



Zurich, 20 May 2015

**Call for Papers: Presentation or Poster at Workshop “Concepts in Transition”**

Dear Sir or Madam,

From **September 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>**, the URPP Asia and Europe Research Field “Comparative Conceptual Research” is organizing an international workshop on conceptual transitions between different spheres of knowledge and/or different cultures. Experienced scholars from philosophy, religious studies, art history, linguistics, history and cultural studies will present cases of conceptual transition and discuss their findings and methodological approach with us.

We would like to invite PhD-candidates and postdocs with an interest in these topics to give a short oral or poster presentation during the workshop. The workshop shall create an opportunity to discuss the relation between concepts and the disciplines, fields of knowledge or cultures they emerge from. Furthermore, we want to talk about how scholars could or should approach concepts in these different environments and discuss how conceptual change can be grasped theoretically. To sum it up: we want to deepen our understanding on how concepts and their environment affect each other, how conceptual transition actually happens and how it influences concepts and their environment.

There are **three** slots for oral presentations (each about ten minutes long, followed by 15 minutes of joint discussion) and **four to six** slots for poster presentations. Please submit a short outline of your project or presentation (max. **2 pages A4** size) until **30<sup>th</sup> of June** to this mail address:

[thomas.huellein@uzh.ch](mailto:thomas.huellein@uzh.ch)

We will inform the applicants of those presentations that thematically fit into the whole workshop until **July 15<sup>th</sup>**. Please also take note of the workshop description attached to this letter. Submissions taking into account the list of questions (see end of this document) will be preferred.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Thomas Hüllein'.

Thomas Hüllein, M.A.  
Member Organizational Committee



## CONCEPTS IN TRANSITION: MODES AND EFFECTS OF CHANGE

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*URPP Asia and Europe, Research Area 1: Comparative Conceptual Research*  
*Organizers: Christoph Mittmann, Polina Lukicheva, Thomas Hüllein and Wolfgang Behr*  
*with friendly support of Philipp Hetmanczyk*

### Activity Description

Concepts are fundamental for all models of cognition. Theories of concepts are being developed by several academic disciplines, reflecting the plurality of approaches and views on mind, language and philosophy. Focusing upon these developments, a workshop *Concepts of Concept* was organized in 2014 by members of the research field “Comparative Conceptual Research” of the URPP Asia and Europe at the University of Zurich, which discussed how “concepts” are defined in analytic philosophy, history, linguistics and psychology.

Concepts are also means by which research domains can impact each other: changes in domains can occur as a result of a concept transition from one domain to another. For example, the conceptual inputs from cognitive sciences, semiotics and phenomenology into “classical” art history have turned the latter into a much more broadly defined discipline when it comes to studying images *per se*. In recent years, an interdisciplinary understanding of concepts, which focuses on the crossing of boundaries between research domains, has gathered momentum in cultural studies. How concepts move from one domain of knowledge to another and what changes occur both to the concepts and the involved domains as the result of this transition are being investigated intensely with the aim of revealing hitherto unnoticed properties and functions of concepts, but also of contributing to finer-grained models of the structural changes their host domains undergo.

Questions of this type are even more acute for scholars who are involved in cultural or regional studies, since ambiguity may simply arise in the process of comparing language use in various cultural and pragmatic settings. If, for example, the Chinese term *wèi* 位 (customarily translated as “place”) is analyzed by scholars trained in “Western” paradigms, European notions of “space” are involuntarily superimposed on the Chinese term and may interfere with the indigenous epistemic context. The latter problem revolves around the applicability of pre-established European concepts and categorizations of knowledge for other regions of the world.

In view of the increasing importance of comparative studies for a wide area of scientific disciplines, the lack of established methodological tools to trace and analyze conceptual transitions in relation to their social and cultural environments is rather surprising. While a growing body of research in the fields of historical semantics and conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*) addresses such topics as change in meaning of terms and concepts *over time*, focusing on historicity of conceptual change, interdisciplinary inquiries into concept transitions *across domains* largely remain an unresolved issue so far. Even discourse analysis, by definition an interdisciplinary research program that is often applied to analyze transitions and changes in epistemic structures, does not provide a conclusive methodology to analyze the transitions themselves and often resorts to descriptions of past events.

In the interdisciplinary approach to concepts through transitions, the focus shifts away from both the inquiry into the “nature” or ontological status of concepts and the evolution of concepts through time to the following problems: how do concepts change when they move between domains (including changes in semantic content, function, properties of the concepts); how do properties and



functions of a concept differ when it operates in different domains; how do concepts move from one domain of knowledge into another (by which means and modes of transfer: rhetorical strategies, means for settling meanings, etc.); and how do domains change when concepts move into them?

Concept transitions may involve domains of different kinds, traditionally separated by disciplinary divides (e.g. religion vs. the sciences). In this context, a broad definition for the domains is required: specific areas of cultural, symbolic and epistemic activity, such as art, religion, language, science and similar large-scale systems within which concepts emerge. Transitions between domains can also be of different kinds, such as intertextual transitions, transitions between different media or semiotic systems (e.g. text to image, music to image, or vice versa, etc.), or transitions across specific disciplines or branches of knowledge. Intra- and intercultural transitions add complexity to this multi-layered structure.

Whereas a convincing definition that would encompass a variety of uses of “concept” has probably to remain an unresolved issue as it raises more questions than provides insights, a tighter systematization of the variety of actual transformations and changing properties of concepts can be developed. In the proposed workshop *Concepts in Transition* we shall therefore consider different case studies focusing on emergence and transitions “concepts” undergo, which, as a side effect, might also provide clues related to general properties of “concepts”. The main purpose of this workshop is to initiate discussion on possible classifications of concept transition that could help scholars working interdisciplinarily to come to terms with this phenomenon.

### List of Questions

The workshop aims at general conclusions concerning consistent patterns of transitions and how these transitions relate to the epistemic organization of knowledge. Moreover, we hope to discuss how modes of transfer could be categorized. In order to focus on these aspects, it might be helpful to approach the topics in the talks from a perspective shaped by the following set of questions:

#### A. Description of concepts transition:

1. How and by whom is the analyzed concept defined?
2. Which domains or concepts are involved in the transition? Are the concept(s) and domain(s) involved clearly identifiable at all?
3. Is the concept in question defined by belonging (by way of origin, proper definition etc.) to a specific domain, or is it a non-specific, general concept with multiple cultural applications? Can the transition be described as one between a primary domain and one or several secondary domains?
4. What modes, mechanisms and operations were deployed in the transition (e.g. processes of abstraction and concretization in concept formation, metaphors, etc.). Was the transition intended or accidental?
5. What reactions did the transition trigger in both contexts (start and end)?
6. How are the definition, meaning and normative impact changed by this transition (semantic, epistemological and normative shifts)?
7. Can the transition be tied back to individual agents or institutions and their actions?

#### B. How to confront concept transition in scholarly research? How to analyze factors and conditions, under which a certain concept transition is viable?

1. Which existing theoretical models can be applied in order to describe concept transitions?
2. Which transitions are contingent and which are predictable? Are there general principles or predictions for future transfers possible?
3. How are concepts in scientific practices applied to research objects?



4. Obstacles and limitations of the applicability of (scientific) concepts outside of their original domains?
5. How can the difference between “proper” and “improper” use of a concept be analyzed and argumentatively substantiated?