



Call for Papers

**Reforming Religion, Morality and Society in Afro-Eurasia:
Intellectual and Cultural Traditions in Motion in the Global Eighteenth Century**

*Early Career Seminar of the International Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ISECS)
Trier (Germany), 17-20 June 2026*

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Eighteenth-century studies were long based implicitly or explicitly on the premise that contacts between European, African, and Asian cultures had no significant intellectual and cultural impact before the modern Age of Imperialism. In the historiography of the European Enlightenment, the interaction with non-European thought in the course of early-modern European colonial expansion has long had a place, but was above all understood - as in the “shock of discovery” thesis - as the trigger of a process that undermined European certainties. In the second half of the twentieth century, scholars emphasized othering processes rather than circulations, receptions, and translations. In recent decades, however, scholarship has gained a much better understanding of the profound impact that contacts across religious borders had on thought and culture before modern European imperialism in Afro-Eurasia. Three scholarly developments have been particularly significant: first, placing eighteenth-century phenomena in the *longue durée* of Christian erudition has shown the roots in knowledge-making of many reorientations once associated with secularization. Second, emphasizing the mobility of people and objects, in particular manuscript books, has revealed the groundedness of new perceptions in material circulations. Third, taking seriously as intellectuals all participants in global interactions has revealed a world not divided between thinkers and their informants or

intermediaries but rather one in which knowledge was co-produced cross-culturally by a variety of agents.

The Early Career Seminar aims to contribute to this renewal by understanding cultural and intellectual change as a response to the increasing connectivities in the early modern world. For the purposes of the seminar, we will restrict our focus to interactions between what we are calling “transcendentalist worldviews,” namely the universalist religious and/or ethical systems that prevailed in large parts of Afro-Eurasia since antiquity. The centuries-long dominance of universalist ethical systems from Japan to Portugal and West Africa suggests an intensive dialogue along the many roads linking world regions in the pre-modern era. In recent scholarship, a special emphasis has been placed on the circulation of millenarianism in early-modern Eurasia, yet addressing circulations is as relevant for many kinds of religious and ethical reform movements, like moral rigorism, mysticism or the quest for a more rational religion and a society based on natural principles. Adopting a broad view on religious and ethical change across Afro-Eurasia may help to provincialize Europe by putting ideas popular from Portugal to Russia into a wider geographical and chronological context.

We would therefore like to ask the following questions in this workshop-style seminar:

- How did in-depth engagement with foreign universalist religious-ethical thought and symbolic languages arise in the early modern era, and especially in the eighteenth century? And how did it shape cultural and intellectual developments in various parts of eighteenth-century Afro-Eurasia?
- What were the conditions for the creative appropriation of foreign religious-ethical thoughts and symbols across Afro-Eurasia? What circulations—of people, texts, objects, symbols or images—brought these appropriations into being? What conceptual tools—for example, comparisons, analogies, translations—played a part in mediating between traditions? What role did the similarities between religious-ethical systems or shared pre-modern traditions play in circulations? What transfers can we identify both across space and time? What ideas, cultural artifacts and symbols did not circulate and why?
- To what extent did similar developments in thought and culture arise in different regions of eighteenth-century Afro-Eurasia? Do we see equivalent trends in political or moral reformism, or similar notions of the comparability of cultures and religions? Is it fruitful to speak of Eurasian Enlightenments?

Proposals (one page) should be sent with a CV to the following address by 1st July 2025: tricoire@uni-trier.de.

We endeavor to cover travel and accommodation costs in their entirety and for all participants, but cannot guarantee it at this point.