CHAPTER 1

East Asian New Religious Movements: Introductory Remarks

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Introduction

The Handbook takes into focus eminent East Asian new religious movements (NRMs), that is, NRMs that originated in the East Asian region. Hence, in this introductory chapter the two key notions—East Asia and NRMs—have to be outlined before light is shed upon their amalgam that forms the subject of the Handbook. The choice of NRMs for inclusion in the Handbook follows both contextual and pragmatic considerations. All NRMs discussed in the individual chapters represent major exponents of East Asian 'new religiosity' (often also expressed by a sizeable institutional manifestation). However, whereas the twenty-five groups indeed cover a wide spectrum in the articulating mode of East Asian NRMs, the assemblage is certainly not exhaustive when looking at the diversity of the new religious panorama in its entirety. Hence, the groups included were selected, above all, due to their wide-ranging significance within the religious landscape in past and/or present of the countries concerned. Thus, the NRMs introduced in the Handbook depict a well-rounded collocation of the most crucial new religious actors that took shape in this region, providing a sound cross section of the phenomenon of East Asian new religiosity. The pragmatic dimension behind the inclusion is largely fed by three conditions: the word count limitations of the Handbook, the ensuing attempt to avoid too many thematic overlaps,[1] and the general unavailability of relevant expertise.[2]

1 For example, the selection of Nichirenist NRMs—many of which appear among the largest groups in Japan—was limited to two groups deemed most important, namely Sōka Gakkai 創価学会 and Risshō Kōseikai 立正佼成会, while leaving out the likes of Reiyūkai 霊友会, Bussho Gonenkai Kyōdan 佛所護念会教団, Fuji Taisekiji Kenshōkai 冨士大石寺顕正会, or Myōchikai Kyōdan 妙智会教団. Similarly, ranking among the most sizeable Korean NRMs, Taesunjillihoe 대순진리회/大巡眞理會 was taken as representative for the Chŭngsan religious cluster 증산교/甑山教, which is why a chapter on the hitherto internationally more dynamic Chŭngsando 증산도/甑山道 is omitted.

2 This holds especially true for more recent new religious developments in Vietnam and mainland China, a situation that is to some degree a repercussion of the harsh religio-political climate in which NRMs operate, hampering scholarly explorations in the field.

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East Asia

There is no scholarly agreement in defining the term 'East Asia.'[3] Approaches therefore vary, even more so in academe than in the political or demotic discourse. Traditionally, in scholarly parlance, starting in the late 1950s, 'East Asia' came to gradually replace the Eurocentric label 'Far East,' comprising China, (the) Korea(s), and Japan. This meaning is still widely associated with East Asia in colloquial usage, and also applied as a working definition by many scholars across disciplines. The notion of East Asia overall is a melange of geographical, political, economic, and socio-cultural demarcations, an imagined regionalist category (Park 2014; Miller 2008: xiii) with artificially set boundaries from an historical perspective (Perdue, Siu, and Tagliacozzo 2015: 2-3). The United Nations have arranged what is classified as 'Eastern Asia' to encompass Greater China—that is, China,[4] and the two special administrative regions Hong Kong and Macao—the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (i.e., North Korea), Japan, Mongolia, and the Republic of Korea (i.e., South Korea).[5] This configuration of East Asia (commonly found with the explicit mention of Taiwan as well) is popular among those who advocate a politico-geographical rubric, often specifically tagged as 'Northeast Asia.'[6] In this understanding, Northeast Asia is meant to contrast the sub-region of 'Southeast Asia,' which usually appears as an umbrella designation for the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), occasionally including Timor-Leste (Dent 2016: 5).[7] For some scholars, in particular within the social sciences, East Asia is simply the sum of the two sub-regions, unfolding at the intersection of chiefly geographical and political determination trajectories. The cultural momentum

3 Chinese: *Dōngyà* 東亞/东亚 or *Dōngyáng* 東洋/东洋; Japanese: *Tōa* 東亜, *Higashiajia* 東アジア, or occasionally *Tōyō* 東洋; Korean: *Tonga* 동아/東亞, *Tongasia* 동아시아, or less frequent *Tongasea* 동아세아; Vietnamese: *Đông Á*.

4 Thought of as the sum of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China (Taiwan). Note that the latter is not explicitly mentioned since it is not formally recognised as a separate national entity by the United Nations following the General Assembly Resolution 2758 (XXVI) of October 26, 1971.

5 Internet site, <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm>. Accessed 01/02/2017.

6 The designation 'Northeast Asia' too contains semantic variety, and may, for example, include Eastern Siberia while excluding Japan: "Northeast Asia is the ecological area that lies between the tundra of the far north and the cultivated plains of China proper to the south. It is bounded to the east by the Sea of Okhotsk and the Sea of Japan/East Sea and to the west by the high Altai range" (Narangoa and Cribb 2014: 16).

7 Yet, one may encounter the binary 'East Asia' and 'Southeast Asia' as well, often in varying compositions—especially with a view to the regional affiliation of Vietnam and Singapore, respectively.

in defining East Asia is naturally taking centre stage in the Humanities and specifically within Religious Studies. In this respect, East Asia is held tantamount to the Chinese cultural sphere, the 'Sinic zone' (Fairbank 1968: 2) and 'Sinic world' (Reischauer 1974), or the 'Sinosphere' (Fogel 2009: 4-5)—all referring to the region culturally engrained by the Hàn 漢 Chinese discursive archive, politically (via tributary relations) and economically clustering in an historical perspective. Regional cohesion is seen to be given most notably through both the dissemination of the Chinese script and a distinctive portfolio of religious and ethical patterns crystallising in the recognition of the importance of self-cultivation and social harmony. For the proponents of a shared East Asian cultural heritage, it is mainly the Confucian nomenclature of reality and its practical application by behavioural patterns that lies at the core of the Sinic religious reservoir (e.g., Shin 2012; Rozman 1991; Tu 1989); the Chinese cultural sphere as essentially a 'Confucian cultural area' (Nakajima 1994: 114-115). By bracketing East Asia in this way, territorial lines are reshuffled—Mongolia is left out, whereas Singapore is added to the core bloc of China/Taiwan, the Korean peninsula, Japan, and Vietnam (cf. Holcombe 2017: 5; Prescott 2015: 5-6). The shift happening at the level of nation-states also takes place in the domestic context, where certain enclaves may presently (let alone historically) effectively be relocated either inside (e.g., concentrated Chinese diasporic settlements in Indonesia and Malaysia) or outside (e.g., Tibet and broad areas of Xīnjiāng 新疆) this culturally contoured enclosure. The constellation over a culturally connected East Asia is likewise not unanimously agreed upon, with Singapore and Vietnam being the movable elements. As for the latter, for instance, the level of 'Confucianisation' as to justify the inclusion into the assumed Confucian cultural area is contested by some scholars (Acharya 2013: 96 n. 37).

The definition of East Asia employed in this Handbook draws on the assumption of cultural, and specifically religious, commonalities of the countries included; that is to say, the discursive aspects shared by the majority of those contributing to the vast nationally confined cultural repository. A determining factor to the East Asian cultural storehouse has been the process of sinicisation, fleshing out most saliently via a shared vocabulary as well as the ideological and material heritage of the 'Three Teachings' (Chinese: *sānjiào* 三 教; Japanese: *sankyō* 三教; Korean: *samgyo* 삼교/三敎; Vietnamese: *tam giáo*): Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism (cf. Pye 2004).[8] The Three Teachings were adding significantly to the religious environment of East Asia,

8 Around sixty to sixty-five per cent of the Korean language today consists of Sino-Korean words, which roughly equals the percentage of the Sino-Vietnamese inventory in Vietnamese; circa fifty-five per cent Sino-Japanese words are found in the lexis of modern Japanese.

mutually influencing each other as well as existing and newly arriving religious systems (e.g., Christianity). The ethical dimension of the Three Teachings, most resonantly voiced by the Confucian tradition in days past, supplied a widely recognised standard of mores deemed conducive across the region for the establishment/maintenance of social well-being. This became so deeply ingrained that it still remains, at least latently, a socio-cultural substratum. The discursive universe of the Three Teachings, in varying diachronic and local configurations concerning the magnitude of influence of each single 'tradition,' keeps serving as the matrix or the syncretising agent of newly emerging and transmigrated religious currents, given the accelerating religious globalisation.

East Asia according to this Handbook denotes the part of Asia whose socio-cultural anatomy is conspicuously characterised by these discursive aspects inscribed through a millennia-long unfolding process in substantial parts of today's nation-states of China and Taiwan, Japan, South and North Korea, and Vietnam.

New Religious Movements

Religions have always been in motion. In addition to the transformations within existing religions, the emergence of new movements is a constant factor in history. Some of them grow and may become an essential aspect of the religious panorama domestically or even internationally. Most of them, however, remain small or eventually disappear. Taken from this angle, the term 'new religious movement' is a relative term. Designating religions as NRMs or 'new religions' is a convention, which came into use due to the lack of a more suitable terminology with respect to recently emerged religious communities. At its heart, the term is defined by a temporal dimension considering the time of institutional formation qua discernible community based on a novel religious provider (founding figure) and consumers (adherents or practitioners). Accordingly, most scholars, taking the temporal aspect as *definiens* for NRM, mark the beginning of 'new religiosity' after 1800, or, alternatively, from the middle of the nineteenth century. This rather broad definition of NRM is occasionally juxtaposed by an approach to the concept that limits its range to the mid-twentieth century by associating the origin of NRMs with the aftermath of the 1960s counter culture or, alternatively, with the end of World War II (see, for example, Arweck 2002: 264; Melton 2007: 30-33). This contraction, however, is Western-centric, for it is linked to the emergence of a striking number of groups particularly in the United States and, by extension, Western Europe, while ignoring other areas of the world. Moreover, this definition is further

compromised since many of the movements that were first encountered in the West at the time can be traced back in history well before this apparent caesura. The general lack of a clear definition entails that the term 'NRM' is limited in its temporal and, especially, its regional usage. There is, for instance, no penchant to use this category in respect to recent developments taking place in the Islamic world, although one could easily think of a plethora of suitable groups, such as the Aḥmadiyya, established in the closing of the nineteenth century.

From the perspective of Religious Studies, a proper definition of 'NRM' should be broad enough to be employed in regionally and temporally diverse contexts. This is most plainly done by adhering to one sole criterion with a flexible lower end, namely 'time.' This lower end is variously anchored throughout nineteenth century religious history in conjunction with industrialisation, colonialism, and incipient 'glocalisation.' At the intersection of socio-cultural, political, and economic shifts that were notably taking shape in all areas of the world during the nineteenth century, novel religious programmes were devised inhaling a transformative spirit moulded by the surrounding discourse and the new paradigm of (unfolding) modernity. 'New religiosity,' whenever conceived in the history of religions, is a concerted attempt to introduce change (Beckford 1986: x) but with a temporally more recent and thus contextually demarcated anatomy.

One of the major concerns with the label 'NRM' is that this category's history is often depicted as a completely separate chapter. Such approach ignores that NRMs are indeed born and bred in a specific religious milieu, and, more often than not, brought forth by and may manoeuver within a single 'parent tradition.' Hence, the expression 'NRM' should not be regarded a new branding of religion along the lines of Buddhism, Christianity, or Islam, but merely as an umbrella notion encompassing 'more recent' institutional manifestations. This approach challenges the nomenclature often applied to religious history, where NRMs are understood as a separate segment next to 'world religions.' NRMs are so multi-faceted as to defy any overall classification not grounded in a temporal definition.

In this Handbook NRM is used in preference to the more senior term 'new religion.' The latter is a direct rendering of *shinshūkyō* 新宗教, which has become the standard designation in Japanese academe. Closely following Japanese terminology, Korean scholars likewise adopted, as the first choice, this term as a calque—*sinjonggyo* 신종교/新宗教. The rationale behind using NRM is its more inclusive semantics. The term 'movement' provides a broader spectrum of 'institutions,' ranging from legally incorporated bodies and hierarchically structured organisations to loosely based communities and religious networks in *statu nascendi*. In addition, the term allows embracing the dynamic

character of new religious developments. The younger and smaller circumscribed institutions are, the more their visibility increases given how lived religion is always in a constant state of reshaping. Cowan and Bromley (2015: 197-198) accordingly introduced the descriptor 'experimental faiths.' In particular, it better depicts the subtle dynamics within the early period of formation, which is often characterised by a slow process of emancipation with various stages of community building and separation. NRMs scholarship and adjacent disciplines have introduced a panoply of alternative terms, many of which explicitly or implicitly convey negative associations, or are bound to very particular circumstances concerning their usage. Most coinages are animated by a basal dichotomy, as is also incidentally the case with 'NRM' or 'new religion' (here: 'traditional' or 'established' versus 'new'). These include, among others: peripheral, marginal, or fringe religion; minority religion/faith; non-mainstream religion; sectarian religion or group; controversial or unconventional religion; alternative religion; and emergent religion. Expressions such as 'new religious organisation' and 'new religious current' are chiefly used in a distinct setting narrowing the semantics of NRM. These designations implicate a dichotomy by generally taking as a defining reference a religious 'mainstream' towards which they appear as an alternative. Such understanding of new religiosity as a non-mainline religious arena is not only relative, that is, depending on the regional and temporal context, but to some extent echoes inferiority vis-à-vis a mainstream ideal. Specific neologisms have spawned in many languages, mostly stimulated by the 'anti-cult' discourse. In this respect, blatantly derogatory labels such as 'cult' and 'sect' are being avoided, unless they are arranged within a specific sociological explanatory framework, which has its own problems of wider applicability, especially with a view to East Asian NRMs.

East Asian New Religious Movements

There is no universally agreed definition for the term 'NRM' (or alternative expressions), yet it is generally perceived as a very useful label—particularly when dealing with the history of East Asia from the nineteenth century—for it stresses a new mode of 'institutionalised' religious expression. The emergence and growth of new religious developments is an important aspect in any description of the religious context of the countries concerned. This is perhaps one of the major differences to the situation in 'Western' countries, where the existence of NRMs is evident as well, but more often than not they lack a substantial followership and thus remain marginalised. This difference exists to a large degree due to the general religious history of the East Asian countries

that is characterised by a greater variety in the religious realm, specifically the dynamic presence of the Three Teachings throughout millennia, rather than the dominance of just one specific religious system over several centuries (such as with Christianity or Islam). In other words, East Asia comprises a much more colourful religious scenery in time and space.

The tendency to use the term NRM in this context must also be evaluated against the background of the history of the last two centuries. Doubtlessly, this period constitutes the most crucial phase in the history of the region. Key societal and political changes have their beginning in the nineteenth century, rapidly transforming the lifeworld of the people. The period witnessed the end of the Chinese emperor system ranging back to the third century BCE and—following social upheavals and a civil war—the establishment of a Communist state in mainland China and a separate one on the island of Taiwan. In Japan, the Meiji Restoration (*Meiji ishin* 明治維新) put an end to the isolationist Edo 江戸 period (1603-1868) by introducing a centralist state focused on (and narrowed down to) the pre-eminence of the Japanese Emperor, which eventually resulted in problematic developments in the first half of the twentieth century culminating in the country's disastrous involvement in World War II. On the Korean peninsula, Japanese 'colonial rule' (*Ilje kangjŏmgi* 일제강점기/日帝強佔期; 1910-1945) concluded the Chosŏn 조선/朝鮮 dynasty (1392-1910), paving the way for the entanglements with the post-war geopolitical situation that eventually divided the country into a communist North and a capitalist South following a bloody fratricidal war (1950-1953). Vietnam became object of French colonial interests in the nineteenth century and had to struggle its way to freedom during the twentieth century, parting the country while being plagued by an atrocious war (1955-1975).

Fuelling further transformation also in the light of advancing industrialisation, technologisation, and globalisation, these developments deeply impregnated the religious history of the region and thus are also pivotal for the new religious domain. The underlying impetus of these massive shifts across East Asian societies was the imperialist encounter with the West, 'glocalising' East Asia. For the religious field, this encounter meant a rapid expansion of offerings due to transmigration of ideas and their accommodation on the one hand, and a self-adapting generative momentum as a response to foreign impact on the other.

The Vietnamese Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ (Cao Đài) is a most well-known example of a movement accommodating both European, 'Western' features (most conspicuously from Catholicism and from Kardecian Spiritism) and Asian elements in the course of the formation into a new comprehensive religious system. A more recent example concerns the new manifestations

impacted by the Euro-American so-called 'New Age' in East Asia in the second half of the twentieth century. Groups manoeuvring in this 'new spirituality' segment either embraced concepts to widen their religious portfolio or are a direct outflow of this reception process.[9] Several of these actors, navigating noticeably on the trajectory of the New Age current, have now grown into seminal suppliers in the global 'spiritual market.'

The formation of 'new religiosity' in East Asia at large is mainly based on an impulse brought forth by accelerated crisis. Whereas 'crisis' is certainly no universally applicable instrument for explaining the emergence of novel movements, it nevertheless serves well the East Asian context as a tool for understanding the specifics of its new religious developments. 'Crisis' is a defining factor of the human condition, a biographical disruption triggered by perceived deprivation. The deprivation felt may have numerous causes—social inadequacies, illness, identificatory disorientation, etc.—that are engendered or at least energised by the dynamics of one's life environment. The aspect of crisis is well articulated in the East Asian new religious cosmos, manifesting in an all-pervading elaborate spectrum of millenarian expression that aims at closure of collective deprivation. The rugged transformation process of the East Asian region continuously nourished the potential for crisis and thus occasionally gave rise to a social response in the form of NRMs. Conducive for this religious crystallisation is the pluralist religio-cultural East Asian heritage, offering a wide array of new avenues to spell out novel social programmes. It is this vast crucible of traditions old and new, native and nativised, soaked through by the Three Teachings and socially grammaticalised especially by Confucianism that distinctively circumscribe the East Asian religious context. Born and bred in this specific socio-cultural milieu, East Asian NRMs take on the traits of the wider religious framework, shaping the very category this Handbook attempts to explore. The millenarian aspect is one vital feature encountered in the East Asian new religious domain, more often than not coming to life in a saliently ethnocentric narrative. Other typological elements often listed as new religious attributes in the main—particularly a hierarchical structure centring on a founding figure or leader, and a generally this-worldly outlook—are likewise to be found among many East Asian NRMs, yet none of these may be taken as a truly universal feature.

9 A category (*shinreisei undō* 新霊性運動 or 'new spirituality movement') coined by the Japanese Religious Studies scholar Shimazono Susumu 島薗進 (Shimazono 2004: 275-305), also entering the Korean discourse in recent years as *sinyŏngsŏng undong* 신영성운동/新靈性運動.

Regarding East Asian terminology used for describing new religious developments, Japanese scholarship for the most part provided the jargon adopted as calques in the other East Asian languages—recently also English loanwords have entered the wider new religious discourse. The model label employed in Japanese and Korean NRMs scholarship, and increasingly so in its Chinese and Vietnamese counterpart as well, is 'new religion' (Japanese: *shinshūkyō*; Korean *sinjonggyo*; Chinese: *xīn zōngjiào* 新宗 教; Vietnamese: *tôn giáo mới*). However, 'new religion' is by no means a universally accepted designation and thus seldom applied outside academe. Even in Japan, where the study of NRMs already has a long history and the term 'new religion' has its origin, the expressions applied in the media or public discourse as well as in academic disciplines beyond (and at times within) Religious Studies are diverse, chiefly ranging from being implicitly deprecating to outrightly pejorative.

The flexible 'lower end' concerning the temporal aspect of 'new religiosity' is particularly well illustrated in the East Asian context, where the historical departure points vary in the four countries concerned. The rationale behind each individual caesura is a twofold combination. On the one hand, it refers to marked historical developments: the transitory years prior to as well as the Meiji restoration in Japan; the onset of the imperialist ambit stretching out to a weakening Qīng 清 -China (1644-1912) (early nineteenth century) and, later also, Chosŏn-Korea (mid-nineteenth century); and the Southward Movement (*Nam Tiến*; early nineteenth century) along with the dawn of French colonial rule (mid-nineteenth century) in Vietnam. On the other hand, it involves the emergence of individual groups that for the first time visibly inhered anatomical and contextual features in line with the general corpus of what now appears as 'East Asian NRMs'—most prominently, Nyoraikyō 如来教 (1802) and Ch'ŏndogyo 천도교/天道教 (1860).

Each of the four regional sections in this Handbook is prefaced by a chapter outlining the specific context and new religious environment. The general themes touched on in these introductory remarks are further amplified therein, providing more comprehensive insights into the complex phenomenon of East Asian new religiosity.

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