

Editor's Note

The contributions presented here address a number of important issues in the study of transcultural interaction: space, networks, agency, and media.

Transcultural interaction might take place within the space of a transnational ideological community such as the Communist International and the later “socialist camp,” and in the process it might develop a shared visual language with its equally transnationally connected opponent, in this case the Axis powers. (Schwartz, Zhang) It might occur in a space held together by shared commercial and scholarly interests, but made up of points at great geographical distance from each other such as the United States and Japan and inserted into specific local hierarchies such as those between Japan and its Korean colony (Schladitz). It might take place in a narrowly circumscribed space such as the Silk Road oases, where traders, warriors, herders, and religious men congregated and the conflict and cooperation between the surrounding great powers was acted out (Gasparini). Or it might be constituted through the social and intellectual action of a foreigner in a distant land such as the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci in China, whose survival, activity as a translator, and continued ability to engage with local actors as well as his superiors and friends at home is evidence for his assumption of a shared humanity (Hosne).

It would seem self-evident that transcultural interaction is a process driven by human beings; that these human beings act not as stand-alone monads but within and through highly structured networks that link actors with different motivations and interests; and that it is through such networks that concepts, institutions, practices, and goods that incorporate them reach a different cultural environment. At the same time, the privileging of the human being that is implied in this understanding attributes to them a god-like power although any little Tsetse fly is able to undo it, quite apart from the fact that organisms, weather systems, tectonic plates, or technical devices all are part of networks. These networks sometimes include humans, and these actors most definitely impact human networks. Bruno Latour has made pertinent comments on this.¹ Peter Schwartz shows the intricate and highly interactive layers thus formed. The emblems of the revolutionary masses and leaders he studies include, among other layers, a layer of political and ideological authority; of artists from different contexts with different agendas who used different media; of historical references to earlier European depictions of leaders

1 Bruno Latour, “Spheres and Networks: Two Ways to Reinterpret Globalization,” *Harvard Design Magazine* 30, (September–December 2009): 139–144.

classified as “revolutionary”; of image-making and -recording devices each with their strengths and limits, and of encoding devices as well as the viewing strategies suggested by them. All of these layers are themselves conduits for transcultural interaction, often in a tense and contentious way. A particular contribution made by this study is its thick description of the interaction within the Communist context so rarely addressed in transcultural studies. Lars Schladitz studies a network made up of institutions such as museums in the US and Japan, Japanese whaling companies, the US Navy, and whaling stations in colonial Korea with actors in each, who assume particular roles and identities to make the network functional or prevent it from functioning. The head of the Japanese whaling company becomes a sponsor of scientific research; a Norwegian whale gunner becomes a source of information on whale behavior; the film camera developed for producing entertainment pictures becomes a documentation tool; the museum curator collecting the whale specimens spends much time to establish the network needed to acquire them, then starts interacting with the scholarly community through his articles so as to establish the standing of the collection, and he ends up popularizing his results in lectures and books to secure the funding for the cetacean wing of the Smithsonian Natural History Museum in Washington D.C.; the local climate in the Korean waters might fail to be as attractive for the whales to spawn as in the year before the arrival of the researcher; the whales flee the Orca “killer” whales by swimming close to shore; and after “helping” the whalers by driving the whales toward their trawlers, the Orcas abandon their cooperation once the whale is harpooned, and start taking a bite from it.

Ricci is educated at a school that was to provide the Jesuits not just with theology but with the broad education that would enable them to engage with men of letters and men of power in Europe. Ana Carolina Hosne studies Ricci’s first work in Chinese, which is based on memorized humanist classics rather than the Holy Writ or writings by the Church fathers and offers to Chinese men of letters and of power maxims on one of the founding blocks of networks: friendship. But Ricci writes this in his persona as a European man of letters addressing Chinese of the same tribe within a code that gives pride of place to “classical” sources and rational presentation. He assumed that this mode of presentation as well as the argumentative and value underpinnings of friendship were appreciated by both sides. Once he moved to his persona as a missionary for whom establishing connections to the same men of letters and of power was of crucial importance for the spread of his religious beliefs, he acted according to a different logic.

In all of the cases mentioned, whether we are dealing with revolutionary iconography, propaganda or the laborious process of getting whale specimens

to Washington D.C., we have written evidence to document the networks, their participants, and their perception. The silent textile fragments and wall paintings studied by Mariachiara Gasparini, however, offer no such texts, but they do furnish some evidence that allows us to at least partially reconstruct these networks: the textile patterns that are formed by a weaving technique using similar fixed “mathematical” numbers of warp and weft threads. This evidence allows for a tentative reconstruction of the different cultural warps and wefts going into these fabrics.

Where is the agency driving the transcultural interaction analyzed in these papers? The quick answer “agency is a function of power,” which seems to need no further proof, finds little if any support here. Shaoqian Zhang’s contribution shows that the artists forming, in 1943, the Japanese Print Service Society to support the war effort did so with their own, possibly rather complex, motives, but there was no “power” appearing at their studio demanding that they make propaganda prints. The same was true for the Chinese artists producing the propaganda prints for the various Chinese governments installed by or cooperating with Japan as well as for those who did the same in the context of the resistance against Japan, whether their output was taken up by the Political (Propaganda) Department of the Guomindang/Chinese Communist Party government or published independently. The study by Peter Schwartz points in the same direction. The ultimate authority, however, that decides on transcultural acceptance (or rejection)—and in fact produces the “pull” for it—is characterized by something one might call “passive agency.” The anonymous Chinese scholar, to give an example, who is willing to have a look at Ricci’s *On Friendship* might not have been involved in the activities of selecting the maxims, translating them, spending money to have them cut and printed, writing a preface for the book, or checking whether its maxims contravene an imperial ban on pornography or prognostications concerning the dynasty, but it is to him that all this activity is ultimately directed, and the collective absence among such scholars of any interest in Ricci’s maxims would assign the nicely printed work to the great dustbin of unsuccessful transcultural offers. The equally unknown father who might – or might not - be taking his children to attend a lecture by Andrews on whale species and who will perhaps even make a donation to the Smithsonian or support a congressman who votes funding for it is under no “power” pressure either way. The endlessly complex layers of agency from Andrews’ letters to the water currents, from the Korean workers taking home part of Andrews’ whale to cook a soup to the Orcas showing up in time for the hunt are in the end all validated only by the passive agency of this father or his counterpart in Tokyo who might – or might not - go to have a look at the whale model the Smithsonian sent in exchange for the specimens. All the “power” of the photographer or cameraman over the image-making

and -recording device only opens the way to operate within the agency of the device itself; this agency of the device in turn establishes its own interaction with that of its object, and all three layers depend on the same ultimate arbiter who furthermore enjoys the privilege to “understand” the product according to his or her own devices with often unexpected and creative results. Instead of a unified simple ascription of agency to “power” these studies show that transcultural interaction takes place in a complex and highly unstable chain of interlinked and distributed agency of many different hues with the ultimate, unpredictable, and “passive” anchor at the very end of the process.

Finally, the media. Their sad name has reduced their role to just being the blind “middle”men, but since Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore at least the modern media have seen their standing improved. The papers contained in this volume show that the agency or assumed powers of media, as well as their lively interaction existed long before the “globalized” media of modern times. The patterns woven into Central Asian textiles of the seventh or eighth century reappear as architectural ornaments in murals; the iconology underlying PRC bank notes takes up elements from Soviet photography and film both of the avant-garde and the Stalinist periods, but ultimately goes back to visual strategies developed for earlier political narratives; Ricci’s *On Friendship* moves from a Europe, where print was just in the process of establishing its own features independent of manuscripts, to a highly commercialized Chinese urban print culture with the aim of inserting itself into the high-register category of “classics”; Andrews mobilizes the full range of “media” at his disposal, trying through their combination to mobilize the strengths of each, and overcome their limitations—with the notebook and its measurements, drawings and descriptions, with photography, the film camera, parts of the whales preserved in alcohol in glass containers, the whale bone specimen itself, slides for public lectures, the painting of a seascape on the museum wall behind the whale skeletons, and scholarly articles as well as popular books.

The still prevalent arraignment of academic fields that assigns texts in a given language and scholarly field to one discipline, images in a given medium and from one given place to another, and the historical, cultural, and geographic contexts of all of them again to different disciplines is certainly not contributive to studies such as those attempted here that are defined by the intrinsic connections of an object or process rather than a scholarly discipline. The contributions which the studies in this issue present have to be read and appreciated as efforts to live up to this challenge which all of us face.

Rudolf G. Wagner