

SUMMER SCHOOL 2014

CITYSCAPES AND NEW RELIGIOSITIES IN ASIA

10-17 August, 2014

University of Göttingen

In cooperation with BMBF-funded research network “Dynamics of Religion in Southeast Asia” (DORISEA) at the University of Göttingen, CETREN organises a summer school on *Cityscapes and New Religiosities in Asia*.

Date: 10-17 August, 2014

Venue: Tagungszentrum an der Sternwarte (Historic Observatory), Göttingen

DORISEA and CETREN are two key platforms building research, network and outreach capacities in the study of religions at the University of Göttingen. Bringing together scholars in the humanities and social sciences for inter-disciplinary dialogue, the networks in particular foster an appreciation of regional diversity and intra- and cross-regional entanglements in Asia. With DORISEA’s expertise on Southeast Asia and CETREN’s core competence in China and India, both networks will join creative forces and pool their academic networks to organise this summer school.

The summer school is open to doctoral and research-based master’s students of all cultural-studies disciplines, whose work relates to East, South and/or Southeast Asia. Instead of limiting the study of religion in Asia to one discipline, the summer school brings together the disciplinary competences of social and cultural anthropology, history, sociology, media and visual studies, religious studies, and area studies.



For this event, DORISEA and CETREN have been awarded funding by the University of Göttingen’s new summer school programme SPIRIT, which awards 20,000 Euros for summer school concepts promoting the university’s core research profiles and internationalisation strategy. DORISEA and CETREN have also received funding approval for a follow-up summer school, to take place in 2015.

THEME

China, Southeast Asia and India are entangled through complex histories. But they are also connected through multiple contemporary ties in the political, religious, economic and cultural spheres. India and China now boast strong economies and are global political and economic players, while the Southeast Asian states are eager to follow them: ASEAN has become a politically and economically ambitious alliance in Asia. Rapid urbanisation, the emergence of an aspiring middle-

class, the spread of consumer culture and a growing civil society are also features of these transformations. Cities are the future in Asia: the World Development Bank estimates that within the next 20 years, 1.1 billion people will move to cities in Asia. By 2030, 55 per cent of Asia's population will live in urban environments.

While modernisation was long believed to result in secularism, Asian modernities refute this thesis as euro-centric: far from becoming secular, Asian societies see a revival, a reformulation and transformation of religion in modernity, as well as striking religious dynamics. Religion is not an antithesis to modernity but is in complex interaction with it. With modernity implying far-reaching social, political, and economic changes, it results in new aspirations and practices but also in new constraints, fears and moral panics. These are articulated and addressed in religious practices and ways of expression, in new concepts of religion or, in extreme cases, in acts of religiously motivated violence. Cities are spaces of longing in Asia, promising a modern lifestyle, economic opportunities, global connectedness, education and upward social mobility. At the same time, they stand for the loss of social and economic safety nets, for changing norms and values and the loss of close social relationships. Religious life in the city is an answer to these hopes and fears and to the changing social make-up of communities.

The summer school **Cityscapes and New Religiosities in Asia** brings the contexts of "religion" and "urbanity" in Asia to the centre stage. It will engage with urban spaces and religiosities through **case studies especially in India, China, Vietnam, Korea, Thailand, Singapore, Cambodia and the Philippines**. While paying attention to the specific context and ethnographic details of the case studies, we will also make visible their transnational and transurban connections, as urban spiritual lives and spirit worlds have been informed by the changing cultural maps of migration, adaptation, and transformation across Asia. Metropolitan centres are particular receptacles and laboratories for such global encounters, as they interweave with middle-class consumer power and diasporic identities.

The summer school therefore invites participants to engage with, and develop, their own work through an exploration of three key thematic intersections, including **(1) transformations of religious sites** in contexts like architecture, city planning, heritage, urban place-making and re-habitation; **(2) religious communities**, in which different classes, castes, generations, ethnicities and genders intersect; and **(3) religion and media**, exploring how spirituality is visualised, sensed, communicated, staged or experienced across urban landscapes.

With this explicitly transurban focus, we also acknowledge the growing imperative for a "global-studies" perspective in postgraduate research, through which new demands are placed on students to manage the disciplinary boundaries of "regional" or "area studies", while wondering what actual research tools they need to do so effectively and competently within the limited time frame of a thesis.

PROGRAMME

Speakers will include, among others:

- Lily Kong (National University of Singapore)
- Dan Smyer Yü (Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen)
- David A. Palmer (University of Hong Kong),
- Julius Bautista (National University of Singapore)
- Rupa Viswanath (University of Göttingen)

Keynotes and morning lectures will provide theoretical frames and ethnographic snapshots from diverse Asian cityscapes. The summer school's main focus, though, will be on small working and reading groups moderated and mentored by each of the invited speakers over two-day units. Participants will have the opportunity to introduce their own work, especially through a poster but we do not expect full presentations. Instead, students will be invited to use the working groups to connect their research to each of the three theme blocs to develop new ideas and learn new approaches for their own work.

As a follow-up to the summer school, we will also feature an essay competition for interested participants, with the best paper selected for submission in an edited volume prepared by DORISEA in 2014.

Highlights of the cultural programme include:

- A visit to the historic Bodenwerder synagogue from 1825, which was translocated to Göttingen in 1825, to find out about the transformation of religious sites in a local context.
- A discussion with South East Asian artists working on religion and modernity, who will be guests in Göttingen for a joint event by DORISEA and Kunstverein Göttingen.
- A special film screening in cooperation with Lumière Cinema in Göttingen.

APPLICATIONS

The call for applications will open shortly.