

**Religion in a plural society :**  
**Comparing the Chinese**  
**and Indian Worlds**

on **Friday 10**  
and **Saturday 11**, June 2016  
from 9:30 to 17:30

A workshop at the **Confucius Institute**  
266, rte de Lausanne – 1292 Chambésy

under the scientific direction of  
Prof. **Vincent Goossaert** (EPHE)

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# **Religion in a plural society : comparing the Chinese and Indian Worlds**

**A workshop at the Confucius Institute  
on Friday 10 and Saturday 11, June 2016**

## **Rationale :**

Both the Chinese and the Indian worlds have known religious plurality for a much longer time than Europe. Thus, rather than comparing either of these with Europe, as is often done, we stand to learn much by comparing them directly, which is much less frequently undertaken. Yet, any preliminary attempt at comparison will show that these two cultural worlds have developed vastly different ideas and practices of religious plurality. What these Indian and Chinese ideas have in common is that they not pluralism (a modern concept predicated on tolerance and a notion of equality between faiths) : in both India and China, religious plurality is hierarchical, regulated, and based on assigned identities. Most of the rest differ, because of hugely different historical developments, including a role for a central state, which looms much larger in the Chinese case. While one may consider that there exist in both cases an encompassing framework for integrating plurality (Chineseness; Hinduness), they obviously differ in major ways. We consider that it is because of such differences that the comparison is interesting.

## Friday, June 10

9:30 Keynote speech : **Peter van der Veer** (MPI Göttingen):

10:45 Panel 1. Religious pluralism : Collective and individual affiliation

China : **Cao Xinyu** (Renmin University) : “Reconsidering the social-religious infrastructure in rural North China.”

India : **Aminah Mohammad Arif** (CNRS, CEIAS) : “Beyond Homogeneity: Internal Religious Plurality among “Born Again” Young Muslims in Bangalore”

Discussant : **Vincent Goossaert**

13:15 Lunch break

14:30 Panel 2. Shared holy sites

China : **Adam Chau** (U. Cambridge) : “Ritual Terroir: Spatial Practices in Chinese Popular Religion”

**James Robson** (U. Harvard) : “Co-presence and Conflict : Negotiating Sacred Space in China”

India : **Maya Burger** (U. Lausanne) : “Between inclusion and exclusion : Religious discourses on appropriating sacred sites, a few examples from India.”

Discussant : **Peter van der Veer**

## Saturday, June 11

10:00 Panel 3. Cultural homogeneity and local/ethnic variation

China : **Kenneth Dean** (National U. Singapore) : “Migration and ritual change : the circulation and transformation of Taoist ritual traditions between Southeast China and Singapore and Malaysia”

India : **Mathieu Claveyrolas** (CNRS, CEIAS) : Hinduism in plural societies : from India to Mauritius

Vietnam : **Tam Ngo** (MPI Göttingen) : Scriptural Transcendence : Sanskrit and Chinese in Vietnamese Spirit Writing

Discussant : **James Robson**

12:30 Lunch break

14:00 Panel 4. Religious specialists and the division of ritual labor

China : **Vincent Goossaert** (EPHE) : “The regulation of ritual labor in modern Jiangnan”

India : **Arpita Roy** (MPI Göttingen) : “Religious Pluralism between Birth and Rebirth.”

**Jacob Copeman** (U. Edinburgh) : “The plural religious specialist”

Discussant : **Youri Volokhine** (U. Geneva)

16:30 Tea break

16:45 General discussion and future perspectives

17:30 End