



CAS-E

Alternative Rationalities and
Esoteric Practices from a Global Perspective

CAS-E Newsletter 06/2024

The Center for Advanced Studies [CAS-E](#) investigates practices aimed at predicting, influencing, and orchestrating contingent life events. By bringing together researchers from all over the world, CAS-E compares such practices and examines their resilience despite socio-cultural discourses delegitimizing them.

Dear Friends,

As the festive period in Germany is fast approaching, we would like to take this opportunity to wish you a joyous and fulfilling holiday season. We also would like to thank our readers and the extended CAS-E network for their support and engagement throughout 2024, with the hope for an even more inspiring 2025!

Before wrapping up for a short winter break, we are excited to share a preview of some of the events to come, the latest publications and news from CAS-E, and a recap of some of our recent salient initiatives.

We wish you a serene festive season and a wonderful start into 2025,

Your CAS-E Team



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Events

CAS-E Lecture Series

Our weekly lecture series, with presentations by CAS-E fellows and invited guests, will resume on January 7 and, as usual, take place on **Tuesdays** at **6.15pm CET**. Exceptionally, on January 14 and February 4, we have two additional lectures, at **3.15pm CET**. Join us in person in the **Big Seminar Room, Building D1, Hartmannstr. 14, Erlangen**, or via [Zoom](#).

Lecture Series Winter Semester 2024/25 Upcoming Lectures

January 7, 2025 - 6.15pm CET

Dr. Tommaso Previato (CAS-E Fellow)

Sufi Saints and Their Contestation in the Modern Islamic Revival: Lessons from the Chinese Qadiriyya and Jahriyya

January 14, 2025 - 3.15pm CET

Prof. Erhard Schüttpelz (CAS-E Fellow)

[The Amerindian Americas: A Parallax and its Paralipomena](#)

January 14, 2025 - 6.15pm CET

Prof. Heather Freeman (University of North Carolina at Charlotte)

Podcasting and Popular Media as Research Advocacy in Magic and Esoteric Studies

January 21, 2025 - 6.15pm CET

Prof. Sabina Magliocco (University of British Columbia) – on Zoom

The Magical Resistance 2.0: Meme Magic and the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election

January 28, 2025 - 6.15pm CET

Dr. Douglas Farrer (CAS-E Fellow)

Art, Dreams, and Witchcraft in the Malay World

February 4, 2024 - 3.15pm CET

Dr. Gang Li (CAS-E Fellow)

[Politics of Orthodoxy, and Process of Othering: Esoteric Practices and Alternative Rationalities in the Case of Islamic Mysticism in China](#)

February 4, 2025 - 6.15pm CET

Prof. Peter Pels (Leiden University)

Sacralizing Human Production: Commodities, Identity Fetishism, and the Spirit of the Screen

Please find the **extended program including the abstracts** [here](#).

You can watch the **recordings of passed lectures** on our [CAS-E YouTube channel](#).

[More on CAS-E Lecture Series](#)



Network

People

With each newsletter, we present you a different set of people from our CAS-E network. This time, meet one of our directors, one of our permanent fellows, one

of our research coordinators, one CAS-E alumna and one of the Center's student assistants!



Prof. Dr. Andreas Nehring

Andreas Nehring (*1957), Dr. theol. is Professor em. for Religious Studies and Intercultural Theology at the Friedrich-Alexander-University, Erlangen-Nürnberg. He has been visiting Professor at the University of Salzburg, Makumira University in Tanzania, the LTS in Hong Kong, as well as in Malaysia and Myanmar. At present he is one of CAS-E's directors. His fields of research are: Theories of Religious and Cultural Studies, Postcolonial Theologies, Transcultural Processes of Exchange and Communication between Europe and India, History of Missions, Mindfulness, and the Reception of Buddhist Concepts in the West.



Dr. Bernd-Christian Otto

Dr. Bernd-Christian Otto is one of the founding members of CAS-E and works as a permanent fellow at the Center. Trained in religious studies, Otto's research focuses on Western magic and esotericism, where he combines different methodologies such as conceptual history, discourse analysis, interviews, participant observation and practitioner-scholarship. Otto is also co-founder and scientific director of the [Research Network for the Study of Esoteric Practices](#) (RENSEP), a charitable association that builds bridges between scholars and practitioners and funds cutting-edge research.



Dr. Lina Aschenbrenner

CAS-E research coordinator Lina Aschenbrenner holds a PhD in the study of religion with a background in cultural studies. She researches practices of contemporary neo-spiritualities in global(ized) consumer societies with a particular focus on aesthetics and embodiment, as well as global assemblages of neo-indigenous spiritualities, especially Hawaiian hula. In both contexts, she concentrates on the question of agency and power.



Zheng Liu

CAS-E Alumni Zheng Liu researches the transmission of the *Yijing* (Book of Changes), and four divination techniques based on or derived from the *Yijing* in contemporary China. As an insider and academic, her project focuses especially on the construction and maintenance of secret knowledge.



Geetha Sai Mada

Sai Geetha Mada is pursuing a Master's degree in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), focusing on networking and digital communications. At CAS-E, Geetha contributes to the Public Relations team by maintaining the organization's website, managing social media channels, and providing updates on announcements and lecture series. She also assists the IT team with the setup and configuration of equipment for lectures.

[More CAS-E People](#)

CAS-E Welcomes new team member Dr. des. Jessica Albrecht

Commencing December 1, Dr. des. Albrecht has joined CAS-E as a Research Associate and contributes to Strategic Project Development. Her scholarly research is based on an intersectional, discursive and embodied understanding of religion. Currently, she employs Queer, Crip and Gender Theories to study Buddhism and Buddhist psychology from the perspective of a global history of religion. Jessica has [published](#) several articles on the history of eugenics, feminism and esotericism, as well as gender and Theosophy in Sri Lanka. She is currently preparing two monographs, one based on her PhD thesis, and the other on Buddhist Masculinities in Sri Lanka. Jessica is also the founder of [En-Gender](#), an international and interdisciplinary network, journal and podcast on Gender Studies.



Publications and Lectures

In this section, we present the publications of our fellows, alumni, and team members that draw on their research and intellectual exchanges at CAS-E. Here you can also find the latest invited lectures and conference presentations that CAS-E fellows and team members have given at institutions around the world.

Book Chapters

Previato, Tommaso. 2024. "Stati Alterati di Coscienza come Pratica Ascetica: Annientamento di Sé, Fenomeni Allucinatori e Culto delle Reliquie nel Sufismo Jahriya" [Altered States of Consciousness as an Ascetic Practice: Self-Annihilation, Hallucinatory Phenomena, and the Cult of Relics in Jahriya Sufism]. In *Pluralità degli Stati di Coscienza nelle Esperienze Religiose* [Plurality of States of Consciousness in Religious Experiences], edited by E. Bianchi, F. Marcattili, and M. Minelli. Mimesis, pp. 135-150.

Book Reviews

Chopel, Dendup. 2024. Review of *Rare Ethnography on the Politics and Practices of Religious Plurality in Rural Bhutan*, by Kelzang T. Tashi. *Current Anthropology*, 65(5): 934-35. <https://doi.org/10.1086/732397>

More Publications

Invited Lectures and Conference Presentations

Graw, Knut 2024. "Shells that Speak: Divination and its Author." Invited lecture at Academia Sinica, Institute of Ethnology, Taipei, Taiwan, November 18.

Hayes, Kelly E. 2024. "Esoteric Economies and Ritual Flows: Comparative Perspectives from Senegal and Brazil." Panel on "Religion and the Economy: Genealogies, Borders and Thresholds." 2024 European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) conference, Barcelona, Spain, July 26. <https://easaonline.org/conferences/easa2024/programme#14839>

Hayes, Kelly E. 2024. "Space-Time Travelers: Interstices of the Real, the Material, and the Imagined in the Valley of the Dawn." Brazilian Studies Association (BRASA) biannual meeting, April 24.

Hayes, Kelly E. 2024. "Space Age Religion: The Imagined World of Brazil's Valley of the Dawn." Brazilian Studies Association (BRASA) biannual meeting, April 4.

Hayes, Kelly E. 2024. "Space Age Religion: The Imagined World of Brazil's Valley of the Dawn." Lake Forest College Lecture Series, March 4.

Hirmer, Monika. 2024. "When the 'Esoteric' Strikes Back: Revising the Field of Tantric Studies." Invited Lecture, Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies (OCHS), UK, November 29.

Hirmer, Monika. 2024. "Śaktipur's Cosmological Architecture: The Embodiment of Śalti and Śiva's Play." European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) conference, Spain, July 18. <https://easaonline.org/conferences/easa2024/programme#14606>

Hirmer, Monika. 2024. "Motherhood, the Śrīvidyā Way: Of Male Mothers and Birthing the Cosmos." International Society for Academic Research on

Shamanism (ISARS), Rome, Italy, June 5.

Hirmer, Monika. 2024. "Existence Beyond the Anthropocene: The Enmeshed Beingness of Śrīvidyā Practitioners in South India." European Academy of Religion (EUARE) Palermo, Italy, May 21.

Marino, Davide. 2024. "From Da(o)daim to Traditionalism: Giulio Evola's Daodejing," panel on "Esotericism, Politics and East Asia." 2024 East Asian Network for the Academic Study of Esotericism (EANASE) conference, December 1. <https://eanase.com/conference-schedule-2024/>

Müller, Dominik. 2024. "The Bureaucratization of Islam in Southeast Asia: A research group project in retrospective." Invited Lecture at Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO), Paris, France, December 18.

Müller, Dominik. 2024. "Verbotene Magie, staatlicher Exorzismus – Staat und Islam in Brunei, Darussalam." Invited Lecture at the Abteilung Ethnologie of the Natural History Museum, Nürnberg, Germany, November 20.

Otto, Bernd-Christian. 2024. "CAS-E and MagEIA: Exploring Synchronicities between two Bavarian Centers for Advanced Studies", 1st International MagEIA Symposium, Würzburg University, October 31.

Previato, Tommaso. 2024. "Islamic Afterworlds and Nation Building in Modern China," panel on "Esotericism, Politics and East Asia." 2024 East Asian Network for the Academic Study of Esotericism (EANASE) conference, December 1. <https://eanase.com/conference-schedule-2024/>

Courses

Errichiello, Mariano. 2024. "Esotericism and the Making of Modernity in the Global South". Postgraduate Module taught at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) by alumnus Mariano Errichiello, inspired by the CAS-E colloquia.

[More Lectures and Conferences](#)



Bulletin

In this section you can read about our team members', fellows', and alumni's awards and new positions, as well as their media appearances.

Awards and New Positions

Lackner, Michael. 2024. Nominated Chair and Senator of Section 28 (Cultural Sciences) of the [Leopoldina Nationale Akademie der Wissenschaften](#).

Li, Gang. 2024. Nominated Principal Investigator of the DFG (German Research Foundation) project "Minoritization of Muslims: A Social History of China's Regulatory System over the Hui" (Research Grants, 2025-2028), at the FAU Forschungszentrum für Islam und Recht in Europa (FAU EZIRE).

Otto, Bernd-Christian. 2024. Member of the Advisory Board, ERC Synergy project "Mapping Occult Sciences Across Islamicate Cultures" (MOSAIC).

Otto, Bernd-Christian. 2024. Member of the Advisory Board, Centre for Advanced Studies (Kollegforschungsgruppe) "MagEIA", University of Würzburg (<https://www.phil.uni-wuerzburg.de/en/mageia/>).

Otto, Bernd-Christian. 2024. Editor-in-Chief. Journal *Praxis-Knowledge* (<https://www.rensep.org/praxis-knowledge/>).

[More Awards and New Positions](#)

Media Appearances

Hayes, Kelly E. 2024. "The Valley of the Dawn." Mysterious Universe podcast. March 23. 1 hour, 34 minutes. <https://mysteriousuniverse.org/2024/03/31.11-MU-Podcast-The-Valley-of-the-Dawn/>

Otto, Bernd-Christian. 2024. "Rejected Religion Spotlight - Dr. Bernd-Christian Otto & Andrea Centore." Rejected Religion Podcast. October 21. 40 minutes. <https://www.patreon.com/posts/rejected-dr-otto-114417674>

Otto, Bernd-Christian. 2024. "Gnoseologies: Researching Alternative Rationalities." Invited Lecture at the Harvard Divinity School Center for the Study of World Religions, September 25. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xmp0H2Ddws4>

[More Media Appearances](#)



Media

CAS-E Blog

Our blog features short writings by the scholars who presented their work at the CAS-E lecture series. In their blog entries, scholars reflect on their research and address broader societal, political, cultural or religious questions in an essay format, making it attractive for academic and non-academic audiences alike. You can access the latest blog entries below. Happy reading!



"Unlocking the Unknown: Intuitive Cognition in the Book of Changes" by Dominique Hertzner

Read blog [here](#).



"The Sacred Gaze: Some Reflections on the Act of Seeing in Religion and Beyond" by Roger Canals

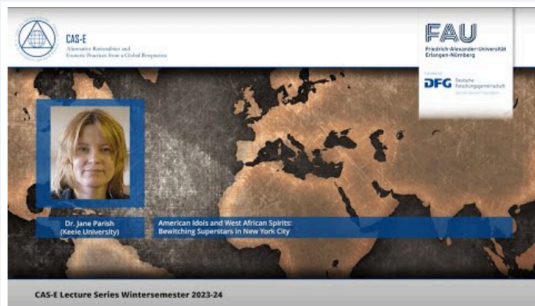
Read blog [here](#).

CAS-E Blog

CAS-E YouTube Channel

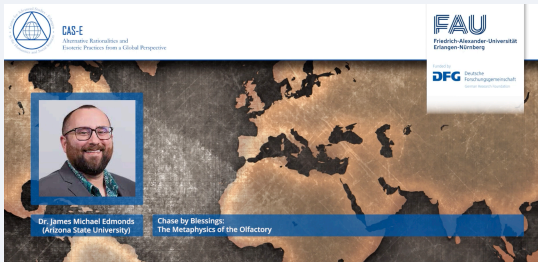
On the CAS-E YouTube channel you can re-watch the talks from our lecture series and catch up on the ones you missed. You will also find brief interviews where our fellows, alumni and team members introduce their respective

interests and research areas. Don't forget to [subscribe](#) to the channel to keep up to date with the latest lectures! Have a look at some of the lectures below:



Reaching for the Stars in New York City: Ghanaian Religious Discourses and Bewitching Celebrity

Jane Parish, November 28, 2023
Watch it [here](#).



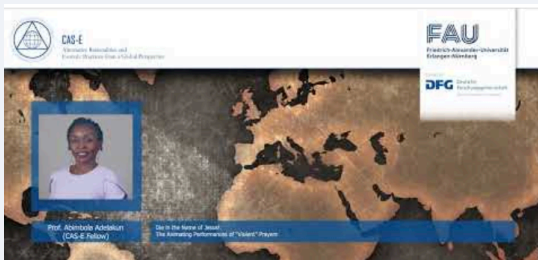
Chased by Blessings: The Metaphysics of the Olfactory

James Michael Edmonds, November 21, 2023
Watch it [here](#).



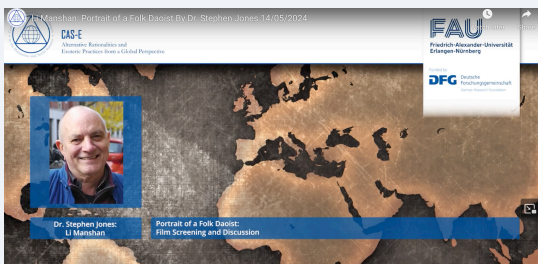
Identity, Body and Emotion among Yoga and Meditation Practitioners in Brazil

Cecilia Bestos, December 5, 2023
Watch it [here](#).



Die in the Name of Jesus!: The Animating Performances of "Violent" Prayers

Abimbola Adelakun, December 19, 2023
Watch it [here](#).



Portrait of a Folk Daoist

Stephen Jones, May 14, 2024
Watch it [here](#).

CAS-E YouTube



Recap

Conference: "The Aesthetics of Esoteric Practices: Materialities, Performances, Senses"



November 12–14, 2024

This year's CAS-E conference "[The Aesthetics of Esoteric Practices](#)" was jointly organized by CAS-E, the [Giorgio Cini Foundation](#) (Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations and Spiritualities), the [Center for the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents](#) at the University of Amsterdam, and the [Research Network for the Study of Esoteric Practices](#) (RENSEP). The conference took place in a very special location, the island of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice, Italy. The conference's numerous contributions dealt with a topic that has long been on the research agenda of our center: the aesthetics of esoteric practices, i.e. their performative, sensory, and material dimensions. Over the course of three days, the topic was widely discussed in various global, social, cultural, and historical contexts, with each contribution highlighting a different aspect and thus contributing to the overall picture and discourse. The conference [program](#) is still available and provides a good overview. The conference proceedings will be published. Until then, we will take home many insights into new fields of practice as well as fruitful discussions that will contribute to the research activities at our center.

Study Day with Prof. Fan-sen Wang: "Symbolic Action in Late Imperial China"

November 21, 2024

On November 21, 2024, CAS-E hosted a [one-day workshop](#) featuring [Prof. Fan-sen Wang](#) 王汎森 from Academia Sinica, Taiwan. Prof. Wang, who was awarded the Humboldt Research Award 2024, presented his ongoing book project on "Symbolic Action in Late Imperial China 中國近世歷史中的象徵性行動."

The workshop comprised of two sessions. The first session was devoted to a general outline of the book, including a definition of "symbolic action," and its relevance to the social and cultural dynamics of late imperial China. In the second session, Prof. Wang presented a detailed account of Chapter 2, which deals with customs such as "leaving the boots behind 留靴" and the "people's umbrella 萬民傘." These customs exemplify forms of symbolic interaction between local officials and the communities they served, offering unique insights into grassroots expressions of gratitude and critique. Both sessions (5 hours in total) were followed by a lively discussion with the audience, including CAS-E visiting scholars and guests from Germany, Taiwan and China.



DFG Kollegforschungsgruppe „Alternative Rationalities and Esoteric Practices from a Global Perspective“
Hartmannstr. 14, 91052 Erlangen



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