Junior Research Group “Transcultural Dynamics of Pentecostalism” is part of Research Area B of the Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context.”

Research Area B “Public Spheres” explores cultural exchange processes between Asia and Europe in public and private fields of social practice. A particular focus lies on the transculturality of visual and textual media entanglements, gender-specific practices, and social networks. The projects within this research area study shifting conceptions of music, art, culture, changing media, floating spaces, and intermedary figures such as cultural brokers.

The institutional framework for the Research Group is provided by the Cluster of Excellence „Asia and Europe in a Global Context“ at Heidelberg University. Established in October 2007 and in cooperation with renowned international institutions, it is part of the Excellence Initiative by the German Federal and State Governments. The aim of the Cluster is to enhance the understanding of the multi-layered interactions between and within Asia and Europe by examining the specific dynamics of transcultural interactions from an interdisciplinary perspective. In 2017, the Cluster will be merged into the permanent Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies (HCTS).

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OVERVIEW

Over the last decades, Pentecostal Christianity has increasingly developed into a global phenomenon with a strong ability to adapt to different cultural contexts. Since the 1980s, a sustained growth of Pentecostal churches in the multi-ethnic and multi-religious, but secular state of Singapore is observable.

The Singaporean state prescribes a strict separation of the political and the religious sphere and sanctions any violation of the separation by law. State control necessitates ongoing negotiations and transformations of religious discourses, practices and identities that produce new localised forms of Singaporean Pentecostalism and simultaneously generate new forms of a global identification with Pentecostal Christianity.

The Junior Research Group “Transcultural Dynamics of Pentecostalism” focuses on the transformation of late-modern Pentecostal moral codes and modes of subjectivation, questions of identity, and the negotiation of boundaries in the nexus of globalising processes and localised public spheres in contemporary Singapore. Local processes of negotiation, adaptation, and transformations of religious discourses and practices in a global context are at the centre of the analysis. Here, the focus lies on the production of new forms of localisation of Pentecostal Christianity and how these are re-injected into larger circuits of exchange.

ACTIVITIES

To discuss their research with fellow scholars and further develop their projects, the JRG “Transcultural Dynamics of Pentecostalism” organises several workshops and lectures focusing on various aspects of Pentecostalism.

During lectures with Allan Heaton Anderson (University of Birmingham, UK), Cristina Rocha (University of Western Sydney, Australia) and Michael Wilkinson (Trinity Western University, Canada), local, global, and transcultural aspects of Pentecostalism were explored. The workshop “Studying Contemporary Evangelicalism and Charismatic Christianity” was the kickoff event for future collaboration with the German Association for the Study of Religion (DVRW).

In order to engage in dialogue with peers, members of the group have presented their research at internationally well known institutions, such as the NUS Singapore, SOAS in London and the World Congress of Sociology in Yokohama. Within the Cluster’s Annual Conference 2014, the JRG organised a panel on “Mediating Asian Christianities: Agents, Practices, Concepts” together with Prof. Robbie B. H. Goh (NUS Singapore).

To make the group’s research results open to the public, an exhibition with photo and video installations on Pentecostalism in the public sphere of Singapore is planned for 2015.

GROUP MEMBERS

Dr. Katja Rakow is Leader of the Junior Research Group. Her current research project “Making the Global Network Tangible” is a fieldwork-based case study on televangelists and megachurch pastors in the USA and Singapore. The analysis focuses on the global distribution of media products and the network of religious actors and key figures as cultural mediators between different local and global spheres.

Esther Berg has studied Religious, East Asian and Transcultural Studies at Heidelberg University. Currently, she is conducting research for her PhD project “Transcultural Dynamics of Contemporary Christian Small Group Practice” evolving from a case study of a charismatic megachurch in Singapore.

Matthias Deininger’s PhD project “Building the ‘Antioch of Asia’: Christian Heterotopias and the State in Singapore” aims to explore different modes of Christian mission practices and societal engagements in Singapore. Before conducting his research at the Cluster, Matthias Deininger studied Cultural Studies and Religious Cultures in Switzerland.