



KHK Working Paper Series

VI. Dynamics & Stability

KNUT MARTIN STÜNKEL 

ABSTRACT Our goal for *Entangled Religions* is to inform 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. *Entangled Religions* publishes case studies on the issues outlined above. The engagement with explicit analytical concepts is of specific importance, as those concepts shall serve as *tertia comparationis*, which allow comparability of individual case studies. We invite authors to consider engaging their material with analytical concepts, categories and approaches that have been discussed in the Käte Hamburger Kolleg (KHK) “Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe” (2008–2022), or to introduce other concepts and theories to the discussion. The KHK Working Paper Series informs readers about some major aspects of the KHK’s thinking about these concepts. We are looking forward to your contributions to this ongoing conversation!

The inseparable **interrelation of the concepts of dynamics and stability** is one of the most important elements in the study of religious history.¹ More than others, the concepts play a significant role on a meta-level of description and explanation. On the one hand, the examination of the “dynamics” involved here prevents the misapprehension of religious traditions as spatially and temporally stable, closely defined and autarkical entities. The notion, therefore, represents a modern scholarly claim. On the other hand, some concept of “stability” involved allows the scholarly examination of phenomena of religion in the first place. In addition to that, stability is one of the most important claims in the self-characterization of religious traditions. Among others, the notion represents a claim of the object-language that cannot be ignored in scholarly description. The basic question is how to present a religious tradition as being subject to dynamics or how religions might be described dynamically while at the same time taking into account object-language claims and epistemological necessities of a certain stability. [1]

Situations of **religious contact** play a key role in dynamizing the development of a religious [2]

1 This working paper was written in 2017 and updated in 2023.

tradition as well as in stabilizing one. As for the latter, they provide reason for the rise of stable material objects (that are the bases of scholarly examination) and, therefore, introduce a dynamics, i.e. an intensification of expression. As basic forms of intensification one might consider sacralisation (i.e. the utilization of religious elements in other areas thus intensifying meaning) and self-reference (i.e. the systematization of religion as a religion, which leads to the emergence of a religious field, a notion of religion, a canon, dogmatics etc.). Opposite developments, i.e. the diffusion of expression or de-sacralisation via the influence of another religious tradition are as well manifestations of the dynamizing, or rather stabilizing effect of contact situations.

One may analytically differentiate between three basic types of dynamics: **inherent dynamics (development, growth and decay, differentiation, crystallization, “densification”), external dynamics (demarcation, inclusion etc.) and phenomena of transfer combining internal and external elements regarding push- and pull factors.** The three types might be further investigated with regard to two basic forms of movement that is movement within space (expansion, shifting, withdrawal, material translocation) and movement within time (change of theory and practice, stabilizing, formation of canon etc.). [3]

Articles relating to the topic of “dynamics and stability” devote themselves to collecting and evaluating forms of dynamics that can be found with regard to a contact situation in the history of religion, for example phenomena of expansion, transfer, intensification, leveling, crystallizing, growth and decline etc., that might be used for a more adequate description of religious history. Of course, the concept itself might be investigated due to its presuppositions and heuristic value for scholarly research. [4]

Relevant *Entangled Religions* Articles

- Freudenberg, Maren. 2019. “Dynamics and Stability in Globally Expanding Charismatic Religions: The Case of the Vineyard Movement in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.” *Entangled Religions* 8. <https://doi.org/10.13154/er.8.2019.8353>.
- Berkwitz, Stephen C. 2018. “Dynamics and Stability in the Encounters between Asian Buddhists and European Christians.” *Entangled Religions* 5. <https://doi.org/10.13154/er.v5.2018.1-43>.
- Kasai, Yukiyo. 2022. “Dynamics, Stability & Tradition: The Role of the Religions of Iranian Speakers in Central and Eastern Asia.” *Entangled Religions* 11 (6). <https://doi.org/10.46586/er.11.2022.9771>.
- Torri, Davide. 2019. “Religious Identities and the Struggle for Secularism: The Revival of Buddhism and Religions of Marginalized Groups in Nepal.” *Entangled Religions* 8. <https://doi.org/10.13154/er.8.2019.8355>.

Further Reading

- Krech, Volkhard. 2011. “Dynamics in the History of Religions. Preliminary Considerations on Aspects of a Research Programme.” In *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe. Encounters, Notions and Comparative Perspectives*, edited by Volkhard Krech and Marion Steinicke, 15–70. Leiden: Brill.

- Shils, Edward. 1981. *Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Smith, Wilfried Cantwell. 1983. "Traditions in Contact and Change. Towards a History of Religion in the Singular." In *Traditions in Contact and Change*, edited by Peter Slater and Donald Wiebe, 1–23. Waterloo: Wilfried Laurier University Press.
- Tweed, Thomas A. 2006. *Crossing and Dwelling. A Theory of Religion*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Vásquez, Manuel A. 2011. *More than Belief. A Materialist Theory of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.