It has taken a long time for Europeans to recognize that there are diverse ways of defining the word “religion” in terms of global cultures. It has also taken a long time for peoples outside of the Abrahamic religions coming to understand the monotheistic connotation of the term “religion”. Etymologically, the concept of “religion” denotes the obligations ritually paid to God(s), to remain connected with the divine one(s). Although Christians considered the ancient Greek religion “paganism”, the diversity of cult practices and pantheons in the classical Greek world had enough in common to be viewed as a single system, and were widely perceived as such by the ancient Greeks. [1] Thus, since antiquity, in comparison to non-European cultures, normative thinking arose in the European context to define the concept of “religion” and its related terms regarding religious practices, ritual behaviors, and doctrines. [2] Correspondingly, since antiquity in Europe, “superstition” has emerged alongside “irreligion” and “atheism” as a counter-concept to “religion” and has been used to denote excessive or improper rituals, cults, devotional observations, and divinatory practices. Among the divergent interpretations of “superstition”, the most authoritative can be found in Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologia* (II-II: 92:1), in which he condemned “superstition” as “a vice opposed to religion by way of excess; not because in the worship of God it does more than true religion, but because it offers Divine worship to beings other than God or offers worship to God in an improper manner.” In Aquinas’ view, “superstition” had three basic forms: (a) idolatry; (b) divination; and (c) false observances. With Aquinas’ statement, “idolatry” became a central issue in European Christian culture through the Late-Medieval period, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and well into the modern day. To some extent, the persistence of the idolatry controversy can be viewed as a sign of the cultural defeat of the medieval church in Christianizing the European peoples. [3] Especially in the 15th century, many European authors were inclined to declare the threat of idolatry as the greatest danger within the category of superstition. [4] In the 16th and 17th centuries, as a result of debates provoked by the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, the controversy over “idolatry” intensified. However, under the spell of the Renaissance, the vigorous upsurge of interest in the humanism transformed the classical pagan antiquity into an inherent and, in fact, an erudite part of the early modern culture. To some extent the Renaissance appeal to the autonomy of “art” saved the controversial worship of the Virgin Mary and the saints, which was on the brink of collapse. Along with the Confessionalization of Europe, means of quelling disputes over the problem of idolatry gradually became part of the cultural policies of each Christian confession. Later, in the Romanticism, the formerly labeled “barbarian” elements of the Germanic and Celtic pagan past [5] were upheld as icons of national identity and were integrated well into European mainstream culture in the same way that the classical pagan elements were integrated in the Renaissance.

With the European expansions to the New World, Asia and Africa in the 17th century, the idolatry controversy received attention outside of Europe and entered a new battleground involving the challenges of global cultures. As their explorations extended to the vastness of the world, Europeans were suddenly confronted with the unfamiliar “universal” phenomena of polytheism, pantheism,
natural religion, and shamanism. Viewing these foreign religions in terms of the belief in the Christian true God not only presented a grave theological problem for all European confessions but also provided a new battle for the orthodox representation of “the” European religion overseas.

From February to November 2012, Heidelberg University Library staged an antiquarian book exhibition “Götterbilder und Götzentnder in der Frühen Neuzeit - Europas Blick auf fremde Religionen” to review the aforementioned historical course of the early modern Europeans. In cooperation with the “Transcultural Studies” research team of young professionals at Heidelberg University and the Institut für Kunstgeschichte of Ludwig Maximilian University Munich, this exhibition was presented in physical and virtual forms. Although the physical exhibition has ended, the virtual one (hosted on the website http://goetterbilder2012.uni-hd.de) has remained as a permanent online exhibition with exquisitely digitalized books. Heidelberg University Library and Munich Bayerische Staatsbibliothek are two highly acclaimed libraries in Germany that are dedicated to digitalizing and sharing their valuable collections of illuminations, manuscripts and antiquarian books. The digital book collection provides a new way for the exhibition to reach a worldwide audience.

The concept of the exhibition originated in the recently emerging new interest in a richly illustrated book, Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tout les peuples du monde [The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of All the Peoples of the World; hereafter Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses], published between 1723 and 1737. This lavishly illustrated book-set with seven folio volumes is the result of collaboration between two Huguenot refugees in Amsterdam: the publisher Jean Frederick Bernard (1683-1744) and the most famous engraver after Hogarth, Bernard Picart (1673-1733). Because the author Bernard chose to remain anonymous, the book bore only the name of its illustrator, Picart. In contrast to the stereotypical impression of the Enlightenment intellectuals, Bernard and Picart were not atheists but were confessed Calvinists. Faced with terrors caused by religious wars, inquisitions and persecutions, they consciously took a stand on religion as a universal constant in human society. By guiding readers with texts and illustrations to perceive religion from this new perspective, Bernard and Picart aimed to explore what world religions shared in common rather than how they differed from each other. Due to the large format and copious illustrations, the expense of Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses was beyond the reach of common people. Nonetheless, thanks to the prosperous Dutch book trade at that time, the book sold a remarkable number of 4,000 copies of editions in diverse European languages. Its widely acclaimed reception by the wealthy social class made Picart’s illustrations into the visual canons of most of the exotic religions well into the 19th century, albeit with European adaptations.

The starting point for more thorough explorations of Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses, especially in terms of South Asia, was established with the pioneering monograph written by Paola von Wyss-Giacosa. [6] Subsequently, the collaborative project established by Lynn Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob, and Wijnand Mijnhardt with participation from scholars, curators, and graduate students from multiple disciplines, brought about two related monographs [7] and one website hosted at the UCLA digital library, which provides online all of the images of the first French, Dutch, English and German editions of Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses (http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/picart/index.html). Why has Bernard and Picart’s book drawn such recent scholarly attention? In Hunt, Jacob, and Mijnhardt’s view, “they invited readers to distance themselves from their own beliefs and customs to think about religious practices around the globe. This distance marked a crucial first step toward toleration.” [8] The social background of the two producers was also noteworthy. Bernard and Picart were remarkable examples outside of “the great thinkers” of their time, as Anthony Grafton states: “In the light of their accomplishment, the Enlightenment itself takes on a new look, as a program achieved not only by the highly educated deep thinkers in their lonely studies, whom historians have celebrated in the past, but also by workingmen who earned their living in the commercial world.” [9]

Following the growing interest in Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses, the Heidelberg University Library’s book exhibition aimed to explore the text and image sources available to Bernard and Picart, and their contemporaries, such as Bernard de Montfaucon (1655-1741), one of the founding fathers of modern
archaeology with his *L'antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures* (1722-4) [10], and Joseph François Lafitau (1681-1746), the first of the Jesuit missionaries in Canada with a scientific anthropological perspective with his *Moeurs des Sauvages Amérindiens, Comparées aux Moeurs des Premiers Temps* (1724). [11] The exhibits amount to nearly 140 antiquarian printed books, dated from the early 14th through the late 18th century, primarily focused from the late 15th century to the first quarter of the 18th century. In light of the copious illustrations in Picart, Montfaucon, and Lafitaus's books on world religions and the significant impact of visual image in shaping new perceptions and disseminating new knowledge of the immense exotic world, the exhibits focus on the relationship between book illustration and the proto-scientific construction of knowledge of foreign religions in early modern Europe.

The whole exhibits are displayed and catalogued in five sections. The first one is "Der Blick auf alle Religionen und Riten der Welt" (the view of all religions and rites in the world). Three examples of this section are the aforementioned books by Bernard Picart (Cat. No. I.1), Monfaucon (Cat. No. I.4), and Lafitau (Cat. No. I.6). Faced with the rising interest in religiosity outside of the Christian monotheism and the emerging pursuit of the systematic compilation, editing, and interpretation of documents, counter-approaches emerged. It is noteworthy that the Paris-published 1741 version of Picart's *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses* complied with the authority of the French Catholic Church: on the attached-in title page of volume one [12], Catholicism's triumph over other religious beliefs was represented. In this way, Bernard and Picart's original idea of all of the religions in the world meeting on equal terms was pictorially twisted. This irony clearly illustrates the predicaments with which the construction course of the early modern knowledge system was confronted.

The second section "Antiquarisch-historische Forschung" (antiquarian and historical studies) addresses interpretations and systematic reconstructions of the ancient religious culture. The early modern period was not only a time to rediscover the pagan antiquity and to witness the birth of handbooks on ancient mythology compiled and edited by erudite humanists (such as Lilio Gregorio Giraldi's systematic study of classical mythology *Historia de diis gentium*, 1548, Cat. Nr. II.11); it was also the age of the first attempt to decipher the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, of which the renowned German Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher was the most prominent representative. Between 1652 and 1655 Kircher published his masterpiece *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (Cat. Nr. II.34), which thoroughly interpreted the Egyptian religion, theosophy, and philosophy. The publication took three years because of the time-consuming printing of abundant illustrations. Thanks to Kircher's scholarly expertise in Egyptology, an obelisk was erected in 1691 at Piazza Navona in Rome (Cat. Nr. II.24). In addition, relevant to the studies of the roots of the European Christianity was the excavation in approximately 1600 of the early Christian underground tombs in Rome, the catacombs. Antonio Bosio, the first systematic explorer of subterranean Rome who received the nickname "Columbus of the Catacombs", published *Roma Sotterranea* (1659, Cat. Nr. II.26) and established the foundation of Christian archaeology. The inestimable value of this book lies partly in its extensive and detailed illustrations by the painter Angelo Santini [13], who often accompanied Bosio underground for archaeological explorations.

Along with the rediscovery of classical antiquity and the discovery of the new world, the early modern period is an important period for the rediscovery of the Germanic and Scandinavian pagan past. Philipp Clüver, who was born in Danzig and studied at Leiden University, published *Germania antique* (Cat. Nr. II.36) at Leiden in 1616. This book became the most important work on the early German past in the 17th century and earned the author the title *Geographus Academicus*. This heavily illustrated book was produced under the profound impact of the phenomenal Renaissance rediscovery of Tacitus' *Germania* and was conceived as a type of pictorial commentary. Simon Frisius, a Dutch engraver residing in Den Haag, was responsible for the production of the twenty-two full-page and four double-page etchings for this book. His compelling illustrations of the early Germans, which carried an air of archaic rustic monumentality [14], were consequently used as an authentic visual canon of German antiquity and exerted a considerable influence on the depiction of proto-Germanness [15] well into the late 18th century. In 1673 at Frankfurt am Main, Johannes Scheffer published
Lapponia (History of Lapland. Cat. Nr. V.5), a book on Northern Scandinavia with detailed descriptions of the indigenous people, the Sámis, and their lifestyle as well as studies of shamanism. Regarding 17th-century research on the European aboriginal cultures and religious beliefs, an in-depth survey of this topic is needed to provide a comprehensive introduction to the construction of the early modern European identity, as Peter Brown earnestly reminds us in his classic The Rise of Western Christendom: “A Europe with only ‘Christian roots’ would be a very airless place, even for Christians.” A profound dialogue between contemporary archaeological studies on Late Antiquity through the early Middles Ages and analyses of the early modern documents describing European indigenous cultures is to be expected in the future research.

The third section “Bildwerke, Objekte, Architekturen - die Rolle von Kunst und Künstlern” (visual images, objects, architectures - the role of art and artists), is concerned with Bernard Picart and his contemporaries’ commitment to graphic arts and their inevitable confrontation with the rising appeal of artistic originality in the 18th century. The early modern period was not only an age of book illustration; with the dynamic presence of the Renaissance, it was also the golden age of discoursing on artistic autonomy. How did the book illustrator answer the challenge of increasing pleas for artistic originality? To justify the raison d’être of graphic arts, Bernard Picart wrote a plaidoyer “Discours sur les préjugés de certains curieux touchant la gravure”, with 78 engravings in imitation of the ouvre by past masters such as Raphael, Rembrandt, and Poussin, etc. (Cat. Nr. III.16). This posthumously (1734) published work manifested Picart’s life-long ardent commitment to uphold the unique value of graphics as an art of reproduction and a powerful medium to disseminate new knowledge and new ideas. To illuminate Picart’s perception of the legacy of the past masters, an elaborate survey on his studies of Rubens’ book illustration is necessary for the current project. Rubens was committed to book illustration due to his close connection with Balthasar Moretus, the head of the printing company “Officina Plantiniana” in Antwerp. Rubens’ achievement in this field led to the substantial evolution of the 17th-century title-page illustration; he was very good at visualizing the content of the book through a compact allegorical representation. In addition, due to his friendship with the rector of the Jesuit College in Antwerp, Rubens had the opportunity to become familiar with the overseas Jesuit missionaries. For example, in 1617, he drew a famous portrait of Nicolas Trigault, a Jesuit missionary to China, in Chinese literati costume. With his note of the garment color inscribed in Latin directly on the drawing, Rubens manifested his interest in exotic costume studies rather than portraying religious encounters. A similar example can be found in Rubens’ famous altarpiece Miracles of St. Francis Xavier. An onlooker in the central foreground under the podium with a Korean high horsehair cap is the only Asian missionary portrayed by this celebrated artist of the Counter-Reformation age.

The fourth section “Polemik und Poetik” (polemic and poetics), addresses the two contrasting perceptions of exotic religious imagery and ritual practices: either as idolatrous embodiments of spiritual bewilderment or as poetic tokens of human imagination, in which profound truth was embedded. As far as idolatry is concerned, the deification of the absolute monarchs, such as the Sun King (le Roi-Soleil) Louis XIV, was a central issue in Bernard Picart’s time. The French graveur du roi Simon Thomassin produced 218 engravings of the furnishings at Versailles, one of which depicted a well with a statue-group entitled “Bath of Apollo” (Cat. Nr. IV.23). In this engraving, Apollo’s wig and posture were strongly reminiscent of Hyacinthe Rigaud’s famous portrait of Louis XIV (1701). Conversely, antipathy toward deified statues of absolute rulers was expressed by some French intellectuals. For example, François Lemée caricatured Louis XIV as “Prince idolâtre” in Traité des Statuës (1688, Cat. Nr. III.7), and Abbé Guillaume Alexandre de Méhégan asserted in Origine, progrès et décadence de l'idolâtrie (Paris, 1757. Cat. Nr. III.8) that the origin of paganism lay in the deification of the leader and kings of the primitive society.

Although Joseph François Lafitau’s Moeurs des Sauvages Amériquains is exhibited in Section I, its content fits the theme of the fourth section quite well. By applying the comparative method rather than relying on European traditional sources, Lafitau made his name as a pioneer of scientific anthropology with this work on the Iroquois. His scholarly achievement was combined with his missionary thinking
about “primitive monotheism” [21], in which he stressed the biblical statement about mankind’s original common share in one religion. According to Lafitau, the ignorance of the true God by the ancient Greeks and the American Indians was caused by migrations, separations and gradual alienation from the root of the primordial religion. However, the existence of symbols in their material cultures indicated the possibility of tracing back to the original unity. In light of Lafitau’s view, all the symbolic and hieroglyphic expressions should be decoded to reconstruct the fundamental religious truth. Taking “primitive monotheism” into consideration, the illustration of Moeurs des Sauvages Amériquains reflected on the everyday life of Canadian Indians [22], whom Lafitau personally encountered during his five years of missionary work there, although the illustrations were stylistically flavored with French classicism.

Corresponding to Lafitau’s proto-ecumenical thinking, there was an emerging scholarly interest in Islam at the beginning of the 18th century: The evangelical theologian David Nerreter translated the entire Koran into German in 1703 (Cat. Nr. IV.12). Two years later, Adriaan Reland, professor of Arabic studies at the University of Utrecht, aimed to do away with European conventional bias by publishing De religione Mohammedica libri duo (Cat. Nr. IV.11), in which he meticulously translated and annotated a considerable number of Islamic primary sources. In 1723, Jean Gagnier, professor of oriental studies at Oxford, issued the Mohammed-Vita by Abū Al-Fidā (1273-1331) in Arabic, with a Latin translation and annotations (Cat. Nr. IV.14a). The French translation of this book (1732) was richly illustrated and remained the most authoritative source for the Western European understanding of Mohammed’s life until the mid-19th century.

The theme of the fifth section is “Erkundung der Welt und ethnographische Interessen” (exploration of the world and ethnographic interests). Before the rise of the book trade in Amsterdam, book illustration reached an unprecedented peak in Germany thanks to the invention of the printing press. In 1486, before the publication of Hartmann Schedel’s famous Weltchronik (1493), Erhard Reuwich illustrated and printed Peregrinatio in Terram Sanctam in Mainz, a book written by Bernhard von Breydenbach, a wealthy canon of Mainz Cathedral. It is widely accepted that this book was the first European travel book containing purposeful illustrations. This book is collected at Heidelberg University Library but not selected for this exhibition. The Peregrinatio in Terram Sanctam was elaborately conceived. In 1483-1484 Breydenbach took Reuwich to Jerusalem for a pilgrimage and assigned him the task of drawing the sights on the journey. The fruit of their cooperation was a book that included five large foldout woodcut plates of the most exceptional quality ever seen in Europe, which marked the first use of panoramas depicting large cities such as Venice and Jerusalem. With the printing of this book, Reuwich became the first painter known in Europe to have published a book. Within a year of the publication of the Latin edition, the German version reached the market too.

In the Age of Voyage, illustrated travel reports and maps were not only the media by which most Europeans obtaining ever-increasing knowledge about the world, but they were also the key to success or failure in the overseas conquest under constantly varying circumstances. The three decades after the independence of the Dutch Republic in 1648 was a booming period that saw the publication of extraordinary books with far-reaching impacts. Willem Janszoon Blaeu (1571-1638), the appointed cartographer of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), opened a workshop in Amsterdam for globe- and map-making with a publishing business. After his death, in 1655 his son Joan published Novus Atlas Sinensis. Das ist ausführliche Beschreibung des grossen Reichs Sina by Pater Martino Martini, a Jesuit missionary in China (Cat. Nr. V.22). This book contained 17 maps of China and Japan and was the first European atlas devoted to China.

Although Germany and Switzerland were not active participants in overseas expeditions in the 17th century, German-speaking individuals were not absent from this epochal endeavor. Three decades ago, the travel report of Caspar Schmalkaden, a German soldier in service to the Dutch East India Company, was published. [23] This valuable travel report, created by a man skilled at measurement and sketching, stood out among the 17th-century travel reports with its 128 illustrations, mostly colored pen-and-ink drawings of the everyday life of the local people whom Schmalkaden encountered in East Asia. One example similar to Schmalkaden’s case that should be mentioned here is the travel report
Eine kurze Ost-Indianische Reiß-Beschreibung (1669) by Albrecht Herport [24], a Swiss soldier and painter from Bern. This report is also excluded from the exhibition, although it is in the collection of Heidelberg University Library. As an amateur painter, it is not surprising that Herport stressed his ambition in the preface to convince the reader of the veracity of his account with visual depictions: “Auch vermittelst meiner Malerei-Kunst allerlei Geschlecht heidnischer Völckeren/Indianischer Früchten/Thieren/ Festungen/Schiffahrten eigentlich und nach dem leben abgezeichnet.” [25] In addition to illustrations, Herport’s writing is notable for his neutral manner of describing East Asian religions. For example, in one segment of the book title, his wording was “der Einwohneren Sitten und Gottes-Dienst” [26], and he captioned the subtitle of p. 103 “Der Chinesen Religion”. Herport’s narration of the Calvinist mission in Formosa (Taiwan) was a valuable source for a comprehensive understanding of the multiple European missionary activities in East Asia in addition to the Jesuit one: “Herr Hambruch [Antonius Hambroek] Diener des Göttlichen Worts/ihrer Sprach/durch Lateinische-Buchstaben/in Schrifft gebracht/welches ihnen zuvor ganzunbekant war/hat auch hernach die ganze Heilige Schrifft in ihre Sprach übersetzt/dardurch er in kurzer Zeit viel zu unserm Reformierten Christlichen Glauben gebracht.” [27]

Cosmopolitan interests in the discovery of the world are not found only in the reports of travelers, missionaries and soldiers; they are also found in works by scholars who never crossed the borders of Europe but who were committed to editing, compiling and commenting on the abundantly available sources written by others. For example, the founding father of Egyptology Athanasius Kircher published in 1670 China Illustrata (1670, Cat. Nr. V.15), a work of encyclopedic breadth combining all the information about China and Chinese culture collected by the Jesuit missionaries there. Kircher stated that in relation to his own thesis on ancient Egyptian religion as the origin of paganism, the propagation path of paganism was from India to China and Japan. Furthermore, the founder of African studies, Olfert Dapper, also published in the same year Gedenkwaerdig bedryf der Nederlandsche Oost-Indische Maetschappye, op de kuste en in het Keizerrijk van Taising of Sina (Cat. Nr. V.19), a book on China with encyclopedic richness. The illustrations of this book were considerably borrowed by Picart in Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses. In terms of Dapper’s Protestant-minded criticism of Chinese idolatry, it is interesting to reflect on the comment on page 301 of the exhibition catalogue about an illustration of a Chinese temple interior reminiscent of the European Catholic church. [28] Did this affinity allude to Catholicism as a type of idolatrous belief?

To answer the above-stated question, a multi-dimensional analysis of early modern conception of “idolatry” is required. The term ‘idolatry’ seems to be used by the precursors and contemporaries of Bernard Picart as a slippery concept to describe most of the overt features of exotic, non-monotheistic religions overseas. Over time, the biased connotations of the word have been more or less neutralized in the context of more open-minded discourses. Faced with the exotic religions and cultures, it is difficult to say that all early modern Europeans perceived them as idol-worshiping paganism. On the contrary, some missionaries found the indigenous peoples to possess greater potential to return to the “pure” religion than Europeans. For example, the German-speaking Calvinist minister Georgius Candidius (1597-1647), the first missionary to be stationed in Formosa (Taiwan), explicitly stated, “In Holland, it is often the case that as many religious opinions are to be found in one house as there are persons in it. […] Among ourselves, the task of exterminating error is a difficult, indeed, an impossible one; for those who cling to error writings in which their opinions are embodied, so that they can teach their posterity the same falsehoods. We have seen, however, that the Formosans have no writings whatever to hand down their superstitions and idolatry to further generations.” [29] In addition, as Martin Mulsow notes, the Jesuit missionary Lafitau not only criticized the contemporary French absolute government in light of his appreciation for the political equality of the Indian indigenous social organization, but also endeavored to reconstruct the prototype of religion by means of his studies of Indian religious rites and mythology. [30] Given such an open-minded attitude, we should be aware that the practical discrimination in the early modern period between “religion” and “idolatry”/”superstition”/”paganism” was not always bound by biblical doctrines but was very often a matter of expediency. In other words, the practical borderline between “religion” and “idolatry”/”superstition” was, in reality, not a matter of
biblical exegesis but was largely dependent on the level of acquaintance with non-Christian cultures, the way to exercise ecclesiastical authority overseas, and the missionary strategies of how to define the relationship between Christianity and exotic civilizations.

Bernard and Picart were well aware of the complexity of issues of exotic religions. Instead of using the general term “religion” or “idolatry”, their deliberate wording of “Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses” revealed their familiarity with the previous controversies over these concepts. As Hunt, Jacob, and Mijnhardt note, Bernard extensively cited in Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses the views of a contentious figure in the “Chinese rites controversy (1645-1939)”, Louis Le Comte, who was strongly condemned by the theology faculty of the Sorbonne for his advocacy of Chinese ancestor and Confucius worship as “civil custom”, not “religion” or “rite”. [31] In the view of the Catholic Church, rites were related to liturgy, which should be strictly normalized and supervised by a supreme authority, such as the Vatican. Bernard and Picart’s choice of the terms “ceremony” and “custom” instead of “religion” and “idolatry” for their book title and the topics addressed in the book demonstrated their commercial coyness, without losing their Calvinist identity, in the turbulent time. However, they also demonstrated their ingenuity in facilitating a new approach toward a more comprehensive comparison of the global “religions” free of confessional restraints. In light of this situation, we can say that the legacy of Bernard and Picart lies more in their knowledge-constructing approach toward a more pluralistic perception of the modern world by shying away from a dogmatic interpretation of faith.

It is difficult to say that any particular book decisively changes the world without the support of any mainstream mechanism(s). However, the rising self-awareness and confidence of “the mediocre”, the amateur as well as artisanal intellectuals and ordinary people, proved to be a strength in the making of early modern culture and opened a new path toward plurality. Although, as Peter Burke reminds us, the early modern process, from the rudimentary assimilation of exotic sources to a publication reaching the market, was like “an assembly-line” [32], on which many verified and unverified components of information were combined. It is rather like the Internet revolution of our time, in which greater convenience of mass communication has led to the downfall of authoritarian thinking and dictatorial regimes, although the circulated information in total is always combined with pioneering thoughts, echoes, copies, transferences, rumors, and errors. Corresponding to this historical movement was the embarrassment of a lack of appropriate language, exemplified in the slippery usage of the derogatory term “idolatry” to describe all of the exotic religious imagery encountered overseas. This type of vocabulary predicament was not unique in Europe; rather, it is common when human civilization is challenged by drastic changes and unpredictable newness. In the late 19th century, Chinese intellectuals had to coin a new term to translate the European concept of “religion”, though this term was semantically closer to nationalistic than monotheistic thinking. Traditional Chinese mainstream culture had been fashioned with an emphasis on absolute surrender to the emperor, so the idea of a one and only true God beyond the political sphere was at that time difficult for most people to grasp in their everyday life and culture. Despite this enormous discrepancy, the expansive dimension of the modern worldview was opened in the West and East through these zigzag courses. In Europe, the involvement of various individuals in settling the idolatry controversy also opened up a new path outside of the ecclesiastical and theological authorities with remarkable achievements in the construction of modern knowledge.

The French historian Pierre Nora coined the term “lieux de mémoire” [33] to describe the diversity of symbolic, visual, textual, and material embodiments of lingering historical memory in contrast with the continuously updated knowledge culled from professional studies of history. With the vast number of antiquarian printed books in the Heidelberg exhibition, we not only obtain an overview of the transformation of the early modern worldview in terms of the European encounter with the exotic religions and religious imagery, but we also enter the sources of “lieux de mémoire” to obtain insight into the intricate shaping of visual memory for
these encounters. Luckily, the digital reproduction of these valuable books by Heidelberg University Library is exquisite, precise, and easily available online. However, what we ultimately extract from these materials is a "problem history" of early modern European conception(s) of non-Christian deities rather than a "total history" of documenting and interpreting them. When visual images began to play a role as communication media for new knowledge and new ideas, they began a new journey toward modernity and toward a new life by overcoming the controversy over idolatry and the wars of iconoclasm. An onlooker gazing at pictorial images would no longer be warned against being trapped by the devil's tricks. With the rise of photography, cinema, YouTube, smart phone apps, the significance of visual images increases. Like the age of Bernard and Picart, our time is shaping new culture with the conveniences of technical innovation. Our time is also an age for not only scholars but also common people to disseminate new knowledge and new ideas, an age for the rise of citizen reporters in addition to professional journalists. Among pioneering thoughts, echoes, copies, transferences, rumors, and errors appearing in all printed texts and images or on websites, a new approach to the construction of the 21st-century knowledge system and the diversity of visual impact will emerge in the near future - a more difficult task than our current studies with a vast but limited amount of paper sources on the precursors and contemporaries of Bernard Picart.

Notes:


[31] Lynn Hunt / Margaret C. Jacob / Wijnand Mijnhardt: The Book that Changed Europe, 235f.


Yih-Fen Hua