

Labeling the Religious Self and Others: Reciprocal Perceptions of Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucians in Medieval and Early Modern Times: Introduction¹

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1.

Seeing there are no signs nor fruit of religion but in man only, there is no cause to doubt but that the seed of religion is also only in man; and consisteth in some peculiar quality, or at least in some eminent degree thereof, not to be found in other living creatures.²

When Thomas Hobbes thus began his chapter “On Religion” in his seminal 1651 *Leviathan*, he made use of the word “religion” in an abstract way that would have been impossible a century earlier. At roughly the same time, “religion,” which as a Latin or vernacular European word had been almost entirely synonymous with “Christianity,” was also for the first time applied to non-European phenomena described by European missionaries.³ To be sure, the conceptual shifts “religion” underwent at the very begin-

1 The contributions to this volume are revised and extended versions of papers first given at the workshop “Labeling Self and Other in Historical Contacts Between Religious Groups” held in Bochum on January 8th and 9th, 2010. The workshop was organized as part of the activities of the research consortium “Dynamics in the History of Religions Between Asia and Europe” based at Ruhr University Bochum and many of the insights and ideas reproduced in this volume and especially in the introduction stem from discussions held within the consortium since 2008. The editors express their gratitude to the consortium for the support received for the workshop and this volume.

2 T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, First Part, Chapter XII.

3 For an overview of early uses see J.Z. Smith, *Religion, Religions, Religious*, in: M.C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, Chicago 1998, pp. 269–84, here: p. 270.

ning of the modern period were not simply the outcome of encounters with new (non-European) forms of religiosity. They were also the result of intra-religious, even polemical, differentiations within Christianity following the Reformation. From sociology, we know that “the more differentiated a group is, the easier it is for the group to appropriate foreigners and the foreign,” but that this greater flexibility is paid for by “increasing internal otherness” (*Binnenfremdheit*).⁴ Considering that the religious concept of Western provenance is closely tied to the history of Christianity, one must ask whether the experience and assimilation of “internal otherness” in the shaping of the late-Enlightenment concept of religion at the same time enabled the overcoming of religious alterity vis-à-vis groups coming from outside. This is suggested by the fact that the Western Christian term “religion” was transferred onto Islam and Judaism (and later other religions as well). The classification of Judaism and Islam as “religions” happens only in conjunction with an “internal otherness” resulting from the religious schism of the Reformation.⁵ While one thus might assume that intra-religious internal differentiations – such as are also the case in Islam between Shia and Sunna – are central to the development of religious concepts, this assumption is complicated by considering cases from East Asia. There, a situation of religious plurality without differentiation – at least if we understand this term to have its prototype in a religious schism such as that of the European Reformation – dominated in premodern times. In China, three major traditions (Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism), which self-consciously defined themselves as distinct but displayed little tendency to engage in competition against each other, by and large coexisted peacefully,⁶ while in Japan combinatory practices of Buddhism and Shintō proliferated. Religious alterity was certainly easily overcome in East Asia, but it might have been less due to the degree of internal differentiation than to a long-established practice of assimilation that was applied to teachings in the broad sense (encompassing both religions and philosophies in today’s understanding).

When studying transfer processes of religion and knowledge up to the Enlightenment, it transpires that challenges posed by the contact with other religions contributed to processes through which a clear conceptual grasp of the religious field as something separate from other spheres of social action came about. In terms of the conceptual dimension, this means that in any given society or culture, something like a general concept of religion can be expected to have been formed after intensive contact with other “religions,” i.e., entities understood to be commensurate with the tradition(s) existing in that society or culture. The formation of religious concepts, especially of the concept “religion” itself,

4 J. Stagl, *Grade der Fremdheit*, in: H. Münkler (ed.), *Furcht und Faszination: Facetten der Fremdheit*, Berlin 1997, p. 99.

5 On the other hand, Christendom, Jewry, Islam, and paganism had been well-established categories of religion (albeit not yet called so) in Latin Europe since around 1000. See E. Sharpe, *The Study of Religion in Historical Perspective*, in: J.R. Hinnells (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, London 2005, pp. 21–45, here: p. 25.

6 See J. Gentz, *Die Drei Lehren (sanjiao) Chinas in Konflikt und Harmonie: Figuren und Strategien einer Debatte*, in: E. Franke/M. Pye (eds), *Religionen Nebeneinander: Modelle religiöser Vielfalt in Ost- und Südostasien*, Münster 2006, pp. 17–40.

thus cannot be regarded as an isolated process within one religious group or cultural environment, since transfer processes, translations of terms and concepts, and religious contact usually play an important role.

Still, the term “religion” and its equivalences in modern languages around the world today are of Western provenance, which fact forces us to reflect on the applicability of the language we use in speaking about the problem of the concept of religion in inter-religious comparison. The Christian Western shaping of the concept of religion presents a particular difficulty for the analysis of religious concepts in inter-religious comparison and contact. As with conceptual history in general, there is an “interlinkage of the history of things and the history of concepts”⁷ with reference to the history of the definition of religion. That is to say, the particular problems and experiences that gave rise to the modern concept of religion have inscribed themselves into this very concept. For this reason, the concept of religion cannot simply be carried over into the religious concepts of other cultures. Christoph Auffarth emphasizes that “[r]eligion, as can be gathered from the history of the term, is a concept of European religious history” and is formulated “out of the perspective of an occidental position of Christian Antiquity”; it is a term belonging to a “Christian object-language.” Auffarth concludes that the term is therefore clearly problematic as a comparative term of “religious studies metalanguage.”⁸

2.

A methodological aid in confronting this problem of intercultural and comparative studies is to resort to object-level language, i.e., to take seriously how societal actors themselves have historically referred to the practices they were involved in.⁹ It is not we historians who were the first to think about the commensurability and comparability of the term “religion” to non-European phenomena, but rather those non-Europeans themselves who were in contact with European languages. Historical actors in early modern and nineteenth-century India, China, Korea, Japan, and elsewhere had good reason to identify some of their traditions with this newly discovered European concept of “religion” but not to do so with others. While sociopolitical factors cannot be ignored in this story, there is also an intra-religious dynamic to explain why the majority of Chinese opinion leaders in the twentieth century came to the conclusion that Confucianism is not a religion, although Daoism is.¹⁰ The essays in this volume will carefully tread the

7 H. Homann, Religion, in: Wörterbuch der Religionssoziologie, Gütersloh 1994, p. 260.

8 C. Auffarth, Religion, in: C. Auffarth/J. Bernhard/H. Mohr (eds), Metzler Lexikon Religion, vol. 3, Stuttgart 2000, pp. 160–172, here: pp. 162–3.

9 On the methodological approach of the conceptual history of religious concepts see L. Hölscher, Religiöse Begriffsgeschichte: Zum Wandel der religiösen Semantik in Deutschland seit der Aufklärung, in: H. Kippenberg/J. Rüpke/K. von Stuckrad (eds), Europäische Religionsgeschichte: Ein mehrfacher Pluralismus, Göttingen 2009, pp. 723–46.

10 Both attributions have been and still are contested. See, e.g., C. Meyer, ‘Religion’ and ‘Superstition’ in Introductory Works to Religious Studies in Early Republican China, in: Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung 33 (2009), pp. 103–25, here: pp. 113–4, 121.

ground between object-level and meta-level language in order to contribute to making a shared academic discourse possible that reaches across Europe and Asia and is sensitive to the European legacy of the term “religion,” while at the same time keeping the door open for comparative investigations across cultures. We will therefore not limit our analysis to the term “religion” in the narrow sense (i.e., only the European languages) but consider other umbrella terms used for “teachings” or “worldviews” that are part of the religious field in a broad sense. This will allow us to reconsider the widespread assumption that outside Europe there was no such thing as a general concept of religion in pre-nineteenth century societies.¹¹

The aim of our endeavor is to extend the history of the concept of “religion” by an intercultural perspective. We hope that the case studies presented in this volume show the relation between the rise of the general concept of “religion” (or other abstract concepts) and the processes of perception and understanding in religious contacts. Moreover, we ask whether it might be possible to gain further insights into the processes of translation and the export of religious concepts and maybe even into the limits of these exportations. Thus, we are interested both in the formation of the European concept of religion as well as in its transfer and spread and in the repercussions of these transfer processes on the European concept. In addition to these questions of the possibilities and limitations of the transcultural use of concepts of “religion,” this volume poses another question: It inquires not only into the application of the Western concept of religion in transcultural comparison but also reflects on how concepts of religion are organized and developed in different cultures and societies.¹²

Furthermore, we hope that the essays in this volume will not only be fruitful for the history of the concept of “religion” itself, but will also contribute to a history of perception. In current studies of the mutual perception of different religious groups in different historical contexts, the contemporary use of the term “religion” is often not taken into account.¹³ To make up for this lack of a conceptual dimension, we will focus on the question of how different religious groups tried to describe and “label” each other in situations of encounter and mutual perception. This “labeling” and the different attempts at grasping each other conceptually are important for the question of how one religious tradition saw the other. Whether a particular religious group recognized another group as a “religion” or whether it tried to distinguish itself from that group by labeling it as heresy, superstition, or even as something not belonging to the “religious” sphere at all

11 Over the last decade, this assumption has made its way from books such as T. Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, Oxford 2000, to introductory works to religious studies. See, e.g., John R. Hinnells's claim that there are “cultures’ that have no word for ‘religion,’ as in Sanskrit” (J.R. Hinnells, *Why Study Religions?*, in: J.R. Hinnells (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, London 2005, pp. 5–20, here: p. 7).

12 Daniel G. König's essay in this volume, for instance, draws on examples from Christianity and Islam to examine how descriptions of the Other become differentiated and more precise in the course of intensifying contacts.

13 A recent example is L. Grenzmann/T. Hays/N. Henkel/T. Kaufmann (eds), *Wechselseitige Wahrnehmung der Religionen im Spätmittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit*, vol. 1: *Konzeptionelle Grundfragen und Fallstudien*, Berlin 2009, which deals intensively with the issue of mutual perception but mostly avoids the problem of the concept of religion.

is an essential part of a history of perception. We follow the scholar of religious history Barend ter Haar in assuming that labels “are used according to vague and often only implicit criteria, and are rarely based on close examination. [...] Contrary to analytical categories (or generic terms) in modern scholarship, labels are, therefore, not used to analyse or describe. [...] Labels form a kind of closed system, always accurate for those who apply them, and providing justification for actions against the labelled phenomena.” We differ from ter Haar, however, in not necessarily presupposing that labels always “are, or have been used to denounce certain phenomena.”¹⁴ To the contrary, value attributions associated with labeling can be rather ambiguous, as we will shortly show in our tentative sketch of the historical patterns undergone by religious othering (see Section 3 below). To define the parameters of our undertaking as outlined here and to give a sense of our methodological approach to the problems it poses, it is necessary to first clarify what we mean by a general concept of religion. The contemporary understanding of the abstract noun “religion” in the European languages (and those non-European languages that have coined a congruous term) encompasses several dimensions, three of which we will single out and identify for heuristic purposes. First, there is the (relatively old) generic meaning of one religion vs. others: “a particular system of faith and worship.”¹⁵ In this sense, European languages have allowed us to speak of several “religions” in the plural since about 1400.

From about this time onwards, “religion” started its career as a collective noun, becoming a key concept of European societies later on in the course of the Enlightenment. Beyond its usage in the plural distinguishing different religious traditions, the conceptual shift during this period made it possible to use the term religion in the singular, referring to something like an ubiquitous human ability and predisposition. Next to this understanding of religion as a universal phenomenon stands the borderline concept, in which “religion” is delineated from other, “non-religious” or “secular,” spheres of societal activity, such as law, politics, education, and so on.¹⁶ We find all these meanings overlapping in today’s “religion,” but they must by no means be actualized in one and the same word, and they have indeed developed separately in the European languages, where the first meaning is clearly the oldest one. The relationship between them, however, is not entirely contingent. In the European languages, again, it seems that the two more abstract meanings of the universal dimension and the borderline dimension actually developed out of the plural meaning. Although this may not be a necessary sequence found in all

14 B.J. ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History*. Honolulu 1999, pp. 13–14.

15 Oxford English Dictionary, entry “religion,” meaning no. 4.

16 For the history of the European concept, see M. Despland, *La religion en occident: Évolution des idées et du vécu*, Montréal 1979; F. Wagner, *Was ist Religion? Studien zu ihrem Begriff und Thema in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Gütersloh ²1986; E. Feil, *Religio: Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffs*, 4 vols., Göttingen 1986–2007; M. Hildebrandt / M. Brocker (eds), *Der Begriff der Religion: Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven*, Wiesbaden 2008.

languages, there is in fact an area of overlap between the three in many European and non-European languages.¹⁷

Equally, it is by no means self-evident what one should understand under “contact” between “religions.” Indeed, in many cases it would be problematic to treat “religions” as meaningful entities that can have an encounter, and the contribution by Daniel G. König to this volume will spell out some of the problems incurred by such an approach. Again, however, by privileging the conceptual approach, it becomes clear that in many historical instances, social actors in situations of encounter do identify with a certain (religious) tradition, which they juxtapose to that of another. These contacts can be of a broad variety of types, encompassing, e.g., the actual meeting of individuals, situations of warfare, or theological debates conducted in the pages of books. In all of these instances of “contact” in the broad sense, issues of self-identity are negotiated all the while the Other is being defined.

3.

In a very abstract fashion, one could attempt to identify a common pattern that is by and large shared by many situations of encounter that take place over a longer span of time. While the following considerations do not represent a unilinear development, and while these phases overlap to a considerable degree, a number of actual historical cases from broadly diverging chronological and local backgrounds share the following modes of perception and description.

In the very early phase of a contact, with limited opportunities to get to more deeply understand that which is foreign, it is a common strategy to view what is foreign as a variant of that teaching or worldview with which one oneself identifies. Such a strategy has recently been described by anthropologist Gerd Baumann as the “grammar of encompassment”: “Encompassment means an act of selfing by appropriating, perhaps one should say adopting or co-opting, selected kinds of otherness.”¹⁸ This is precisely what can be seen in early contact between religious groups. Buddhism, e.g., was seen as a variant of Daoism when it was first introduced in China.¹⁹ As Antje Flüchter shows in her contribution to this volume, early modern Christian missionaries to India “discovered” traces of Christianity in the pagan religions they encountered there. When Buddhism began to spread in seventh-century Japan, the Buddhas were interpreted as identical to local deities, the *kami*, the first step in a complicated process leading to what has recently

17 The historical relationship between different meanings of religion seems to have been given little attention so far. For some preliminary suggestions, see J.Z. Smith, *Religion* (as in note 3), pp. 271 and 272, and E. Feil, *Religio: Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffs im 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2007, pp. 14–16.

18 G. Baumann, *Grammars of Identity / Alterity: A Structural Approach*, in: G. Baumann / A. Gingrich (eds), *Grammars of Identity / Alterity: A Structural Approach*, Oxford 2004, pp. 18–50, here: p. 25.

19 J. Gentz, *Buddhism and Chinese Religions*, in: P. Schmidt-Leukel (ed.), *Buddhist Attitudes to Other Religions*, St. Ottilien 2008, pp. 172–211, here: p. 176.

been called “combinatory religious practice.”²⁰ And the eighteenth-century Capuchin missionaries to Tibet were called “(white) lamas” by Tibetan Buddhists.²¹ The notion that the foreign religion is actually a sub-sect of the dominant religion with which one-self identifies can remain a valid option long after the initial encounter, as is apparent in the identification of Islam as a heretical sect of Christianity in early modern Europe²² or in Buddhist views of Christianity as an erroneous form of Buddhism, twisted into its deviant shape by the misguided teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.²³ The perception of the foreign is initially characterized by distance, a distance that can be spatial, temporal, or cultural. Standing in such a distance, the foreign largely evades conceptual definition or description: initially, it stands outside “habitualized knowledge.”²⁴

Distance, however, does not mean that one does not imagine the “Other” at all. On the contrary: As the contributions of Daniel G. König and Antje Flüchter to this volume show in great detail, travelers, merchants, missionaries, soldiers, and ambassadors all conveyed knowledge of other religious traditions existing in other countries to their homeland. Even if conceptually marked as “religion,” the distance remains intact, yet what was previously foreign has now become the Other, finding its place within the accepted worldview. Nevertheless, the attempts to conceptually grasp other religious ideas as religion are never independent of self-perception and its conceptual frame. Face-to-face contact, along with the examination of writings of other “religions,” leads to deepened knowledge. As a result of getting to better know the foreign, identification increasingly becomes impossible as a means of dealing with it. A new terminology, however, often does not yet exist in this transitory phase; rather, foreign terms which do not become a fixed part of one’s own language are then used to refer to that which is foreign. At this stage, the epistemological status of this foreign element within one’s own worldview is still relatively unclear and open.

Christian priests in sixteenth-century Japan, e.g., initially referred to by the Japanese words for “Buddhist priest” (such as *shō*), soon came to be called *bateren*, a word derived from an approximate pronunciation of the Portuguese word “padre.” This word, instead of referring to the function of the missionaries, emphasized their foreignness, and soon vanished from the Japanese language once the last missionaries left Japan in the first decades of the seventeenth century. The famous eighth-century inscription on the Nesto-

20 M. Teeuwen/F. Rambelli, Introduction: Combinatory Religion and the Honji Suijaku Paradigm in Pre-Modern Japan, in: M. Teeuwen/F. Rambelli (eds), *Buddhas and Kami in Japan. Honji Suijaku as a Combinatory Paradigm*, London 2003, pp. 1–53, here: p. 7.

21 See I. Engelhardt, *Between Tolerance and Dogmatism: Tibetan Reactions to the Capuchin Missionaries in Lhasa, 1707–1745*, in: *Zentralasiatische Studien* 34 (2005), pp. 55–98. The same was true for the sole non-Capuchin missionary to Tibet, the Jesuit Ippolito Desideri; see T. Pomplun, *Jesuit on the Roof of the World: Ippolito Desideri’s Mission to Eighteenth-Century Tibet*, New York 2010, p. 159. Ippolito also called himself “a Christian lama” (p. 120).

22 See the essay by Thomas Kaufmann in this volume.

23 See the essay by Hans Martin Krämer in this volume.

24 J. Osterhammel, *Distanzerfahrung. Darstellungsweisen des Fremden im 18. Jahrhundert*, in: H.-J. König/W. Reinhard/R. Wendt (eds), *Der europäische Beobachter außereuropäischer Kulturen: Zur Problematik der Wirklichkeitswahrnehmung*, Berlin 1989, pp. 9–42, here: p. 40.

rian Stele originally erected in Xi'an in China is a curious example of how religious language works in the transition period from (little-known) foreign to (more well-known) Other. The wording of the Chinese text on the tablet is so unspecific that it is difficult to tell at first glance that this is the description of a Christian group. The name of God is given in a phonetic rendering of the Syriac "Allaha," but is otherwise simply called by the generic name "true lord." Christianity is, however, referred to as *jingjiao*, i.e., as a proper name within the general framework of "teachings" (*jiao*) current in China at the time.²⁵ What was initially completely unfamiliar over a long term began step by step through the multiplicity of encounters to gain a recognizable contour and became integrated in those cultures' worldview, even if this happened by drawing borders; in other words, even if distance was maintained. The attempt to understand, classify, and grasp the foreign leads to its description. It is only through being described and narrated that the "foreign" progressively becomes the "Other," as Marina Münkler has argued.²⁶ Only then is the foreign fully appropriated by subsumption into one's own worldview. The terminological system is adapted accordingly, usually in such a way that the Other is clearly marked as such with a conventionalized set of phrases, or by modifying those words in use for one's own teaching by prefixes or attributes referring to the deviation it represents.

Islam, for example, was for a long time held by Latin Christians to be a heretical deviation from Christianity; it was only through the intensification of information due to travel writing and diplomatic accounts, as well as through the analysis of religious writings such as Petrus Venerabilis's translation of the Qur'an into Latin, that Islam emerged as a "self-standing" religion, even if a mostly polemical one at first glance. Another obvious example is *xiejiao*, the conventionalized Chinese label for heresies of all sorts, essentially meaning a deviation from the correct teaching (i.e., Confucianism) and applied to all teachings recognized as such but judged to be unorthodox, such as Christianity in the seventeenth century.²⁷ An opposite example is the title of the linguistic work of Nicolas Trigault, a seventeenth-century French missionary to China. His 1626 "Aid to the Eyes and Ears of Western Literati" (*Xiru ermu zi*) applies the label *ru*, typically used for Confucian scholars, to Jesuit missionaries, who were his intended audience.²⁸

It is only in this phase, when the foreign has become the Other, that another of the "grammars of identity/alterity" described by Baumann first becomes possible, namely that of "orientalizing," which Baumann himself has argued to be particularly prevalent "in contexts called 'religious.'" "Orientalizing," according to Baumann, is "a binary op-

25 See P. Pelliot, *L'inscription nestorienne de Si-ngan-fou*. Ed. by A. Forte, Venice 1996.

26 M. Münkler, *Erfahrung des Fremden: Die Beschreibung Ostasiens in den Augenzeugenberichten des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 2000, p.148. It is interesting to analyze in this context not only the perception of different groups such as merchants, missionaries, or diplomats but also their varying conceptual definitions of the Other. Certain systems of cultural contact might be more inclined to classify the 'Other', to determine it, and to describe it with more verbal precision.

27 See the essay by Ya-pei Kuo in this volume.

28 On the *Xiru ermu zi* see L. Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579–1724*, Cambridge (MA) 2007, p. 261. On the efforts of Jesuit missionaries to portray themselves as equals of the Confucian literati, see the essay by Ya-pei Kuo in this volume.

position subject to reversal,” i.e., something that makes possible not only the denigration of the Other but also a “cultural self-critique,”²⁹ exemplified by the modern urbanite who glorifies the way of life of primitive tribesmen. Orientalizing in this sense – becoming aware of one’s own shortcomings when facing the (still inferior) Other – may be seen in the case related by Thomas Kaufmann in his essay in this volume about Georgius de Hungaria, who spent two decades in Turkish captivity, yet in his account could not deny being impressed by various aspects of religious life in the Ottoman Empire, such as “the shining brightness of the *praxis pietatis*,” seemingly implying that such devotion had sadly been lost in Christian Europe. It is also visible in the fascination displayed by the Jesuit East Asia missionary Luís Fróis in his tract detailing cultural differences between Europe and Japan, e.g., when he describes the cleanliness of the Japanese, which is, he laments, so woefully lacking in his sixteenth-century Europe.³⁰

4.

A final theoretical consideration concerns the heuristic value of looking at how heresies and heterodoxies were defined. The construction of a category such as “religion” is not complete until it attains some type of negative foil. Logically, two models of opposition are thinkable: One is the labeling of deviant groups, which are, however, in the final analysis still seen to belong to the larger field identified as “religion.” In the case of heterodoxies or heresies (the labels actually used vary greatly), this is usually the case: The teachings of the Other may be of the devil and deserve to be attacked, yet they are still regarded as examples of the broader category of religion. In contrast, other groups may be judged to fall completely outside of the scope of the religious. This process is typical of modernity when “religion” is established in such a fashion as to exclude groups on either side of the conceptual spectrum: one, “superstitions,” which do not deserve to be included among proper religions and which are treated with indifference at best, although modern states would not infrequently undertake to dismantle them.³¹ On the other end of the spectrum is the border shared with science or agnostic *Weltanschauung*: In contrast to the treatment of “superstition,” the exclusion of philosophies, etc., from the modern category of “religion” did not necessarily entail a demotion in rank, as the example of Confucianism in modern China demonstrates.³²

29 G. Baumann, Grammars (as in note 18), pp. 20, 29.

30 L. Fróis (F. Schütte, ed.), *Kulturgegensätze Europa–Japan* (1585). *Tratado em que se contem muito susinta e abreviadamente algumas contradicções e diferenças de costumes antre a gente de Europa e esta provincia de Japão*, Tokyo 1955. An English translation is available as: R.D. Gill, *Topsy-Turvy 1585: 611 Ways Europeans and Japanese Were Contrary*, Key Biscane 2004.

31 The most extreme case would seem to be early twentieth-century China, where several hundred thousand local religious buildings were either destroyed or converted to secular use. See V. Goossaert, 1898: *The Beginning of the End for Chinese Religion?*, in: *Journal of Asian Studies* 65, 2 (2006), pp. 307–36, here: pp. 307–8.

32 See Chen H., *Confucianism Encounters Religion: The Formation of Religious Discourse and the Confucian Movement in Modern China*, Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, Cambridge (MA) 1999, pp. 1–20.

By paying close attention, again, to object-level language, one may make out distinctions between labels such as “heresy” or “heterodoxy” (or “Ketzerei,” *xiejiao*, etc.), differences which are reflected on the sociopolitical level of having to deal with the Other in some concrete way. Not infrequently, the one theologically closer to oneself was regarded as more “heretical.”³³ To some degree, the history of the development of a general concept of religion is equivalent to the overcoming of denominational sensibilities. The acknowledgment of the equivalence of other religions implies the abandonment of one’s own superiority to a certain extent. While this is essentially a story of the modern age, the essays on premodern cases discussed in this volume represent the first steps of such a full-fledged acknowledgment.

5.

The cases presented in this volume, although coming from a variety of cultures, all involve Christians as one of the two sides engaging in contact. The concentration on Christianity out of the multiplicity of possible encounters between religions in world history is due on the one hand to the arbitrary configuration of the field of history in Western Europe (from which all the contributors come), but on the other hand to the fact that, historically, Christianity has been the most aggressive in reaching out to other religions, mostly with missionary intention. The wealth of historical materials produced out of the encounter of Christians with representatives of other religious traditions is therefore unmatched in world history.

The other side is represented here in this volume by Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucians. While we have thus striven for breadth and while the cases come from a variety of cultures, the list is by no means exhaustive; the essays collected here can thus really achieve nothing more than to begin to address the many issues, questions, and problems raised in this introduction. Even when limiting the scope to Eurasia, some of the more prominent encounters are missing in our collection, most conspicuously perhaps that between Jews and Christians (referred to briefly by Antje Flüchter) and that between Jews and Muslims. Encounters between the latter two in the Islamic world were dense and took place on many different levels and occasions throughout the age of the caliphates. Important case studies for encounters and attempts to describe and conceive the Other are Islamic courts, where Jews often played an integral part, be it as

33 In this regard, early modern Europe, with its changing allegiances between Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Muslim states, is an excellent case in point. See the essay by Kaufmann in this volume. The polemics exchanged between the so-called spiritual Franciscans and their mainstream brethren are another typical case. In the rhetoric directed against each other, the label Antichrist was sometimes employed with more recklessness than when writing about Islam. See D. Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century after Saint Francis*, University Park (Penn.) 2003, p. 227.

physicians, translators, or in administrative functions, and where interreligious dialogues took place.³⁴

A veritable goldmine for linguistically complex interreligious interactions in the premodern period was Mughal India. Just as Muslim–Christian contacts in the Mediterranean world frequently went far beyond simple labeling, in premodern South Asia, processes of appropriation such as translations of Hindu texts into Persian, the high language of Islam on the subcontinent, and of Muslim texts into the vernaculars of the region seem to have been dominant.³⁵ That the issue of labeling the religious Other extends even to less institutionalized groups has been demonstrated for the case of Mongolia, where the introduction of Buddhism since the sixteenth century has led to the reification and new categorizations of indigenous shamanistic practices.³⁶

The recent volume *Buddhist Attitudes to Other Religions* includes chapters on Buddhist relations towards Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, among others. Importantly, the volume sets out from the observation that, in contrast to common notions of Buddhism as generally accommodative or as indifferent to other religious traditions, “it can hardly be denied that the confrontation with, the critical discussion and the normative assessment of, rival views and of one’s own views in relation to other views has not only been present in Buddhism from its inception, but continued to be so.”³⁷ In light of the problems raised in the present introduction, however, the approach taken by the volume on Buddhism is self-declaredly “theological” and therefore by and large ahistorical. Moreover, only scant attention is given to issues of labeling, since it is “the question of whether we are not in danger of overestimating the impact of terminology. For whatever terms and categories we might choose, the basic problems and possible solutions indeed seem to be astonishingly similar.”³⁸

Such an approach indeed seems possible only if one is faced with fundamentally theological problems that are in need of solutions. For the historical reconstruction of encounters between religious traditions, however, it seems well advised to take semantics seriously. Not only are they indicative of perceptions and attitudes towards self and Other, but, in the final analysis, they are also a key to explaining social behavior in situations of religious contact.

34 H. Lazarus-Yafeh / M.R. Cohen / S. Somekh / S. Griffith (eds), *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, Wiesbaden 1999; J. Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fatimid Caliphs*, New York 1970.

35 T.K. Stewart, *In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim–Hindu Encounter Through Translation Theory*, in: *History of Religions* 40, 3 (2001), pp. 260–87.

36 K. Kollmar-Paulenz, *Zur Ausdifferenzierung eines autonomen Bereichs Religion in asiatischen Gesellschaften des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts: Das Beispiel der Mongolen*, Bern 2007. Kollmar-Paulenz also gives examples of Tibetan Buddhist polemics against non-Buddhist religious groups (pp. 13–14).

37 P. Schmidt-Leukel / J. D’Arcy May, Introduction: *Buddhism and Its “Others,”* in: P. Schmidt-Leukel (ed.), *Buddhist Attitudes to Other Religions*, St. Ottilien 2008, pp. 9–22, here: p. 13.

38 P. Schmidt-Leukel / J. D’Arcy May, Introduction (as in note 37), pp. 11–12.