

A New Trend in Japanese Studies at Heidelberg University

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The Dynamics of Transculturality

In the twenty-first century, with its rapidly intensifying global exchange and interconnectedness, ideas, objects and people are highly mobile. They travel in multiple ways, and with varying degrees of success have done so throughout history and around the globe. Ideas, objects and practices are transported, shared and appropriated by people on the move who constantly cross, subvert or define the boundaries of languages and cultures. Situated in multiple contexts, these objects, concepts, and practices are appropriated, domesticated, re-shaped or rejected. More importantly, these processes always take place in specific historical circumstances. Looking from a broader temporal and geographical perspective, the larger power of structures, economic trends, political alliances and technologies are subject to such influences, too.

A new trend that looks at histories through the itineraries of these moving objects, concepts and people—things and agencies that decidedly transcend, divide, or connect human societies and cultures—is currently gaining pace. Inevitably, new questions are formed. In the view of the trends that constantly reveal the dynamics of transculturation at work, how is one to understand what culture is, and what cultural entities, such as Japan, are? Moreover, given how intricately intertwined the societies of the twenty-first century have become, what is the place of Japan and Japanese Studies in this new context? Can studies of Japan also be re-considered from this challenging perspective?

Introducing the Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context”¹

Attempts to approach studies of Japan as seen through its complex connections and entanglements with the rest of the world are currently carried out at the Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context,” an interdisciplinary network of researchers at Heidelberg University, Germany.

This research center was founded in 2007 as part of the Excellence Initiative by the German state and its federal governments. It is located at the Karl Jaspers Centre for Advanced Transcultural Studies in Heidelberg, Germany, and has a branch office in New Delhi, India. Among its international partners are Chicago University, Oslo University, Zurich University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and Kyoto University.

¹ See the homepage of the Cluster: www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de.

The Cluster comprises about 250 scholars who examine the processes of exchange between cultures, and complex historical relationships, many of which unfold between Asia and Europe. Characterized by competition and conflict as well as by cultural interactions ranging from migration and trade to the formation of concepts and institutions, these relationships and exchanges are of great relevance for the global transformations of the twenty-first century. In conducting such research, the Cluster thus comprises an integral part of the University's Field of Focus "Cultural Dynamics in Globalised Worlds," with the view to making the dynamics of transcultural interaction into a field of research with strong institutional grounding and high international impact.

The Cluster of Excellence "Europe and Asia" has developed a research environment that fits the particular conditions of transcultural research crossing linguistic, media, and political borders. The institutional framework for this is in place; an inter-faculty Committee for Transcultural Studies; five tenured professorships with a transcultural focus; a Centre for Transcultural Studies as a sustainable research platform; an international Graduate Programme and a new M.A. in Transcultural Studies that will facilitate research-based learning; and cooperation with students and scholars from Asian countries, most notably Japan. Interdisciplinary Research Groups and research mini-clusters are promoted to set new benchmarks for the productivity of collaborative scholarship.

Studies of Japan from a Transcultural Perspective

The Cluster's many projects are involved in the study of Japan. These research projects approach Japan's cultural, economic, political, religious, and art history from multiple perspectives, and in close contact with other geographical and cultural entities, such as India, China, Korea, South Asia, and of course, Europe. These close contacts were not always based on the direct and unhindered exchange of ideas, material objects, and practices, but included the extended periods of time when fomenting such agencies on Japanese soil and within Japan's own cultural landscape was necessary. The modern history of Japan's entanglement with the world is even more complicated. This time span alone prompts the necessity to look very closely at the events of the twentieth century, its wars, tensions and conflicts, as well as their precursors and aftermaths in their full magnitude and scope, from a transcultural perspective.

One of the Cluster Professorships, the Chair of Cultural Economic History, has the study of Japan as its major focus. Professor Harald Fuess's research concentrates on a wide variety of topics in the social and economic history of Japan, ranging from examining gender relations and divorce politics, to nineteenth-century German origins of the Japanese beer industry. One of his recent projects curated under the auspices of the Cluster during 2009–2012 is "The Asian Sea: A Transnational Maritime History of

the Age of Imperialism, 1850–1918.” This collaborative project used the construct of an “Asian Sea” as a heuristic device to explore the transnational experiences and commonalities of countries adjacent to what has been called “the Japan Sea,” the “Korean Sea,” the “Chinese Sea,” or “the Indian Ocean” as one interdependent narrative connected or disjointed by their mutual maritime and coastal experiences. In the first Cluster funding period, along with the Chair of Chinese Intellectual History, Professor Joachim Kurtz, Professor Fuess was also a formal coordinator of the project “Religion and Medicine in Premodern East Asia” (2010–2012).

Harald Fuess is currently the Director of the Graduate Programme for Transcultural Studies, Deputy Speaker of the Cluster Research Area A “Governance and Administration,” Executive Board Member of the Graduate School for Humanities and Social Sciences of Heidelberg University (HGGS), University Scientific Coordinator of Hexagon Alliance of six German and Japanese Universities (Heidelberg University, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Kyoto University, Osaka University, Tōhoku University), and the ERASMUS² Coordinator (Cluster and East Asian Studies). Presently, he is working on two book-length projects tentatively entitled “Corporate Capitalism and Consumer Culture: A Transnational History of Beer in Japan,” and “The Republic of Commerce: Consular Courts and Conflict–Resolution in East Asia.”

Transcultural processes, no doubt, are among the chief factors shaping cultural production, in the form of reading and writing practices, bookmaking, printing, and shifts in language. Professor Judit Árokay (Japanese Studies, Heidelberg) was one of the principal investigators of the recent research project entitled “Gauging Cultural Asymmetries: Asian Satire and the Search for Identity in the Era of Colonialism and Imperialism.” This project examined the production of satire in South, East, and West Asian traditions during the high tide of European colonialism and imperialism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, focusing on satire as a communicative tool. Another project recently led by Professor Árokay is dedicated to “Language and Cultural Translation: Asymmetries in the Emergence of Modern Written Languages.” The main emphasis of this project is the Japanese language and the process of its codification as a written entity.

The study of gender, sexuality, and the body in transcultural settings is another fruitful area of Cluster research, where studies of Japan are well represented. In the Cluster’s previous funding period of 2007–2012, Professor Inken Prohl (Religious Studies, Heidelberg) and Professor Melanie Trede were involved in the project “Rethinking

2 European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students.

Gender, Sexuality and the Body in a Transcultural Art World” that was conducted mainly in 2009.

Cultural and historical entanglements of Japan are reflected in and therefore can be traced and discerned through its art. Professor Melanie Trede (East Asian Art History, Heidelberg) is a collaborator and principal investigator with several projects in the Cluster. Her projects encompass multifarious themes and topics such as “Arts and the Transcultural,” “Transcultural Visuality,” “Historicizing Violence,” “Multi-centred Modernisms,” and more recently, “Frames and Objects.”

The latter projects investigate the processes of enframing the objects in cultural exchanges between Japan, Europe, and China. This includes, for example, how an unfamiliar object could be integrated into new displaying practices by discarding, adding, or changing frames. The “Frames” focuses on the specific ways in which Chinese and European paintings, prints, or objects were adapted into Japanese visual practices—and vice versa. Among the examples of this phenomenon are the remounting of Chinese paintings for display in Japanese shogunal palaces of the fifteenth century; the transformation of frames in Flemish and Dutch world maps in Japanese painted and printed works of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the simultaneous practice of enframing East Asian artifacts in European palaces. Considered also are the late nineteenth and twentieth century re-framing of Japanese paintings in Europe and America, and the adaptation of the wooden frame for Japanese paintings in modern Japanese museum practices.

Professor Hans Martin Krämer (Japanese Studies, Heidelberg) has joined the Cluster under the auspices of the research mini-cluster “Toward a Global History of Concepts.” This research group sets out to reflect the global scope of concepts that are mainly Euro-American in origin and have been adapted around the globe in a large number of languages and by sizeable and culturally diverse communities. As a result, native keywords, metaphors, and practices have been enriched, but also replaced, by representations of globalized notions that can be understood and applied across diverse cultural contexts. Professor Krämer collaborates on this large-scale project focusing on Japan, while also leading his subproject, entitled “The Transcultural Construction of ‘Religion’ between Asia and Europe.” This project charts the processes and consequences of the introduction of the concept of “religion” into Japanese society, and explores the sweeping changes in religious practices such as the excision of rituals now deemed superstitious in Japanese Buddhism.

Not only do religious policies of the nation-states emerging in the nineteenth century reflect transcultural processes; the tensions, strategies and mechanisms of acquiring legitimacy are an object of interest for political historians. Dr. David Mervart’s project on “Languages of Political Legitimation” focuses on Japan’s political history and philosophy

in the late Tokugawa period. Part of the research mini-cluster dealing with discursive practices of political validation, his project questions how political legitimacy was acquired, constructed and sustained in pre-Meiji Japan. Dr. Orion Klautau, who specializes in the study of modern Japanese Buddhism and who joined the Cluster in 2013 from Japan, is also collaborating on this project.

During 2010–2012, Dr. Anna Andreeva, together with Dr. Dominic Steavu (Daoist Studies/Chinese Intellectual History, now at University of California, Santa Barbara, U.S.A.), co-led the project “Medicine and Religion in Premodern East Asia.” Set against the backdrop of premodern China and Japan, this joint project combined a number of case studies that shed light on the interweaving of notions about the human body, on the one hand, with wider conceptual networks of medical and healing knowledge connecting East Asia, India, and the ancient West, and on the other, the religious traditions of India, China, Korea, and Japan. In her personal contribution to this project, Dr. Andreeva focused on the cultural history of childbirth and women’s health in premodern Japan, concentrating on the study of medical and religious texts and practices dealing with gynecology, obstetrics, and constructions of the female body and gender. Dr. Andreeva is now leading the project “Economies of the Sacred: Merging Esoteric Buddhism and Kami Worship in Premodern Japan,” which is a part of the research mini-cluster “Negotiating Religion.” This project focuses on the interactions between Buddhist institutions (mainly those specialising in the study and practice of *mikkyō*) and cultic sites and sacred areas that enshrine Japanese kami.

Dr. Mio Wakita’s previous work on the visual constructs of Meiji femininity in the souvenir photograph of Kusakabe Kimbei has led to a fruitful collaboration with a number of projects within the Cluster, such as “Visual Transculturality” and “The Asian Sea.” Given the transcultural background of the souvenir photographs and their semantic ambiguity, she investigated their visual encodings by the Japanese photographer in the context of indigenous visual practices, with special attention to critical issues such as female visibility in the mid- and late Meiji period, social identity of photography models, and visual typologies. She also investigated how the original signification of Meiji femininity represented in these nineteenth-century Japanese images was perceived, manipulated, and embodied by their Western female recipients. Dr. Wakita’s further areas of interest include forms of modernity in Japanese visual culture, construction of *Japonisme* in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and Japanese cultural politics from the nineteenth century to the present day.

Martin Dusing (Japanese Studies, Newcastle, U.K.) is an Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Research Fellow currently residing in the Cluster. He was previously based at the Cluster as a visiting professor, during which time, under the auspices of

the project “The Asian Sea,” he co-organized a conference entitled “The Asia-Pacific Maritime World: Connected Histories in the Age of Empire.” Dr. Dusinger works on the social and cultural history of Japan from the mid-nineteenth to the late-twentieth centuries, focusing in particular on the ways in which the lives of “ordinary people” force historians to rethink a number of crucial issues in modern Japanese history. These include the significance of rural decline in the twentieth century, the local impact of the nuclear power industry, and the impact of the overseas Japanese diaspora on homeland life. His new project is provisionally entitled “From Newcastle to New Nation: Japan, the World, and a Ship, 1884–1910.” This will be a social history of Japan’s engagements with the outside world in the late-nineteenth century through the perspective of a single passenger-freight ship, the *Yamashiro Maru*, which was built in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.