Our Goal for ERiC is to create a comprehensive, easy-to-use online companion to **E**urasian **R**eligions **i**n **C**ontact that informs readers about occasions, themes, modes, conditions and consequences of contacts between religious groups and the way religious thought and practice developed in and through such contact phenomena, eventually creating both the larger and smaller religious traditions of today and the religious field as a social entity distinct from other fields such as politics, economics and art. The companion will be comprised of **case studies** with each case study focusing on a particular geographical region, a particular moment in or period of time and a particular constellation of two or more religions encountering each other. Each case study will extrapolate the occasions as well as the historical and social contexts of such encounters and, most importantly, shed light on the issues, notions, themes and practices addressed in the particular contact situation.

In each case study, authors will present their material in light of a specific theoretical concept or approach. We particularly encourage authors to consider engaging their material with theoretical concepts and approaches **developed at the KHK** *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe* **over the past years.** This includes specific understandings of the role of concepts such as "purity", "secret", "tradition", "gender", "media", "the senses", "the immanence/transcendence-distinction" and "dynamics/stability". The **KHK Working Paper Series** informs readers about some major aspects within the KHK's thinking about these concepts. We are looking forward to your contributions to this ongoing conversation!

Categories of dual differentiation between 'pure' and 'impure' can be found in all aspects of thinking that structure the world in symbolic forms: culture, society, cult, ritual, morality, everyday life, philosophy. As categories often relating to symbolic values, they are communicative elements as well and hence part of social interpretational systems. The asymmetric oppositional terms ('clean'/'unclean') provide a basis for a categorization which, from the perspective of cultural anthropology, must be regarded as a major social construct.

Though not construed spontaneously or intentionally as classifiers and not even restricted to rational activity alone, one cannot deny that the historically and culturally developed categories *function* as a classificatory system in a given social context (even if they do not merge entirely in this function). By forming multiple identities, they are meant to stabilize or destabilize social order within systems of complex interaction that are related to various ecological, economic, social, and religious factors. Rather than being absolute, universal, natural or essentialist categories (as in 19th century scholarship) 'purity' and 'impurity' are to be considered culturally biased, relative and ascriptive. Using the term ascription

highlights the performative aspect in the application of the pure/impure-scheme, which is not entirely free from but rather beyond essential, material or physical aspects that are a matter of description.

One of our basic assumptions at the KHK is that purity concepts are developed not in isolation but rather in diachronic and synchronic processes of contact, influence, reference and interference, i.e. mutual exchange. Hence, we are interested in a comparison of contents, concepts and especially functions of purity discourses.

While 'pure' and 'impure' are constructed as diametrical opponents that exclude each other, their dimensions are not completely parallel in construction. Although physical contact is crucial for both dimensions, the categories differ regarding the contact dimension. While the 'pure' can be defiled by contact with 'impure' matter, the 'impure' cannot be made pure simply by contact. In contrast, every contact with the impure defiles the pure or degrades the state of purity. While 'impure' is a cumulative category (several impurities can be added, exacerbating the 'impurity' or the temporal extension of the defilement), 'purity' usually cannot be gradually amplified by addition or accumulation. While 'impurity' is a category often construed in relation to time (something is *temporarily* unclean but becomes clean again after a certain period of time), purity is usually not constrained *explicitly* by temporal extensions/limits. While 'impurity' is not a totally coherent construction where underlying logic is concerned, the order established by 'purity' is much more coherent. It is a symbolic and structuring system, which is regarded as endangered and has to be defended.

Although 'religion' is neither coextensive to nor identical with 'cult', there is no dimension or aspect of purity that is completely spiritualized or metaphorized and coevally totally disconnected from the cult. Cultic activity in a broader sense, as it is meant here, is the performative and pragmatic exterior of religion. Thus 'impurity' hinders a person's ability to participate in the cult or disqualifies an object from being used in the cult. Normally, purity is the precondition for cultic activity or attendance. In this regard purity is a category of participation or exclusion and integration or disintegration in a social respect.

Pure or impure is not only a category of objects or persons but also of places and spaces (e.g. temple precinct, city, land, living place, etc.). The contagious power of impurity has an unavoidable impact on the pure space, be it from within (by the actual presence of impurity, which is defiling) or without (by the influence of impurity from contact zones or even from afar, which is polluting). Thus, purity and impurity have a liminal function in establishing the borders of 'in' and 'out', inner and outer space, almost on a horizontal axis. While the

center is pure, the fringes are more impure than pure and the outside is impure. The latter is deviant and thus a threat to the established state of order. In this respect purity/impurity as a symbolic category has a regulative function that may be used in a concessive, permissive, prescriptive, exclusive, restrictive, etc., manner.

Purity rituals change (or better, *communicate* the change of) the status from impure to pure or confirm the pure state of the cultic space, the matter used in cult, or the persons performing the cult. Rituals are based on worldview; they encode it iteratively in performative acts that are enacted by and communicated to the participants. Hence, the transitional function of purity rituals is most meaningful in physical, social, and psychological respects.

It seems obvious that the pure/impure-scheme is not only a classification system of everyday life. The religious-cultic dimension of purity is rather inherently predominant and thus performative. By concentrating on the religious aspect, we assume that the dichotomy pure/impure is part of the specific terminology of religions. Without assuming unified and totally coherent systems of religious thought, purity—especially in the ancient Western Mediterranean—is considered to be religiously related to, or at least part of, the intrinsic logic ("Eigenlogik") of religions.

Some guiding questions for scholars interested in contributing to ERiC with a special emphasis on matters related to purity should be helpful:

(1) What role does 'purity' play in the forming of religious traditions? How are representations of purity described in the specific material with respect to their *liminal* function from a spatial, temporal, social and institutional perspective?

(2) What role does purity play, within the geographical and chronological context, in rituals, cult(s), social organization, as well as in collective or individual processes of identity formation?

(3) Is there a differentiating semantics of concepts of purity and impurity? Which are the aspects that come to the fore: physical, cultic, moral-ethical, or genealogical purity? Is there a remarkable differentiation between so-called 'ritual' and 'moral' purity, and if so, how are these domains distinguished one from the other? How do they influence each other mutually?

(4) How is the difference between 'purity' and 'holiness' (or, respectively, 'pure' and 'holy') evaluated (differences, congruence, interdependence)?

(5) Are there, in the investigated material (texts, images or archaeological remains), indications of *diachronic* developments of purity representations and concepts? Are such developments the result of religious contacts or influences from outside, or are they exclusively to be understood as an internal development? Furthermore, are there specific discourses focusing on the topic of purity, and how are they to be chronologically and historically located?

We invite applicants to the 2017-2018 KHK fellowships to address some of the above issues with case studies related to matters of religious purity on any period, region or area within Eurasia.

One objective of our comparative approach is thus a comparison of purity semantics. Being aware that the comparison of specific religious traditions on the semantic level is seriously restricted by particularities of the culturally coded languages, the aim is not to compare the semantics in particular, either in a diachronic or a synchronic manner. Often the lexical fields of purity/impurity are not comparable, but the underlying concepts which are expressed semantically in a specific and distinct manner are. Accordingly, one needs to concentrate not only on lexemes but on contextualizations and conceptualizations of terms in descriptive, prescriptive and ascriptive texts, in epigraphic as well as in literary compositions, in narrative contextualizations as well as in textual representations of performances in rituals, in iconographic representations as well as in the material culture.

Besides the semantic dimension, another aspect of the relevance of purity concepts in comparative studies is the correlation and interconnection between the anthropological, the social and the cultic dimensions. At the KHK, we consider the formation, contextualization and functionalization of the concept as one of the *tertia comparationis* of religions. In processes that are dependent on the cosmological order and worldview on the one hand and sociopolitical strategies and balances of power on the other, purity is often used to assign relevant borders both spatially and socially. Social stratifications and differentiations are defined by purity. This is obvious, for example, in the higher demand for purity of priests as compared to lay people, evidenced in ancient Egypt, Greece, Iran or Israel.

The more a religion or society is forced to demarcate itself by establishing and highlighting borders, the more important the liminal function of purity becomes in social respects. It is not clear-cut social/religious entities that develop coherent purity-systems. On the contrary, purity issues apparently arise where those borders are "in the making" or when they are challenged. Thus it seems more appropriate to strengthen the integrative and disintegrative

functions of purity, which are correlative and coextensive in historical processes. Understood in this way, one can speak of the 'demarcational' function of purity.

One additional important aspect of the purity discussion: the question of moral purity. In addition to the basic differentiation between cultic and non-cultic purity, the distinction between ritual and moral purity is often stressed as a second basic differentiation. To have a pure heart or conscience (e.g. Ps 51:12; 1 Tim 3:9) or to act with pure hands (e.g. Ps 18:21) seems to speak of a purity that is completely disconnected from the cultic sphere and is attributed instead to the ethical realm. The difference between the two dimensions appears to be clear at first glance: While ritual purity is considered to be contagious, moral purity seems not to be. While both have collective aspects, moral purity is rather restricted to individual behavior. Finally, while ritual impurity may be a temporary phenomenon, moral impurity is often a lasting one.

Even if purity is considered an ethical issue, this should not lead to disregard for the cultic dimension. The separation of the two categories is misleading in several ways: the dimensions of physical and moral purity differ (for example on the level of acts) but are not two separate concepts, either in synchronic or in diachronic respects. They are close to each other and are often intertwined. There is neither a 'pure' moral purity nor a physical impurity without any link to the ethos of a specific society and thus to a certain ethic.