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XXV.15 On the propagation of religion

- The Spirit of Law - Book XXV. On laws in their relation with the establishment of religion and its external policy -

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All the peoples of the Orient, with exception of the Mohammedans, believe all religions to be indifferent in themselves. It is only as a change in government that they fear the establishment of another religion. In Japan, where there are several sects, and where the state had an ecclesiastical head for so long, they never quarrel over religion. [1] The same is true of the Siamese. [2] The Kalmouks [3] go farther : for them it is a matter of conscience to suffer all sorts of religions ; in Calcutta [4] it is a state maxim that every religion is good.

But it does not result from all this that a religion imported from a very distant country, one wholly different in climate, laws, morals, and manners, has all the success that its holiness ought to promise. This is especially true in the great despotic empires : at first foreigners are tolerated, because no attention is paid to anything that does not appear to threaten the prince's authority ; they are in extreme ignorance of everything. A European can be welcomed for some knowledge he provides : this is very good for a start. But as soon as he has some success, as soon as some dispute arises, as soon as the persons whose interests may be affected are alerted ; as this state, by its nature, insists on tranquility above all, and as the slightest disturbance can overthrow it, the new religion and those who proclaim it are immediately banned. With disputes breaking out among those who preach, they begin to turn away from a religion about which even those who propose it are not in agreement.

[1] See Kaempfer.

[2] Memoirs of the Count de Forbin.

[3] *Histoire généalogique des Tatares*, part 5.

[4] *Voyage de François Pyrard*, ch. xxvii.