

Editorial Note

This issue of *Transcultural Studies* opens with a study of interventionist art at urban sites in the heart of post-apartheid Johannesburg. Fiona Siegenthaler examines the role of artists as agents in the public spaces of a transforming city, as they resist, contest, or end up complicit in its gentrification. The article describes two different approaches adopted by artists as they engage with projects of urban revitalization: while the artist Ismail Farouk developed new trolleys to campaign for the rights of informal entrepreneurs, the artist duo The Trinity Session worked with the City of Johannesburg to refurbish parks and develop a program of site-specific art in densely populated inner-city neighborhoods. The work of art in this study emerges as something ongoing, a definition that shifts from a finished product to an intervention. The use of public space and the sites chosen to challenge the image of the city as a site of urban decay has the effect of broadening the audience to include those who may not be regular gallery visitors. Yet the position of artists in a gentrifying city, Siegenthaler argues, remains caught in the ambivalent nature of their sociality as politically engaged actors, as well as residents and consumers of the same urbanity. Though at first glance this would appear to be a local story, it unfolds against the backdrop of complex transformatory processes that mark the transition from a “European-style” city to an “African” one, signaling the importance of locality to a transcultural investigation. Further, Siegenthaler’s study builds on a distinction that separates the art it examines from that which circulates globally under the label “African contemporary art.” In doing so, such work wrestles with established notions of whom a work of art is expected to “please,” who has the right to assess it, and how we measure its efficacy. The often unpredictable forms of artistic production that we encounter in this story of engaging with the city have been described by the author as ending in a form of capitulation to, or complicity with, the forces of neoliberal gentrification they had set out to oppose, leaving us with the question: could this very failure succeed in pushing the concept of art further? What does such intervention make visible, not only in the urban locale, but also in the art world beyond?

The second contribution moves from the exploration of urban art to the transcultural histories of politics and law. Egas Moniz Bandeira reconstructs a pivotal moment in the global history of constitutional thinking in the first decade of the twentieth century. Within five years, four major Eurasian powers, Russia, Persia, and the Ottoman and Qing Empires, drafted constitutional documents in a roughly simultaneous effort

to align their polities with an emerging international consensus on the indispensable elements of modern statehood. Focusing on the tumultuous process that led to the presentation of the first and ultimately futile drafts of a Qing constitution in the years leading up to the fall of the dynasty in 1911, the author draws attention to the interconnected nature of the global wave of constitutional movements. His careful analysis, which draws on published sources and archival materials in eight languages, challenges two conventional assumptions that continue to inform simplistic accounts of an exclusively Western origin of the modern world order. In their attempt to craft a charter suited to meet the specific needs of the vast Qing Empire, he shows that Chinese scholars and officials looked not only to the Euro-American “centers” of constitutional thought or their Japanese outpost. Rather, their insights were formed in a dialogue with thinkers in other so called “peripheral” states, such as Russia, Persia, and Ottoman Turkey, who wrestled with problems much more similar to their own than those addressed by the Western models that their blueprints allegedly mimicked. Instead of a unidirectional transfer from the West to the rest, the history of constitutional thinking as recounted here thus reveals a complex network of multidirectional linkages that punctures the plausibility of diffusionist paradigms. These latter assumptions often entail a second tacit assumption that Moniz Bandeira’s study invites us to question: namely, the general temporal precedence of Euro-American developments. To be sure, many tenets of the modern world order found their earliest expressions in Europe and North America or the territories dominated by Western powers. But this does not imply that every aspect we have come to identify as essential to the modern world system was conceived and implemented there first, in splendid isolation, and only then transferred, with inevitable delays, to regions struggling to catch up. The “constitutional moment” captured in Moniz Bandeira’s essay suggests a more complicated chronology that acknowledges the more or less simultaneous contributions by actors and societies from around the world through which this system was eventually stabilized.

The two concluding studies focus on an aspect of the early East Asian treaty port system that has attracted little attention: the firms and places at the margins that failed in their efforts to exploit the new options. Takahiro Yamamoto delves into the local archive of the port town Arita on Kyushu Island in southern Japan, which to this day is a center of porcelain production. What he found allowed him to reconstruct the forgotten efforts of the Tashiroya company to establish itself in Japanese and Chinese treaty ports and do global business with porcelain products in places as far apart as New York, Seoul, and Singapore, until it was

brought down by Japanese competitors and market fluctuation. Steven Ivings describes Hakodate, a fishing village in Japan's far north, which had been made a treaty port because of its fine natural harbor and had even been the capital of a short-lived "Ezo Republic." He shows how it never attracted the local and international entrepreneurial talent that made places like Shanghai or Yokohama into such regional and global hubs of trade, finance, and media, but drew only rough whaling crews and a few frustrated consuls.

Even for such micro-historical studies, there are formidable challenges to exploring the connections that tie local actors to layers of state and international diplomacy on the institutional side, to developments and actors in far away places with their own records in other languages, and to ideas and concepts that have become widely shared across languages. These two superbly sourced papers call for further explorations with different methodologies and, hopefully, cooperation from different fields. What makes a shop in Arita, which is not even a treaty port, imagining itself as a trading and even manufacturing company with dependencies across different treaty ports and beyond? What does the reliance on family members to manage these dependencies say about the Tashiroya family's (lack of) trust in legal institutions in other treaty ports or states to secure its rights? What were the models for Japanese bureaucrats and diplomats in acting as facilitators and protectors of Japanese trade in Shanghai or Korea? How does one integrate the study of a single business with that of the international market in which it operates? What role do the productive, cultural, and financial resources of the hinterland, rather than the safety of the harbor from storms, play in the fate of a treaty port such as Hakodate? How does one define the locale of a treaty port? Are the successful ones among them primarily part of the geographical and political entity where they are situated, or primarily part of a network of treaty ports and other international hubs with which they share a substantial degree of independence from the government? To what degree did the East Asian treaty ports offer an attractive level field for entrepreneurs from East Asia, even though extraterritoriality privileged the Westerners? Would the Hanseatic League be a good model to think about these ports? Even the most enclosed locale and local activity is inextricably linked to transcultural exchanges. Starting out from this assumption rather than from the often staunchly defended identity and authenticity of the local remains the real methodological and practical challenge of transcultural studies.

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