



Cluster of Excellence  
**ASIA AND EUROPE**  
IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT



**UNIVERSITÄT  
HEIDELBERG**  
ZUKUNFT  
SEIT 1386

International Conference

## **Theosophy Across Boundaries**

Interdisciplinary Research Group MC7 “Political  
Legitimation”

September 24–26, 2015

Heidelberg Center for American Studies  
Hauptstraße 120, 69117 Heidelberg

## THEOSOPHY ACROSS BOUNDARIES

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Curt und Heidemarie Engelhorn Palais

Hauptstraße 120

69117 Heidelberg

### Concept

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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 gone beyond geographical boundaries, from Europe to India and on to other Asian countries. It has blurred boundaries between religious traditions, mixing elements from various European and Asian traditions, also appealing 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 (somewhat ironically, because it wanted to transcend 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, in which Western audiences defined their own identity with implicit or explicit reference to the “Otherness” of the East. 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. For people in Asia, esotericism could function as an entry point into orientalist discourse and, at the same time, provide opportunities for a critical resignification of its contents, which in turn impacted on orientalist notions.

In order to acknowledge that esotericism played an important role in the global religious history of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the current academic paradigm of a purely “Western Esotericism” requires revision. The conference will try to bring together Western Esotericism Studies and Asian Area Studies and, equally importantly, draw in contributions from other disciplines, especially History, Literary Studies, and Art History. By not just narrowly focusing on theosophy and the usual suspects thought to have been its main agents, 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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## Program

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### *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

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