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Asia and Europe  
University of Zurich  
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### Editors

Prof. Dr. David Chiavacci, Prof. Dr. Raji C.  
Steineck, PD Dr. Simone Müller, lic. phil. Roman  
Benz, lic. phil. Nathalie Marseglia

### English Language Editor

Dr. des. Phillip Lasater

### Articles by

Aline von Atzigen, M.A.  
Research and teaching assistant (social and  
cultural anthropology) at the Department of  
Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies,  
University of Zurich  
Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Behr  
Professor of Chinese Studies, University of  
Zurich, and Academic Director of the Doctoral  
Program Asia and Europe  
Roman Benz, lic. phil.  
Academic associate at the URPP Asia and Europe  
Dr. Natalie Böhrer  
Postdoctoral researcher (film studies) at the  
Department of Film Studies, University of Zurich  
Dr. des. Sofia Bollo  
Postdoctoral researcher (East Asian art history),  
former doctoral candidate at the URPP Asia and  
Europe

Dr. des. Ulrich Brandenburg  
Research and teaching assistant (Islamic  
studies) at the Institute of Asian and Oriental  
Studies, University of Zurich  
Laura Castro Royo, M.A.  
Doctoral candidate (art history) at the Institute of  
Art History, University of Zurich  
Prof. Dr. David Chiavacci  
Academic Director of the URPP Asia and Europe /  
Professor of Japanese Studies, University of Zurich  
Dr. Kiu-wai Chu  
Postdoctoral fellow in Chinese arts and culture,  
Australia-China Institute for Arts and Culture,  
Western Sydney University  
Julia Escher, M.A.  
Research and teaching assistant (Chinese  
studies) at the Institute of Asian and Oriental  
Studies, University of Zurich  
Fynn Holm, M.A.  
Research and teaching assistant (Japanese  
studies) at the Institute of Asian and Oriental  
Studies, University of Zurich  
Dr. des. Eliza Isabaeva  
Postdoctoral researcher (social and cultural  
anthropology), former doctoral candidate at the  
URPP Asia and Europe  
Henna Keski-Mäenpää, B.A.  
M.A. student (art history) at the Institute of Art  
History, University of Zurich  
PD Dr. Simone Müller  
Lecturer (Japanology) and executive manager  
URPP Asia and Europe  
Elika Palenzona-Djalili, lic. phil.  
Doctoral candidate (Islamic studies) at the

Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies, University  
of Zurich, and at the URPP Asia and Europe

Prof. Dr. R. Ramakumar  
NABARD Chair Professor and Dean of the School  
of Development Studies at the Tata Institute of  
Social Sciences, Mumbai

Dr. Olga Serbaeva Saraogi  
Postdoctoral researcher (Indian studies) at the  
Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies, University  
of Zurich

Prof. Dr. Raji C. Steineck  
Academic Director of the URPP Asia and Europe  
/ Professor of Japanology, University of Zurich

Prof. Dr. Hans B. Thomsen  
Professor of East Asian Art History, University of  
Zurich

Dr. James Weaver  
Senior teaching and research assistant (Islamic  
studies) at the Institute of Asian and Oriental  
Studies, University of Zurich

Dr. des. Helena Wu  
Research and teaching assistant (Chinese  
studies) at the Institute of Asian and Oriental  
Studies, University of Zurich

### Cover

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Nathalie Marseglia (pp. 3, 41–43), Roman Benz  
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# Editorial

*Dear Readers,*



You hold in your hands the sixth and final issue of the *Asia & Europe Bulletin*. It went to press a few months later than its predecessors. The delay had to do not with problems in content or production, but rather with the fact that the URPP Asia and

Europe terminated its main activities in late August 2017, so we wanted to include all organized events in this final issue.

Founded in 2006, the URPP has reached, according to plan, the end of its allotted twelve years. University Research Priority Programs are an instrument of the University of Zurich to strengthen its research profile by selecting and supporting some of its excellent research fields for a limited period. Provided positive evaluations, a URPP can reach a maximum life cycle of twelve years. That is what the URPP Asia and Europe has achieved. By looking back on these twelve years, we can show impressive results. Our publication record includes about 100 books, 300 articles in scientific journals, and another 300 articles in edited volumes. And of course, even after the end of our URPP, the output of publications that are the fruits of its endeavors will continue. At this point, we should mention the forthcoming edited volume *Asia and Europe – Interconnected: Agents, Concepts, and Things* that includes contributions of many URPP members and, to some extent, documents the URPP. Also in the interest of supporting young scientists, the URPP can point to thirty-two PhD theses and seven habilitations that have already been completed. This number of academic qualification works by young researchers who have benefited from the URPP is set to increase even more so in the coming years. Along these lines, we are especially proud that, among former junior URPP members, eight have already been appointed to professorships all over the world from Basel to Paris to Edmonton.

This last bulletin gives a good insight into the dynamism and diversity of our URPP through its reports on the major activities of 2016 and 2017. Among these activities, we would especially like to mention three events. First, the 2016 URPP annual conference “Human : Non-Human,” which was planned out and realized by Bettina Dennerlein, Angelika Malinar, and Andrea Riemenschneider. Second, in

2017 and with support from many URPP members, Yasmine Berriane, Natalie Böhler, and Simone Müller organized the series “Grenzgänger – Grenzenlos: Asien und Europa,” consisting of documentary and feature movies for the general public in cooperation with the Filmpodium Zurich, where the films were shown. Third, thanks to the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich that acted as host, we had a splendid URPP farewell day with many academic, artistic and culinary events.

We sincerely thank all those who made the URPP Asia and Europe possible. The University of Zurich and its managing body fully trusted and accompanied our scientific endeavors over all of these years and provided the URPP with generous financial and administrative support. Still, without all the foundations and institutions that were likewise willing to support our projects financially, the URPP would not have enjoyed the success that it has. Over the years, we successfully raised more than 11 million Swiss Francs via third-party funding. Our most important external donors were the Gebert Rüf Stiftung and the Humer Foundation for Academic Talent, to whom we are especially grateful for their generous support. Unfortunately, there is not enough space here to thank all the people who contributed in crucial ways to the URPP's success story. Suffice it to say that, without the circle of founders; the academic directors; the various speakers of research fields; the director of the PhD program; the advisory board; the URPP assistant professors; the senior research fellows; the head office and its executive managers; and the postdoc and PhD students, the URPP would simply not have been what it was.

This moment is indeed bittersweet, but there is reason to look optimistically toward the future. Although *c'est la fin, finito, aus und vorbei* for our URPP, it will have a lasting impact on the University of Zurich. A major structural outcome of the URPP was the foundation of the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies, which will eventually guarantee an international reach for Asia-related research at the University of Zurich. The thriving PhD program of the URPP will continue, thanks to Bologna II/III funding and thanks to the funding we were able to secure from *swissuniversities*. The URPP allowed us to build strong cooperation within the University of Zurich, as well as a large international network, which will also be of major import for research and teaching.

*Prof. Dr. David Chiavacci and Prof. Dr. Raji C. Steineck*

# Agrarian Distress in India

*In October and November 2016, R. Ramakumar was a visiting scholar at the URPP Asia and Europe. He held a seminar on rural and agrarian change in India with special attention to different methodological approaches. In an additional talk, he gave an overview of India's agricultural policy and the performance of its agricultural economy, which is also the subject of the following essay.*

R. Ramakumar

When in 1947, India became free from the yoke of colonialism, it had an in-

creasingly lopsided agricultural economy, marked by low, and at times declining, yield of crops, low share of irrigated area, large extent of cultivable land left fallow, deterioration of soil quality and the use of

poor quality seeds and poorly yielding livestock. The reasons for the deteriorating state of agriculture under colonialism were many and complex. Nevertheless, the one overarching reason was the backward and oppressive relations of production in agriculture. Big landlordism was the dominant feature of agrarian relations. All the land systems of British India, though diverse in their features, were united in their outcomes: sub-division and extreme fragmentation of operated land, sub-infeudation of holdings, in-

security of tenures, rack-renting, illegal cesses and usury.

## Indian agriculture after 1947

After independence, the Indian state embarked on a system of national planning for the economy. The necessary condition for a rapid increase in the growth of the agrarian economy was a radical transformation of land relations. However, notwithstanding the emphasis on the land question in the plan documents, agricultural policy after independence never really considered the reform of property rights in land as a means of eliminating structural inequalities in the economy and expanding the home market. Land reforms were a major failure; and the agrarian question remained unresolved. Agriculture was viewed as a "bargain sector" i.e., a sector where output can be increased with very little additional investment.

By the mid-sixties, the possibilities of expanding the cultivated area had been exhausted and agricultural production slowly headed towards a plateau. The food crisis of the 1960s threatened to derail the planning process itself. A significant assumption in the planning process was that of government control in the supply of wage goods. With the wage goods bottleneck building up, an increase in agricultural production was essential to sustain industrial growth rates.

## The green revolution of the 1960s

In response to the fears of inadequate food production, a number of programs for "intensive agricultural development" were introduced. These programs aimed at encouraging the adoption of a "package" of high yielding inputs, combining improved technology, credit, high yielding seeds and assured irrigation. It is this New

Agricultural Strategy (NAS) that is credited for what came to be known as the "green revolution." After the mid-1960s, there was a significant rise in the public expenditure on agricultural research and extension; the technologies of the green revolution were a product of the National Agricultural Research System (NARS).

While the NAS was mainly a technology-led program, it was also supported by four forms of institutional support—price support, credit support, input-subsidy support and marketing support. First, the adoption of the new technologies required price incentives, i.e., higher product prices. The Agricultural Prices Commission (APC) and the Food Corporation of India (FCI) were established in 1965 to advise the government on the level of administered product prices and to assist in procurement. Secondly, the policy of nationalizing commercial banks in 1969 helped to significantly raise the availability of credit for peasants. Bank nationalization helped to mop up the new liquidity in the rural areas, improve the geographical spread and functional reach of public banks, and weaken the hold of usurious moneylenders in rural areas. Thirdly, the subsidy policy of the 1970s covered the pricing of important inputs like fertilizers, pesticides and electricity for irrigation. Prices of major inputs were "controlled" to promote their adoption. Fourthly, the Agricultural Produce and Marketing Committee (APMC) Act and the Essential Commodities Act were passed in States to regulate the marketing of farm produce by minimizing distortions in exchange. Under the APMC Act, a number of regulated markets were set up across the country.

The NAS made a signal contribution towards reducing India's dependence on food imports. The NAS was instrumental in transforming the "ship-to-mouth" predicament of India in the 1960s and, as the agricultural sci-



entist M. S. Swaminathan pointed out, “established the linkage between [national] sovereignty and food self sufficiency.”<sup>1</sup> Yet for all its technological advantages, the outcomes of the NAS were far below potential, especially in the 1970s.

The limitations of NAS have to be understood in terms of the “failure of planners...to see agriculture as a strategic, system transforming sector” that would have required a “focus away from the supply side to the centrality of property relations and mass demand as a propellant for the whole economy.”<sup>2</sup> The implementation of land reform was a crucial factor in determining the extent of technological diffusion; the limits of NAS lay in its circumvention of this strategic choice. Consequently, the benefits of green revolution were distributed unevenly with a “region-wise, crop-wise and class-wise concentration of production.”<sup>3</sup> The NAS focussed on regions well-endowed with irrigation, on just two crops (rice and wheat) and on sections of the peasantry that could mobilize the investment necessary for adopting the new technology.

### The liberalization of the 1990s

As distinct from the earlier periods, agricultural policy in the 1990s took a different turn. The agricultural sector was significantly liberalized and globalized after 1991. India’s economic “reform” was based on an explicit rejection of the need to transform the traditional institutional framework of agriculture. The basic premise of the reform program was that with increased openness of the economy, the barriers to raising agricultural surplus could be overcome by using external trade as an instru-

ment. The need for land reform did not just take a backseat; the effort was to reverse the implementation of land reform altogether.

The critique of the agricultural policy that had been followed up to the 1980s was first put forward by international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, and willingly embraced by the ruling governments. In the new discourse, the concept of terms of trade began to dominate discussions on agricultural policy. It was argued that the earlier policy deliberately skewed the terms of trade against agriculture through protectionist industrial and trade policies and an overvalued exchange rate. As the argument went, once we “get the prices right,” the incentive structure in agriculture would improve, and farmers would respond to higher prices by producing more.

Liberalization of domestic agriculture and agricultural trade was put forward as important steps towards imparting “efficiency” to Indian agriculture. A free trade policy was envisaged not just to “promote farmers’ own investments,” but also “investments by industries producing inputs for agriculture and agro-based industries.” In 1994, India signed the WTO agreement.

According to the new view, terms of trade were biased against agriculture also because the policies of input subsidies and output support prices suppressed domestic prices. Subsidies in agriculture were “fiscally unsustainable...inefficient and costly to farmers.”<sup>4</sup> It was argued that the government should gradually retreat from the functions of procuring food, as “government cannot manage commodity trade in an efficient way.”<sup>5</sup> The large buffer stocks of food should be gradually brought down; as a corol-

lary, food subsidies should not be universally accessible, and need targeting. Instead of public procurement and distribution of food, people could rely on private trade.

The agenda for the liberalization of the agricultural sector also included a number of additional components. First, as part of the larger program of financial liberalization, the policy on agricultural credit underwent significant changes towards deregulation. Banks should function on a commercial basis, and profitability should be their prime concern. Thus, banks were permitted to rationalize their branch network in rural areas. Norms related to the compulsory provision of agricultural credit by banks were considerably diluted. Secondly, it was argued that the existing laws on agricultural marketing discriminated against farmers by not allowing them to interact directly with the big buyers. Contract farming was seen to be beneficial to farmers in their efforts at crop diversification. It was argued that land ceilings have to be raised so that rich peasants and agri-business firms could freely lease in land. The underlying belief was that, if permitted, land leasing could provide economies of scale by attracting potential investors, including corporate players, into agriculture. Thirdly, though the official policy often reaffirmed its commitment to encourage public agricultural research, private sector research was to be promoted in a large number of sectors. To encourage the private sector and meet the commitments of the WTO agreement, an Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) regime was endorsed in agricultural research.

### Impacts of liberalization

The longer period of implementing agricultural liberalization policies in India was also a period of slowdown in agricultural growth rates. Agricultural growth rates in India between 1991–92 and 2014–15 were lower than

1 “For an ‘Evergreen Revolution’”, Interview to Parvathi Menon, *Frontline*, 16 (27), 1999.

2 Rao, J. Mohan (1994), “Agricultural Development under State Planning”, in T.J. Byres (ed.), *The State, Planning and Liberalisation in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p. 133.

3 Prabhat Patnaik (1975), “Current Inflation in India”, *Social Scientist*, 3(6/7), Special Number on Inflationary Crisis, January-February, pp. 22–42 (p. 28).

4 Kirit Parikh (1997), “Overview: Prospects and Retrospect”, in Parikh, Kirit (ed.), *India Development Report 1997*, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Oxford University Press, Mumbai, p. 11.

5 Parikh, *ibid.*, p. 12.

the growth rates recorded for the 1980s. Rate of growth of food grain production, especially rice and wheat, slowed down significantly. The per head food grain availability (the sum of domestic output, net imports and change in stock) fell from about 175 kg in the triennium ending 1992 to 156 kg in the triennium ending 2014. The availability per head of pulses and coarse cereals also fell in the period after 1991–92. In spite of these obvious adverse outcomes, it is required that each argument raised in favour of liberalization and their outcomes be examined more closely.

#### *Reversal of land reform laws*

New economic policies in Indian agriculture were premised on rejecting the need for a basic institutional transformation in rural areas. It is no surprise, then, that one of the most important features of this policy was the rejection, and reversal, of state-led land reform.

The new policy aimed at a shift in India's cropping pattern from less-remunerative food grains to high-value and export-oriented crops. Such a change in cropping pattern was to be achieved by promoting economies of scale in agriculture, allowing free leasing in and leasing out of land, boosting agro-processing and facilitating the development of private post-harvest and marketing infrastructure in rural areas. The new organization of production demanded possession of large tracts of land with private firms, which was constrained by the ceilings on land possession in the land reform laws. Post-1991 policies aimed at removing the ceiling limits by amending these laws, to allow private firms to cultivate unlimited areas of land.

In a country with a terrible track record on land reforms, lifting of land ceilings have encouraged absentee farming by large farmers and corporations. It has also reduced the extent of ceiling-surplus land, while a substan-

tial proportion of rural households is still landless.

#### *The stagnation of public capital formation in agriculture*

Public expenditure on agriculture has a significant impact on agricultural growth. According to scholars, government spending on productivity-enhancing investments, such as rural infrastructure, irrigation and agricultural research, have significantly contributed to growths in agricultural productivity as well as rural poverty reduction. However, public investment in agriculture, as a share of agricultural GDP, began to decline from the early-1980s and continued to decline after the 1990s. Almost all of the increase in total fixed capital investment in the 2000s came from private sources.

#### *The promise of free trade in agriculture*

The argument put forward in support of trade liberalization was that it would improve the prospects of export-led growth in agriculture. This promise has remained unfulfilled. Between 1990–91 and 2014–15, while agricultural exports grew at an annual rate of about 13 per cent, agricultural imports grew at a faster rate of about 21 per cent. Driven by a surge in agricultural imports, the difference between the rupee value of farm exports and imports significantly narrowed after the mid-1990s, when the WTO agreement was signed. Exports and imports in agriculture also displayed significant instability in the period after the mid-1990s.

Consequently, there was a sharp fall in domestic prices of many commodities after the mid-1990s. In the background of greater integration between domestic and international markets, domestic prices of cotton, tea, coffee, spices and many fruits and vegetables fell after 1997–98 following a fall in the corresponding international prices.

The increased alignment of domestic and world prices after trade liberalization also effectively imported the vola-

tility of international prices—formed in highly imperfect and monopolized market environments—into Indian agriculture. On the one hand, price volatility increased the uncertainties in cultivation. On the other hand, price volatility also sent misleading price signals to domestic producers. Misleading price signals encouraged cropping pattern shifts that were largely ecologically unsound and economically unviable in the medium term.

#### *The rise in input costs*

The rationale for the provision of input subsidies has historically been to provide farmers with remunerative as well as stable prices so as to enable them to adopt new technologies and raise yields. Also, subsidies help to compensate for imperfections in the capital market and the risks associated with the adoption of new and high-cost technologies. There is by now wide agreement that input subsidies have significantly aided the process of adoption of new technologies in the post-green revolution period.

The argument in favour of reducing subsidies was based on three reasons: first, subsidies constitute a substantial burden on the finances of the government; secondly, subsidies crowd out public investment by diverting resources; and thirdly, the prices of inputs do not reflect their scarcity value and hence these inputs are prone to overuse resulting in environmental degradation and fall in soil quality.

The Indian government's policy in the 1990s and 2000s was to cut input subsidies. As a result, input prices and costs of production increased sharply. It was the prices of fertilizers and pesticides that rose most sharply. Particularly after 2009, the prices of phosphoric and potassic fertilizers tripled or quadrupled. The rise of input costs, coupled with the fall of output prices, shrank profitability of agriculture in a range of crops.

*Public expenditure on agricultural research*  
Historically, the government has been the leading investor in agricultural research, as it was considered a “public good.” In the developed world, public spending on agricultural research as a share of agricultural GDP ranges between 2 and 3 per cent. For all developing countries put together, public spending on agricultural research as a share of agricultural GDP was 0.6 per cent in the 2000s. In India, the corresponding share stood at 0.56 per cent. In the 1990s and 2000s, private firms have expanded their hold over agricultural research. However, private sector research has never been considered a substitute for public sector research.

#### *Shrinking credit to agriculture*

The period of financial liberalization between the early-1990s and early-2000s was clearly a period of reversing the achievements of bank nationalization in 1969. In the 1990s, there was (a) large-scale closure of commercial bank branches in rural areas; (b) a widening of inter-State inequalities in credit provision, and a fall in the proportion of bank credit directed towards regions where banking was historically underdeveloped; (c) a sharp fall in the growth of credit flow to agriculture; (d) increased sidelining of small and marginal farmers in the supply of agricultural credit; (e) increased exclusion of the disadvantaged and dispossessed sections of the population from the formal financial system and (f) strengthening of the hold of moneylenders on rural debt portfolios.

In sum, a consequence of the squeeze of formal credit in the 1990s was the resurgence, in different degrees across India, of the informal sector of credit, particularly moneylenders. Studies have shown that the expansion of the informal sector of credit sharply raised the costs of credit in agriculture in the 1990s. Beginning from the early-2000s, the supply of agricultural credit assumed a totally dif-

ferent role—of financing new forms of commercial, export-oriented and capital-intensive agriculture, including by corporate houses.

#### **Concluding comments**

Agricultural development in post-independence India is marked by the state’s failure to resolve the agrarian question. This issue involves ending the extreme concentration of land ownership and use, as well as weakening the factors that fostered disincentives in investment and technology adoption and that tied workers to a social system with considerable pre-modern features and compressed purchasing power. While this failure shaped the pattern and nature of agricultural growth in India after 1947, the implementation of economic “reforms” after 1991 introduced new dimensions to the contradictions of the earlier regime.

The green revolution of the 1960s and 1970s helped Indian agriculture overcome a “ship-to-mouth” existence and achieve self-sufficiency in production. This achievement was built on a platform of state support. There was price support, subsidy support, credit support, and marketing support. The interventionist role of the state in the 1970s and 1980s led to the creation of a network of institutional support structures in rural areas. Indeed, given the unreformed agrarian economy with dwindling public investment, the benefits of these support structures were distributed unequally—across crops, classes and regions.

But economic “reform” after 1991 was based on an explicit rejection of the need for an institutional transformation of Indian agriculture. Instead, it was argued that with increased openness, the barriers to raising agricultural surplus could be overcome through free trade. Diversification away from food grains, and towards export-oriented crops, was promoted. Land reform laws were amended in

many States to raise land ceilings and encourage private corporate investment.

Over the longer period of reform between 1992–93 and 2010–11, agricultural growth rates slowed down. In the 1990s and 2000s, there was a weakening of public institutional support to agriculture. The protection offered to agriculture from predatory imports was removed, resulting in falling prices for many commodities. As part of fiscal reforms, the input subsidy system was restructured, due to which input prices and costs of production increased sharply. The growth of public capital formation in agriculture stagnated, as did the growth of public expenditure on research and extension. The expansion of rural credit slowed down in the 1990s, reopening the doors for the informal sector; in the 2000s, public banks increasingly catered to the needs of large farmers and corporate agri-business groups.

In sum, continuity and change mark the period of liberalization in Indian agriculture. On the one hand, many features of the long-run path of agrarian change continue into the contemporary agrarian regime. On the other hand, Washington consensus-inspired policies after 1991 have led to acute adverse impacts on the conditions of life and work in rural India.

#### **R. Ramakumar**

R. Ramakumar is the NABARD Chair Professor and Dean of the School of Development Studies at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. His research has focused on agrarian change in rural India, agricultural credit policies, economic reforms and changes in rural livelihoods, communalism and social movements as well as the national identity project in India. He was also recently appointed as a member of the State Planning Board in the southern Indian State of Kerala.

## What Will Remain?

**At the end of 2017, the URPP Asia and Europe will reach the maximum duration of twelve years that the University of Zurich allotted for its University Research Priority Programs. Former and current academic directors and executive managers look back on the URPP's achievements and answer the question of what will remain of its activities in research and teaching.**

Interview: Roman Benz

*How did the URPP Asia and Europe come into being?*

**Ulrich Rudolph:** To a certain extent, the Swiss Asia Society's junior researchers' meeting, which has been held every three years since 1995, can be seen as a starting point for the URPP. The meeting is aimed primarily at PhD candidates and postdocs and it brings together researchers from all over Switzerland who are working on Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. As the junior researchers' meetings have shown since 1995, there is common ground shared by the participating fields of study, which include not only the regionally oriented scholars on the field of Asian and Oriental studies, but also historians, geographers, ethnologists, etc.

This model of cross-disciplinary discussion was in the minds of those who were involved in the founding of the URPP. When the University of Zurich announced in 2004 that selected fields of study should be strengthened and mutually connected by setting up University Research Priority Programs, a group of six people was quickly formed in order to propose that the Executive Board of the University create a cross-disciplinary research project focused on Asia. Robert H. Gassmann (Chinese studies) and myself (Islamic studies) were from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Christoph Uehlinger (his-

tory of religions and comparative religion) and Konrad Schmid (Hebrew Bible and ancient Judaism) from the Faculty of Theology, Andrea Büchler (private and comparative law) from the Faculty of Law, and Ulrike Müller-Böker (human geography) from the Faculty of Science. Our group thus reflected the diversity of the fields of study, as we already knew it from the junior researchers' meeting of Swiss Asia Society. We were also supported—and this was a very important fact—by the Gebert Rüt Foundation in Basel, which agreed to provide financial support for the project's initial three years.

*What steps followed the commitment of the Executive Board of the University?*

**Andrea Büchler:** At first, it was clear that the future project required an executive manager. We were able to find a very competent person for this office: Inge Ammering, a scholar in Islamic studies. In addition, we wanted to expand the group of professors involved in the project. All professors of Asia- and Middle-East-oriented fields at the university, as well as professors of social and cultural anthropology, art history, political science, and history were invited to participate, as well as professors of law, study of religions, and geography.

*What role did the group of initiators play within the group as a whole?*

**Ulrich Rudolph:** The six members of the core group never claimed a special status for themselves, but simply understood themselves as a founding circle. All of the participating professors involved in the URPP had the same rights from the outset.

**Inge Ammering:** The openness to new members continued. All newly appointed professors with a focus on Asia joined the URPP.

**Christoph Uehlinger:** It is remarkable—this fact was not only strategically conceived, but founded on a common concern—that the six initiators belonged to four different faculties. Our URPP was thus positioned in an unusually broad manner. It had the ambition to initiate research projects through cross-faculty cooperation, projects which can rarely be implemented within faculty structures but require university-wide cooperation.

*Can you remember the beginnings of the URPP?*

**Inge Ammering:** The project officially started on January 1, 2006, and the first meeting of participating professors took place that same month, with over a dozen professors present who were enthusiastic about the project. On the basis of the application documents, they selected the junior researchers with whom the URPP should start its research and teaching activities. Already in February, the first meeting, the so-called "URPP Colloquium," was held to discuss research projects. At that time, only a few PhD candidates and postdocs had taken up their position and they were only a few in comparison with the professors.

**Mareile Flitsch:** Three years after the URPP's founding, I joined the project and was impressed at being accepted as an equal member immediately after my professorial appointment. This was a very special welcome to the University of Zurich, and that's why I feel particularly attached to the colleagues involved in the URPP. I was also impressed by the large number of events that were held to inform an interested public about current topics over the last years. Sometimes, these events were organized on short notice, and they made it possible to invite internationally recognized scholars to Zurich.

**Andrea Riemenschneider:** However, it should not be forgotten that the URPP also meant an additional obligation

for the participating professors, apart from the one associated with their chairs. Fortunately, there was an excellent staff in the administration office of the URPP, which contributed substantially to the project's success.

**David Chiavacci:** Shortly after my professorial appointment to Zurich in 2010, I was invited to participate in the URPP. A newly founded chair is connected with a lot of administrative work, so I was afraid that the URPP could become a burden. But fortunately, I decided to join the URPP, which, thanks to the variety of subjects involved, proved to be a unique opportunity, because my chair for social science of Japan is a mixture of methodological and regional subjects. The URPP broadened my horizon as a researcher and helped me to establish a personal network within the University of Zurich in a short period of time.

*What steps were taken to ensure the first four-year extension of the URPP (2010–2013)?*

**Christoph Uehlinger:** Our URPP has always been administratively assigned to the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Its cross-faculty orientation was soon underlined when a law scholar and a scholar in the study of religions, both from other faculties, were appointed as academic co-directors. The ambition for a real cross-faculty col-

laboration has been dampened over the years by the relatively sharp division between faculties that characterizes the University of Zurich. The university management was hardly prepared for the particular needs of the URPP, especially in the field of cross-faculty cooperation. As a result, subsequent academic directors were all members of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. On the other hand, the institution of a co-directorship was upheld with only one exception.

**Andrea Büchler:** One challenge was the internal structuring of the URPP with regard to the diversity of research interests: Promoting a “flower meadow” with the greatest biodiversity was not viable under the given circumstances, even though it promised maximal stimulation. So we needed a more thorough structure for the growing group. What resulted were the three research fields—“Concepts and Taxonomies,” “Entangled Histories,” and “Norms and Order(s).”

*Have the three research fields proved their worth?*

**Inge Ammering:** At the beginning, the URPP was very manageable, and there was no need for this additional structuring. Yet over the two years that followed, the number of junior researchers tripled, with the group becoming too large and too heterogeneous, so

that the creation of research fields seemed desirable to us.

**Ulrich Rudolph:** Their establishment was particularly helpful for PhD candidates and postdocs. By belonging to one of the three research fields, it became clearer to them what expectations were related to their research and in what context their own projects were located.

**Christoph Uehlinger:** In my opinion, the process, which was partly determined by others, has proved to be only partially successful. I considered it rather artificial that philologists and historians should be divided into two separate research fields only to comply with certain norms of science management. On the other hand, the immediate reference group became clearer again, and it was indeed easier to formulate joint research objectives. The third research field, oriented toward social science, became much more dynamic in the process and increased in overall importance.

**Raji Steineck:** The initial expectation of some people that it would be possible to carry out joint and coordinated research within the single research fields has not been fulfilled. However, there has been continuous discussion on subjects and research problems of common interest, which has proved to be particularly beneficial for junior researchers.

### Academic Directors of the URPP Asia and Europe



**Prof. Dr. Ulrich Rudolph**

Professor of Islamic Studies  
Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies

Director from January 2006 to December 2007



**Prof. Dr. Andrea Büchler**

Professor of Private and Comparative Law  
Institute of Law

Co-Director from January 2008 to July 2010



**Prof. Dr. Christoph Uehlinger**

Professor of History of Religions / Comparative Religion,  
Department of Religious Studies

Co-Director from January 2008 to July 2010

**David Chiavacci:** Once again, one should remember that the URPP as an overarching structure thematically covered two thirds of mankind and their cultural history. For that reason, a division into research fields was unavoidable in my opinion. By orienting itself toward the social sciences, the research field “Norms and Order(s)” was able to have a strong focus on methodological issues in this field of study, which would hardly have been possible within the overall structure. But it was also important that the boundaries between the research fields were permeable.

*Was the application for a second extension of four years (2014–2017) accompanied by further major changes to the URPP?*

**Andrea Riemenschneider:** Since 2012, all junior researchers who were employed with university funds had a contractual obligation to prepare an application for third-party funding in their first year of employment, doing so with their supervisors and submitting it to the Swiss National Science Foundation or another research funding institution. As of 2014, the requirement has been for junior researchers to do so by the first half of the second funding year. This measure enabled the URPP to maintain its engagement in research and in the promotion of junior re-

searchers in the third funding phase (2014–2017) on a nearly unchanged scale—despite degressive funding from the university. Furthermore, it laid the foundation for the promotion of junior researchers based on third-party funding in the medium term. I would like to mention that this strategic decision contributed significantly to meet the sustainability goals that the University of Zurich had formulated for its URPPs. In the course of the application for a second extension of the URPP, measures were also taken to acquire non-university funding for establishing a new professorship.

*Was there a difference between the last four years of the URPP and the years before them?*

**Angelika Malinar:** It was important to keep the commitment of all parties involved on a high level, even when the financial means available to the URPP declined due to the university’s degressive funding. After all, quite a few junior researchers successfully applied for third-party funding, so that the number of PhD candidates and postdocs at the URPP remained on a high level.

**Simone Müller:** Although the division in three research fields was retained during the last funding phase of the URPP, events were increasingly organized jointly by all research fields, for

example the topical lecture series “‘Asia and Europe:’ Actors, Concepts, Narratives” in the fall semester 2015; the URPP’s annual conference “Human : Non-Human – Bodies, Things, and Matter across Asia and Europe” in the fall semester 2016; or the movie series “Grenzgänger – Grenzenlos: Asien und Europa,” jointly organized with the Filmpodium Zurich. An overview of all the different projects worked on in the three research fields will be published in the edited volume *Asia and Europe – Interconnected: Agents, Concepts, and Things*.

*The URPP Asia and Europe is not the only University Research Priority Program at the University of Zurich. How does it differ from the others?*

**Angelika Malinar:** I would like to compare the URPP with other forms of interdisciplinary projects that I knew prior to my professorial appointment in Zurich. They include projects such as Clusters of Excellence, Priority Programmes, and Collaborative Research Centres. I did not know the form of University Research Priority Programs, and I was surprised that the participating professors did not have their own research projects, but rather were concerned with supervising the projects of the PhD candidates and postdocs.

**Wolfgang Behr:** In fact, the URPP Asia and Europe was very focused on the

### Academic Directors of the URPP Asia and Europe



**Prof. Dr. Andrea Riemenschneider**

Professor of Modern Chinese Language and Literature, Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies

Director from August 2010 to December 2012



**Prof. Dr. Angelika Malinar**

Professor of Indian Studies  
Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies

Co-Director from January 2013 to December 2014



**Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Behr**

Professor of Sinology with focus on Traditional China, Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies

Co-Director from January 2013 to December 2014

support and the promotion of junior researchers. This was also due to the generous seed funding granted by the already mentioned Gebert R uf Stiftung, which made it possible to employ numerous junior researchers at the URPP. Later on, the Humer Foundation for Academic Talent made a major financial contribution to support PhD candidates. For a URPP in the field of humanities and social sciences, this excellent financial endowment was exceptional.

**Christoph Uehlinger:** For a URPP, this tight collaboration across faculty boundaries was unusual, as I said before. It has enabled us to establish contacts and forms of cooperation, which have also proved their worth in other contexts, such as the reform of study tracks or the cross-faculty supervision of doctoral theses.

*Has the URPP developed in a way that the founders intended?*

**Ulrich Rudolph:** The starting point was the conviction that it is definitely worthwhile to study exchange processes in a comparative manner, as well as from a historical perspective, by using methods stemming from social science and the humanities. We deliberately formulated open-ended research questions to avoid limiting our horizon. Thanks to this openness, I believe, the URPP enabled a great

learning process for all people involved, for PhD candidates and postdocs, but also for the participating professors. In my opinion, they learned to answer questions in a more reflective and multipolar way—and I would dare to say that one can recognize whether a person has ever had the chance, or been required, to work in an interdisciplinary context.

**Inge Ammering:** When I remember the first research colloquia, the discussions were very controversial, based on perspectives stemming from different academic disciplines. Over time, discussions became calmer after getting to know each other's disciplinary positions. In fact, there was a process of broadening horizons and getting to know different perspectives. It was a process of looking for a new language, a language that transcended the disciplinary boundaries.

**Wolfgang Behr:** The enhanced communication skills are always evident at the junior researchers' meetings of Swiss Asia Society. When our PhD candidates and postdocs present their papers, it becomes clear that they have already come into contact with many methods and theories beyond their own subject's boundaries, and that they have no difficulty in speaking with scholars in Islamic studies, Indian studies, or Japanese studies, with classical philologists or representa-

tives of other subjects, while members of other universities sometimes find it difficult to speak in such situations. Thanks to the interdisciplinary structure of the URPP, they have learned to adapt to other scientific cultures.

*Were there disappointments about the development of the URPP?*

**Ulrich Rudolph:** Disappointment is too strong a word, I think. The URPP has indeed shown me the limits of joint analytical efforts, but I do not consider this to be a disappointment, but rather the result of a learning process. In addition, there is the insight into how important one's own discipline remains despite all interdisciplinary cooperation.

**Christoph Uehlinger:** Reaching a certain size, every association that promises access to third-party funds consists of prime movers and freeloaders alike. The involvement of the participating professors certainly varied, but the strong commitment of our junior researchers more than compensated for this.

**Raji Steineck:** I think that the URPP would have had the opportunity to raise the quality of academic discussion in selected areas to a new level by establishing systematic joint research efforts across the participating disciplines. This did not end up happening.

### Academic Directors of the URPP Asia and Europe



**Prof. Dr. Mareile Flitsch**

Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology  
Department of Social Anthropology and  
Cultural Studies  
Co-Director from January 2015 to April 2016



**Prof. Dr. David Chiavacci**

Full Professor of Social Science of Japan  
Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies

Co-Director from January 2015 to December 2017



**Prof. Dr. Raji C. Steineck**

Professor of Japanology  
Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies

Co-Director from May 2016 to December 2017

**Simone Müller:** Despite the advantages of the URPP's interdisciplinary structure, the limits to interdisciplinary research cooperation became visible. Some of the fields of study involved in the URPP have very different methodological and regional orientations, which has sometimes set limits to communication. Nevertheless, the advantages of the interdisciplinary cooperation have far outweighed their disadvantages.

**Andrea Riemenschnitter:** As Christoph Uehlinger already mentioned, the URPP Asia and Europe also had to contend with structural problems arising from its transdisciplinary and cross-faculty orientation. For structural reasons, the doctoral program was based at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Since there are no established models for cross-faculty structures at the University of Zurich, improvisational skills were sometimes needed to find a way to give credit to PhD candidates from other faculties for their academic achievements made in the context of the doctoral program.

**Simone Müller:** It would be desirable to have a university-wide, standardized model to set up cross-faculty institutions, which would regulate the recognition of the graduates' academic achievements as well as their assignment to institutes and faculties—a

controversial point between institutions because of the importance of having the greatest "head count" possible.

*After 12 years, the URPP will come to an end. Wouldn't it be better to maintain the structures that have been built up through so much effort?*

**Andrea Riemenschnitter:** An achievement that we want to maintain is the international visibility of the Asia-related research done at the University of Zurich. We consider both the doctoral program and the continuity of our integrated media communication, such as the annual bulletin and our website, as good possibilities for signaling intellectual alertness, commitment and the ability to keep pace with the trends in our fields of study. The same also applies to several interdisciplinary cooperation projects among colleagues that are currently underway and have evolved from our activities at the URPP Asia and Europe.

**Christoph Uehlinger:** Most professors are also involved in other cooperations and projects and will now be able to devote more time and intensity to them.

**Raji Steineck:** The experience at the URPP has shown that research cooperation requires both common thematic interests and the possibility of

systematically coordinating methods and theories with one another. In the end, the context of the URPP was too large for this to happen. However, the URPP made cooperation possible on a smaller scale that will continue to exist and develop.

*What has the URPP achieved in the long term?*

**Ulrich Rudolph:** The URPP has certainly contributed to the fact that the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences considers Asia as one of its strategic priorities. That has simplified the establishment of the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies in 2013, which brought together the disciplines of Indian studies, Islamic studies, Japanese studies, Chinese studies, and gender studies. The initiative was taken by the disciplines, but our proposal was well received by the faculty, since there was already a well-functioning collaboration between these disciplines at the URPP Asia and Europe.

**Angelika Malinar:** In my opinion, the tried and tested collaboration also made it easier for the professors to take part in the new institute. The URPP had shown the existing levels of common understanding and exchange opportunities, as well as the limits in cooperation.

**Simone Müller:** The URPP created a doctoral program in 2009, which will be continued under the auspices of the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies starting in the 2017 fall semester. The interdisciplinary and cross-faculty structure of the doctoral program will be maintained, including the participation of the professors who have been involved in the URPP so far, and who will continue to cooperate with each other beyond the faculty boundaries.

**Mareile Flitsch:** Right from the beginning, methodological disciplines such as social and cultural anthropology have been part of the URPP Asia and Europe. Such close connections to

### Executive Managers of the URPP Asia and Europe



**Dr. Inge Ammering**

Islamic Studies

Executive Manager from January 2006 to December 2013



**PD Dr. Simone Müller**

Japanese Studies

Executive Manager from January 2014 to August 2017

Asian studies were and still are a blessing for the methodological disciplines. Thanks to the URPP, these connections are now well established for the future. For students and PhD candidates in methodological disciplines, they impose high standards in terms of language skills and intimate knowledge of the regions. At the same time, these close connections also mean for students and PhD candidates in the field of Asian studies that they are continuously working on methodological-theoretical questions. To hark back to the URPP Asia and Europe, I was impressed by the fact that great emphasis was placed on linguistic competence when selecting junior researchers, even in awarding funding to PhD candidates of methodological disciplines. This seems important to me, because we work so closely with colleagues from all over Asia that a high level of language competence should no longer be negotiable even for anthropologists. Fortunately, the URPP was relentless in this point. Accordingly, the level of discussion was on a high level—but so were the demands. I sincerely hope that this orientation can now be maintained thanks to the continuation of the Doctoral Program Asia and Europe.

**David Chiavacci:** Apart from all the achievements in research, the successfully acquired third-party funding, and the countless new ideas and impulses that all members got, it must be re-emphasized that the URPP Asia and Europe was a means of promoting junior researchers par excellence. Former junior members of the URPP are now holding professorial chairs in Basel, Hamburg, Paris, or Edmonton. And we can be very confident that the number of former URPP's junior researchers appointed to chairs will continue to rise in the future. Like no other institution, the URPP brought excellent junior researchers from all over the world to Zurich in order to send them back into the world from Zurich.

## Arab Feminism

**The international workshop “Feminism and Theory in the Arab World” (March 18–19, 2016) aimed at strengthening the cooperation and exchange not only between gender scholars in Switzerland and their counterparts in the Arabic-speaking countries, but also between Arab researchers themselves. The six speakers presented research on five Arabic-speaking countries in North Africa and the Middle East, while extended panel discussions on both days of the workshop brought the speakers into dialogue with each other and with researchers from Switzerland. The workshop was jointly organized by the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies, the URPP Asia and Europe, and the Swiss Society for Gender Studies.**

Ulrich Brandenburg

The first day of the workshop opened with welcoming, introductory remarks by the head of the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies (IAOS) Angelika Malinar, as well as the workshop's organizers, Bettina Dennerlein and Yasmine Berriane. Malinar stressed how interplay between the global entanglements of feminist concerns and their local contexts was vitally important to feminist scholars and activists. Dennerlein and Berriane highlighted that it was impossible to separate feminist theory from political feminism. Instead, the workshop intended to examine the relevance of theory in a climate of political upheaval in the Arab world and, by the use of theory, go beyond the ideological fault lines in the field.

As the workshop's first speaker, Marnia Lazreg (City University of New York) introduced her concept of the “median space” for Arab feminism, which she laid out with reference to the situation of women in Algeria. The median space in the conception of Lazreg would mark the convergence of femi-

nist theory and the actual empowerment of Arab women. Lazreg's concern was especially how to reclaim the value of freedom for Arab feminists against a form of cultural relativism which was used to deny Arab women equality with women in Western countries. Sketching the unequal relationship between feminist movements in the West and in the Middle East, she described the emergence of Arab feminism as a derivative discourse, serving first as a projection for Western feminists' universalist claims and later being relegated into the realm of cultural difference. The remedy would be for Arab feminists to improve on Western gender theory by adapting it to their local concerns.

### **Feminism between the Arab World and Switzerland**

The next speaker was Fatima Sadiqi (University of Fez), who also taught as a visiting researcher at the IAOS in the 2016 fall semester. Sadiqi described the situation of feminism in Morocco between the two extremes of Westernist secularism and resurgent Islamism. She envisaged feminist concerns as having to occupy a center position, bridging the antagonism and contributing to the creation of an egalitarian society in Morocco. The third speaker was Amel Grami (Manouba University), who approached feminist concerns from another direction and addressed the phenomenon of male feminism in Tunisia. She detected two main trends in male support for the feminist movement: men who see their support for the women's movement as part of modernism and progressivism and others who detect a chance of achieving social justice and even redefining traditional masculinity. As the first day's final speaker, Zeina Zaatari (UC Davis) addressed feminism in Lebanon, identifying intersectionality as being at the heart of the most recent struggle for women's rights. In states preoccupied with the “war on terror,”

spaces for women are curtailed and citizenship rights have become a daily concern. What is necessary, according to Zaatari, is thus mutual awareness and cooperation between different civil society actors against various forms of discrimination.

The first day of the workshop concluded with a roundtable on the topic of "Women's and Gender Studies in Arab and Swiss Universities." It was moderated by Bettina Dennerlein, with the participation of Hoda Elsadda (Cairo University), Amel Grami, Fatima Sadiqi, Marylène Lieber (University of Geneva), and Regina Wecker (University of Basel). The discussion revolved around the term and concept of gender and the current situation of academic feminism. The participants laid out interesting details about their career paths and personal motivations to do gender studies, as well as the trajectory of gender studies at the participants' respective universities. What became clear during the discussion are the enormous achievements that these pioneers of Gender Studies have accomplished during the last twenty to thirty years, making Gender Studies from a fringe concern into an established, though not uncontested, field of research and teaching. At the same time it was astonishing to see the commonalities and parallels between the different Arab countries and Switzerland, and that it is not necessarily Switzerland as

part of the so-called West which is at the forefront of progress. Instead, the interest in Gender Studies was in both cases triggered especially by developments in Anglo-Saxon academia, as can also be seen by the difficulties of rendering the term "gender" not only into Arabic but also into German. The discussions gave thus renewed cause to question the established boundaries between a "progressive," "pro-feminist" West and a "traditional" and "backward" Arab world.

#### Universalism in women's rights

On the second day of the workshop, Hoda Elsadda spoke about post-revolutionary Egypt, discussing the drawing process for the constitution of 2014. After the Islamist-inspired constitution of 2012 had taken steps to undermine women's rights, the constitution of 2014 reinstated the principle of equality between men and women. One important lever to achieve this was the open discussion about the issue of sexual harassment in Egypt since 2013 and the ensuing concerns for the international image of Egypt. This served as an example of how rights activists could employ international norms and the language of women's rights in local power struggles, disproving the claims of cultural relativists.

The last speaker was Raja Rhouni (University of El Jadida), who talked about the work of the Moroccan femi-

nist Fatema Mernissi and her impact on feminist discourse. Mernissi strove for the liberation of Moroccan women as an indigenous project, demystifying the Orientalist idea of the seclusion of women in Muslim majority societies. Women's rights in Mernissi's writings were shown not to be a problem for Islam itself but only for the male Muslim elite. Mernissi also established the concept of Islamic feminism by reappropriating Islam for women's rights and actively engaging in a struggle with the Islamist challenge about the meaning of Islam.

The workshop ended with a final discussion about the workshop's results, which was initiated by the discussants Nadia Al-Baghdadi (Central European University) and Katrin Meyer (University of Basel). Points of discussion concerned especially the notion of universalism in women's rights and the relationship between feminist theory and the concrete challenges of local contexts. A question which was unfortunately only lightly touched upon concerned the questionable notion of the "Arab World." One wonders about the usefulness of this Arab framework in view of the following points: 1) several papers preferred to describe the region not as Arab, but as a distinctly Muslim MENA; 2) the Arabian Peninsula was largely left out of the picture, with frequent reference instead to developments in Iran; and 3) a noticeable gap existed between Arab scholarship in Arabic and in English or French.

Nonetheless, the benefits of this workshop about the Arab world are obvious in having brought together eminent scholars from different Arab countries, who have not been directly in debate with each other even though they share similar concerns. It was also a reminder that feminist concerns should not be overshadowed by culturalist visions, and that frequent talk about the "West" and the "non-West" can never be left unquestioned.



Public roundtable discussion on "Women's and Gender Studies in Arab and Swiss Universities," March 18, 2016

# Early Classifications

**Organized by the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies – Islamic Studies, the URPP Asia and Europe, and the Università degli Studi di Milano, the conference “Putting the House of Wisdom in Order: The Fourth Islamic Century and the Impulse to Classify, Arrange and Inventory” (February 19–20, 2016) brought together several researchers on the Early Islamic period at the University of Zurich.**

James Weaver

The fourth Islamic century (roughly the tenth century CE) witnessed a proliferation of texts that aimed in one way or another to codify and render accessible the scientific and literary production of the preceding Islamic centuries and of the pre-Islamic cultures whose intellectual heritage had entered the purview of Arabic scholarly tradition. In an age that combined consolidation with renewed scientific ingenuity, many authors aimed at comprehensiveness in compiling, arranging, editing and commenting upon the products of discrete, well recognised domains of scholarly endeavour. Others were involved in a more novel project of surveying the whole sweep of human knowledge, mapping the topology of its distinct parts, and describing their contents. This effort ranged in manifestation from the more pragmatically inclined composition of inventories and categorisations of books and the authors who had composed them, through to theoretical attempts to classify knowledge on a fundamental level, delineating its forms and structures and defining the relationship between them. Somewhere between the two lies a cluster of works, often referred to as ‘encyclopaedic’ and emanating largely from the cadre of state bureaucrats, that both lay out taxonomies of the sciences and present summaries of their contents, providing a sort of ‘state-of-the-art’ of a

wide range of disciplines of knowledge. Reflection on such matters was not entirely new to Arabic-Islamic scholarship in the fourth century. But this period’s concentrated increase in the number of works, as well as the invention of new kinds of works dealing with the classification of knowledge or

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**Technology-change in the form of the ever-greater availability of paper had led to an explosion in book production generally, that began much earlier but gathered speed from the late third century.**

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the arrangement of material according to discipline, is a readily observable intellectual-historical phenomenon worthy of scholarly attention.

### **An unanswered set of key questions**

So far, this drive towards classification and arrangement has been approached in a largely piecemeal fashion, through studies on individual works (or, more often, particular aspects of works), and in a small number of articles that provide summary overviews of fairly divergent corpora of texts. These have thrown up, but mostly left unanswered, a set of key questions concerning whether concepts such as ‘encyclopaedia’, ‘humanism’ and ‘renaissance’ are at all helpful in understanding the fourth century phenomenon; whether there exist other genres of texts that should be considered relevant (e.g. mirrors for princes, secretarial manuals, literary anthologies); whether they should be linked with particular courtly environments or patrons; how the practical requirements for the composition of such works (well-stocked libraries, awareness of and access to

teachers in a wide variety of disciplines etc.) would have been met; and what the relationship of these texts might be to earlier forms of literature, be they Arabic, Greek and Persian models, that treat the organization of knowledge in some fashion or another.

### **Current state of research**

Organized by Ulrich Rudolph (University of Zurich), Letizia Osti (Università degli Studi di Milano), and James Weaver (University of Zurich), this workshop (the first of a two-part series, the second of which was held in Milan in May 2017), built upon that previous work, attempting to encourage (i) a more chronologically focused effort to understand the specifics of the new drive to classify and arrange that we see in the fourth century, and (ii) a more comprehensive approach that does not take as its starting point the identification of a genre of texts that can be labelled ‘encyclopaedias’, but seeks to understand the phenomenon of classification and arrangement of knowledge from a variety of perspectives, without excluding *a priori* any kind of text that devotes space to these topics. A group of international experts on Middle Eastern intellectual history and literature (Lale Behzadi, University of Bamberg; Maaïke van Berkel, Radboud University Nijmegen; Hinrich Biesterfeldt, Ruhr Universität Bochum; Godefroid de Callataÿ, Université Catholique de Louvaine; Regula Forster, Free University of Berlin; Antonella Gherseti, Università Ca’Foscari Venezia; Konrad Hirschler, Hugh Kennedy, both SOAS London; Sarah Savant, AKU London; Johannes Thomann, University of Zurich; and James Weaver came together to better establish the current state of research, present new findings for discussion, to elaborate on the conceptual models that have underwritten our approach so far, and to identify the most pressing focus-points for future research. They were joined by two experts in the fields of Sinology (Alessan-

dra Lavagnino, Università degli studi di Milano) and Early Modern European History (Peter Burke, University of Cambridge), who gave *regards obliques*, providing comparative insight into similar phenomena in other periods and places.

### Chronology and completeness

The workshop provided for a fruitful meeting, and various theses and avenues for potential further research were suggested. These can be summarized under the following four points:

i) The fourth century witnessed the increasingly rapid dissolution of the 'Abbāsid caliphate. The new preoccupation with classifying and summarising previous knowledge was presented sometimes as a project to conserve something that was in danger of being lost, and sometimes as a product of a growing intellectual efflorescence in the former provinces as more sources of patronage became available to scholars from wealthy, local ruling dynasties.

ii) Technology-change in the form of the ever-greater availability of paper had led to an explosion in book production generally, that began much earlier but gathered speed from the late third century. To some extent the 'classification and arrangement' phenomenon seems to have been a response to an ever-larger literary environment that was increasingly difficult to manage and understand.

iii) The phenomenon might be bound up with the 'coming of age' of so many disciplines of Arabic-Islamic scholarship and the increasing professionalization of their practitioners, reacting to and bolstering a growing disciplinary self-consciousness even in fields that already had well established identities.

iv) The classificatory act is often normative in intention, but in practice often reflects the classifiers' personal experiences of the institutional relationships between certain disciplines and their practitioners in the fourth century.

## Encounters with the Terrible

**The first Zurich International Conference on Indian Literature and Philosophy (ZICILP) took place on February 19–20, 2016 at University of Zurich as a collaboration of the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies – Indian Studies and the URPP Asia and Europe. Organized by Angelika Malinar and Olga Serbaeva, it had the title "Transgression and Encounters with the Terrible in Buddhist and Śaiva Tantras."**

*Olga Serbaeva Saraogi*

The conference had the following aims: 1. to discover what subjects are related to horror and transgression in Buddhist and the Śaiva tantras; 2. to find out how they were interpreted from within the traditions as well as from outside; and finally, 3. to explore different levels at which Buddhist and Śaiva tantras are interconnected. The conference consisted of two independent parts. On the first day, the presentations were held, whereas on the second day, the workshop on the technicalities of the edition of the tantric texts took place. This conference attracted a number of world-famous specialists in Buddhist and Śaiva tantras, from all over the world.

### Transgressing the split between Śaivism and Buddhism

The keynote speaker, Harunaga Isaacson (University of Hamburg), presented a paper on aspects of interaction between Śaiva and Buddhist tantric traditions, outlining the essential similarity in the general ritual structures that include *mantras*, *mudrās*, fire-offerings and *maṇḍala*. Isaacson also addressed the most transgressive ritual practices, namely, the practice of selling human flesh (*mahāmāṅṣavikraya*), or making the dead body raise for various magical needs (*vetālasādhana*). This is, however, a transgression of the rules of generally accepted human behaviour, and especially of the Vedic injunctions concern-

ing purity. Another aspect, evoked by Isaacson, is the transgression of, so to say, one's own religious identity by a Buddhist practitioner, who pretends to be a Śaiva in order to obtain a girl for sexual practice. The fascinating passage presented by Isaacson belongs to the Buddhist text called the *Guhyasiddhi*.

Péter-Dániel Szántó (Oxford University), presented the recently (re-) discovered tantric manuscripts of the Cakrasamvara corpus with some of their most important parallels, including the *Sarvabuddhasamāyogadākinījālasamvara*, the Buddhist text which is probably the closest to the root text of the *yoginī*-related tantras on both Buddhist and Śaiva sides. It is possible that this manuscript provides the ancient variants of transgressive *yoginī*-related practices reflected in later texts. The importance of this discovery can hardly be overestimated, and the edition of the text is eagerly awaited.

### The idea and symbolism of horror

David Gray (Santa Clara University) presented a paper on the idea of horror in the Buddhist tantras, with the cremation ground being the most prominent symbol of it. It is the playground of the terrifying witches (i.e. *dākinīs*), and Gray discussed the encounters with them as described in the *belles-lettres*, tantras, and hagiographical literature. One of the most interesting aspects brought in by Gray is the opposition and interplay of fear and laughter in the practice. The interpretation of the horror passages in the tantric literature is complicated by the fact that there is almost always a possibility of the internal, esoteric interpretation, bringing all those terrifying encounters with the *dākinīs* from outside within the subtle body of the practitioner.

Tsunehiko Sugiki (Kaichi International University) centered his presen-

tation mainly on the technical aspects of *mantras* and *maṇḍalas* in the Cakrasamvara tradition. It is typical for the tantric deities to trample upon the deities of the opponent current, and in the description on the Heruka *maṇḍala* in its form restored by Sugiki, we effectively find Heruka standing upon Bhairava and Kālarātrī, as clearly representing the existing at the same time Śaiva tantric traditions. The *maṇḍala* itself is filled with the terrifying armed deities, holding human skulls, and skins of non-Buddhist gods. However, some of those deities are given a more esoteric interpretation: They impersonate the qualities of Buddhist teaching, regardless of their iconographic aspects.

Jung-Lan Bang (Hamburg University) presented her research on the question of death in Śaiva and Buddhist tantras. Bang demonstrated a well-built table of the time as running

internally in the practitioner, in her main source text of the *Tantrasadbhāvatantra*. She listed and compared the signs of approaching death that, on the one hand, are the physical changes on the body and, on the other hand, are subtle signs, such as *bindus* or “shadow” that are only perceivable in specially provoked states of consciousness. The main aspect of transgression here lies in the fact that in the tantric texts the procedure of conquering death is literally called “cheating death.” The ways to cheat time and thus death include *sānti-* or pacifying rituals, addressing the deities of long life or related to “nectar” (Amṛteśvara, etc.). As one, rather definite option, a yogic suicide (*utkrānti*) is prescribed.

#### Kinds and functions of *yoginīs*

Somdev Vasudeva (Kyoto University) selected as his subject the disease provoking *yoginīs* in the early Śaiva tan-

tras, with particular attention to the *Kulasāra*. The sequence of these goddesses, namely, *vāmeśvarī*, *khecari*, *gocarī*, *dikcarī* and *bhūcarī*, has been traced by Vasudeva in a variety of texts, from the classification of *ketus* in the *Atharvavedaparīśiṣṭa*, to the texts of the Krama. Two aspects of transgression are evoked: 1. the destructive actions of the *yoginīs* provoking disease or even the death of a person unrelated to the tantras; and 2. the transgressions done by the tantric practitioners which specifically punished by the attacks of *yoginīs*. Besides these two, the *Kulasāra* makes out of the *yoginīs* precisely that threshold overstepping of which constitutes transgression.

Judit Törzsök (University of Lille) also worked on the varieties of *yoginīs*. In her paper she sought to define who the *sākinīs* are, concluding that they are the most sinister kind of *yoginīs*.



Kailash Raj, Goddess Kali with King Vikramaditya prostrating at her feet

She tentatively called them “bad witches” versus *yoginīs*, who are “good witches.” Törzsök notes their particular importance in the *haṭhamelaka*. In opposition to *yoginīs* of the higher orders, the *śakinīs* are considered to be impure and terrifying. Törzsök argued that the *ḍākinīs*, *śākinīs*, and other words of similar formation are identical, based on the evidence that it was forbidden for the initiated to pronounce some words and syllables.

#### External and internal interpretations

Olga Serbaeva (University of Zurich) talked about one of the most emblematic tantric transgressions, namely, ritualised human sacrifice. Among numerous passages prescribing it, there is a set that stands apart, and these passages are all related to the concept of the “seven-times-reborn” victim (*saptajanmapaśu*), who is recognized with the help of the physical and visionary (*dhyāna*) signs, and killed at the behest and to the great joy of the *yoginīs*. The flesh of the seven-times-born is the most powerful magical substance in both śaiva (*Tantrasādhava*, *Yoginīsaṃcāraprakaraṇa*) and Buddhist (*Abhidhānottara*) tantric texts, and it is either offered to fire or consumed. Starting with a presupposition that for the initiated any non-initiated human is potentially a *paśu*, i.e. victim, Serbaeva argued that in case of seven-times-born, this is completely subverted to become a means of rectifying the transgression made by the initiated themselves, such as revealing *mantras* to the non-initiated, or abandoning the practice. That is, the victim in question is not some person duped and killed, but a potentially divine being, a (former) tantric practitioner himself, who needs to undergo multiple rebirths to expiate his original transgression.

Shaman Hatley (University of Massachusetts) spoke about an object that became, like a human skull-bowl, the

symbol of recognition of extreme tantric traditions on both Śaiva and Buddhist sides. It is called *khaṭvāṅga*, and is depicted as a stick with one or more human heads on it. It is carried by tantric deities, but it has many layers of interpretation other than the physical. Hatley evoked the fact that it is prob-

**The signs of approaching death that, on the one hand, are the physical changes on the body and, on the other hand, are subtle signs, such as *bindus* or “shadow” that are only perceivable in specially provoked states of consciousness.**

ably more often visualized (*dhārayet*) than physically carried around, and that it can be interpreted, like all other arms the deities hold, as a *mudrā* or hand-gesture.

#### Intergration of transgression

Yonghyun Lee (Sungkyunkwan University) presented a paper on the significance of the Kālacakraṃḍala for Abhayākara Gupta’s Vajrāvalī System. In this presentation, Lee principally addressed the following aspects related to transgression: 1. the problem of the incorporation of foreign, non-Buddhist elements within Buddhist tantric tradition; and 2. the question of renovation of the Vajrayāna with the introduction of the Kālacakra doctrine, which can be seen as transgression in relation to all what precedes it. Lee demonstrates how the new elements, brought in by the *Kālacakratānta*, were interpreted as “skilful means,” one of the purposes of their inclusion would be to attract the heretics to the Buddhist doctrine. Lee’s work is a very good example of how an interpretation by a single person, namely Abhayākara Gupta, of the heterogeneous elements can largely reshape a whole tradition.

#### Transgressing borders

Andrea Acri’s (Nalanda University and ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute) presentation went beyond the conference’s pre-defined Indian borders. He discussed the adaptation of the Bhairava cult in South-East Asia, namely in the Javano-Balinese world. Translated into a variety of local contexts, the figure of Bhairava is, on the one hand, barely recognizable, and, on the other hand, still appears to preserve its sinister and transgressive original characteristics.

Elisa Ganser (University of Zurich) presented a paper on how dramatic performance domesticated the Tantric ritual according to medieval dramaturgical sources. Like David Gray, she raised the question of the interconnection between the transgressive and the humorous, but in non-ritual texts. The parody of the transgressive, of performing it while not being the insider of the tradition in question, appears to be a very important question for understanding medieval Indian dramas, which Ganser addressed through Sanskrit and Prakrit sources.

The panel presentations were followed by a general discussion outlining the multiple modalities of the terrible and the transgressive in the variety of medieval Indian sources.

#### Abhidhānottara workshop

The workshop that followed the discussion was rooted in the project of editing and translating the *Abhidhānottaratantra* in the frame of “84000.co,” which united some of the conference participants as a team. It was dedicated to the technical aspects of this critical edition of the Sanskrit tantric texts. In that context, Olga Serbaeva presented a paper on parallel passages between the *Abhidhānottara* and the Śaiva tantras, and David Gray and Harunaga Isaacson demonstrated how to finalize the edition taking the first chapter of the *Abhidhānottara* as an example. A volume of the conference proceedings is now in preparation.

# Rediscovered Japanese Stencils

In cooperation with the URPP Asia and Europe, the Institute of Art History's Section for East Asian Art (KGOA) planned a major international symposium, "Katagami in the West" (March 18–20, 2016), on the Japanese textile stencil, or *katagami*. Organized by Hans Bjarne Thomsen and Natasha Fischer-Vaidya, this event marked the first international symposium on the subject anywhere in the West and brought together over thirty major scholars in the field, including a number from Japan. The symposium was held over the course of three days, with two full days of presentations at the University of Zurich and a third day of excursions to two major Swiss centers of *katagami* collections: St Gallen and Aarau.

Hans Bjarne Thomsen

Japanese woodblock prints have rightly been considered one of the prime influences of Western art during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Prints such as Hokusai's *Great Wave* have been endlessly discussed as one of the sources of Western modern art movements, such as Impressionism. Upon reading the popular books and academic scholarship on artists of the period such as Van Gogh, one is likely to read extensively about the influence of Japanese art through its woodblock prints.

There was, however, another important Japanese source of inspiration during this time. This was the medium of the Japanese fabric stencil *katagami*, which arrived in the West in strikingly large numbers, reaching into the hundreds of thousands. These objects came to dominate the storage areas of museums and collectors in terms of sheer numbers and were eagerly studied in the classrooms of schools of applied arts. In time, they became integral parts of educating art and design students and noted artists such as Gustav Klimt

received a number of designs from Japanese stencils. In time, movements such as Japonisme and Jugendstil came to owe significant debts to textile designs imbedded into the *katagami*.

Importantly, the stencils were seen in the country of origin as mere tools for the creation of textiles, but when exported to the West, they were seen as works of art and sources of design. Many were framed and exhibited in homes and legends were created about them, such as the tall tale that the hair of geisha was used in the creation of the stencils. Western textile producers were, in fact, unable to use the *katagami* to reproduce Japanese textile production and the *katagami* kept their role as key sources of Japanese design.

## A surprising neglect

The Zurich symposium aimed to study the neglected phenomenon of the *katagami* and their reception by artists and the public. It also aimed to understand the reasons for their neglect, in spite of the great influence and popularity it enjoyed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, a neglect that is particularly surprising in terms of their great numbers in Western collections. Only now, scholars are becoming aware of the objects, through exhibitions and discoveries such as the recent exhibition in Dresden, *Logical Rain*, that highlighted a long-lost and forgotten collection of over 15,000 sheets.

In Switzerland, too, the stencils are present in many museums across the country, including but not limited to 500 sheets in St Gallen; 600 in Basel; 1500 in Bern; 10,000 in Aarau. New collections are being discovered on a regular basis. In fact, almost no Western museum, especially those of arts and crafts, is without at least a few of the *katagami* sheets, including the Ethnographic Museum at the University

of Zurich. There are especially numerous examples in local textile centers such as Lyon and Mulhouse.

## Increasing research interest

The *katagami* have been neglected for almost a century, and there is a clear need for a comprehensive survey and understanding of these pieces, not least in terms of their collection histories and their roles in Western art education and design. The symposium marked the first international conference on the *katagami* in the west and marked the beginning of a wave of new research on the topic in bringing resources, research methods, and

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**The *katagami* have been neglected for almost a century, and there is a clear need for a comprehensive survey and understanding of these pieces.**

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knowledge of collections together in a meaningful way. After the symposium in Zurich, a number of new projects have started across the world, in the East as well as the West, and exhibitions have started to spring up on the basis of forgotten collections, as the sheets are brought out from corners of museum archives by the new knowledge of the stencils' importance.

The KGOA has also been involved in this research for a number of years through surveys of Swiss collections. In 2014, two exhibitions featuring *katagami* were created as a result of collaboration between the KGOA and Swiss museums in St Gallen (namely, the Textile Museum and the Historical and Ethnographic Museum). Jeanne Fichtner, a PhD student at the URPP and the KGOA, curated the latter exhibition and presented her findings at the symposium. In addition, an important research and conservation project was just concluded on the significant *katagami* in the collection of the Historical



Symposium participants examining *katagami* at the State Archives of the Canton Aargau

Museum of Bern. Laura Palicova, a MA student from the KGOA who participated in the Bern project, also presented at the symposium. Another KGOA student, Alessandra Lardelli, presented her discovery of a collection

of *bingata katagami*, stencils created for the *bingata* textiles of the Ryukyu Kingdom (present-day Okinawa) in the collection of Museum der Kulturen in Basel, which then became the subject of her MA thesis. It also was the subject of

a KGOA class in August 2017, featuring Professor Yoshikuni Yanagi of the Okinawa Prefectural University of the Arts, also a member of the Zurich symposium. A number of KGOA students remain involved in *katagami*-related projects, and a major publication is being planned, featuring essays for the leading scholars on the stencils, from both Japan and the West.

The KGOA's *katagami* project aims to foster interest in young scholars and curators from across Europe and from Japan, who are starting to study these objects. We hope to show that, although Japanese woodblock prints are often given sole credit for the reception of Japanese art in the West, the *katagami* at a time held equally important roles as transmitters of Japanese art and design. The KGOA hopes to resurrect the roles, the reception, and the history of these objects through events such as the Zurich symposium.

## Research Challenges

**In the spring semester 2016, the workshop “Methodological and Ethical Challenges in Qualitative Research Projects” (May 10–11, 2016) took place at the University of Zurich, organized by Dorothea Lüddeckens and Nina Rageth.**

Sofia Bollo

Take eleven doctoral candidates based in Switzerland, Germany and Armenia, who work in disciplines ranging from anthropology, study of religion, archaeology, museum studies, gender studies, and Islamic and Middle Eastern studies. Add three experts on qualitative research, Elisabeth Arweck (University of Warwick), Marta Trzebiatowska (University of Aberdeen), Aymon Kreil (University of Zurich). Weigh research doubts and mix them with the obstacles of doing fieldwork, making sure to be

open for dialogue. The result is a fruitful context for analysing and discussing specific methodological and ethical challenges in qualitative research, with the goal of finding practical solutions to be applied in the respective doctoral projects.

The workshop started with a lecture by Elisabeth Arweck, who presented her vast expertise on qualitative research. Using examples from her own research projects, she offered her perspective and experience in dealing with important issues, such as finding a suitable object of research and facing challenges related to context. She also shared insights on methodological approaches, sample practices, path determination, gathering of participants and access to the field. Arweck also introduced the crucial

discussion on ethics and on the emotional part of doing research.

Marta Trzebiatowska presented her biographic story during her qualitative research projects. Being of Polish origin and having studied Catholic Polish nuns for her doctoral dissertation, she identified several key issues with which a researcher is faced during the course of fieldwork. The issues she addressed were the vulnerability of a researcher in the field, the problem of being a ‘hostage’ of the field, and the difficulties in forming relationships with informants. Trzebiatowska described how she dealt with conditional access to her field and with the constant questioning of one’s own place in it, explaining how fieldwork is made up of power relations. There are good tools and methods for operating in the field. Yet lack of control, as well as emotional and physical vulnerability, are sometimes inevitable. From her past projects, she learned that developing a deeper understanding of

the field can turn emotional hardship into greater reflexivity.

Aymon Kreil also shared his experiences on imbalanced power relations in the field of research. In addition, he explained how, during fieldwork, the researcher must occasionally make decisions within seconds, while still considering ethical issues, cultural appropriateness, and cultural politeness. He believed that every problem encountered during fieldwork has to be considered as element of study rather than as obstacle. When introduced to families of the deceased, for example, the difficulties of blending in the field is indeed part of the data to be collected.

To prepare for the workshop, doctoral researchers were asked to create a 10-minute presentation to address their own methodological challenges. The aim of these presentations was to clarify both for other participants and for ourselves our own research problems and failures. In an opposite trend against common tasks of presenting a research project at the best of it, in this session, the clearer you could set out your research complications, the more successful you were. This exercise was extremely important, since the goal of the workshop was not to generally discuss what kind of problems one might usually encounter in qualitative research, rather to collect and inductively organize actual problems raised by the PhD candidates and seek solutions to them. After the eleven presentations, an overwhelming amount of methodological difficulties emerged. However, the session ended with a reassuring awareness that, even if operating in different disciplines, researchers often face common problems in their projects.

The workshop's second day started with a roundtable discussion, aimed to sum up and classify the various problems that had been identified the day before. The challenges were chronologically ordered along the usual research path, from the initial stage of fieldwork towards the final steps of the

doctoral project. Using flip chart paper sheets, the workshop participants grouped research problems into several categories and subcategories. The six identified areas were the following: 1. covert/overt fieldwork; 2. the problem of inside/outside; 3. language barriers; 4. ethics; 5. data analysis; 6. dissemination/publication of data.

#### Discussing some categories of problems

In detail, the first category of problems named *covert/overt fieldwork* included challenges of the researcher's behaviour during fieldwork, a back stage or front stage attitude, the gender issue, the topic of intrusive fieldwork, and rapport issue connected with sensitive problems. The *insidel/outside* problem also dealt with fieldwork approaches, with doing anthropology at home and juggling aspects of the researcher's identity, with blind spots, stress in the field, and cultural conventions. In the *language barriers* we discussed how to adapt and talk to different audiences during data collection, how to change the register of languages and how to face different understanding of particular terms or notions in data analysis and translation. The challenge of *ethics* focused on the ethical conventions in research, on ethics used as a defence set up by the field, on ethics as an excuse, on power imbalance between researchers and their interlocutors, and on the power of actors in the field. The *data analysis* category included a broad range of issues ranging from how to make sense of interview post-data collection, how to assess the weight and validity of collected data, how to deal with uneven data and different response rates, how to go about transcribing interviews, how to treat informal knowledge when e.g. a tape recorder is turned off during or after an interview, how to deal with non-verbal communication including emotions, as well as with secrets, rumours, and lies. In the *dissemination/publication* category we discussed the observance of data ano-

nymity in the writing process, loyalties towards one's interlocutors, whether and how to pay back participants, confidentiality, and finally publication issues in view of career perspectives.

After a detailed discussion pertaining to each of the challenges listed, the participants could choose one of the six categories of problems to focus on more deeply. An even closer and more intimate debate took place within smaller groups of students concerned with similar challenges. Sharing personal experiences and exchanging solutions was often eye-opening and informative for others facing similar questions. After the close discussion, each group had to choose two specific unsolved challenges within the category, which needed further discussion in the final roundtable. The most problematic issues were then re-addressed in the presence of the whole group and approached always with emphasis on linking the problem to the context of the specific research, to the project characteristics, and to the research questions. Everyone could eventually receive individual advice and practical tips on how to solve his or her problems and how to proceed in the doctoral project.

The final feedback discussion involved each participant feeling more confident and stronger in the previously problematic area. By honestly and openly sharing problems, it was possible to find solutions, and not just general ones, but personalized answers fashioned to the needs of the specific problems presented. The workshop ended with positive feelings. Each participant felt encouraged and incentivised, more confident in making decisions in his or her research and in combining methods with more awareness. Sitting down and reflecting together on research challenges proved to be very productive, more so than just praising positive achievements. But in the case of this workshop, success has to be fully acknowledged.

# Hong Kong and the “Sinosphere”

**Jointly organized by the URPP Asia and Europe and the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies – Chinese Studies at the University of Zurich, the two-day international workshop “Many Different Shores: Hong Kong Connections Across the South-/East Asian Sinosphere” (September 16–17, 2016) explored Hong Kong’s outreach into the “sinosphere” by engaging with the multiple relationships and entanglements between political borders, cultures, languages, ethnicities, affects and experiences against different post-/colonial contexts, trans-/local cultural representations, and socio-political events. The conference’s conveners were Andrea Riemenschneider, Kiu-wai Chu, Justyna Jaguścik, Brigit Knüsel, and Helena Wu.**

Helena Wu

The keynote speech was delivered by Stephen Yiu-wai Chu, Head of the Hong Kong Studies Program at the University of Hong Kong. In his speech, Chu explained how “Hong Kong Studies as Method” can potentially engender a new paradigm for understanding the reconfiguration of Hong Kong culture and society as a postcolonial anomaly, since the sovereignty over Hong Kong was reverted from Great Britain to China in 1997. While the notion of “Sinophone” pioneered by Shu-mei Shih provides an alternative to China-centric discourse, the Sinophone was spelled out by Chu in the context of a series of heterogeneous, localized, and interconnected marginal sites of cultural production. On the cultural and social levels, Hong Kong’s unique history—as a city-state, a British colony and a special administrative region (SAR)—contributes various standpoints to the Sinophone as an analytical category and Sinophone studies in general.

On the theoretical level, Chu responded by putting forward the notion of “Hong Kong Studies as Method” as it relates to the rise of China in the context of Asianization, and it is in this space where Hong Kong studies can build a constructive dialogue with the notion of the Sinophone. In his concluding remarks, Chu revoked the line “to light a lamp” from Wong Kar-wai’s film *The Grandmaster* (2013) to remind us of the importance of inheritance and transmission in propagating and translating Hong Kong culture beyond the Asian region, and also in reviewing Hong Kong culture and society as an interdisciplinary academic field that is increasingly relevant for the understanding of urban (postcolonial) cultural trends, to be promoted and further developed as Hong Kong studies.

## Re-configuring Cold War Hong Kong

With a look back at 1950s- and 1960s-Hong Kong, Xiaojue Wang (Rutgers University) in her presentation drew our attention to radio culture, popular literature, and cinema of the Cold War period. Wang looked at how the radio played an important role in the development of an ever-evolving Hong Kong society that was composed of locals and foreigners, and how listening to the radio constructed an integral part of local daily lives. With this in mind, Wang presented an extensive examination of the radio as a sound medium whose collaboration with other expressive forms such as literature, drama, and film was considered to be conducive to the intersection of different languages, cultures and identities in Hong Kong during this era of movements and uncertainties.

With a similar spotlight shining on Hong Kong in the late 1950s and the 1960s, Brigit Knüsel Adamec (University of Zurich) explored the cultural

framework and process within which “liberal values” were discussed and appropriated by scholar Lao Sze-kwang (勞思光 1927–2012) under colonialism. In face of the influx of refugees from China in the 1950s, Hong Kong society was exposed to the threat of communism and responded with a call for humanitarianism in the 1960s. In this special temporality, Lao took part in shaping the narrative of Hong Kong as “free China” in his

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**Not content with seeing Hong Kong only from a human-centered perspective, the workshop also offered a new perspective to break through the boundaries between human, nonhuman and different species.**

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writings and teachings, with British colonial administration of the city in the backdrop. Apart from translating works from economist Friedrich A. Hayek, wherein contemporary liberalism was promoted, Lao in his writings also provided in-depth discussion on key concepts such as freedom, rationality, and society in connection to liberal ideas. With reference to Lao’s critique of authoritarian values, Knüsel asserted that Lao’s personal diasporic experience as an exile and his scholarly efforts in promoting liberalism in the colony brought about a successful dissemination of liberal ideas and reflected the limitations of Cold War ideology with respect to intellectual debates of his time.

Arriving at the late 1960s, Shuang Sheng (Penn State College) set out to explore the connections between politics and aesthetics in Hong Kong. In order to achieve this, Shuang examined a journal called *The Chinese Stu-*

*dent Weekly*, which was published in Hong Kong between 1952 and 1974, and its Singapore/Malaysia edition. She highlighted particularly the cultural transmission of the works of the two Nobel laureates Boris Pasternak and Jean-Paul Sartre in this journal. With these in the background, Sheng explained how the dissemination of literary values echoed the core values of the metropolitan West, and responded to local histories of student activist movements against the Vietnam War and the colonial British rule in Hong Kong. The struggle between the apolitical, anti-radical stance of the journal and various political aspirations diffused through the journal to its readers, argued Shuang, is a reflection of Hong Kong as a contested site of power play and clashes of forces during the Cold War era.

#### Transgressing the borders

Not content with seeing Hong Kong only from a human-centered perspective, the workshop also offered a new perspective to break through the boundaries between human, non-human and different species. With reference to Leung Ping-kwan's poems that focus on plants, Andrea Riemenschneider (University of Zurich) invited us to revisit Leung's take on traditional flower spirits, religiously invested lotus leaves and a widely admired flame tree that constitute a kind of vegetal discourse that lingers—albeit usually unnoticed—in the urban landscape of the hustling-bustling city. Riemenschneider argued that these plants and their literary legacies came to claim a voice of their own as well as agency, thus insisting on the continuity of primordial human-non-human points of connection as rekindled, and reworked, by the lyrical dialogues in Leung's creative works. Riemenschneider demonstrated how the non-verbal interaction between human and nonhuman in Leung's poems captured eloquently what was rendered visible and turned invisible in

modernity. With an eye to these plants and the natural, spiritual, emotional and sensual landscapes they inhabited, Riemenschneider suggested to redistribute attention to the presence and the agency of the nonhuman as an important part of both the urban environment and its representation in the arts.

Moving beyond the scope of literary poetry to the visual poetics generated in cinema, Andrea Bachner (Cornell University) brought us to the topic of cannibalism in Fruit Chan's *Dumplings* (2004), with the aim of engaging in a critical reflection on globalized biopolitics and the discourse on immunity. Regarding the cannibalistic horror visualized in the film, Bachner aptly read it as a constellation of involution, stagnation, and self-destruction. On a national level, the reference made to modern Chinese representations of anthropophagy could be regarded as critique of Sino-phone cultures. On a global level, the film opened up a transnational scenario that presented the fluid mobility of capital, human, goods, and others. With an eye to all these, Bachner concluded that Hong Kong in the film was both China's other and its double, where the acts of border crossing were precisely delineating a regional mirror image and microcosm of globalized capitalism.

When Bachner's study of Fruit Chan's film drew on the primal desire of modern humans in pursuit of eternal youth through cannibalism, Chu Kiu-wai (University of Zurich) chose to look at a landscape filled with inter-species beings and connections. With a focus on Tsui Hark's *Green Snake* (1993) and Stephen Chiau's *Mermaid* (2016), he probed the expression of eco-consciousness in the fantastical worlds fabricated by the two films where multi-species coexistence was highlighted. Chu argued that the films served as political allegories where, for instance, the fictional green gulf in the *Mermaid* can be read as a symbolic

space of postcolonial Hong Kong under transformation.

#### A postcolonial anomaly

Entering the post-1997 era, Thomas Hahn (Cornell University) guided us to (re)visit the defunct Kai Tak Airport, a legendary airport surrounded by high-density buildings situated in downtown Hong Kong, with an aim to examine the different forces at work behind the development plan of the former Kai Tak area, now an asset estimated to be worth several billion Hong Kong dollars. Through design sketches and project plans devised at different stages, Hahn uncovered how the Kai Tak project was rendered into a "fantasy," which could be translated into visions of the Hong Kong SAR government and the Chinese government towards Hong Kong in the future. Hahn, however, also reminded us solemnly at the end of his presentation that the general public was not invited to take part in this spatial imaginary even under the post-colonial setting of the city.

#### Social and political movements

Moving away from the urban topography and arriving at the cultural landscape, Carolyn Cartier (University of Technology, Sydney) innovatively studied the changing governance policies between Hong Kong and Mainland China from perspectives offered by alternative art events and exhibits in Hong Kong. In particular, Cartier drew our attention to the Central Star Ferry Preservation Campaign in 2006 and the Umbrella Movement in 2014, where creativity—channeled out in form of aesthetic representations and artistic responses—was proven to have played an important role in driving community-based social and political movements forward in postcolonial Hong Kong. Cartier showed how the realization of different forms of community, where citizenship and democracy could be redefined through public en-

gagement, was spurred through generating heterogeneous objects for perception, artistic practice and expression, as well as how these serve as a new mode of subjectivization, where critiques directed to the establishment are “locally understood and nationally conscientious.” To encourage reflection on the issues, Cartier ended her presentation with a video (as another artistic response) where the actual “one country two systems” policy governing the Hong Kong-China relationship was sarcastically and anxiously interpreted as an act of frying two eggs on the same pan (in a way that everyone could imagine the consequences).

With a similar concern with the post-1997 scenario of Hong Kong, Helena Wu (University of Zurich) explored how Hong Kong localness was conceived and perceived contrastingly in Hong Kong with reference to the film *Ten Years* (2015), and how its supportive and unsupportive spectatorships were generated respectively. On the one hand, the film—as a dystopic depiction of a “mainlandized” Hong Kong in the year 2025—stirred up resonances in the Hong Kong society and was recognized by the supporters as a voice speaking up for their anxieties towards the frustrating reality and the uncertain future of Hong Kong. On the other hand, the outspoken film was condemned by China and the pro-establishment camp in Hong Kong, especially after it was crowned the Best Film in the 2016 Hong Kong Film Awards Ceremony. By analyzing the transmission and the translation of localness, Wu uncovered a web of diversified and sometimes contradicting post/colonial experiences, emotions such as anxieties and insecurities towards disappearance as a cultural and social phenomenon that have been accumulated since the colonial era, and are continuously produced in the postcolonial, or rather the neocolonial, age of Hong Kong in the postmillennial era.

## After the Transition

**The three-day graduate seminar “Hong Kong Identity: Lost and Found in Transition” (September 19–21, 2016) was delivered by visiting professor Stephen Yiu-wai Chu, who is the head and the founder of the Hong Kong Studies Program at the University of Hong Kong. The seminar aimed to explore the transformation and the entanglement of Hong Kong identities in times of transition, by analyzing cultural as well as social phenomena in Hong Kong’s colonial period as well as in the postcolonial era.**

Helena Wu

Twenty years after the transition of sovereignty of Hong Kong, how is Hong Kong positioned in the presence of China and in the world? Is a new Hong Kong identity on its way to formation (or, is it already there)? After all, how is Hong Kong’s future determined by the newly developed power structure, and how can it be reimagined? These questions are certainly not easy to deal with (much less to answer). However, it is a situation Hong Kong people are facing at the moment. With these in the background, the seminar provided various entry points and critical perspectives to reflect on these postcolonial inquiries, by offering historical, cultural, social, and political references to the formation of a Hong Kong cultural identity during the colonial era, the ambiguity of identity in face of the handover of sovereignty from Britain to China in 1997, and the negotiations of a post-1997 Hong Kong identity on the local, national and global levels.

### “Neither Western nor Chinese”

The Hong Kong identity that emerged locally during the 1960s and the 1980s was characterized by anthropologists like Huge Baker and Gordon Mathews and historians like John Carroll as

something that was “neither Western nor Chinese.” With reference to this, Chu explicated with detailed examples and specific texts how the mass media and popular culture in Hong Kong, ranging from television and radio industries to the development of Cantonese pop songs (CantoPop) and Cantonese-speaking cinema, played an important role in building up a sense of belonging among the urban dwellers, and setting up cultural trends that shaped Hong Kong distinctive local culture and identity, thus actualizing Benedict Anderson’s “imagined community” in the vibrant cultural landscape in Hong Kong during these times. From the 1990s and onward, growing anxiety spread through the population, for instance, in several migration waves, in face of 1997 where the sovereignty of Hong

**Chu invoked the importance of preserving histories and securing past memories with a critical mind-set, in order to rejuvenate the present and pave way for future trajectories.**

Kong would be transferred from Britain to the People’s Republic of China. In this regard, Ackbar Abbas has famously named Hong Kong culture before 1997 as “a space of disappearance,” meaning that one—troubled by disturbed psyche and problematized visibility—is no longer able to see what is there in the situated present.<sup>1</sup> An oft-quoted expression from Rey Chow also eloquently describes Hong Kong’s dilemma as an “entrapment

<sup>1</sup> Abbas, Ackbar. *Hong Kong Culture in a Space of Disappearance*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997.



Seminar participants with visiting professor Stephen Yiu-wai Chu (center) and professor Andrea Riemenschneider (center right)

between colonizers [Britain and China]" before and after 1997.<sup>2</sup>

#### Beyond a "Chinese global city"

In the post-1997 scenario, Chu presented an even more contested picture, or what Chu repeatedly emphasized as "predicament." Postcolonial negotiations and reconfigurations ceaselessly took place in the hope of finding new ways to cope with the local (Hong Kong itself), the national (mainland China) and the global (beyond Asia and also the world). In the first phase, Chu guided us to reflect critically on how Hong Kong was shaped by various means into a "Chinese global city" (e.g. branding Hong Kong as "Asia's World City"), and how the local components were overlooked when the Hong Kong identity engineered in this narrative was subject to integration only with the national as well as the global. In this regard, understanding Hong Kong only as "Asia's World City" was critiqued by Chu, as its underlying ideology and identity politics attempted to confine Hong Kong to a generic commercial city without any dis-

2 Chow, Rey "Between Colonizers: Hong Kong's Postcolonial Self-Writing in the 1990s." *Diaspora* 2 2 (Fall 1992): 151–170.

tinctive, local characteristic. Chu thereby invoked the importance of preserving histories and securing past memories with a critical mind-set, in order to rejuvenate the present and pave way for future trajectories.

In the second phase, Chu guided us to examine a number of events, which could be regarded as the turning point that shaped the local socio-cultural landscape of post-millennial Hong Kong. These events include preservation campaigns, the annual 1<sup>st</sup> July protests, and the 2014 Umbrella Movement. With reference to the works from scholars such as Agnes Ku, Pun Ngai, Anthony Cheung, and Arif Dirlik, the turn to the local (local affairs, local identity, local voices etc.) actually brought light to the possibility to re-imagine Hong Kong's future. According to Sebastian Veg's analysis, a poll published in April 2014 showed that a broad majority (62%) of people in Hong Kong identified with a "pluralistic and international" Hong Kong identity, rather than "China's historical and cultural identity" (29%) and not to say "China's identity as rule by the Chinese Communist Party" (3%). When Veg put forward in 2015 that "the core of Hong Kong's new identity

is a civic, rather than a national one,"<sup>3</sup> he had also opened up the third phase of discussion concerning ways to find alternatives and look for new angles in Hong Kong culture, society and Hong Kong studies as an academic field.

#### A persisting Hong Kong flavour

In examining the "northern expedition" of the auteur of Hong Kong cinema Johnnie To, Chu read To's insistence of his "Hong Kong flavour" even in films he made for the China market as a form of "cultural untranslatability" in Homi Bhabha's term. Even though making films in a co-production model with China means accommodating for a market taste (which is different from Hong Kong's) and being restrained by China's state censorship (when there is none in Hong Kong),<sup>4</sup> the continual circulation of Hong Kong flavour which is not entirely translatable was proposed by Chu as a way for Hong Kong cinema to "move on in the age of Chinese cinema."<sup>5</sup> In face of China's increasing influence and the "deadline" of 2047 (a year when Hong Kong's "50 years of unchange" will end), Chu joined the voice of Stephen Chiu-kiu Chan, and called for the need to "think, unthink, imagine and unimagine" Hong Kong's alternative future.<sup>6</sup> A line from Dante Lam's *Unbeatable* (2013) that Chu had referenced in his essay might speak to the current situation faced by Hong Kong and its population: "[y]ou're in the rings. Don't be afraid. Once you fear, you lose."<sup>7</sup> Last but not least, as Chan also had it put: "delay no more."<sup>8</sup>

3 Veg, Sebastian. "Legalistic and Utopian: Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement." *New Left Review* 92 (March/April 2015), 70–71.

4 Chu, Yiu-wai. "Johnnie To's 'Northern Expedition': From Milkyway Image to Drug War." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 16 2 (2015), 201.

5 Ibid.

6 Chan, Stephen Ching-kiu. "Delay No More: Struggles to Reimagine Hong Kong (for the Next 30 years)." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 16 3 (2015), 346.

7 Chu, 203.

8 Chan, 346.

## Expanding the View

**The distinctions between human and non-human, between bodies, things, and matter seem to be clear-cut and evident. Yet currently—for example, in the context of the recent development of bio-technology or the debate around the present age as the “anthropocene”—this clear-cut and seemingly “natural” divide between human and non-human, between bodies and things and between subject and object is put into question. As the boundaries become more and more blurred new theoretical frameworks to rethink and redefine the relationships between human and non-human are required. Exploring the challenges posed by these current re-configurations from an interdisciplinary perspective was the aim of the URPP’s annual conference “Human : Non-Human—Bodies Things and Matter across Asia and Europe” (October 6–8, 2016).**

*Aline von Atzigen*

Taking as a starting point the different theoretical “turns” (somatic, material, post-humanist), the conference centered around the following questions: How are bodies, things and matter defined and positioned in relation to each other on different levels and in different respects in Europa and Asia, and how are they entangled? How are boundaries between human and non-human configured, constituted and naturalized in concepts, systems of knowledge and normative orders?

The three organizers—Bettina Dennerlein (University of Zurich), Angelika Malinar (University of Zurich / Research fellow at University of Erfurt) and Andrea Riemenschmitter (University of Zurich / Research fellow at University of Art and Design Linz)—opened the conference with their introductory remarks on the context of human and non-human relationships. Angelika Malinar continued by opening the first session that focused on

“Conceptualizing Bodies, Things and Matter.” She based her talk on the translation and interpretation of the Sanskrit word “prakṛti”—an entity referring to the interconnectedness of all living beings—either in terms of “matter” or “nature.” According to her, prakṛti or pradhāna as “productive matter” is an interesting notion in modern/post-modern debates to rethink the relationship between human and non-human beings and between bodies and things as it encompasses both aspects according to Sāṃkhya philosophy. Yet based on this analysis, she emphasized that appealing alternative notions of “nature” need to be understood and addressed in the context of their specific philosophy and with regard to their social implications. Thus, they need to be thought through with regard to their repercussions before integrating them into current environmental debates. Also focusing on India, Julia Shaw (University College London) outlined the early Buddhist engagement with “nature” in the field of agriculture from an archaeologist point of view. She pointed out how the current modern ecological movement misunderstood traditional Buddhist human-environment interactions as “premodern ecological utopia” by conceptualising Buddhism as an “eco-friendly” religion due to overemphasizing the notion of “eco-dharma,” while at the same time overlooking the entanglement of Early Buddhism with environmental change and urbanisation.

### **Mechanization of human beings**

Urs Gösken (University of Bern) analysed the distinction between human and non-human in the Iranian authenticity discourse based on the writer Ġalāl Āl-e Aḥmad. In his essay “Wes-toxication” Ġalāl Āl-e Aḥmad expresses his concern with regard to technology

and modernity. According to Gösken, Ġalāl Āl-e Aḥmad describes the technology and modernity of the West (here not regarded as a geographical concept) as resulting in a transformation of humans into things, based on the principle of the machine. The distinction between humans and non-humans is based on a distinction between meaningfulness and meaninglessness. Thus, mechanization reduces human beings to non-humans in the sense of “less-than-human.” Religion on the other hand allows for transcending the mere human towards the non-human in the sense of “more-than-human.” Dorothea Lüddeckens (University of Zurich) closed the first session, elaborating on the different narratives on “bodies,” “things,” and “matter” in practices of healing between Asia and Europe. She pointed out how in biomedicine (Western style) the human body is transformed into “matter,” an object or thing. In this healing system, the patient is reduced to the illness: the physician is the subject of knowledge, truth, and authority, while the patient is reduced to an object of research and treatment. On the other hand, “holistic” and “alternative” healing systems (Western style with a matrix in Asian traditions) provide a “counter narrative” where the human body is viewed as animated and not as “matter.” In these systems both patient and physician have knowledge, but different forms of knowledge—the former has inner knowledge, the latter transcendent knowledge. In holistic healing practices, it is not the body, but the whole person who is ill. Thus, healing the patient includes restoring harmony and balance. In this narrative, the patient’s illness is moralised, and his/her body becomes decisive in the healing process.

In her public keynote speech, Bonnie Mann (University of Oregon) explored the notion of shame in American culture and politics. According to Mann, in U.S. foreign politics and practices of war, shame is assigned to the devalued

other in order to explain the other's difference (for instance, during the wars against Japan or Iraq). With regard to American culture and shame, she states that the U.S. is a shame-based culture as shame (and not guilt) is at the heart of American politics, history and culture. The American shame is closely tied with the dominant modes of the formation of masculine and feminine subject and understandings of pride and power. Thus, shame shapes the American understanding of "human," as well as the attitudes towards "life."

#### Law and morality

Melike Şahinol (Orient-Institute Istanbul) opened the second session on "Ruling Bodies, Legal Matters" comparing Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART), its legal framework, as well as its social and cultural context and impacts in Turkey and Germany, addressing the issue of freedom of reproduction. Due to Islamic conceptions of family and reproduction, in Turkey ART is only allowed if no third party is involved. Thus, in Turkey biological parenthood is not questioned in practices of ART as it is in Germany. Yet, the "optimisation" and modification of "human nature" affects the individual and social life in Turkey as well as in Germany. Andrea Büchler (University of Zurich) focused on legal aspects of human body parts and questions concerning the relationship between a human and his/her body parts and the (non-)commercialisation of the latter. In the legal context of Switzerland, human body parts are to be distinguished from body substances insofar as body parts constitute the person and thus fall within the domain of personal law, while body substances are objectified as separate from the person and thus treated under property law. Although body substances maintain a link with the person, the disruption of the congruence between the person and the body along such distinctions poses legal challenges about the potential ac-

cess and commercialisation of the body. Marcia Inhorn (Yale University) also engaged with law and morality in the context of ART (also referred to as in vitro fertilization IVF) and outlined the paradoxical "reprotravels" of western European people to Dubai in order to evade restrictive reproduction laws in their countries just to find other restrictions resulting in complex ethical and moral dilemmas. Thus, these "reproductive outlaws" move their bodies around the world from one prohibitive place to another. Bettina Dennerlein closed the second session with her talk on naturalistic themes in modern Islamic legal thought and Islamic normativity with regard to gender and sexuality. She started by pointing out that, even though it is hard to tell what is old and what is new in modern Islam, the reception of European ideas is always filtered through specific local conceptions and debates. Analysing the Koranic notions of "nature," *fiṭra* (including only human characteristics and having a moral and epistemological dimension) and *ṭabī'a* (being the central principle in physical bodies, both human and animal), she argued that nature is a foundational category of Islamic law and showed how naturalistic terms are used in defence of Islam. In this context gender differences are based on moral (not natural) differences and dispositions.

#### Matter and aesthetics

The third session "Aesthetics and the Politics of Matter" was opened by Andrea Riemenschneider with her analysis of "the clandestine agency of matter" based on the example of humans and food (fish and coffee-tea), and the insect oxymoron of China. She proposed a new approach towards bodies and non-human matter in a cosmopolitan context. Jay Johnston's (University of Sidney) paper on "Esoteric Ecologies" was read in her absence. On the one hand, she presented a subtle body scheme resonating with

"new materialism." On the other, she engaged with human-animal relations exemplifying how spiritual practices (cf. "Being a beast" by Charles Foster) in the field of what she calls "Esoteric Ecology" are based on recognising and respecting other-than-human agency. Meng Yue (University of Toronto) closed the third session with the presentation of a new understanding of the concept of agricultural land she deems the "hopeful matter of the anthropocene." This change from a socioeconomic to a poetic concept of agricultural land is based on her analysis of the global journeys of two early 20<sup>th</sup> century classics on ecofarming.

#### Cows, tigers and speaking beasts

Pheng Cheah (University of California, Berkeley) opened the last session on "Querying the 'Non/Human,'" proposing an alternative to the normative theory of "world literature," in which "world" was defined in terms of human intercourse, based on the phenomenological concept of "worlding." His concept of "worlding literature" as "literature that intimates," includes time (capitalist modernization), all people (culture, cosmopolitan consumption), as well as human and non-human forms of existence, thus allowing us to rethink "world literature" beyond man's intercourse with the world. Annu Jalais (National University of Singapore) explored Asian (Indian) social and cultural "cosmological responses" to social injustice and climate change by comparing different social movements and collective actions, which have a bearing on the conceptualisation of the human/non-human relationships. These were further exemplified by instances of human-animal (cow/tiger) interactions, such as the specific configuration of the man-tiger relationship in the Sundarbans (Bengal).

Raising the question what makes a human being a human, Wolfgang Behr (University of Zurich) focused on "hu-

man language" in early and medieval China, at the close of the fourth and final session of the conference. He compared texts on "animal language" and the construction of human/animal and human/non-human linguistic boundaries stating that while generally language is seen as a human capacity differentiating humans from non-humans, in medieval Chinese literature there exists an "animal language," though the animals cannot escape from being just animals.

The broad spectrum of perspectives and aspects of human and non-human relationships, which formed part of the conference, shaping its truly interdisciplinary character, fostered lively dis-

cussions. The human/non-human divide puts into question distinctions between man and life, or between bodies and things, which have legal repercussions. Rethinking these boundaries means also participating in the problematization of the anthropocene from a non-modernist perspective, including the urgent need to rethink both intra-human conflicts as well as intra-species relations. Some consensus existed that the "overwhelming nature of problems" calls for actions beyond intellectual and university life. These actions are needed in order to protect life and to change a system of distinctions. However, creating distinctions always implies hierarchies and power rela-

tions, so that, when thinking of how to change a system of distinctions, it is important to consider doing it without getting lost in further distinctions. Furthermore, these actions aim to challenge the fantasy of independence. From this perspective, ideas such as the "communal property of bodies" emerged during discussion, allowing attention to the interdependence and interconnectedness of beings, to rethinking the purpose of the body/human-condition, to addressing the continuity between the anthropocene and the rest of life, and to striving for socially, publically accepted, rooted and promoted ideas and notions of what constitutes a "good life."

## Humans as Biological Agents

**Jointly organized by Raphael Studer of the Doctoral Program in History and Fynn Holm of the URPP Asia and Europe, the doctoral workshop "The Environment and Global History: Humans as Biological and Geological Agents" (October 26, 2016) was held at the University of Zurich. Special guest Ryan Tucker Jones, professor at the University of Auckland, introduced doctoral students to the topic of "environmental history."**

Fynn Holm

When we think of global history, we usually focus on interactions among humans, be it on an empire/nation-state level or in a transnational network. But at least since the works of Alfred W. Crosby, Jr. (i.e., *The Columbian Exchange* and *Ecological Imperialism*), it has been well known that humans have willingly and, even more often, unwillingly influenced the environment on a global scale.

Twelve doctoral students from the ETH, University of Zurich and University of Basel got the chance to re-

think their own dissertation through the framework of environmental history. For this workshop, Ryan Tucker Jones came from New Zealand to Zurich to collaborate with Martin Dusing, who holds the professorship of Global History at the University of Zurich. They examined global historical events through the lens of environmental history.

The workshop began with a discussion of Dipesh Chakrabarty's paper, "The Climate of History: Four Theses." The participants debated the proposal that the old distinction between natural history and human history can no longer be maintained, when we assume that human action influences the natural environment and vice-versa. Jones put these discussions in a broader context with his subsequent presentation "Anthropocene and Climate Change." The Anthropocene, as Jones explained, is a proposed geological epoch by geological scientists that highlights the significance of human action to the earth's geology. Humans no lon-

ger influence only local ecosystems, but their actions have ecological consequences on a global scale. The most famous of these consequences are climate change or the so-called sixth mass extinction of species caused mainly by humans. These changes are so massive that our epoch can in the future be easily distinguished in the sediments from former geological epochs like the Holocene. The exact beginning of the Anthropocene is contested among scientists. But common proposals for the starting point include the beginning of agriculture 10'000 years ago; the Columbian exchange in 1500; the industrial revolution after 1800; or the test of nuclear weapons in the 1950s. After this thought-proving presentation the participants continued debating the issues during a lunch break at the ETH Dozentenfoyer.

In the two workshop sessions, the participating PhD students gave short presentations of their dissertation projects, putting them in relation to environmental history. Here they discussed possible problems and limitations of the framework, and how a new perspective might challenge previously gathered results.

# Islamic Art in Context

**Putting Islamic art in context with its neighbours was the aim of the workshop “Islamic Art: Reception Processes in the Middle Ages and Modern Times,” which took place on November 4<sup>th</sup> at the University of Zurich, organized by Katrin Kaufmann, Helena Lahoz Kopsike, and Elika Palenzona-Djalili. It covered an extensive period, with speakers and students focusing on medieval, modern, and even contemporary times. They emphasized that Islamic art is not only a matter of the past, but also affects the present.**

Laura Castro Royo

When retrospectively considering Islamic Art, there is a tendency to isolate it as its own chapter of art history, which may be an easier way for scholars to acknowledge and study it. But not contextualizing it can lead to serious mistakes in research. Limiting Islamic art to certain characteristics and conditions apart from particular historical contexts obscures issues such as cultural exchanges with other types of art or with different societies.

The first speaker was Magdalena Valor (University of Sevilla), who presented a paper about the transformation of religious buildings after the Christian conquest in the Iberian medieval context. According to Valor, there were many steps involved in adjusting former mosques for Christian use. Some could take hours or days to perform, whereas others could require even longer. None was devoid of meaning, and, as Valor pointed out, they demonstrated the cultural exchange at the time between Muslim and Christian societies. Christian elites knew exactly what to erase and what to preserve from the mosques in order to make the new religious rites happen.

Next, Yuka Kadoi (University of Edinburgh) spoke about the transfer

of images and objects in the Mongol Empire, which profoundly influenced the arts of the book in Persia, where the Ilkhanate of the Mongols was established. Starting from textiles, which provided an easier way to transport images and decorative motifs, the Mongol conquest strengthened an already existent bridge of commerce and cultural exchange. The most representative consequence is the beginning of illustration on Persian manuscripts (e.g., the *Shahnameh* form Ferdowsi), with shapes similar to Chinese and Mongolian landscapes, faces, and buildings. It was a turning point for art history, since illumination appeared and afterwards became almost a sign of identity in Persia.

Maximilian Hartmuth (University of Vienna) presented the last paper about a particular Neo-Islamic building in Bosnia under the rule of the Habsburg. Hartmuth questioned the intentions behind this construction and how Islamic exteriors influenced nineteenth century society, as well as took into account other buildings with the same aesthetic in neighbouring

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**Starting from textiles, which provided an easier way to transport images and decorative motifs, the Mongol conquest strengthened an already existent bridge of commerce and cultural exchange.**

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countries. The selection of Islamic decoration for adorning civil constructions is a matter of increasing scholarly interest, providing important avenues for understanding orientalism and colonialism alike.

While the speakers pointed to the import of transculturality and gave

examples of its role in the cultural exchanges through which Islamic art achieved definition (e.g., Persian paintings under the rule of the Ilkhanids; influence from Chinese artists; turning mosques into Christian sanctuaries), students were able to share their own research and the difficulties they have encountered in it.

The day ended with an open discussion where everybody could participate and comment on the topics that had been addressed. It was pointed out that caution is required when using certain concepts, since they could wrongly lead to generalisation. It would be interesting to combine both cases and common points when studying processes that need to be sequenced: appropriation, spread, imitation ... always bearing in mind that in history nothing is exactly the same, no matter the high similarity two different moments could present. Another attention-grabbing matter was the discussion of originality inside a transcultural process. Could it be claimed that, after a transfer, innovation is over? Some thought that imitating basically means copying. Nevertheless, others noted that copies could answer to some interests, and they were never exact reproductions of previous works. Imitation is an important part of the process, because afterwards something new is always created.

Although it was only a single day, the workshop provided a general vision of the revisions required in studies of Islamic Art, especially studies of transculturality and exchange, since these historical processes were not isolated from nearby circumstances. A space for dialogue and discussion was provided to students and professors at the same time, pointing out the importance of these encounters not only for the historical and artistic discussions, but also for the communicative atmosphere they represent and that is so required inside academia.

# Seeing with the True Dharma Eye

**The workshop “Vision and Visuality in Buddhism and Beyond” (November 24–26, 2016) took place at the University of Zurich. It brought together a group of eighteen outstanding scholars from various academic disciplines, working on Indian and East Asian religious, epistemological and aesthetic traditions. All papers presented engaged with theories of vision and visuality against the canons of the richly variegated traditions of Buddhism in South and East Asia. The central workshop theme addressed in the papers was the analysis of implications, epistemic validity and the metaphysical place of kinds of knowledge derived from various types of vision, all topics strongly reflected in the relevant Buddhist and comparative sources.**

Julia Escher

Organized by Polina Lukicheva, Rafael Suter, and Wolfgang Behr (all University of Zurich), the goal of the workshop was to highlight aspects of Buddhist theory and practice where visual perception and visuality play a central role. The organizers also aimed to consider these Buddhist conceptions in their original discursive contexts, as well as discussing their transformation within the broader fields of epistemology and aesthetics in East Asia.

The introductory lectures were by Rafael Suter and Polina Lukicheva. Suter presented on the terminology of perception in pre-Buddhist and early Buddhist texts of medieval China. Taking the text *Gōngsūn Lóngzǐ* 公孫龍子 as a starting point, he analyzed the use of the terms “sè 色” (color) and “xíng 形” (shape), as well as their connection to the Sanskrit term “rūpa” (form, shape). Lukicheva’s talk was focused on the adaptation of Buddhist concepts of visuality in aesthetic theories. She explored the question of what model of vision is involved in vision

and visuality in Buddhism, and elaborated on how these concepts influenced pictorial paradigms in China.

## Indian epistemological tradition

The first part of the workshop was dedicated to exploring the notion of perception in early Indian tradition. Jens Schlieter (University of Bern) explained that, in contrast to early modern philosophy in Europe, there is no indication of subjectivism or perspectivism in early Indian Buddhism. He argued that imagery of non-perspectival vision was dominant instead, which entailed the transgression of the observer’s horizon. Philipp Maas (University of Vienna) presented a semantic study of the term “dhyāna” (meditation) in the yoga tradition by focusing on the Sanskrit work *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, which is dated to the early 5<sup>th</sup> century. Comparing it to Buddhist and early Brāhmaṇa sources, he observed that “samādhi” (absorption) and “dhyāna” are used synonymously in some parts of the text. Christina Pecchia’s (Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna) presentation was concentrated on the concept of cognition in Indian epistemological tradition. Based on Dharmakīrti’s (6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century) discussion of direct perception and interference, Pecchia analyzed the relationship between perception and conceptualization and explored how cognitive processes can be improved or trained in order to gain illumination. Dan Lusthaus (Harvard University) introduced us to the notion of “rūpa-prasāda,” which is understood in various Indian Buddhist schools as a rarified type of rūpa that has the ability to sense. According to this theory, the “rūpa-prasāda” was located in the sensory organs and performed the cognitive perceptions.

Several scholars talked about visualization in Medieval Japanese Bud-

dhism. In Steffen Döll’s (University of Hamburg) presentation, he discussed how actual topographies, monastic architectures and religious iconographies were combined, in order to create a manifestation of transcendent realms, such as the Pure Lands. Monasteries can therefore be interpreted as a visual representation of an imagined environment. Paulus Kaufmann (LMU Munich) focused on the role of visuality and visualization in Esoteric Buddhism in general and in the teachings of the Japanese monk Kūkai (774–835) in particular. He elaborated on the apparent prioritization of acoustic signs over visual signs in Esoteric Buddhism, concluding that the relationship between the two was far more complex than often believed. Pamela D. Winfield (Elon University) arranged her presentation around the Japanese Sōtō Zen master Dōgen (1200–1253) and his visions of monastic architectural layouts. She asked what theoretical systems and firsthand experiences shaped the material and visual forms of Dōgen’s Zen temples and came to the conclusion that he reworked the Chinese five elements system into a Buddhist context.

## Non-duality of the visible and invisible

A large number of presentations were dedicated to visuality and visualization in Chinese Buddhism. Hans-Rudolf Kantor (Huaan University) analyzed the significant role of “guān 觀” (self-referential observation/contemplation) in Tiantai teaching. He also reflected on the non-duality of the visible and invisible, as well as the paradoxes that arise in connection to the term “guān.” Jane Geaney (University of Richmond) focused on the metalanguage of perception in Early Chinese thought. By basing her findings on textual sources, she argued that there was

no hierarchy between the actions of seeing and hearing. On the contrary, they formed a balanced pair. Additionally, Geaney elaborated on the uses of “yì 義” as “(external) meaning” and “yì 意” as “(internal) meaning.” Christoph Anderl (Ghent University) explored the terminology of visual processes in visualization sūtras of early Chan Buddhism. According to Anderl, analysis of the usage of the terms “guān 觀” and “kàn 看” in these sūtras shows a growing focus on introspection in the early Chan Buddhist school. Stephan Peter Bumbacher (University of Basel) explained how the introduction of the notion of visualization to Chinese thought influenced meditational practices in China, which previously had focused mainly on breath control. He further described the new forms of Daoist and Buddhist meditational practices in China, which were centered on the visualization of either a Daoist deity or of the Buddha. Paula Varsano (University of California, Berkeley) discussed the notion of visuality in the “yǒngwù 詠物” tradition in Chinese poetry, which entailed poems

dedicated to a physical object. She furthermore raised the question of how visuality was used by the poets to play with the boundaries between viewer and object, as well as between poet and imagined audience. Mark Nürnberger (LMU Munich) examined the structure of Kumarajiva’s translation of the *Lotus Sūtra* and its commentaries in connection to the use of the term “yǒngxiàn 湧現” (emergence). He observed that emergence in the *Lotus Sūtra* often takes the form of an unforeseen occurrence, which challenges his disciples’ understanding of the Dharma and thereby enables a first step towards awareness. Xiao Yang (Heidelberg University) presented an analysis of different representations of Mahamayuri found in Sichuan, dating from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Several discrepancies between transmitted descriptions in texts and the actual images can be observed, which is possibly due to local tradition as well as different means of representations (e.g. painting or carving).

The workshop concluded with two presentations that focused spe-

cifically on image studies or on imagery. Barbara Lund (LMU Munich) applied theories of image studies to the context of Buddhist visuality. She identified the concept of “Upaya” as a suitable connection between Buddhist visual studies and image studies. Nicholas Newton (Edinburgh) examined the use of imagery in the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*. By focusing on the metaphor of the “great tower of networks of clouds of lights,” he created a visual reconstruction of the imagery and thereby showed the importance of visuality to the rhetoric of this text.

The participants found the workshop to be a great success, and they appreciated that scholars from different fields could exchange ideas on vision and visuality in Buddhism. The concluding discussions showed that there were still many questions to ponder and various areas to explore further, e.g. the representation of concepts of visuality in Buddhist art, the effect of (partly) hidden images on the viewer, or the role of mimesis in visuality and vision in Buddhism.

## So Far, and Still Onward

**Created through collaboration with the Filmpodium, the series “Grenzgänger – Grenzenlos: Asien und Europa” (April 1–May 15, 2017) showed a wide range of both fictional and documentary films from Asia and Europe. Central to it were the borders between these cultural areas, and the encounters, fantasies, and conflicts experienced by those who cross borders.**

Natalie Böhler

As contemporary events show, borders have again become a major issue. Around the world, there are diverse points of conflict between global net-

working, regional ties and confederations, and a reemergent nationalism. The films in this series address all of these issues through approaching them in terms of borders. The geopolitical borders between, as well as within, Asia and Europe are ambivalent: They constrict, protect, generate spaces for freedom, and may foster imprisonment or openness. In one way or another, the main figures in the films are all border crossers. Whether their journeys are real or imagined, these figures encounter cultural, linguistic, physical or psychological boundaries, sometimes go-

ing beyond them into the new and the unknown.

### Thinking outside of the box

Boundary crossers’ encounters enable them to question that which is familiar and consider their background anew, and their identity can be confirmed or destabilized. *Where Are You Going* (Yang Zhengfan, China/Hong Kong 2016) shows the constricted view from a taxi driving to urban Hong Kong. The taxi driver’s question regarding his passengers’ destination touches not only on individual lives, but also on the city’s current political and cultural development. In *We Went to Wonderland* (Great Britain 2008), the filmmaker Guo Xiaolu intimately documents a meeting with her parents. For the first

time, they leave their home in China to visit their daughter in her adopted home of London. Seen from the parents' perspective, London sparks philosophical reflection about the perception of the foreigner. *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Stephen Frears, Great Britain 1985) also shows England from the view of an immigrant. The screenwriter Hanif Kureishi complements his intercultural, gay love story with an ironic take on Margaret Thatcher. By contrast, *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (Karan Johar, India 2001) depicts life in the diaspora as an escape from narrow, traditional boundaries, but as nonetheless marked by a longing for India and by isolation from family. In *Stupeur et tremblements* (France and Japan 2003), Japanese work culture is seen as lacking any transparency from the perspective of a Belgian woman. Her career declines relentlessly, a process accompanied by a curiously masochistic sense of amusement. Yet a positive, alternative perspective is available in *Au sud des nuages* (Jean-François Amiguet), where a reticent, Welsh farmer finds reconciliation with himself through a journey with the Trans-Siberian railroad.

#### Ideals and illusions

Encounters with what is foreign are sometimes mere fantasy. How do perception and reality diverge from each other, and what can be inferred about the fantasizer based on how he portrays others? In the children's film *Bekas* (Karzan Kader, Sweden, Finland, Iraq 2012), two Kurdish youths embark for the border in order to realize their dream of living in America, their knowledge of which is only based on the movie Superman. Two films in the series have titles pointing to the topic of temporality. *What's the Time in Your World?* (Safi Yazdanian, Iran 2014) features an Iranian woman who, having lived in France for twenty years, travels back to her country of origin. Encounters with former acquaintances from

her earlier life evince her fragile relationship with her past. Indeed, the film's fragmenting narration conveys the boundaries of memory and belonging. *What Time Is It There?* (Tsai Ming-liang, Taiwan, France 2001) depicts two parallel lives – one in Taipei, another in Paris – that happen to connect. The main figures vacillate in thought between the two cities and time zones, with the film becoming a reflection about temporality and placelessness. The Philippine comedy *The Woman in the Septic Tank* (Marlon Rivera, 2011) operates on a cinematic meta-level. Three filmmakers act out a script in three different styles in order to correspond to the perceptions of the festival's international audience. Chris Marker's path-breaking film essay *Sans soleil* (France 1983) pursues the issues of remembering and image making, transcending the boundaries between lands and continents with a global perspective.

#### Irreconcilable differences

Where comprehension and fantasy fail, conflicts emerge. Yet they can lead to humor, rather than murder and homicide. The satire entitled *Win Win* (Claudio Tonetti, Switzerland and Belgium 2013) involves an ironic, but also affectionate, take on cultural misunderstandings that occurred during a Chinese beauty contest in the Swiss canton of Jura. *The Land of the Enlightened* (Belgium 2016) shows how Soviet and American occupations affected a group of children in the mountains of Afghanistan, with Pieter-Jan De Pue's film performing the delicate balancing act between documentary and fiction. In *Gegen die Wand* (Germany and Turkey 2004), Fatih Akin presents a couple in Berlin who, having entered a marriage of convenience, fall in love only for it to intensify further. The romance becomes a catalyst for the figures to break with their Turkish origin and reflects the instability of life away from it. *Theeb* (Naji Abu Nowar, Jordan 2014) presents how, during the First World

War, a Bedouin youth leads an English soldier through the desert of the Arabian Peninsula. Their journey brings the young man into adulthood. In *Merry Christmas*, Mr. Lawrence (Great Britain and Japan 1983), Nagisa Oshima reenacts the tensions in a prison camp between the British occupants and Japanese wardens during the Second World War – a scenario amounting to a sadomasochistic power game. And finally, a black and white film shows the countless nuances in a migration story: In the animated film *Persepolis* (France and the United States 2007), the native Iranian Marjane Satrapi depicts her homeland's upheavals during her childhood and how, as an adolescent, she found her way to Europe.

As part of the film series, there were many special events with members of the the URPP Asia and Europe, as well as the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies (IAOS). Tobias Heinzelmann (IAOS) provided an introduction to *Theeb*, and Rohit Jain (formerly of the URPP Asia and Europe) provided one to *My Beautiful Laundrette*. Elisa Ganser (URPP Asia and Europe) and Sabrina Ciolfi (Università degli Studi di Milano) led a discussion about the Bollywood film *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*. After the showing of *Where Are You Going*, Andrea Riemenschneider (IAOS and URPP Asia and Europe) spoke about the film with Helena Wu (URPP Asia and Europe) and Kiu-wai Chu (IAOS). Especially gratifying was that two directors could be won for an appearance at the Filmposium. Helena Wu spoke with the Chinese director Guo Xiaolu, along with others, about her documentary *We Went to Wonderland*, and Elika Palenzona-Djalili (URPP Asia and Europe) spoke with Safi Yazdanian (*What's the Time in Your World?*) about the Iranian cinema.

(This text was originally published in German in the program book of the Filmposium. The English translation was done by Phillip Lasater.)

# The Middle East in Global History

**In the spring term of 2017, the public lecture series “The Middle East in Global History – Global History in the Middle East” dedicated to the role of the Middle East in Global History took place at the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies. The event was organized within the framework of the Inter-University Doctoral Cooperation in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies (MUBIT), which unites the departments of Islamic/Middle Eastern Studies at the Universities of Zurich, Basel, and Bern. The event’s conveners were Ulrich Brandenburg and Helena Rust.**

Eliza Isabaeva

In the lectures, three invited speakers explored different facets of global entanglements involving the Middle East, and offered insights into their research. The first speaker was Liat Kozma, Senior Lecturer in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, followed by David Motadel, Assistant Professor at the London School of Economics and Political Science. A lecture by Umar Ryad, Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Utrecht, concluded the series. Each of the lectures was followed on the next morning by an in-depth discussion, for which researchers and students prepared with a text written and chosen by the lecturers.

## Women in migration

Liat Kozma’s lecture entitled “Prostitution and Migration in the Interwar Mediterranean” looked at the important role of women in migration across the Mediterranean in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and was largely based on her research in the League of Nations archives. She addressed four main questions about the migration of female prostitutes: why, where, who and how. The “why” question situ-

ated migratory prostitutes within the larger migratory trends of the time, revealing that most of the prostitutes seemed to have migrated willingly. Although they generally needed the assistance of a male procurer to subvert the restrictions on female movement, seeing migration of prostitutes as trafficking is highly questionable. The “where” question examined the three cities—Istanbul, Marseille and Port Said—that were the major hubs of migration and transit points of migratory flows. The “who” explored different categories of prostitutes, brothel keepers, and procurers within the prostitution trade who mutually depended on each other. Finally, the “how” question examined the methods which served to subvert state regulations and restrictions on the movement of “undesirables” such as prostitutes.

The discussion with Kozma on the following day circled around a chapter from her recent book “Global Women, Colonial Ports: Prostitution in the Interwar Middle East” (SUNY Press 2017). An important point of discussion was the issue of Mediterranean identity, which the migratory prostitutes arguably represented in crossing the borders of several countries in the Mediterranean region. The participants found the author’s approach of “zooming into” and “zooming out” from particular contexts to be helpful for analyzing historical events, processes, and actors, because the approach enabled them not only to look at particular phenomena, but also to compare them with one another. Furthermore, the difference between the notions of trafficking women and female migration was emphasized. While the former, morally charged one obscured the active role of the women in migratory decisions, the

latter one allowed for an open discussion about women who possessed decision-making power in transnational movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Royal representations

International relations and their symbolic representations were at the heart of David Motadel’s presentation. His lecture focused on the trips of two Iranian monarchs Nasir al-Din Shah and Muzaffar al-Din Shah to the European capitals St. Petersburg, Berlin, Vienna, London, Brussels, and Paris. Nasir al-Din Shah (in 1873, 1878, and 1889) as well as Muzaffar al-Din (in 1900, 1902, and 1905) each made three trips to Eu-

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**The history of Muslims in Europe is thus still an underexplored field that offers the potential to shed light on hitherto largely obscure aspects of 20<sup>th</sup> century developments and debates.**

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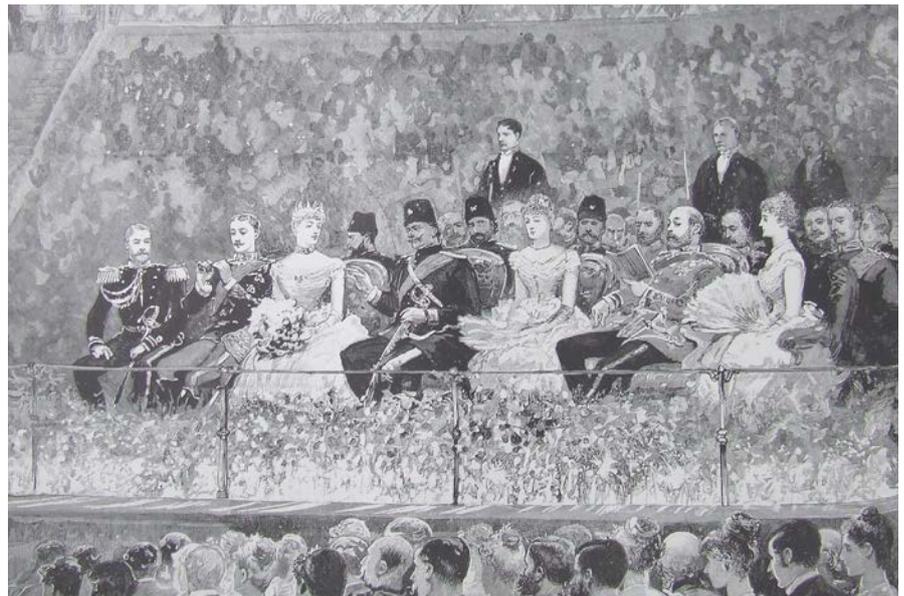
rope, where they met with their European counterparts. As Motadel argued, the main mission of the Iranian royals was to represent their country to the monarchs in Europe and to achieve a kind of “ceremonial Europeanization.” But also European monarchs and diplomats had to get used to their unfamiliar visitors, adapting their rituals to what they perceived as Iranian customs. However, as Motadel described, attention for Iranian visitors also decreased over time. While the first visit of Nasir al-Din Shah was celebrated as a grandiose event in several European cities and left its traces in popular culture, later receptions tended to be much more modest. However, the trips of the Iranian

Shahs to Europe were a useful tool for the non-European monarchs through which they could place royal birth above ethnicity and demonstrate the legitimacy of their rule and the sovereignty of their country.

The next morning, the discussion focused on a draft for an introductory chapter of an edited volume entitled "Struggles for Sovereignty: Europe and the Non-European Powers in the Imperial Age," which Motadel will publish together with Houchang Chehabi (Boston University, forthcoming). The chapter dealt with the strategies that a number of independent non-European countries employed in the age of imperialism to assert their rights and independence within the unequal sphere of international law. The participants' expertise lay mostly in the field of Japanese history and thus outside of Motadel's immediate area of research, which greatly enriched the discussion. A controversial point was the dichotomy "European" vs. "non-European," which participants sought to deconstruct by suggesting alternatives that focused more on status nuances in international law or questions of citizenship in order to add a perspective "from below."

#### Pan-islamic networks

Umar Ryad delivered the final lecture, entitled "The Hajj and European Imperial Powers: Between Pan-Islam, the Cholera, Shipping Trade." This lecture dealt with different perceptions of the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca from a European point of view in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ryad stressed that the Hajj was a global religious enterprise and outlined several fields in which Europeans struggled for influence and control over the Muslim pilgrimage. On the one hand, European empires feared the growth of pan-Islamic networks, which were seen as a possible challenge to colonial rule in the Middle East and Asia. The Hajj



The Iranian monarch Nasir al-Din Shah with the royal family in the Royal Albert Hall, London.

united Muslims from all over the world, and was regarded as a particularly important force in the creation of such networks. On the other hand, economic motives created more positive impressions of the Hajj, providing considerable opportunity for European shipping companies and travel agencies. Again a source of unease, matters of public health and the prevention of diseases like cholera were another impetus for European involvement in organizing the pilgrimage and setting up quarantine stations. Ryad looked at these topics with a particular focus on the Netherlands and its Mecca travelers P.H. van der Hoog and Snouck Hurgronje, demonstrating how even a smaller European country showed considerable interest in the Hajj.

On the following morning, Ryad discussed the topic of Muslims in Europe, based on the introductory chapter from his co-edited volume "Muslims in Interwar Europe: A Transcultural Historical Perspective" (Brill 2016). Examining the activities of Muslim activists and intellectuals who lived in Europe, the authors of the edited volume argued for an understanding of the European past that goes beyond seeing Muslims as the "other." In

fact, Europe was an attractive destination for Arab and Muslim students, revolutionaries, nationalist activists, political exiles, and intellectuals. The discussion focused on Rashid Rida, Shakib Arslan, and especially Zeki Kiram. Relatively unknown to history, Zeki Kiram was a former Ottoman-Arab officer who took up residence in Berlin after the First World War. Ryad demonstrated how, through careful historiographic work and the usage of family archives, one can find astonishing links with better-known Muslim figures in Europe. The history of Muslims in Europe is thus still an under-explored field that offers the potential to shed light on hitherto largely obscure aspects of 20<sup>th</sup> century developments and debates.

The organizers of the lecture series sought to add a Middle Eastern perspective to the history of the globalizing world. Each lecture provided fascinating insights into the entanglements between the Middle East and the wider world. Sarah Khayati, who joined the lecture and discussion with Umar Ryad from the University of Basel, aptly summarized the event as "a wonderful opportunity for finding inspiration and connecting with innovative scholars."

## Interlaced Paths

**In the spring of 2017, the colloquium of the Institute of Art History grappled with the topic of “Routes and Paths: Knowledge Transfer in Asian Art,” focusing on various forms of knowledge transfer between cultures and continents, as well as between generations and epochs. Through numerous case studies, surprising relationships and interconnections became discernible, making it clear that cultural transport can provide fruitful ground for innovation. The colloquium was organized by Hans Bjarne Thomsen and Alessandra Lardelli.**

Henna Keski-Mäenpää

In the keynote address, Madeleine Herren (Europa Institute, University of Basel) emphasized that the routes of knowledge transfer should not simply be described, but rather analytically examined. A “neutral,” descriptive approach can obscure structures and inequalities of power that are not directly recognizable. What is required is critical engagement. This approach means discussing the political, social, and economic presuppositions and conditions of knowledge transfer, all of which is to be illuminated from various perspectives.

Most of the colloquium’s lectures addressed the pathways of knowledge transfer in relation to geography. For example, Alexis Schwarzenbach (Lucerne University – School of Art & Design) dealt with the import routes of Asian art in Switzerland, and Francine Giese (University of Zurich) dealt with the transfer of motifs between the Islamic world and Spain. Yet the colloquium also addressed chronological issues. Sofia Bollo (University of Zurich) analyzed how prehistoric, archeological material (e.g., Neolithic ceramics) is displayed in contemporary Chinese museums. Xenia Piëch (University of Zurich) sought to show

a certain continuity between early Chinese photography and contemporary Chinese art. Both of these speakers emphasized the importance of considering historical dimensions when discussing knowledge transfer between and among cultures. In a given geographic space, a cultural transformation or even a radical break (e.g., the Chinese cultural revolution) may occur, where the old traditions become lost or survive only in a highly limited way. In such a scenario, a new generation may find that its past native culture is no less foreign than that which is actually “foreign.”

The colloquium determined that knowledge transfer between cultures can occur in the form of objects, motifs, and work techniques. Likewise, it may involve the exchange of expertise or cultural competence. For example, Princess Akiko of Mikasa (Kyoto Sangyo University) pointed out the significance of Japanese scholars’ expertise for the change in conceptions of Japanese art in the British Museum.

### **Stereotypical representation**

The pathways of knowledge transfer can be both direct and indirect. Alexis Schwarzenbach outlined how Japanese sample collections for the Swiss textile industry were acquired in Switzerland indirectly through Hamburg in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, the expansion of the Swiss textile industry resulted in increased business travel to Asia. Consequently, more (art-)objects were imported directly from Asia. Such direct, personal ties to Asia affected the indirect acquisition of Asian art, since these ties expanded the cultural knowledge of local collectors so that they knew what European traders considered worth acquiring.

Into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the main transfer of knowledge between cultures

and regions happened over the trade routes. This point is observable by analyzing works of art based on their provenance, which can reveal heretofore unknown or surprising connections. Martin Dusingherre and Christina Thurman-Wild (University of Zurich) showed in their lecture how a painting—in this case, J. D. Strong’s *Japanese Laborers on Spreckelsville* (1885)—can be a document of global entanglements. The work displays a historical connection between Hawaii, Japan, and the United States. It thus constitutes an argument in favor of historiography from a global perspective and a warning against the typical classification of historical spaces according to continents (i.e., East Asia, Pacific, United States).

J. D. Strong’s late 19<sup>th</sup> century work *Japanese Laborers on Spreckelsville* also

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**All in all, the colloquium posed the question of how the complexity of knowledge transfers and their pathways in Asian art can and should be investigated and illustrated. It therefore revolved around the issue of what a transcultural art history should be. Even though there is no unambiguous, simple answer, the main contours of such an endeavor became clear during the colloquium.**

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raises the issue of representing other cultures. Is our perception of other cultures characterized by “othering?” Are the representatives of other cultures portrayed as exotic and primitive? As an American artist, Strong painted the Japanese workforce as sitting on the ground on the sugar plantation and portrayed the Japanese woman with bare breasts, which did not correspond to the self-image of the Japanese as a

civilized nation. Furthermore, Strong's painting contains a mixture of Japanese, Chinese, and Hawaiian traits and objects. For Strong, all island-based and Asian cultures were foreign and exotic: He neither recognized their differences nor understood their meaning. Stereotypical representation of other cultures is typical when something new and unknown is treated. Accordingly, changes in the manner of representation and its diversification can indicate a growing familiarity with the "foreign," suggesting new pathways of knowledge transfer.

From an art-historical perspective, it is interesting to investigate how transfer occurs from influences. Are motifs and stylistic features adopted as direct citations or are they modified and adapted to one's own culture? Roger Buerger (Johann Jacobs Museum) spoke of how, as a young artist in New York, Ai Weiwei became familiar with the currents of modern, Western art. He began informing Beijing about the New York art scene, functioning as an intermediary between cultures. Ai Weiwei was himself inspired by artists like Marcel Duchamp, Andy Warhol, Allan McCollum, and Sherry Levine. From them he adopted modern, artistic strategies such as the use of "ready mades" and repetitive patterns, which he then combined with Chinese art traditions in his own work. Through artistic engagement with two cultures, Ai Weiwei developed his own individual style for which he is now recognized worldwide.

#### **Cultural transfer**

The art of Ai Weiwei is a good example of cultural transfer, whose outcome is a kind of cultural mix. For the writing of art history, it is important to recognize the ambivalence of cultural exchange processes. Alongside noticeable stylistic influences, there may be numerous, subtle characteristics that are still relevant for an object's full im-

pact. Hybrid forms often emerge as a result of cultural exchanges, and such forms are hard to categorize.

Categorization is one of the greatest challenges of art historiography. Western art history is essentially constructed on uniform categories (e.g., stylistic, national, etc.). The problem of categorization also touches on the idea of a culture as a homogenous unity. The danger of essentialism is always present, especially when speaking about "foreign" cultures (e.g., "That is typically Japanese."). Just what is typically Japanese or Asian or German or European? Is there such a thing? What role do national or ethnic categories play today? Is art historiography even conceivable without them?

#### **New challenges for museums**

The colloquium showed that all of the issues mentioned above pose new challenges for museums and other cultural institutions, which all contribute significantly to the construction of history. For this reason, they need to be aware of this position and the responsibility attached to it. Critically engaging their own perceptions and practices is a necessity. What is the basis of these institutions' knowledge? Have they consulted native experts of the other cultures? Do the museums try to present a coherent narrative, or do they try to present breaks and discontinuities that highlight history's ambivalent character?

On the other hand, these cultural institutions must deal with the question of how to regard various conceptions of art. Is an object a work of art or instead an object for use, and how should the museum present it contextually? Frequently in Western collections, objects of Asian art are isolated and presented without any indication of their original function or context. The consequence is that their historical and socio-cultural meanings are sacrificed on behalf of aesthetics. The objects' potential to recall numerous,

alternative histories is thereby starkly reduced.

Moreover, the question of provenance is relevant. An object's traversed routes should be thoroughly investigated. How did they become part of the collections? Yet it is insufficient to explain only the story of its occupation: The larger context should also be examined. Under what conditions were the objects produced, used, or sold? The political and socio-economic conditions, as well as the power relations within the objects' history, should be made evident.

#### **Contradiction of ideal and practice**

These issues have gained more attention both in museums and among art historians generally. In the area of art historiography and the nature of the exhibition, there is a call for critical self-reflection. But the ideal and the practice often contradict each other. In presentations, it is difficult to overcome the tendency toward oversimplification, coherence, and lucidity. Construing a unified narrative, the "big story," is easier than showing the parallels between numerous, often disjointed histories. How can one narrate the various, ambivalent, heterogeneous histories behind these objects without falling into the trap of relativism?

All in all, the colloquium posed the question of how the complexity of knowledge transfers and their pathways in Asian art can and should be investigated and illustrated. It therefore revolved around the issue of what a transcultural art history should be. Even though there is no unambiguous, simple answer, the main contours of such an endeavor became clear during the colloquium. The key factors of the new, transcultural art history involve investigating individual case studies; a multi-perspectival and analytic approach; and an emphasis on the heterogeneity and multi-layered character of history. *(The English translation was done by Phillip Lasater.)*

# A l'Orientale

**Organized by the University of Zurich's Department of Art History and the CNRS/InVisu Paris, in collaboration with the Museum Rietberg Zürich and the Moser Familienmuseum Charlottenfels der Heinrich und Henri Moser Foundation, the international conference "A l'Orientale: Collecting, Displaying and Appropriating Islamic Art and Architecture in the 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries" (Mai 4–6, 2017) brought together experts from both academia and museums to discuss the subject of Islamic art. The conference's conveners were Francine Giese (University of Zurich), Mercedes Volait (CNRS/InVisu), and Ariane Varela Braga (University of Zurich).**

Elika Palenzona-Djalili

The first collectors of art objects from the Islamic lands started by exhibiting their collections—of what they called and still is called "Islamic Art"—in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Up to the present day, the phenomenon of "Islamic Art" appears to be still controversial in terms of the question of which objects qualify to be called "Islamic" or "work of art" as well as in terms of the strategies and concepts required in order to provide a didactically appropriate understanding of the region from which they are coming from and their function and context.

The objects that formed the initial collections of Islamic art in the West provided the first opportunity to conduct research on small items. Therefore, the field has ever since been divided up between experts who decide to display the objects according to special arrangements and installations and scholars who work at educational institutions and universities.

The conference is the first step to bring together both experts from the academia and the museum world to discuss the strategies of displaying and contextualizing Islamic collections in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Another crucial part of

this debate is the role of the collector in the process of collecting and displaying Islamic art. Henri Moser (1844–1923), a Swiss collector in the 19<sup>th</sup> century who is considered one of the main figures of his time in both collecting and exhibiting Islamic art, received special attention on this occasion.

The conference, which examined the three topics "Oriental Taste and Display," "Appropriation," and "Collecting" was held in three different venues. The first day of the conference was dedicated to "Oriental Taste and Display." The talks reflected the strategies or definitions of various objects or exhibitions in the past, such as the Damascus rooms on display in London or the carpet exhibition of 1891 in London.

The second day, under the title "Appropriation," was held at the University of Zurich. The panels discussed various types of appropriation, which is a phenomenon of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This appropriation and integration may take place from the perspective of Islamic history, which is reused in the architecture and interiors. Three papers focused on those regions of Italy close to the lands of Islamic culture, but then again Henri Moser's appropriation of Islamic elements was also part of the presentations. As a commissioner general, Henri Moser used neo-Islamic style for the pavilion of Bosnia at the International exhibition of 1900 in

Paris as well as for the exhibition hall at the Historical Museum of Bern to which he donated his fascinating collection in 1914. The third and last day of the conference was held in Charlottenfels Castle in Neuhausen, close to Henri Moser's hometown Schaffhausen, where he had grown up and where he first exhibited his Oriental collection.

The highlight of the conference was a round table at the end of the first day at the Rietberg Museum in Zurich, the venue of the entire first day of the conference. The participants in the panel were the four curators of the main collections of Islamic art in Europe, Kjeld v. Folsach from the David Collection in Copenhagen, Yannick Lintz from the Louvre Museum, Tim Stanley from the V&A Museum in London, and Stefan Weber from the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin. After a brief introduction and presentation of their collections and the history of their exhibitions up to now, suggestions were presented for improvement or concerning the issue of how far the public can be expected to follow the narrative of each collection without being lost in the host of Islamic dynasties and dates.

What could be observed at the conference was that the fascination with Islamic art continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but there is still no universal solution to how best to display objects of Islamic art.



Room in Bosnian style in the Charlottenfels Castle (© Moser Familienmuseum Charlottenfels, Neuhausen)

# The Chinese *Bildungsroman*

Hosted by the Chinese Studies Department of the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies and the URPP Asia and Europe, the four-day international workshop “Coming of Age in Sinophone Studies” (March 23–26, 2017) was held in the University of Zurich’s Ethnographic Museum. The workshop gathered specialists to explore and broaden coming of age studies and the notion of *Bildungsroman* in Sinophone literature, cinema and culture.

Kiu-wai Chu

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, *Bildungsroman* studies no longer cling to the premise of being a genuinely German literary genre; rather it is now discussed in terms of historical and social change, inquiring into the relationship between its originating from a European context on the one side, and its immersion into global, transnational coming-of-age narratives on the other.

Organized by Kiu-wai Chu, Justyna Jaguścik (both University of Zurich), and Andrea Riemenschnitter (Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies / University of Zurich), this four-day workshop gathered seventeen international scholars and research students to present their research on the topic of “Coming of Age in Sinophone Studies,” centering around cultural history and critiques of modernities in the Chinese-speaking world. The workshop was supplemented by a special screening of the documentary *Boundary* (2015) and conversation with director Ben Wong. The film depicts the life and works of late Hong Kong poet and literary scholar Leung Ping Kwan, a.k.a. Ye Si (1949–2013).

## Resistance of adolescents

On the first day of the workshop, keynote speaker Wendy Larson (University of Oregon) presented a cross-

cultural reading of *Bildungsroman*, contrasting the sociopolitical contexts in Socialist China and Capitalist America. Juxtaposing Wang Meng’s *Long Live Youth* and Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, Larson discussed how the two novels detached optimism and joy from narratives of progress and improvement. Despite the different sociopolitical backgrounds, she argued both novels lean towards the resistance of adolescents to the routine and bureaucratization of modern life demanded by the overarching ethos of progress, be it under capitalism or socialism. Drawing on investigations of literary and film narratives of the past few decades, other presenters explored how the concept of “coming of age” has been modified by historical and social changes. In particular, they were concerned with how the evolving concept surrounding gender, family and age varies among different generations.

## Evolving female subjectivity

In her presentation on women’s poetry in post-Mao China, Justyna Jaguścik (University of Zurich) discussed Sichuanese poet Zhai Yongming’s poems that witness the consolidation of female consciousness in the 1980s and 1990s, a coming of age that is reflected in the poet’s growing awareness of her body and female subjectivity, as well as her gendered position in a time of drastic sociocultural transformations. On the other hand, Xinyue Liu (Peking University) presented her research on female novelists born in the 1980s, examining how the unique experience of growing up in the transitional reform era in mainland China shaped their concepts of family and home. In contrast to the popular “new youth running away from home” narratives during the May Fourth movement, the “old youth returning home” narratives in contempo-

rary novels suggest re-connections with families as well as this generation’s attempts to overcome their “adolescent complex.” Focusing on the same generation in Hong Kong and Taiwan, Fiona Law (University of Hong Kong) used the image of “school uniforms” to bridge *wenyi* films of the 1950s and contemporary teenager films, to explain the shift of female mental states from modern progressiveness to nostalgic, ambivalent regret. Law argued that the new narratives respond to the declining upward mobility of today’s youngsters in the neoliberal social setting.

## From childhood to old age

Re-evaluating Chinese revolutionary *Bildungsroman* narratives, Shuyao Zhou (Beijing Normal University) juxtaposed the representations of childhood and youth in Maoist revolutionary stories with Xiao Hong’s *A Child’s Speech* in the Yan’an period, arguing that the latter highlights a sense of shame and confusion accompanying children’s coming of age that is rarely found in Chinese revolutionary narratives. On the other hand, Danny Chan (Hong Kong Polytechnic University) introduced *The Kid* (1950) and *Little Cheung* (1999), examining the cultural configurations of *Bildungsroman* in the context of Hong Kong’s transitional status from a British colony towards the early days of the handover. As Chan argued, in the specific context of national ambiguity, the cultural constructions of childhood in films bring to light the struggles of people with their experience of nationhood, borders and adolescence. Jessica Chan (University of Richmond) broadened the scope of inquiry by integrating the idea of coming of age into her multidisciplinary study of aging in Hong Kong culture. She drew examples from documentary footages and journalistic writing on Hong Kong’s medical and social welfare system, and Ann Hui’s film *A Simple Life* (2012), to tackle how hitherto un-represented, realist depictions of aging are giving

voice to marginalized social groups, as well as preserving the memory of a passing generation.

#### Transnational encounters

With the mass migration, transitional movements and displacement of people and knowledge in Chinese-speaking countries/regions since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the growth in transnational encounters and exchanges shaped the global cultural scene of the period drastically. Several scholars have analyzed the transnational links that shaped coming-of-age narratives in Sinophone literature.

Mary Wong (Lingnan University) suggested that the decade of political disturbance of the 1960s has kicked off literary modernism in Hong Kong with a new generation of writers. Based on an overview of how these young South-bound writers were influenced by both global pop cultures and local political turmoil, she argued that this resulted in newly emerging themes of growth and coming of age in their stories. In contrast to Wong's focus on local writers in Hong Kong, Mung Ting Chung (University of Texas at Austin) focused on the sojourner writers and argued that their leading voices' being unaffected by the 1967 riot due to their participation in the Iowa Writers' Workshop in the 1960s shaped the transition towards modernist and leftist writing.

Sheldon Lu's (University of California, Davis) presentation explored the transnational coming-of-age narratives that represent the evolution of global, transnational encounters of Chinese youths in foreign countries since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. From Yu Dafu's *Sinking* to Lu Hong's *American Lover*, Lu argued recent literary works could transcend previous coming-of-age narratives that are characterized by self-orientalizing fantasies, unnecessary self-postcolonialization, and East-West binarisms. Pheng Cheah (University of California, Berkeley) interweaved con-

cerns of class, race and human capital in his reading of Anthony Chen's *Ilo Ilo*. Based on the combination of a *Bildungsroman* plot and a domestic soap opera about a middle class Singaporean boy and his Filipino domestic helper,

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**By offering a fresh look on the transnational, transgenerational journeys of the concept of the *Bildungsroman*, the workshop was a first and important step towards reconstructing and reconceptualizing Sinophone literary and cinematic canons.**

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Cheah discussed how the Singaporean film sentimentalizes social and economic suffering in cultivating human capital through transnational migration. In conclusion, he pointed out the limits of the film's sentimental politics.

#### The nonhuman turn

With a growing ecological consciousness reflected in recent Sinophone literature and films, some presenters took the discussion beyond anthropocentric perspectives, and shifted towards the complex relationships between human and nature, landscapes, animals, inanimate objects, and more generally, the nonhuman world.

Focusing on contemporary avant-garde fiction thematizing the PR China's 1980s, Andrea Riemenschnitter (University of Zurich) looked at coming-of-age stories that unfold in haunted gardens and dilapidated environments. As Riemenschnitter pointed out, post-socialist fiction (e.g. Su Tong's *Yellowbird Records* and Ge Fei's Jiangnan trilogy) transplants a premodern, idealized coming-of-age heterotopia, the Grandview Garden (Daguanyuan) as seen in *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, into the reform generation's coming of age narratives. Probing into cultural

texts and phenomena that feature the nonhuman presence of a Hong Kong mountain (the Lion Rock), as reflected in pop songs, animated films and texts centering on the Umbrella Movement, Helena Wu (University of Zurich) showed how the coming of age motif was transmitted and evolved across various generations of Hong Kong people. Winnie Yee (University of Hong Kong) argued that the postcolonial gendered space in Hong Kong represented in works by local female writers and filmmakers do not conform to the dominant economic prosperity discourse. Instead, these ecological texts inspire to re-orient human sensitivities towards nature and the land, and to celebrate alternative ways of understanding the formation of a post-urban, eco-centric identity as Hong Kong's postcolonial coming of age narrative.

Enoch Tam (Hong Kong Baptist University) showed how literature reimagines and rewrites history by identifying linkages between people, objects, and the city. Through Dung Kai Cheung's *Works and Creations: Vivid and Lifelike* (2005), the history of Hong Kong is reconstructed via interweaving coming of age narratives of personal history, family history, and historiographical depictions of modern technological objects such as radio, sewing machines and cars. From the wolves in *Wolf Totem* to the Golden snub-nosed monkeys in *Born in China*, Kiu-wai Chu (University of Zurich) asked whether the notion of "ecological *Bildungsroman*" in films based on anthropocentric depiction and anthropomorphic imaginations of animals could facilitate a better understanding of the relationship between humans and animals.

By offering a fresh look on the transnational, transgenerational journeys of the concept of the *Bildungsroman*, the workshop was a first and important step towards reconstructing and reconceptualizing Sinophone literary and cinematic canons.

## Retrospect and Future Prospects

**The URPP Asia and Europe will wind down for good this year in the fall, but one of its core elements is going to be maintained. As of September 2017, the doctoral program Asia and Europa will continue under the auspices of the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies, carrying forward its well-proven interdisciplinary and interfaculty structure. Moreover, plans to expand it into a nationwide program for interdisciplinary Asian and Oriental studies in cooperation with six other Swiss universities are well under way.**

Wolfgang Behr and Simone Müller

Since the 2009 fall term, the URPP Asia and Europa has offered a doctoral program—the only interfaculty doctoral program in Switzerland related to Asia. Over the years, the program has benefited from generous support by several private foundations, from intra-university “Bologna II/III” resources and, as of this year, from federal funds provided by *swissuniversities* for the development of a cooperation between institutions offering third-cycle education.

### Past and present scope of the program

The doctoral program strives hard to provide an optimal framework for a discipline-specific yet interdisciplinary doctorate, intended for exceptionally qualified young academics. It especially promotes interdisciplinary projects focusing on the relations between the regions of Asia and Europe in historical and contemporary contexts, by looking into the manifold processes of appropriation and demarcation in culture, religion, law and society, which result from these encounters. One of the program’s great strengths, developed and consolidated over the years, lies in the combination of methods and theories of the so-called “systematic” disciplines, such as human geography, religious studies

or ethnology, with those offering a regional or areal focus, such as Indology, Islamic studies, Japanology, Sinology or East Asian art history. The program has always aimed at combining the possibility to obtain a subject-specific PhD on a self-chosen Asia-related research topic, with an interdisciplinary methodological outlook and trans-regional awareness. Naturally, the chief aim for its candidates is to write their PhD dissertation, but this is complemented by a curriculum that serves to deepen and expand interdisciplinary, disciplinary, and technical competencies. Doctoral students of the program regularly participate in workshops and conferences in Switzerland and abroad, and spend a good amount of research time on field work or archival studies in the areas of their projects.

Thirty doctoral candidates from more than ten countries are currently enrolled in the program, and seventeen projects have been successfully completed. Projects pursued in the program cover a wide range of topics, from investigations into terrorist figures in Early China, the philosophical reception of Kant in Teheran, arranged marriages in Switzerland and abroad, to the role of media in the interpretation of the Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011 or squatter settlements in contemporary Kyrgyzstan. Judging from a recent survey, PhD students in the program have been very positive about the great opportunity to learn across academic disciplines, to interact across regions, to benefit from exposure to a variety of research themes and methodologies, as well as about the possibility to receive financial support for conference participation and research stays abroad.

### Future of the program

With the closure of the URPP, the doctoral program Asia and Europa will be

transferred to the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies, relocating it across the street at Rämistrasse 59. Thanks to a successful solicitation of third-party funds with *swissuniversities*, the continuation of the program is secured until at least the end of 2020, but the midterm goal is to build up a program even beyond the coming three years. In accordance with the self-declared targets of the University of Zurich and other LERU universities to establish larger units of doctoral programs, current plans are to widen the regional and thematic scope of the program and to develop it into a Swiss-wide inter-university program. In addition to the fifteen disciplines and four faculties (represented by more than 25 faculty members) that have participated in the program since its start in 2009, the cooperation aims to expand the program to other Swiss universities that offer Asia-related subjects with a view to generating further opportunities for cross-fertilization and to diversify the current program structures. Doctoral candidates will be members and shapers of an inter-university network, opening up many new exchange opportunities with peers and specialists in their field of research and beyond, considerably strengthening their career perspectives. The successful cooperation established within the framework of the URPP Asia and Europa since 2006 will act as an interface hub integrating doctoral training within ever growing international and cross-disciplinary research networks in Asia and Europe.

Against the canvas of Asia’s increasing importance on a global scale, the continuation and expansion of the doctoral program, being newly located at the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies and closely interlinked with other institutes and faculties in Zurich, is a desideratum that will sustainably strengthen Asia-related research across Switzerland for the foreseeable future.

## Farewell, URPP!

**Founded as a temporary institution in 2006, the URPP Asia and Europe will close at the end of August 2017. In order to review this 12 year period and to celebrate achievements in research and collaboration, the URPP invited its current and former members, members of collaborating institutions, as well as the interested public to a farewell day on May 21, 2017, at the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich.**

Roman Benz

Mareile Flitsch, director of the Ethnographic Museum and a participating professor at the URPP, began by welcoming the guests at the farewell day. She described the URPP as a success story of collaboration regarding Asia and Europe—collaboration that has involved people from various countries, universities, institutes, and disciplines.

### Lasting values

The President of the University of Zurich Michael Hengartner then praised the work of the URPP over the last twelve years. He briefly mentioned the funding instrument of the so-called University Research Priority Programs (URPP), which had been established in 2005 to sharpen the profile of the University of Zurich with an eye toward international competition: “Existing strengths in research have to be promoted and developed into international beacons of excellence.”

In 2006, the URPP Asia and Europe started as the last program during the initial round of funding. Like the other URPPs, it was designed to cooperate across disciplines and to work on a specific thematic area across faculty boundaries. Hengartner emphasized that University Research Priority Programs can only receive two four-year extensions. For this reason,

the URPP Asia and Europe ends after the maximum duration of 12 years: “That we celebrate a farewell today is due to formal reasons; it has nothing to do with a lack of success—quite the contrary.” To illustrate this success, Hengartner presented some key figures. Over the past twelve years, more than 25 professors, 31 postdocs, and 68 doctoral students have been active at the URPP. 32 dissertations and 7 habilitations have been completed. More than 100 books, more than 300 articles, and more than 300 contributions in anthologies have been published. Furthermore, the members of the URPP organized more than 100 events during the last twelve years.

Hengartner raised the question of what would remain of the URPP after its termination. He noted that the idea of sustainability was very important to the University of Zurich and, in his opinion, the URPP would certainly have lasting value. Through its research activities, the publications and advancements in knowledge achieved by the URPP would remain important for a long time. Hengartner added that the URPP had also impacted the

University of Zurich’s institutional structures by contributing to the foundation of the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies in 2013. The participating disciplines (i.e. Indian studies, Islamic studies, Japanese studies, Chinese studies, and gender studies) had already worked together closely within the framework of the URPP Asia and Europe. Furthermore, the Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program Asia and Europe would continue to exist in affiliation with the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies. Hengartner concluded that “as part of the first funding round, the URPP Asia and Europe has, in a way, been an experiment, but it was more than a successful one.”

### Some characteristics of the URPP

After President Hengartner’s remarks, the current academic directors of the URPP Asia and Europe—David Chiavacci, professor of social science of Japan, and Raji C. Steineck, professor of Japanology—addressed the guests. Steineck mentioned that an additional aspect of the URPP’s success story was the appointment of seven junior researchers as professors at the University of Basel, the University of Alberta in Edmonton, as well as others. Furthermore, the URPP had



President Michael Hengartner sums up the achievements of the URPP Asia and Europe.



Ulrich Rudolph pondering over radical doubt in the past as well as in contemporary research

complemented the University of Zurich's generous funding by acquiring third-party funds in the amount of nearly 11 million Swiss Francs. The Gebert RUF Stiftung and the Humer Foundation for Academic Talent were the URPP's biggest private funders.

Chiavacci spoke of the URPP's specific characteristics. At the outset, he mentioned its thematic diversity, which encompassed art reception, feminism, secularization, civil society, translation issues, modernity, digital media, and the concept of concept. Secondly, he mentioned the URPP's transdisciplinarity: "The URPP was more than the sum of its parts." He said that critical study of hitherto unknown theoretical approaches or new methodological perspectives had proven very fruitful, and that such study occasionally led to questions about an academic discipline's self-conception. The URPP had never intended to overcome disciplinary divisions, but rather to stimulate research by providing new perspectives. Thirdly, Chiavacci spoke about the successful networking that had taken place both inside and outside the University of Zurich—for example, the new connections with the Centre for African Studies in Basel, with the Tai-

wan Studies Center at the National Chengchi University in Taipei, and with many individual researchers from Switzerland and abroad. Chiavacci concluded by thanking all those who had contributed to the success of the URPP, especially the University of Zurich's executive board, the third-party funders, the URPP's advisory board, as well as the professors who had taken the initiative to establish the URPP. These professors are Andrea Büchler (private and comparative law), Robert H. Gassmann (Chinese studies), Ulrike Müller-Böker (human geography), Ulrich Rudolph (Islamic studies), Konrad Schmid (Hebrew Bible and ancient Judaism), and Christoph Uehlinger (history of religions and comparative religion).

#### Japanese art and Tamil literature

After the welcoming speeches, Raji Steineck and Martina Wernsdörfer, a curator at the Ethnographic Museum, opened the exhibition "Little Bridge." It presented works by Yamamoto Iku, who is a prominent representative of calligraphy and painting in the modern Japanese style. Inspired by her own exhibitions in Portugal and France, Ms. Yamamoto began writing poems in Latin script and in various

European languages. She clings to the basic principles of Japanese calligraphy, which include not only the use of ink and brushes, but also the vertical notation. She aims at making Japanese calligraphy a first-hand experience to interested Europeans. Ms. Yamamoto was present during the farewell day. In a workshop, she introduced the guests to the art of Japanese calligraphy.

The Experi-Theater provided insights into the Tamil literatures of South India and Sri Lanka. The company's actors recited Tamil short stories, which were translated into German by Eveline Masilamani-Meyer and Nina Ragoth, doctoral student at URPP Asia and Europe, and which were published in a book entitled "Bananenblätter und Strassenstaub" (Eng. "Banana Leaves and Street Dust"). Between the recitations, the two translators commented on the criteria for selecting texts for their publication, as well as on some translation problems that emerged. In contrast to German, the Tamil language shows a distinct diglossia between the formal and literary language, on the one hand, and the colloquial language of everyday use, on the other. This diglossia is particularly present in Tamil short stories, where authors often use the colloquial language for their protagonists' speech.

#### Islamic philosophy

After the extensive *apéro* where guests enjoyed a range of culinary options, Ulrich Rudolph delivered the main lecture. He highlighted what he considered one of the URPP's main achievements: a new way of cooperation and joint reflection, or perhaps just a new way of asking questions. "We learned to ask questions that we had never asked before." Sometimes, this interdisciplinary cooperation fostered doubts about the apparent certainties of one's own discipline, accentuating the fragility of one's knowledge

foundation. Based on examples from his own field of Islamic philosophy, Rudolph pointed out that such doubts are neither new nor specifically European. In search of an initial foundation for all knowledge, the Iranian Islamic scholar Abu Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī had entertained radical doubt around the year 1100. He mistrusted teachings received from earlier scholars, the reliability of sensory perception, and the validity of the axioms of understanding, since human understanding could err during sleep or dreams. In his autobiographical work “Al-Munqid min ad-ḍalāl” (Eng. “Deliverance from Error”) from 1107, he concluded that a “light from God” formed the foundation of knowledge and trust in the principles of understanding.

More than 500 years later, René Descartes (1596–1650) also addressed the issue of radical doubt. In his work “Meditationes de prima philosophia,” the famous “cogito ergo sum” formed the foundation of certainty and confidence in the possibility of knowledge. But also in Descartes’ case, the human ability to understanding is dependent on God, as only His existence guarantees the truth of logical and mathematical laws.

Rudolph noted that the solutions offered by Descartes and al-Ġazālī differed. Yet the similarities are striking. Both of them questioned traditional assumptions and ostensible matters of fact and sought to find a stable foundation from which knowledge could be rebuilt. In Rudolph’s opinion, the study of Asia and Europe is valuable because it brings together knowledge from different times and places.<sup>1</sup>

#### Musical finale

The farewell day ended with a concert by “Amine & Hamza – the Band Beyond Borders.” Amine and Hamza M’raihi are two Tunisian musician brothers, playing respectively the oud and the qanun, the two major instruments of classical Arabic music. Together with musicians with a French, Swiss-Indian, Polish and Swedish background, they played a rousing concert, influenced by Arabic, Persian, and Indian music, as well as by jazz and flamenco.

<sup>1</sup> A full version of the lecture will be published under the title “Auf der Suche nach Erkenntnis zwischen Asien und Europa: al-Ġazālī, Descartes und die moderne Forschungswissenschaft” in: *Asiatische Studien* 72/1 (2018).



Musical finale by “Amine & Hamza – the Band Beyond Borders”

## News

**Motaz Alnaouq** (legal studies/URPP Asia and Europe), submitted his doctoral thesis “The Right to Life in the Palestinian Society: The Case of Death Penalty from Comparative Human Rights Perspective” to the University of Zurich and successfully completed his dissertation review in September 2017.

**Monika Amsler** (religious studies/URPP Asia and Europe) received an eighteen-month Marie Heim-Vögtlin grant from the Swiss National Science Foundation for her PhD project “Purpose and Nature of the Talmudic Medical Units in Tractates Shabbat, Pessachin, Gittin and Avodah Zarah” (April 2017 to August 2018).

**Wolfgang Behr** (Chinese studies/URPP Asia and Europe) and **Polina Lukicheva** (Chinese studies/URPP Asia and Europe) received three years of funding from the Swiss National Science Foundation for their research project “Der Himmel hat von sich aus keine Ordnung des Vorne und des Hinten”: Begriffsgeschichtliche Studien zur Herausbildung der Kategorie des Räumlichen in chinesischen Texten des 17. Jahrhunderts” (April 2016 to March 2019).

**Wolfgang Behr** (Chinese studies/URPP Asia and Europe) and **Lisa Indraccolo** (Chinese studies/URPP Asia and Europe) received three years of funding from the Swiss National Science Foundation for their research project “A Tangled Web of Sayings: Structural and Phonological Patterning in the Hanfeizi” (October 2016 to September 2019).

**Yasmine Berriane** (political sociology and Middle Eastern studies/URPP Asia and Europe) accepted a position as assistant professor at the Faculté de Gouvernance et de Sciences Économiques et Sociales at the University Mohammed VI in Rabat, starting in October 2017.

**Sofia Bollo** (East Asian art history/URPP Asia and Europe) submitted her doctoral thesis “Reframing Ancient China: A Multi-perspective Study on Neolithic Pottery Displays in Modern Chinese Museums” to the University of Zurich and successfully completed her dissertation review in September 2017.

**Ulrich Brandenburg** (Islamic and Middle Eastern studies/URPP Asia and Europe) submitted his doctoral thesis “Japan und der Islam, 1890–1914: Zwischen globaler Kommunikation und panasiatischer Bewegung” to the University of Zurich and successfully completed his dissertation review in March 2017.

**Tobias Delfs** (history/URPP Asia and Europe) submitted his doctoral thesis “Devianz in der Dänisch-Englisch-Halleschen Indienmission des späten 18. Jahrhunderts” to the University of Zurich and successfully completed his dissertation review in April 2017.

**Jeanne Fichtner-Egloff** (East Asian art history/URPP Asia and Europe) submitted her doctoral thesis “*Kindai bijutsu* – Zur Rezeption westlicher Kunstkonzepte in Japan um 1900. Mit Fokus auf die Meiji-zeitliche Sammlung des Historischen und Völkerkundemuseums St. Gallen” to the University of Zurich and successfully completed her dissertation review in July 2017.

**Elisa Ganser** (Indian studies/URPP Asia and Europe) received a one year grant from the Zürcher Universitätsverein (ZUNIV) for her research project “Performing Arts and Religious Practices in Classical and Medieval Sanskrit Literature” (January 2017 to August 2017).

**Amir Hamid** (Islamic and Middle Eastern studies/URPP Asia and Europe) submitted his doctoral thesis “Mediating Desire: Yūsuf al-Qaraḏāwī and the Circulation of Norms on Gender & Sexuality in the Transnational Muslim Public” to the University of Zurich and successfully completed his dissertation review in November 2017.

**Philipp Hetmantcyk** (religious studies/URPP Asia and Europe) submitted his doctoral thesis “Begräbnispraxis in China zwischen ‘Wirtschaftsrationalität’ und ‘Verschwendung’: Ökonomische Bewertungen von Religion im Kontext von Religionspolitik und Religionsphilosophie” to the University of Zurich and successfully completed his dissertation review in April 2016.

**Almut Höfert** (transcultural history of the Latin and Arabic Middle Ages/URPP Asia and Europe) accepted an offer for a professorship

of the history of the Middle Ages at the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg.

**Sandra Hotz** (legal studies/URPP Asia and Europe) submitted her habilitation “Selbstbestimmung im Vertragsrecht. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Verträgen zu ‘Liebe’, Sex und Fortpflanzung. Rechtliche und kulturelle (Schweiz, Deutschland, Japan) sowie theoretische Perspektiven zu den Grenzen der Autonomie” to the University of Zurich and successfully completed her habilitation review in June 2017.

**Eliza Isabaeva** (social and cultural anthropology/URPP Asia and Europe) submitted her doctoral thesis “Negotiating Illegality: Re-Production of State Structures in an Illegal Squatter Settlement in Bishkek” to the University of Zurich and successfully completed her dissertation review in November 2017. Furthermore, she received a visiting research grant from the Faculty of Philosophy for a two month stay at the University of Konstanz (October to November 2016) and for a two month stay at Bogazici University (July to August 2017).

**Katrin Kaufmann** (art history/URPP Asia and Europe) received a one year research fellowship from the Swiss National Science Foundation for her PhD project “Orientvisionen im zaristischen Russland – Neo-islamische Architektur und Interieurs in St. Petersburg” (January 2017 to October 2017).

**Phillip Lasater** (biblical studies/URPP Asia and Europe) submitted his doctoral thesis “The Facets of Fear: Fear of God in Exilic and Post-Exilic Contexts” to the University of Zurich and successfully completed his dissertation review in March 2017.

**Ayaka Löschke** (Japanese studies/URPP Asia and Europe) received a visiting research grant from the Faculty of Philosophy for a two month stay at the Department of Health Science and Social Welfare, Faculty of Human Sciences at Waseda University (May to June 2017).

**Angelika Malinar** (Indian studies/URPP Asia and Europe) and **Elisa Ganser** (Indian studies/URPP Asia and Europe) received three years of funding from the Swiss National Science Foundation for their research project “Performing

Arts and Religious Practices in Classical and Medieval Sanskrit Literature” (April 2018 to March 2021).

**Nina Rageth** (religious studies/URPP Asia and Europe) received one year SNF-Doc.Mobility funding for her PhD project “Siddha Medicine in the Context of Neo-Hindu Organizations in Contemporary South India: The Convergence of Religion and Medicine” (October 2017 to September 2018).

**Henning Sievert** (Islamic and Middle Eastern studies/URPP Asia and Europe) submitted his habilitation “Libyen im späten 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert: Wissen, Vermittlung und politische Kommunikation” to the University of Zurich and successfully completed his habilitation review in December 2016. In 2017, he received a call to the University of Heidelberg.

**Raji C. Steineck** (Japanology/URPP Asia and Europe) received a five year ERC Advanced Grant for his project on “Time in Medieval Japan” (TIMEJ), starting in September 2017.

**Ralph Weber** (comparative philosophy/URPP Asia and Europe) submitted his habilitation “Tertium comparationis – Vergleichende Philosophie und Philosophie des Vergleichs” to the University of Zurich and successfully completed his habilitation review in May 2016.

**Urs Weber** (religious studies/URPP Asia and Europe) received an extension of his Doc.CH grant from the Swiss National Science Foundation for the completion of his PhD project “Bestatungspraktiken in Taiwan: Tradition, Moderne und ritueller Wandel” (until February 2018).

**Tobias Weiss** (Japanese studies/URPP Asia and Europe) received a one year grant from ETH/Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) for his PhD project “‘Fukushima’ in Japan. Mediensystem, Netzwerke und Framing” (August 2016 to March 2017).

**Helena Wu** (Chinese studies/URPP Asia and Europe) submitted her doctoral thesis “Reconfiguring ‘Post’colonial Local Relations through Things, Places, and Bodies in Hong Kong Culture and Society” to the University of Zurich and successfully completed her dissertation review in September 2017.