Eduard Erkes and German Scholarship on Chinese Religions in the First Half of the 20th Century

Professor Philip Clart (Leipzig University)
5pm, February 25 (Wed), 2015; Rooms 8 & 9, FAMES

Abstract 2014 is the 100th anniversary of the founding of Leipzig University’s Institute of East Asian Studies. This calls for a retrospective evaluation of this institution’s contributions to Chinese Studies. Rather than sketching a general picture of the Institute’s early decades, however, this paper focuses on Eduard Erkes (1891-1958) as one representative of the so-called “Leipzig School,” who made major contributions to the study of Chinese religions. His studies of the “shamanic substrates” revealed in the Songs of the South (Chuci 楚辭), practice-derived insights into Daoist inner alchemy (neidan 內丹), and his translation of the Heshanggong 河上公 commentary to the Daodejing 道德經 anticipate later developments in scholarship, but are at the same time closely related to contemporary scholarly concerns of the Leipzig School (such as an emphasis on the supposed autochthony of Chinese culture and on evolutionary models of cultural development) as well as to personal (mystical) and political (socialist) interests of Erkes himself. The paper also discusses Erkes’ relationship with other German and German-language scholarship of the time, such as the works of Wilhelm Grube, Erwin Rousselle, Richard Wilhelm, Heinrich Hackmann, Alfred Forke, and J.J.M. de Groot.

Philip Clart is Professor of Chinese Culture and History at Leipzig University, Germany. His main research areas are popular religion and new religious movements in Taiwan, religious change in Taiwan and China, as well as literature and religions of the late imperial period (10th-19th c.). His monographs include Han Xiangzi: The Alchemical Adventures of a Daoist Immortal (University of Washington Press, 2007) and Die Religionen Chinas (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009). He has edited or co-edited Religion in Modern Taiwan: Tradition and Innovation in a Changing Society (University of Hawai‘i Press 2003), The People and the Dao: New Studies of Chinese Religions in Honour of Daniel L. Overmyer (Institute Monumenta Serica, 2009), Chinese and European Perspectives on the Study of Chinese Popular Religions (Boyang Publishing, 2012), and Religious Publishing and Print Culture in Modern China: 1800-2012 (De Gruyter, 2015).

All seminars take place on Wednesdays (unless otherwise arranged) at 5pm in rooms 8 & 9 in the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies. Tea will be served at the same venue at 4:45pm. All are welcome!