

Editor's Note

The good news is that *Transcultural Studies* is doing well, finding its readers, authors, and critics. The other news is: it is hard work.

Issue 2/2011 features studies on the ambivalent role that plaster casts of oriental monuments played in Western museums to document imperial control, highlight the respect for other cultures, inform the foreign public, and provide scholars with hands-on objects to study and even to experiment with (Falser); on the process and agents through which speakers of Tibetan and Korean developed their knowledge of each other in the contact zone that was the Chinese capital in pre-modern times (Tikhonov) and a new contribution to the series on “multi-centred modernisms” that investigates the process, agents, and institutions that devised “modern Chinese art” as a globally recognized frame for a relatively consistent group of artists (Koch). This issue also features the first of two themed sections with studies on the dynamics of “trends”. The contributions to this section show that trends spread with a high formal similarity while being inserted into often utterly different cultural, political, or scholarly environments that substantially changed their meaning. Themes range from the ways in which anime films deal with their own transculturality (Annett) to the adoption of Maoist policies, slogans, and imagery among West German leftists (Gehrig), to the ways in which young urbanites in Nanjing reenacted the romantic encounter depicted in a Taiwanese on-line novel in locations and through the consumption that mirrored that of the novel’s protagonists (Henningsen).

Themed sections, such as the current one, allow scholars who have previously collaborated to publish their results in a manner retaining their cohesion. At the same time, we start to see the linkages between seemingly widely divergent topics. The German avant-garde artists with their “Maoist” sympathies in Gehrig’s paper take up features of Cultural Revolution art, which eventually turn the ironical treatment of this art by Chinese artists after 1977—as treated in Koch’s paper—into an internationally recognizable language.

We are pleased that many of the articles are by junior scholars. For some it is their first publication. A transcultural approach will only be able to show its merits and test its mettle if young scholars take it up. We are also pleased that TS is gradually establishing itself as a publication venue that attracts interest from all over the world. But we also realize what is still ahead of us.

We would like to draw in more contributions from Asian scholars; more contributions dealing with the dynamics of transcultural interaction particularly in the pre-modern and ancient world as well as in the time before writing was developed; and contributions on topics like law, economy, and society that are approaching their subject with a transculturally informed social science methodology.

The vast field of the particular methodologies required for transcultural studies needs to be further explored. These methodologies have to be able to confront the messiness and often shoddy documentation of transcultural interactions while focusing on the problems and issues involved rather than defining them along medial, language, national, or disciplinary borders. At the same time they have to live up to rigorous scholarly scrutiny. How does one prove the impact of a Taiwanese on-line novel (as in the study by Lena Henningsen) on the life-style of young urbanites in the People's Republic of China? How does one document the formation of the notion of a "modern Chinese art" as a viable pedestal for exhibitions, museums, commercial galleries, and scholarly work (as in Franziska Koch's article)? How can a single young scholar produce an integrated study about the international perceptions of the Chinese Cultural Revolution; how they are linked with local political articulations outside China in environments as diverse as Yugoslavia, the US, France, and Germany; the constant interactions between these localized perceptions to form international trends on the level of form rather than of substance, and the involvement on both the local and international level of artists, writers, students, military men and strategists, dissidents, and journalists (as in the case of Sebastian Gehrig's study)? At the center of these questions lies the burden of proof. For the study of transcultural interactions it will not do to simply add up established burdens of proof as they are practiced in, say, media-, language-, or territorially fixed disciplines. This would only result in some "hyperburden of proof" that would be disconnected from the problem under consideration and lead to the double impasse of unfeasibility of the research and easy dismissal of the results. At the same time, the danger of connecting anecdotal tidbits into some grand proposition that does not aim at falsifiability is very real, as is the danger of superimposing some grand theoretical proposition over a specific set of data without allowing the results of the study to respond to this imposition.

We have to explore the potential of an on-line publication for transcultural studies and encourage our contributors to make the best use of it. Transcultural interaction does not abide by an orderly confinement to nicely circumscribed channels. It is systematically underreported in nearly all texts and archives, as well as classification and tagging schemes for texts, sounds, and images. Consequently, the importance of indirect evidence is heightened. The mutually supportive weight of pieces of evidence in different media that are too weak on their own to sustain an argument but together make it plausible enough to open the path to more systematic searches calls for a type of research and documentation that makes fullest possible use of the digital presentation of the evidence. This is what an e-journal can and should do. A glance through this issue shows that making use of this option is a learning process, and that both our authors and the team that is in charge of the journal have still some way to go.

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