

Editor:	Schalk, Peter
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Year:	2003
Title:	<i>Religion im Spiegelkabinett. Asiatische Religionsgeschichte im Spannungsfeld zwischen Orientalismus und Okzidentalismus.</i>
Series:	Acta Universitatis Upalensis. Historia Religionum 22
Publisher:	Uppsala University
City:	Uppsala
Number of Pages:	410
ISBN:	91-554-5620-0

Review:

This is the most recent publication produced by the members of the *Arbeitskreis Asiatische Religionsgeschichte* (AKAR, founded in 1998), a study group affiliated to the German Association for the History of Religions. It contains twelve contributions (the blurb mistakenly gives eleven) most of which are based on papers presented at a workshop of the study group in Weikersheim (Germany) in February 2002. The book discusses new and critical approaches to Edward Said's concept of "orientalism", drawing attention to the manifold and complex discourses and debates about and within religions of different geographical areas in Asia and presenting case studies from different time periods. The book, whose title *Religion im Spiegelkabinett* can be literally translated as "religion in a maze of mirrors" is mainly written in German, but a detailed abstract of the entire volume by editor-in-chief Peter Schalk, as well as abstracts of the ten German articles in English, are helpfully provided for those who need it. Two contributions are presented in English (Michael Pye and Peter Schalk).

In the Introduction, following a short Preface, the editors point out the importance of bringing the discourse on orientalism once more to the fore despite the vast number of publications on the subject following the publication of Said's *Orientalism* in 1978. The organizers of the 2002 AKAR workshop felt that a fresh approach to this debate in the theoretical and methodological framework of the study of religions would be beneficial since "religions are a cultural field that seems to be especially prone for causing xenophobic reactions" (p. 12). In addition, the special mission of the project was to present case studies from hitherto largely ignored Asian religions such as Mongolian Buddhism and Jainism as a means to uncover selective and therefore 'orientalist' research strategies.

Although the editors are aware of the extremely negative connotations of the term ‘orientalism’ they are not ready to give it up. They want to use the term in the context of a dichotomous model of ‘orientalism-occidentalism’ that has “admittedly no actual equivalent in the real world but is supposed to be exclusively used as a heuristic model”. They claim that despite the dividing and therefore often over-simplifying nature of the couplets ‘orientalism-occidentalism’ and ‘auto-orientalism-auto-occidentalism’ that may also ignore the actual pluralistic nature of ‘orientalism’, such a simplifying model is needed for a clearly demarcated comparative approach in the study of Asian – and it should be added – all other religions (p. 13). The first three contributions go into much more detail about this extremely relevant terminological discussion and not only provide but also experiment with revised theoretical and methodological frameworks. This tendency is also found in the other more case-study oriented contributions. Overall, this makes the volume a valuable contribution not only to the history of Asian Religions but also to the field of theory and method in the study of religions.

First, Max Deeg presents Said’s concept, its general criticisms and its impact on the study of religions by way of an introduction to the subject of ‘orientalism’. Perception, construction and reciprocity play a major role in Deeg’s essay. He draws a complex picture of the ‘orientalism’ debate that justifies the book’s title, which suggests that “religion” is found in an endlessly reflecting and self-reflecting ‘maze of mirrors’ and in a ‘field of tension’ (*Spannungsfeld*) between orientalism and occidentalism. Whereas Deeg’s contribution has the character of a complex, tree-like hermeneutical discourse, Oliver Freiberger in the second essay explores ‘religion and ‘globalism’ and seeks to demonstrate the usefulness of the four pillars or ‘trunks’ (my term) of the AKAR ‘orientalism model’ in the context of Sulak Sivaraksa’s and other ‘engaged’ Buddhists’ works. The construction of orient and occident, Freiberger states, mostly serves these engaged Buddhists when they propound criticism of globalization and seek to solve *local* religious conflicts. The geographical standpoints of the ‘orient’, traditionally Asia, or the ‘occident’, traditionally Europe or the USA, can become completely marginal in some of the constructions observed by Freiberger (p. 86). I am not sure why Freiberger did not mention that these criticisms are essentially a part of the discourse of modernity. Nevertheless, his demonstration of how we can use the orientalism model to uncover ideological constructs in the context of modern Asian Buddhist movements and individuals is convincing.

The third and last contribution of this theoretical part of the volume is more programmatic compared to the first two. In his essay, Michael Pye focuses on the very pinnacle of eurocentrism which he terms ‘Westernism’, and introduces meaningful and often witty examples of such a Westernism from the cultural exchange between Germany and Japan. The purpose of this is to underline his critique of statements that the comparative, empirical and rational study of religions “must have” been formed after the introduction of European research methods to Japan, an assertion which he refutes by pointing out the works of the 18th century scholar Tominaga Nakamoto.

Pye's essay is, at the same time, the first of four contributions in all which are focused mainly on Japan, presented in the volume roughly in order of the historical time period examined. The reception of early modern Japanese Buddhism as found in the letters written by Jesuits in the 16th century, by Katja Sindemann, is followed by the history of the reception of Amida Buddhism from the 16th century to the present and a detailed study of the interpretative scheme of a "Protestant outlook" by Christoph Kleine. Inken Prohl concludes the Japan related section with a discussion of the rhetoric of reverse orientalism by modern 'spiritual intellectuals' and the statement that western intellectuals often take this rhetoric for face value. In this way, 'orientalism', somehow animated by Prohl, takes revenge on its originators.

Deeg in his introductory essay justifies the fact that there is no single contribution dedicated to China by saying that the debate on orientalism in the context of China is still in its infancy (Deeg, p. 38). I interpret this as saying that this subject is so new that no contributor could be found to deal with China. This would not make much sense since Deeg himself provides a relatively detailed case study of a current Chinese religious group with an immensely growing significance, Falungong. Schalk, indeed, points to Deeg's China related passage (p. 38-50) in the context of the overall structure of the book ("China is not totally excluded from the cultural and geographical range covered by the papers, as it is dealt with to a certain extent in the first paper" (Abstract). Certainly, one of the strengths of the book is the careful attention that is paid to rather understudied fields such as the perceptions and constructions of: Korean 'shamanism' or *musok* (Dieter Eikemeier), Mongolian Buddhism and Buddhists (Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz), Siamese/ Thai religions (Sven Trakulhun), the modern orthodox monastic tradition of Advaita Vedānta (Annette Wilke), Jainism (Christoph Emmerich) and the current origin myths of the Vāddô ethnic group in Sri Lanka (Peter Schalk). Without exception these six contributions are all exceedingly well-informed and theoretically refined studies. The study by Kollmar-Paulenz is particularly impressive on account of its careful, well-crafted balance between historical aspects and theoretical considerations, and deserves much more attention than I can provide here. My intention is to look at the concept of the book as a whole. In this respect I have to say that the distribution of case studies and geographical areas is perhaps not ideal in this volume but I am sure that I am not the only one who eagerly awaits another AKAR workshop and publication project – maybe with a focus on 'orientalism' and China?

Religion im Spiegelkabinett should be found in every library devoted to the study of religions, Asian area studies or theology. It is a welcome presentation of new research and advanced discussion intended for colleagues and advanced students in all of these fields.