*. Westport: Greenwood Press.

Korom, Frank J. 2023. "Interrogating the Folk/Classical Divide in Indic Traditions." In *Living Folk Religions,* ed. by Sravana Borkataky-Varma / Aaron Michael Ullrey. London: Routledge, 19–34.

Liu, Lydia H. 2012. "Translingual Folklore and Folkloristics in China." *A Companion to Folklore*, ed. by Regina F. Bendix / Galit Hasan-Rokem. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 190–210.

Mori, Akiko. 2012. "Japan." In *A Companion to Folklore*, ed. by Regina F. Bendix / Galit Hasan-Rokem. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 211–233.

Naithani, Sadhana. 2010. *The Story-Time of the British Empire: Colonial and Postcolonial Folkloristics.* Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Naithani, Sadhana. 2012. "India." In *A Companion to Folklore*, ed. by Regina F. Bendix / Galit Hasan-Rokem. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 234–247.

Needham, Rodney. 1972. *Belief, Language, and Experience*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ó Giolláin, Diarmuid. 2014. "Narratives of Nation or of Progress? Genealogies of European Folklore Studies." *Narrative Culture* 1 (1), 71–84.

Primiano, Leonard Norman. 1985. "Feminist Christian Songs: Occasions of Vernacular Religious Belief." *New Jersey Folklore* 10, 38–43.

Primiano, Leonard Norman. 1993. *Intrinsically Catholic: Vernacular religion and Philadelphia's "Dignity."* PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.

Primiano, Leonard Norman. 1995. "Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife." *Western Folklore* 54 (1), 37–56.

Primiano, Leonard Norman. 2012. "Afterword: Manifestations of the Religious Vernacular: Ambiguity, Power, and Creativity." In *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief*, ed. by Marion Bowman / Ülo Valk. Sheffield: Equinox, 382–394.

Primiano, Leonard Norman. 2022. *Vernacular Religion: Collected Essays of Leonard Norman Primiano*, ed. by Deborah Dash Moore. New York: New York University Press.

Ramanujan, Attipate K. 1999. "Two Realms of Kannada Folklore." In *The Collected Essays of A. K. Ramanujan*, ed. by Vinay Dharwadker. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 485–512.

Shulman, Eviatar. 2021. "Canonical Belief Narratives of the Buddha: Folklore and Religion in the Early Buddhist Discourses." *Narrative Culture* 8 (2), 187–217.

Taves, Ann. 2009. *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Valk, Ülo. 2021. "What Are Belief Narratives? An Introduction." *Narrative Culture* 8 (2), 175–186.

Valk, Ülo. 2022. "An Introduction to Vernacular Knowledge." In *Vernacular Knowledge: Contesting Authority, Expressing Beliefs*, ed. by Ülo Valk / Marion Bowman. Sheffield: Equinox, 1–21.

About the author

Ülo Valk is a professor of Estonian and Comparative Folklore at the University of Tartu, Estonia. He is co-editor of *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions* (Brill). Among his recent publications is *Vernacular Knowledge: Contesting Authority, Expressing Beliefs* (Equinox, 2022), co-edited with Marion Bowman. His research focuses on folk narratives, genre theory, and the supernatural.

Mail: ulo.valk@ut.ee