

Editorial Note

Like the field of inquiry from which it takes its name, *Transcultural Studies* has developed quickly over the past five years. Starting with what, in hindsight, looks like a rather slim issue of 99 pages in 2010, the journal has not only grown in size (to 289 pages in this issue) and thematic breadth, but also introduced new features, which, judging from readers' and authors' feedback, have enhanced the utility of our site as a platform for scholarly discussion. Themed sections, video podcasts, and other multimedia formats, as well as a continued commitment to making articles originally written or published in other languages available in English, have all helped to broaden the scope of our project and sharpen its profile. At the same time, they have significantly increased the workload of the editorial team. To share this burden more equitably, responsibilities have now been spread over three pairs of shoulders instead of two. Beginning with this release, Joachim Kurtz, a professor of intellectual history at Heidelberg whose research centers on exchanges of scientific and philosophical knowledge between Europe and East Asia, is joining our effort to stimulate and distribute empirically grounded studies in a transcultural mood.

The five articles in this issue, one of which is a translation of a path-breaking article first published in Italian, underline the fertility of transcultural approaches in areas as diverse as the history of science, art history, archaeology, visual anthropology, and literary studies. Although dealing with very different regions and time periods, all essays aim to understand the mobility of people, artifacts, and institutions as well as less tangible objects such as concepts, practices, styles, and genres, by studying the physical traces they left behind in the diverse environments shaping and shaped by their presence or passage. Operating each with its own distinct analytical vocabularies, these essays underline the necessity of, and contribute toward, crafting a more nuanced lexicon that enables a firmer grasp of transcultural phenomena. They also show that this enterprise does not need to reinvent the wheel: all draw on and enter into conversation with existing languages—postcolonial, structuralist, or other—and demonstrate that their terms can be turned into more adequate tools by tightening their usages and specifying their realms of application.

Dhruv Raina's essay, which opens this issue, adds to our understanding of the global career of the concept of the "sciences"—one of the few notions whose essential modernity is rarely, if ever, questioned—by tracing its "critical assimilation" in India. Building on earlier work on the naturalization of the term in late nineteenth-century Bengal, Raina reconstructs how the sciences came to be qualified as "exact" and "positive" in the early twentieth century. Instead of extracting evidence from scientific books and papers, he scrutinizes

the “meta-narrative” sketched in three pioneering works on the history of science among the “ancient Hindus.” Written by “cultural amphibians” equally versed in the idioms of contemporary science and classical learning, these books offer a “reverse commentary” on European representations of the nature of the sciences and Orientalist views of ancient Indian forms of knowledge. This commentary was no vain historiographical rationalization, fabricated to defend the dignity of Indian civilization. Rather, it must be read in the larger context of the institutionalization of the natural and social sciences, which drew some of its legitimacy from a selective revitalization of the past. Of particular interest from a transcultural perspective is the fact that the linkage between the proliferation of modern scientific practices and the reconstruction of their history was by no means unique to India. As Iwo Amelung has recently shown, the history of Chinese science was shaped in similar ways by a roughly contemporaneous generation of amphibious scientists who used reflections on the past to valorize their own expertise. One could also mention that in Germany, likewise and again at around the same time, the history of technology could not have taken root as an academic discipline without the incisive and perhaps also not entirely disinterested support of the Association of German Engineers (VDI).

Even casual readers will easily understand why the magisterial essay on narrative art between India and the Hellenistic world by the late Maurizio Taddei (1936–2000) seemed so important to our concerns that we decided to translate it more than twenty years after its initial publication in 1993. Based on decades of work on the art of Gandhāra, and many years *in situ*, Taddei reviews and refutes with unparalleled facility the parochial views that have shaped Orientalist understandings of the “classic components,” i.e., alleged Greco-Roman elements, in the stelae, statues, and reliefs preserved in this forgotten Indo-European borderland. Without denying the contributions of earlier generations, his account of changing European views of Indian art, Buddhism, and their expression in Gandhāran artifacts—shifting seamlessly between, and at times even confounding, adulation and condemnation—lucidly exposes the religious and ideological assumptions underlying persistent but largely unproductive debates about who influenced whom and whose style or ideas were more original. Focusing on narrative reliefs depicting scenes from the life of the Buddha, Taddei argues that Gandhāran art has no exact counterparts in either Greece or India. Its representative works should thus not be seen as illicit, if by some standards alluring, mongrels but as independent creations that deserve to be studied in their own right. His analysis proves that the explanatory force of approaches tracing the “interplay of influences” overlooks much of what studies of a more transcultural (not his term) orientation are able to recover. By treating the results of direct or mediated contacts as genuine co-productions, i.e. studying them without

reflexively privileging questions of origin, ownership, or preeminence, we gain “a beautiful opportunity” to recognize their specific or even unique features. Even those inclined to disagree with the somewhat idealistic wording of Taddei’s conclusion should be able to concur that this rich essay, ancient by the standards of current academic fashions, exemplifies many virtues that transcultural studies can ignore only at their peril.

Linkages in and between localities are a key theme of Christiane Brosius’ article on public art in urban spaces. With the idea of a “center” or an “artistic mainstream” able to grant or deny entry to artists from the margins having become an anachronism, the essay shows how cultural practice today has moved towards a more transversal process of linkages that seeks to renew its anchors within one or more localities. The art festival *48°C Public.Art. Ecology*, transculturally curated in Delhi in 2008, allows the author to explore the relationship between globally mobile, contemporary art and its local emplacement within the urban setting of a mega-city. The city itself, an urban agglomeration that absorbs natural resources at an alarming rate, functions as an index of the new geopolitical and economic status of Asia. The article asks questions about the possibilities of artistic intervention within urban public space that emerges as an alternative to the museum or the gallery for staging new narratives, images, and critical perspectives. The ethnographic study draws on information obtained from the organizers of the festival, its curators, and visitors. It proposes the concept of “in-between” to refer to those spaces that lie beyond the more consciously coded arenas and which could become sites of contestation. In addition, it raises questions about the very nature of “publicness” and of the city as a site of human rights and civil society in India. By fashioning itself as both a festival and a discursive realm for cultural debate—and oscillating uncertainly between the two—*48°C* continued to partake of the exclusionary privileges of contemporary art and remained safely cocooned from the teeming urban sprawl beyond.

Lisa Safford’s article on lacquer painting in colonial and postcolonial Vietnam can be located within the growing body of work that seeks to theorize artistic modernism as a transculturally constituted movement. Its formation—so the general argument runs—can be meaningfully studied only when non-Western experiments are brought center stage to destabilize the apparatus wherein the North Atlantic West is cast as the center from which avant-garde trends radiated to the peripheries. The study of Vietnam demonstrates how modernist art was born out of the encounter of local artists with institutions and practices introduced by the colonial power—art schools, new media, and naturalist styles. Much in the manner of the “reverse commentary” explored by Raina, local subjects that were formed through the colonial experience drew on the construct of a “hyperreal” Europe (Dipesh Chakrabarty) to generate a kind of

modernism that revalorized tradition instead of dethroning it. Lacquer painting came to serve as an expression of the urge towards liberation from the colonial yoke and was used to create works in a style and format that staked a claim to be considered “modern.” Parallels to developments described by Raina extend to the institutional level. Colonial art schools opened a space for traditional artisans conversant with the medium of lacquer to train as “artists.” The idioms of European landscape painting were deployed by Vietnamese artists together with a critical engagement with modernist tropes of primitivism to create a style of painting in lacquer that could articulate its own specific social critique. Yet such a style, the article argues, developed an elasticity that allowed it to be used by different actors in specific historical moments—making lacquer painting both a museum object and a mass-produced tourist souvenir.

The final contribution in this issue explores the conditions that facilitate the migration of a literary genre. Supplementing her recent monograph on *The Chinese Political Novel*, Catherine Vance Yeh’s essay reconstructs the role of Shanghai’s Shenbaoguan Publishing House in paving the way for the recasting of Chinese narrative prose around the turn of the twentieth century. Expanding on events summarized in a single paragraph in her book, the author aims to recover the material and cultural conditions that triggered the meteoric rise of the political novel in China after 1898. Driven by its energetic British founder, Ernest Major, the Shenbaoguan set a model of commercially viable publishing that included a nation-wide distribution network, appealing print formats, and channels for effective communication between editors and readers. But the press also contributed to create a favorable cultural environment. Thanks to its protected location in Shanghai’s International Settlement and the port city’s affluent urban audience, it was ideally positioned to introduce Chinese readers to the novel as the leading literary genre in Europe and to prepare the ground for a rehabilitation of homegrown narrative. In paratextual writings and advertisements, Major and his Chinese associates worked to dispel traditional suspicions, defending in the process the novel’s ambivalent affective potential, its entertainment function, and its broadened target readership, including women—all causes, Yeh argues, that were later taken up by the protagonists of her monograph. The immediate reward for the Shenbaoguan’s foray into fiction publishing was mainly commercial. The intellectual impact of their cultural brokerage is much harder to gauge. Still, both are well worth studying and recounting, if only in the humble pages of *Transcultural Studies*.

As always, we hope you will enjoy reading this issue and look forward to your comments, critiques—and further submissions to keep our expanded editorial team busy.

Monica Juneja and Joachim Kurtz