

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

BOOK REVIEWS

***Gurus in America*. Forsthoefel, Thomas A. and Humes, Cynthia Ann Eds. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, 236 pp.**

Gurus in America tells the story of the gurus who have been referred to as part of the ‘second wave’ of gurus in America. The figures involved in this book include gurus who visited America as well as Indian teachers who never came to America but who had a significant impact on later gurus visiting America. For example, Forsthoefel’s essay describes Ramana Maharshi as a teacher who had never been out of his native Tamil Nadu, but whose teachings paved the way for the migration of ideas clad in Hinduism. Many of the gurus who did come to the West either claimed to be descendants of Ramana or responded directly to his message and example. In this sense, the title of the book is more or less misleading; perhaps it would be more appropriate to entitle the volume *Gurus Who Influenced America*.

The collection introduces nine gurus, who can be roughly divided into three categories: Respectively, two gurus from the Advaita Vedanta tradition (Ramana Maharshi and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi), three gurus from traditions that privilege Bhakti (Satya Sai Baba, Ammachi, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami), and three guru from the Tantric tradition (Guru Chidvilasananda, or Gurumayi, Rajneesh, Adi Da).

Generally speaking, these vary from each other, firstly, because of the different aspects of their respective understanding of Hinduism, and secondly because of the different means of adaptation they chose for their missions. More specifically, the anthology highlights the strategy adopted by each for spreading Hinduism to America and their attitude towards non-Hinduism. The possibility for spreading Hinduism to the Western world is imbedded in the universalism implied in Hinduism, which is consistent with Western values. Additionally, the ideological groundwork carried out by the native gurus for the gurus who later arrived in overseas missions, especially Ramana’s questioning of the exclusivist tendencies in traditional Advaita, made the universalism implied by the axioms of non-dualism coherent.

What intrigued me most about this book was its specialized account of the contribution of female gurus to the spread of Hinduism in America. The book covered two female teachers in the second wave, Ammachi and Gurumayi (Muktananda’s successor). The essay on Ammachi was written by Selva Raj. According to Raj, there is a dynamic relationship between Ammachi’s spirituality and Christianity. Ammachi’s theory takes the position of universalism and egalitarianism. She believes spiritual merit comes from experience, not birthright. Women are also one of the models of devotion in the Bhakti movement. Because of Ammachi’s devotion to Krishna, she also articulated the natural response of human feelings toward the divine.

Like many other gurus, Ammachi adopted three main forms of missionary practice – the first being the spiritual formation of non-Hindus using the spiritual resources already available in Hinduism, the second drawing on resources from other religious traditions, especially from Christianity, and the third being cultural innovation to guide Westerners to Hinduism with the

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

familiar content of their original faith. To be more specific, Ammachi's innovations included four aspects: The salient one is that her universalism broke not only the limits of caste and ethnicity, but also the limits of the *darshan* method itself. Another aspect is "water *darshan*", which means that devotees received the embrace of Ammachi in water. The third aspect is a further development involved in the integration of business opportunities and spirituality. The last one is that a strong institutional structure was constructed by Ammachi to serve as a vehicle for charitable and pedagogical matters related to the spread of Hinduism.

Lola Williamson's essay focuses on Guru Chidvilasananda, or Gurumayi, the current leader of the Siddha Yoga community. According to Williamson, Gurumayi focused on the secular life of the believer. She openly stated her support for believers who wanted to marry and have children, and even held fellowship dances in hopes of enabling believers to find lifelong partners. These shifts made by Gurumayi are markedly different from the traditional Hindu emphasis on the radical renunciation of the sannyasi, who "subdued" everything with the goal of liberation. Gurumayi demonstrated the power of gurus by cultivating a common way of life through this more modest goal of morality and good living, thus consciously regulating the urgency and intensity of liberation. Here we can see the important role of women in the development of the religion.

Apart from the female gurus, there were some male gurus who took the importance of women into consideration when dealing with religious matters. For example, Bhaktivedanta paid attention to the value of women's spirituality and leadership in his theology. That was encouraging and impressive.

It is necessary to conclude this review with an overall evaluation of the volume. The book is reasonable in the layout of its chapters, from non-dualism to traditions focused on religious piety to tantric traditions, and reveals a developmental process that gradually steps out of the shackles of traditional teachings as Hinduism spreads to America. The book's detailed presentation of the two female gurus is very encouraging; it recognizes the contribution of women in the spread of religion, and also situates the integration of Hinduism into the American ideal of equal rights. At the same time, the volume also points out certain deviations of gurus, such as the fact that some teachers drew inspiration from the Tantric tradition, asserting that sexual energy itself can be a vehicle for non-dual experience – yet these individuals ended up exhibiting extreme behavior.

This provides a cautionary note regarding the excesses that can manifest in the name of spiritual wisdom. There is also the question that the book holds a prior affirmative attitude towards the Gurus' missionary approach in America and then explains their missionary process. However, one can question the extent to which such a means of catering to the missionary audience does not produce a lopsided view of Hinduism, and whether such a supposed "skillful means" could eventually result in some kind of resistance to Hinduism?

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Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

***Falun Gong: Spiritual Warfare and Martyrdom.* James R. Lewis, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 97 pages. ISBN: 978-1-108-44565-8, Paperback, £15.**

Falun Gong (FG) or Falun Dafa is a New Religious Movement (NRM), more specifically a Chinese spiritual movement, founded in 1992 by Li Hongzhi in the north-eastern city of Changchun. Although FG denies that it is actually a religion putting emphasis on its scientific and spiritual character, it could be considered as one of the very ‘new’ NRMs or cults that has attracted international attention after 1999 when it was officially banned by the Chinese authorities. FG is usually characterized as a controversial group with hidden teachings and ‘aggressive’ media and legal strategies against anyone who could be perceived as an enemy. This brief book, published in Religion and Violence Elements series of the Cambridge University Press is authored by James R. Lewis, Professor at the School of Philosophy of Wuhan University in China.

The book focuses on the role of violence, more particularly of the spiritual warfare and martyrdom, taught and practiced within FG, a strategy described also as ‘spiritual terrorism’ (Lewis and D’ Amico 2017), without, however, neglecting the violence perpetrated against the group by the Chinese authorities after its official ban in 1999. It consists of six sections and an afterword accompanied by an extended and well-informed reference and bibliography list on FG. The main themes discussed in those sections include a brief background about FG and its conflict with the Chinese state authorities until and after the 1999 ban, the atrocity tales narrated by FG members, the role of the founder, Li Hongzhi, his teachings on apocalypticism, karma and spiritual warfare and FG’s media strategies, which is a crucial aspect of the group’s public appearance. One of the key-themes of the book is the incident of the self-immolation of FG members on January 23rd 2001 in Tiananmen square. Building upon this incident as a key-point of the group’s spiritual warfare and martyrdom, the author tries to interpret it by analyzing the testimonies of those who survived, of former members as well as of the official discourse and teachings of Li Hongzhi. Through the interpretation of this particular incident Lewis wants to focus on and expose what he calls the hidden face of FG (pp. 12-21). His input is twofold.

On the one hand, he argues that while studying closed and difficult to access groups, like FG, researchers should be careful when listening to members’ accounts regarding atrocities tales and brutalization at the hands of the secret service, the police and other state authorities. Further, he insightfully offers his personal experience, since, as he admits, he was giving the floor to such victimization narratives of FG members in his own university classes (pp. 3-4). He adds, nevertheless, that this shift in his academic approach on FG does not mean that he is not accepting that state authorities have been treating brutally some of the inmates, but caution is necessary before one unconditionally accepts any story told.

On the other hand, and in relation to the above, he tries to turn his focus on those teachings of FG that could potentially lead to the perpetration of violence on the part of the authorities or violence exercised by FG members upon themselves. He focuses on Li Hongzhi’s teachings especially with regard to spiritual energy (*xinxing*) and its split into good karma (*de*) and bad karma (*karma*) (p. 18), which is based on Buddhism and Confucianism and aims at promoting

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

three values, i.e. *Zhen* (truthfulness), *Shan* (benevolence) and *Ren* (forbearance). This energy which is found in every person is being transferred between people and rises or falls based on human activity. That means that when people are doing good deeds the good karma enters their body as well as when they are victimized by others. He also adds that the founder of FG had been elaborating a theology of martyrdom long before the official banning of the group in 1999 (p. 42). Despite the group's denial that Li Hongzhi's teachings have in any way influenced the 2001 self-immolations, Lewis argues that this could be actually interpreted in terms of his theology of martyrdom, which includes fighting with demons, who basically take the form of oppressors, state authorities and any other enemy (pp. 45-47).

The analysis conducted in this illuminating book offers the opportunity for comparisons in the field of the study of religion and NRMs. Regarding martyrdom, FG's strategy of seeking brutalization or even death reminds of the early Christians who considered their own martyrdom as an imitation of Jesus, a theological idea that survived until the third century more or less and described as voluntary martyrdom (de Ste. Croix. 2006) or as good death and self-conscious suffering (Moss 2012). In addition, such acts of martyrdom remind one of the mass suicides of other NRMs (e.g. Peoples Temple, Branch Davidians, etc.) and one could compare the different theological and spiritual backgrounds and their contexts. On the other hand, FG's media and legal strategy resembles significantly the Church of Scientology as described elsewhere (Lewis 2017). Overall this short book offers fruitful insights on a number of issues and stimulates the reader to undertake further research, analyses and comparative studies, and it would be a useful tool for those interested in FG in particular, in NRMs in general or in the broader field of religion and violence.

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Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

***From Stonehenge to Las Vegas: Archaeology as Popular Culture.* Holtorf, Cornelius. Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 2005, 196 pages. ISBN: 0759102678.**

In *From Stonehenge to Las Vegas: Archaeology as Popular Culture* (2005) Cornelius Holtorf explores the intricate and surprisingly intimate relationship between archaeology and popular culture. Over the course of 9 chapters which partly consist of reworked and previously published articles, Holtorf examines this interdependent and often mutually beneficial relationship through a range of different popular media.

Never reductive nor monothetic, explicitly favoring a more round-about and rhizomatic mode of exposition (p. 19) Holtorf examines a wide range of individual, collective and more often than not consumerist desires that ultimately furnishes the archaeological study and pop cultural portrayal of the past with a distinct and, not least, commercially viable “archaeo-appeal.”

Offering a sympathetic, entertaining and yet penetrating exploration of archaeological practice, Holtorf eventually reaches his more contentious yet intriguing proposition, one that he shares with his poststructuralist brethren of symmetrical archaeology: An object’s value is decided in moving from past to present through the work of desire (Shanks 1995 cited in Holtorf 2005:121). The latter half of his book is spent in circumambulatory consideration of the implications this suggestion has on the way archaeologists and popular culture sustain and create an archaeo-appeal that engages with the public.

Reflecting on the personal and subjective appeal of archaeology, Holtorf examines the psychological, metaphorical and literal “underground” in chapter 2. From idiomatic, everyday body-metaphors (“digging deeper”) to the depths of the Freudian subconscious, Holtorf identifies inherently human relation or obsession with the forgotten and/or repressed past and its relation to the present, conscious self. Given the many literal and metaphorical connotations with their primary field of study, the underground, the archaeologist acquires an adventurous air as he intrepidly probes the subsurface for chthonic secrets all the while shedding civilizing light on the dark and exotic recesses of the world and the human psyche. In chapter 3 Holtorf explores the archaeo-appeal of well-worn archaeological tropes in popular media. Be it the bookish and bespectacled scholar or the hip-shooting and whip-wielding explorer, they reiterate, according to Holtorf, a timeless and clichéd hero-myth as they endure the discomforts of archaeological fieldwork while unflinchingly pursuing noble ideals of truth, enlightenment and scientific discovery. While a tried and proved cast in Western storytelling, Holtorf reminds us that archaeologists usually are more concerned with dust and dirt than lavish treasure, and addresses, albeit somewhat briefly, the more troubling colonial and sexist connotations of these stereotypes.

By chapter 4 Holtorf suggests that much of archaeology’s arhaeo-appeal could derive from the laborious, careful and whodunnit-like approach the excavating archaeologist uses in piecing together the many and often conflicting clues of the past. As with any detective novel, it is not so much the solution to the murder mystery but the mystery itself and the methods

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

applied which ropes the reader in. Whether 18th century faux-excavations at Pompeii for the aristocratic wealthy or inviting online audiences to solve the Ice Age murder mystery of Ötzi, it is the archaeological process itself, the diligent and careful search for clues and reconstruction of past events, that provides the attraction.

At this point, Holtorf arrives at the more theoretically consequential and arguably contentious examination of the archaeological process and its relationship with popular culture. As Holtorf admits, the past rarely presents itself as a ready-made puzzle with an unequivocal solution and compares archaeological understanding of the past with the plasticity of memories. For each revisit memories are reinterpreted by hindsight, tinted by present sentiments, agglutinated by circumstantial detail and, for better and for worse, irreversibly altered even if just ever so slightly.

Tracing the shifting interpretation of Neolithic stone axes in chapter 5 from naturally occurring and evil-warding “thunderbolts” in the middle ages to bulletproofing charms during the Franco-Prussian war, Holtorf successfully conveys how every generation not only are drawn to the remains of the past but also, much like memories, encrust them with layers of meaning conditioned by their own contemporary needs and sensibilities.

Holtorf thus transforms the indeterminacy of translation - our hermeneutical inability to exhaustively and without error understand the past Other - to a source of endless sustainability. In fact, Holtorf suggests that the past is a “renewable resource” (chapter 8) as it is always and already in active translation and interpretation through our ever-compounding and changing understanding of ourselves and others. More worryingly for archaeologists hoping to accurately reconstruct the past, however, is the implication that there really is no objective past, only our experience of it in the present through a welter of historical, educational and entertainment contexts.

This reconsideration of the relation between past and present also has important implications on one of archaeology’s most sacrosanct of axioms: authenticity (chapter 7). If the ultimate goal of archaeology is not so much accurately reconstructing the past as experiencing it in the present - opening up one’s eyes to the past to quip Holtorf (p. 159) – a whole new set of demands on public dissemination of archaeological knowledge may be warranted. Rather than considering Disneyfied theme-parks, apocryphal horned Viking-helmets or the mostly PEG-infused Vaasa ship as bastardized quasi-representations of the past, they may instead be considered more authentic in that they make manifest and explicit our contemporary, consumerist expectations and desires. The study of the past is as much a study of our own, contemporary desires and how we display and engage the public with the past, either through clearly labeled and factual museum exhibits or Indiana Jones-themed rollercoasters, are thus equally informative of our changing relationship with the past.

The book can be charged, as it has by other commentators (Casella 2006; Wallace 2007), with neglecting or not considering at more depth the many misuses and outright abuses of archaeology and its close ties with Western consumerism and culture. Indeed, considering the relativizing nature of its claims - that the archaeological understanding of the past essentially is one of contextual interpretation in the present - one should perhaps be even more vigilant of

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

its abusive potential especially when considering its frequent and appealing portrayal in popular, Western media.

However, I think we can forgive a project that deals with the portrayal of archaeology and the past in non-academic and popular contexts for keeping it light-hearted. In fact, I find it praise-worthy that Holtorf emphasizes that the past ultimately is *experienced* in the present. Beyond reiterating the hermeneutical caution that we always bring our encultured and socially conditioned selves with us when engaging with the past, Holtorf also succeeds in imparting the importance of experiential, phenomenological and lived experience both in the past and in our present understanding of it. In discussing the atmosphere, allure and aesthetic pull the Neolithic menhirs exerted on local and global communities throughout the Bronze and the Iron Age right up to present-day Europe Holtorf reminds us of the ineffable, ephemeral yet undeniable archaeo-appeal of the past and its remains – even without the aid of Hollywood. With the rapidly advancing video game and VR technology, people can now virtually explore in impressive and immersive detail medieval Venice, Ancient Egypt and Greece in a range of popular video game series. I have no doubt that the creating the right set of “authentic” aesthetics, allure and atmosphere will occupy video game designer in the years to come and be much more instrumental in sustaining the continued appeal of archaeology than renewed chronology sequences, erudite publications or even tombs laden with gold ever will.

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Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

***The Invention of Satanism.* Asbjørn Dyrendal, James R. Lewis, and Jesper Aa. Petersen. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 254 pp. ISBN: 978-0-19-518110-4.**

In terms of the general impression given to us by the cultural image of "Satan", Satanism is evil, cunning and ferocious. For those readers who come into contact with the term for the first time, many will ask: does such a belief really exist? Why do people really worship the devil? How did this belief emerge? What are its core values? How is it active in contemporary society?

Indeed, as a strange and complex contemporary social and cultural phenomenon, Satanism is inevitably stereotyped. However, one should not be intimidated by the title and cover of *The Invention of Satanism*. This is an interesting and serious work of research that unveils the mystery of Satanism.

The authors of this volume are three prominent international experts in the study of new religious movements, Asbjørn Dyrendal, James R. Lewis, and Jesper Aa. Petersen. All three have been following and studying Satanism for quite a while and enjoy a reputation in related fields. In this book, they collect academic research and cutting-edge survey information, which provide a comprehensive understanding of Satan.

As the authors state, the core issue of the book is "how Satanism was invented as a self-declared religious and/or philosophical position, and how it serves as a personal and collective identity." The authors tackle this issue from two angles: historical and sociological.

To this end, in terms of material use, this book highlights some central movement texts which are used by spokespersons to create their own discursive position and authority. On the one hand, they reference a variety of published resources. On the other, they present details such as interviews and journalistic treatments, biographies, artistic expressions, and cyberspace material.

The first half of this book focuses on historical context, examining the various sources of Satanism and the stages of self-construction and development in contemporary society; providing detailed information about Anton Szandor LaVey, the founder of the Church of Satan and his famous *Satanic Bible*, and continuing into the Satanism scare cases of the 1980s and 1990s. The relevant content is primarily contained in the first through fifth chapters.

The second half of the book is primarily a sociological analysis of the Satanic milieu's demographics, including three quantitative surveys of contemporary Satanists, featuring sociological observations. It is worth mentioning that Lewis's survey, which spans the first decade of this century, reflects the latest developments in Satanism, though the surveys relied entirely upon convenience samples and thus are open to the criticism of being nonrandom. The relevant content is in chapters 6 to 9.

One of the obvious theoretical contributions of *The Invention of Satanism* is the construction of the three ideal types of Satanism, reactive, rationalist and esoteric Satanism. To put it simply, reactive Satanism refers to a childish form of rebellion against Christian ideology, which is usually related to popular culture, and it is a temporary stage of Satanic identity construction; esoteric Satanism refers to esoteric beliefs and practices; and rationalist Satanism, and which refers to an attitude of "atheistic, skeptical, materialistic, and epicurean", which are the core

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

values in *The Satanic Bible*. These three types are helpful for a better understanding of the complex and pluralistic ideological trends of Satanism. With it, we can form a clearer overall impression of contemporary Satanism: "rationalist and esoteric Satanism occupy a bipolar manifestation of organized, mature, and systematic worldviews with reactive Satanism as a catch-all category of popular Satanism, inverted Christianity, and symbolic rebellion." (pp.5).

All in all, in this fascinating narrative of a seemingly mysterious and often daunting movement, Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen demonstrates that the invention of Satanism is an ongoing and evolving process.

In terms of the impact of this book, I realize that an important source of Satanism is the rebellion against the traditional Christian ruling ideology in the West, from groups that have been treated unfairly because of religious prejudice. With the revival of modern humanism, the image of Satan was subverted in literature, gradually separated from its theological background, and became a cultural symbol: advocating individuality and rebellion against authority, elitism, and the expression of material desires. With the rise of modern consumer culture and sexual liberation and so on, the symbol of Satan contains more abundant contents. All these have contributed to the self-conscious identity construction of Satanism. Satan is a substantial and/or functional equivalent to what is usually meant by "religion" and was specifically created to be so. Thus Satanism belongs to the category of what are called "self-religions", focusing on a this-worldly emphasis that sacralizes the individual self with a critical attitude toward the socializing influence of "mass society." This was one of the most enlightening lessons I took from this book. Of course, there is more room for readers to explore for themselves.

The book is not long, with a total of 254 pages, but it provides a popular and concise outline of how contemporary Satanism emerged step by step. Coupled with a fair and rigorous academic standpoint, readers will gain a comprehensive and profound understanding of Satanism while satisfying their curiosity. No matter why your interests are in Satanism, this book should be your first choice.

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