

THEOSOPHY ACROSS BOUNDARIES

From its inception throughout the period of its highest influence in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the theosophist movement has constantly transgressed boundaries. It has blurred boundaries between religious traditions, and appealed to individuals from a variety of religious backgrounds. And it has transgressed the boundaries between categories such as religion, philosophy, politics, or science.

Dealing with theosophy may challenge our way of looking at things – such as the division of religion and science – because it challenged them. One challenge lies in recognizing theosophy as a crucial agent of global transfers of religion and transfers of Western knowledge. Indeed, it is perhaps the most overlooked agent in this latter transfer. This is largely due to the fact that theosophy has so far mostly been studied within the disciplinary framework of Western Esotericism Studies. Yet, theosophy is not just a part of “Western esotericism,” i.e. the product of a purely western Orientalist imagination. Instead, theosophy, in particular the Theosophical Society, was part of a truly global movement, thus providing an outstanding example of the complex entanglements of the global religious history of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The conference will try to critically discuss and bring together Western Esotericism Studies and Asian Area Studies and, equally importantly, draw in contributions from other disciplines. The goal of the conference is to contextualize theosophy as a global movement, to take effects upon theosophy and effects of theosophy in unlikely places into account, and to go across (disciplinary) borders just as theosophy has also transgressed them historically.

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International Conference

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September 24–26, 2015

Heidelberg Center for American Studies
Curt und Heidemarie Engelhorn Palais
Hauptstraße 120
69117 Heidelberg



Thursday, September 24

15:00 Registration and Coffee

16:15-16:45 Welcome Address

17:00-19:00 Session 1

Wouter J. HANEGRAAFF (Amsterdam, Netherlands)
Emma Hardinge Britten and the Orientalist Imagination

Laurence COX (Maynooth, Ireland)
International Religious Organisations in a Colonial World: Comparing the Theosophical Society and the Maha Bodhi Society

Michael BERGUNDER (Heidelberg, Germany)
Theosophy and Bhagavadgita

19:00 Reception

Friday, September 25

9:30 Registration and Coffee

10:00-12:00 Session 2

Hans Martin KRÄMER (Heidelberg, Germany)
Spiritual Anti-Colonialism: Paul Richard Between Europe, India, and Japan

Jérémy JAMMES (Brunei Darussalam)
Theosophying Vietnamese Religious Landscape: Colonization, Occultism, and Translation in an Anthropological Perspective

Dinah ZANK (Berlin, Germany)
Painting Buddhism for a United Asia? Japanese-Indian Joint Heritage Preservation During the 1930s

12:00-13:30 Lunch Break

13:30-15:30 Session 3

HASHIMOTO Yorimitsu (Osaka, Japan)
An Irish Theosophist's Pan-Asianism? James Cousins, Gurcharan Singh and British Secret Agents

Boaz HUSS (Beer-Sheva, Israel)
The Association of Hebrew Theosophists: Between Jewish Particularism and Theosophical Universalism

Maria MORITZ (Berlin, Germany)
Globalizing "Sacred Knowledge": South Asians and the Theosophical Society, 1879-1930

15:30-16:00 Coffee Break

16:00-18:00 Session 4

Ulrich HARLASS (Heidelberg, Germany)
A. P. Sinnett: The Pioneer of Early Theosophy

Yan SUARSANA (Heidelberg, Germany)
The Healer as Guru: The Esoterization of Balinese Medicine

Dimitry OKROPIRIDZE (Heidelberg, Germany)
From Isis to Anima: The Theosophical Influence on the Analytical Psychology of C. G. Jung

18:30 Dinner

Saturday, September 26

9:30 Registration and Coffee

10:00-12:00 Session 5

Helena ČAPKOVÁ (Tokyo, Japan)
The Golconde Dormitory in Puducherry (1935-1945): Theosophy as a Transnational Network

INAGA Shigemi (Kyoto, Japan)
Kuki Shūzō and the Idea of Metempsychosis: On the Fringe of Theosophical Thinking?

Björn SEIDEL-DREFFKE (Berlin, Germany)
Theosophy and Its Influence on Russian Cultural History

12:00-13:30 Lunch Break

13:30-15:30 Session 6

CHUANG Chienhui (Osaka, Japan)
Education Carried out by Theosophists at the Shanghai International Settlement: Besant School for Girls without Annie Besant

YOSHINAGA Shin'ichi (Maizuru, Japan)
Mahayana Lodge Reconsidered: Theosophical Connections around Beatrice and D. T. Suzuki

SUN Jiang (Nanjing, China)
Spirit Writing (fuji) and Spirit Possession (kamigakari): A Comparative Study of Red Swastika Society and Ōmotokyō

15:30-16:00 Coffee Break

16:00 Concluding Discussion