The Culture of Stress
"The Culture of Stress" was the topic of a workshop on May 22 and 23 at the Karl Jaspers Centre. It was held by project C5 "Stress and Stress Relief". Prof. Richard Wilkinson from University of Nottingham, UK, gave a keynote speech with the title "Inequality: The enemy between us?“

The workshop addressed 'stress' in Western and Non-Western countries. Less than a century ago, Western medical science developed the concept of 'stress'. After the Second World War this concept was rapidly disseminated by the mass media, and it now permeates everyday discourse in the West. With (neoliberal) globalization, success-oriented Western work regimes and life-styles and the 'stress' associated with them are allegedly spreading across the globe, especially into the Asian growth economies.

The workshop combined epidemiological research on 'stress' with anthropological and historical approaches investigating the transcultural processes by which phenomena such as stress emerge and are embedded into very different socio-cultural settings.

The invited scholars addressed questions such as "How are living conditions, life events and lifestyles that in Western discourse are thought to generate 'stress' perceived, framed and acted upon in particular social settings in non-Western countries?" or "What are the (transcultural) trajectories and who are the (transcultural) actors involved in the dissemination of the concept of 'stress'?"

The first keynote lecture on May 22 was held by Prof. Richard Wilkinson, professor emeritus in social epidemiology at the University of Nottingham, UK. He is well-known for his research on inequalities in health and the social determinants of health. Prof. Allan Young from McGill University, Canada, gave the second keynote lecture on May 23. He spoke about "Stress, traumatic stress and the culture of resilience".

The workshop was organised by Dr. Christian Strümpell, Dr. Adrian Loerbroks, Hasan Ashraf and Maria Steinisch from research project C5 "Stress and Stress Relief". The project is coordinated by Prof. William Sax, Prof. Wolfgang Eckart and Prof. Joachim Fischer.
Tuesday, May 22, 2012

09:00 - 09:30 Registration
09:30 - 09:45 Welcome and Introduction

Session A
Chair: William Sax
09:45 - 11:15 Keynote: Richard Wilkinson:
Inequality: the enemy between us?
11:15 - 11:30 Coffee Break

Session B
Chair: Christian Strümpell
11:30 - 12:15 Hasan Ashraf:
Bangladesh’s global garment factories and the political economy of ‘stress’
12:15 - 13:00 Rita Yusuf, Maria Steinisch, Adrian Loerbroks:
Stress and health in Asia: epidemiological perspectives
13:00 - 14:00 Lunch Break

Session C
Chair: Harald Fuess
14:00 - 14:45 Saskia Rohmer:
Culture and ‘insanity’: theories of stress in the late 19th and early 20th century
14:45 - 15:30 Wolfgang Eckart:
Maltreated bodies and harrowed souls: stress and trauma during and after the Great War
15:30 - 16:00 Coffee Break

Session D
Chair: Joachim Fischer
16:00 - 16:45 William Dressler:
Culture and the stress process
16:45 - 17:30 Christian Strümpell:
‘Stress’ and social capital in Bangladesh’s steel Factories
19:30 Dinner
**Wednesday, May 23, 2012**

**Session E**  
*Chair: Wolfgang Eckart*

09:00 - 10:30 Keynote: Allan Young  
Stress, traumatic stress and the culture of resilience

10:30 - 10:45 Coffee Break

**Session F**  
*Chair: Adrian Loerbroks*

10:45 - 11:30 Dominique Behague:  
Teen technoscience and the anguish of ‘making up’ teen mothers in Southern Brazil

11:30 - 12:15 Nike-Ann Schröder:  
Learning resilience?!

12:15 - 12:25 Coffee Break

**Session G**  
*Chair: Adrian Loerbroks, Christian Strümpell*

12:25 - 13:15 Final discussion  
William Sax, Wolfgang Eckart, Joachim Fischer (Discussants)

13:15 - 14:30 Lunch Break
THE CULTURE OF STRESS

Welcome address by Prof. Madeleine Herren-Oesch, the Cluster's Acting Director
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Prof. Madeleine Herren-Oesch welcomes the guests and participants of the conference
The co-organiser Dr. Adrian Loerbroks gives a short introduction and presents the exhibition “Visualising Stress Effects” that accompanied the conference.
The first keynote lecture was given by Prof. Richard Wilkinson from the University of Nottingham, UK.
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Prof. Wilkinson speaking about “Inequality: the enemy between us?”
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One of the diagrams showed by Prof. Wilkinson during his keynote lecture
The audience at the conference listening to the first keynote lecture
Hasan Ashraf during his talk on “Bangladesh’s global garment factories and the political economy of ‘stress’”
Hasan Ashraf giving the introduction to his paper on Bangladesh’s garment factories
Maria Steinisch speaks about “Stress and health in Asia: epidemiological perspectives”
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Maria Steinisch during her presentation
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Discussion chaired by Dr. Christian Strümpell after the talks by Dr. Adrian Loerbroks, Maria Steinisch, and Hasan Ashraf
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Dr. Adrian Loerbroks during the discussion
The paper “Culture and ‘insanity’: theories of stress in the late 19th and early 20th century” was given by Saskia Rohmer
Prof. Wolfgang Eckart speaks about “Maltreated bodies and harrowed souls: stress and trauma during and after the Great War”
Discussion during the coffee break in front of a poster of the exhibition “Visualising Stress Effects”
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Prof. Wilkinson and Dr. Dressler (University of Alabama) in a discussion during the coffee break.
Dr. Christian Strümpell giving a talk on “‘Stress’ and social capital in Bangladesh’s steel factories”
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Podium discussion after presentations by Dr. William Dressler and Dr. Christian Strümpell, chaired by Prof. Joachim Fischer
The second day started with a keynote lecture by Prof. Allan Young from McGill University in Canada on “Stress, traumatic stress and the culture of resilience”
Dr. Dominique Behague from London speaks about “Teen technoscience and the anguish of ‘making up’ teen mothers in Southern Brazil”
Prof. William Sax shared his conclusions during the final discussion
Final comments by Prof. Joachim Fischer in the last session
THE CULTURE OF STRESS
The main organisers Dr. Adrian Loerbroks and Dr. Christian Strümpell give the concluding remarks
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Group picture of the participants of the conference in front of the Karl Jaspers Centre
The conference “The Culture of Stress” was organised by research project C5 “Stress and Stress Relief” at the Cluster “Asia and Europe in a Global Context”.

The concept of 'stress' emerged in Western medical discourse not even a century ago and was associated with a modern, urban-industrial fast-paced work- and life-style. Soon after World War II 'stress' turned into the dominant issue in professional and lay discourse on the predicament of modern success-oriented societies, and triggered a growing demand for 'stress-relieving' techniques and products. With (neoliberal) globalisation this Western life-style is spreading across the globe, especially into the Asian growth economies, and so is – allegedly – the Western concept 'stress'. At the same time, Asian meditation techniques are advertised as traditional Eastern remedies for 'stressed' Westerners.

The project adopts an interdisciplinary approach combining historical, anthropological and epidemiological (biomedical/statistical) methodologies to study the processes underlying the transcultural flow of stress and stress relief techniques between Europe and South Asia.

The researchers investigate from a historical perspective how in the West ‘stress’ developed as a medical concept since the late 19th century (Saskia Rohmer); the anthropological subprojects study how people experience and describe their lives in extremely stressful settings such as factories in Bangladesh (Hasan Ashraf, Christian Strümpell) and how Buddhist techniques are applied to cope with suffering and increase resilience in India as well as in Europe (Nike-Ann Schröder); while the epidemiological subproject works on developing an epidemiological tool to assess stress culturally sensitively and to analyse associations of work stress with health outcomes in Bangladesh and China (Adrian Loerbroks, Maria Steinisch).

The research project is coordinated by Prof. Wolfgang Eckart, Prof. Joachim Fischer, and Prof. William S. Sax.
About the Cluster “Asia and Europe”

The Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context” is an interdisciplinary network of researchers at Heidelberg University. It was founded in October 2007 as part of the Excellence Initiative launched by the German state and its federal governments.

Today, the Cluster has about 300 affiliated researchers, who examine the processes of cultural exchange between Asia and Europe. In particular, they analyse the shifting asymmetries in cultural, social and political flows. Their work probes issues relevant to contemporary concerns about globalisation by investigating the cultural transfer of ideas, knowledge and commodities.

The Cluster is located at the Karl Jaspers Centre for Advanced Transcultural Studies. Among its partners are Harvard University (United States) and the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (India).