Trends on the Move: Transcultural Dimensions of Popular Flows
The exchange of trends between Asia and Europe was the topic of the final conference of research project B12 “Rethinking Trends”. The conference titled “Trends on the Move” was held on October 28th and 29th, 2011, at the Karl Jaspers Centre.

At the conference, project members discussed the transcultural, historical, and socio-political dimensions of popular global trends with senior scholars from various fields of study. Topics of the conference “Trends on the Move – Transcultural Dimensions of Popular Flows” included trends in consumer culture, film, fashion, media, and popular political culture.

The conference was the final event of research project B12 “Rethinking Trends”. By covering a wide array of different trends, it seeks a better understanding of the dynamics of trends over time: “How do trends develop? Which role do different agents as well as institutions play in the global popularisation of certain trends? Why are some trends rather short-lived while others surprisingly resilient?” The research project consists of a three-year fully funded research network comprising 13 junior scholars from different academic backgrounds under the auspices of Prof. Barbara Mittler.

For more information visit www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/en/trends-conference
Friday, 28 October 2011

Welcome and Introduction
BARBARA MITTLER, JENNIFER ALTEHINDER

PANEL 1: Mapping Transcultural Images: Gender, Body and Beauty in Consumer Culture
Chair: LENA HENNINGSEN


JULTEN ABDELHALIM: ISO-Certified Pardahs and the Dislocation of Agency among Muslim Women in Kerala

ANNIKA JÖST: Contemporary Visualisations of Foreign Women in China’s Vogue and Elle – Layers of Othering as a Trend of Consumer Markets

LAILA ABU-ER-RUB: Striving for an International Look: the Trend of Travelling Beauties in Asia

Comments & Discussion
SUSAN INGRAM and RAMINDER KAUR KAHLON

Keynote Lecture
JING WANG (Massachusetts Institute of Technology): Prosumers as Trendsetters: Change Agents on the Social Web
Saturday, 29 October 2011

PANEL 2: Mapping Pan-Socialist Cultural Consumption

Chair: LIYING SUN

XUELEI HUANG: The Banality of the Sublime: Consuming Soviet Movies in Pre-socialist China

JENNIFER ALTEHENERG: Children of the Crocodile: Cartoon Magazines, Political Satire and the Pan-socialist Project in the early PRC and GDR

SEBASTIAN GEHRIG: The Second “Evil Empire”? “Red China” and the “Yellow Peril” in Cold War Cinema

Comments & Discussion

MATTHEW JOHNSON and RANA MITTER

PANEL 3: Consumer Trends - Trend Consumers: Mapping Growing Markets in China and Japan

Chair: XUELEI HUANG

CORA JUNGBLUTH: Creating Desire to save the World – The Evolution of Eco-friendly Consumption in China

BJÖRN-OLE KAMM: Gates and their Keys – Language

Comments & Discussion

KARL GERTH and HARALD FUESS

Roundtable Discussion

Chair: SEBASTIAN GEHRIG
Group of participants at the conference
The two-day conference, “Trends on the Move: Transcultural Dimensions of Popular Flows”, was the final event of research project B12 “Rethinking Trends.”

At the conference, eleven project members and junior scholars from the Cluster discussed transcultural, historical, and socio-political dimensions of popular global trends with eight senior scholars from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds from the UK, the US, Canada and Germany. The central theme of the conference was to examine trends in consumer culture and popular culture. Papers and talks addressed trends’ popular flows via print and digital media, migration, political and ideological movement, as well as marketing and branding.

In her welcome speech, Prof. Barbara Mittler (Heidelberg) introduced the project as completely run by PhD students and post-docs. Sinologists and researchers on India, Japan and Europe looked at issues from a comparative perspective. Project member Jennifer Altehenger introduced the history and conceptual structure of the project, as well as the focal concerns and central questions the project has addressed.

The keynote speech was given by Prof. Jing Wang (MIT). In her talk “Prosumers as Trendsetters: Change Agents on the Social Web,” she examined the impact new media has on branding and trending with a discussion of what she called “prosumers”-network and proactive consumers that emerged accompanying the new technology of web 2.0. She showed a wide array of new media products created by “prosumers” to the audience. This included political satire, web advertisements, and particular writing styles and phrases which are popular on the internet. In doing so, Jing Wang argued that prosumers were becoming significant trendsetters, not only on commercial markets but also in the world of civic actions. Her case study addressed many of the key concepts of the conference, which relate to local/trans-local flows, trendsetters, agents, networks and the public.

The first panel of the conference focused on transcultural images. More specific, the discussion topics focused on visual representations of Freikörperkultur (Nudism) in the Chinese print media in the 1920s and 1930s that originated from Germany (Liying Sun), South Indian women’s adoption of a traditional Arabic female attire since
the 1970s that were largely due to labour migration (Julten Abdelhalim), the ways in which foreign women are “othered” in contemporary Chinese versions of international women’s magazines (Annika Jöst), and the “international look” of fashion models that appear in contemporary Indian fashion magazines and ads (Laila Abu-Er-Rub). Furthermore, the panel examined the ways in which gender, body and beauty were represented and constructed through transcultural flows of images and people. The panel discussants Susan Ingram (York University) and Raminder Kaur Kahlon (Sussex University) provided thought-provoking comments on how to rethink the globe and take psychological, anthropological and philosophical aspects into account to further contextualize the case studies examined.

The second panel explored cultural representations of socialism/communism and the flow of socialist cultural products, themes and symbols between the USSR, China, GDR and USA. The panel papers focused on commercial and political mechanisms of showing Soviet movies in pre-socialist China (Xuelei Huang), socialist cartoon magazines published in the PRC, the GDR, and the Soviet Union, and their artistic production during the early years of the Cold War (Jennifer Altehenger), and on the uses of Maoist themes in Western cinema as part of the cultural Cold War (Sebastian Gehrig). To summarize, this panel demonstrated the power of pan-socialist trends in popular spheres. In their insightful comments and questions on the three papers, Rana Mitter (Oxford) and Matthew Johnson (Grinnell College) lead the presenters to rethink “trends” as a critical category and to reconsider trends’ move in non-linear routes.

The subject of the third panel was trends in consumer culture. Issues explored included the trend of ecologically sensitive consumption and production in contemporary China (Cora Jungbluth), barriers and gatekeepers that emerge in the global flow of Japanese popular culture (Björn-Ole Kamm), coffee consumption and the Chinese Starbucks trend as part of consumer culture in contemporary China (Lena Henningsen), and Chinese youth culture and its representations in literature and art examined through the lens of consumerism (Petra Thiel). The focal concern of the panel was to examine transcultural trends and their relationship with consumerism, youth culture and urban culture. Discussants Karl Gerth (Oxford) and Harald Fuess (Heidelberg) raised issues concerning green
language, ecological protection, as well as Japan’s role in popular consumption, and the latter concluded with a thought-provoking question: “Trends are on the move - but do they ever arrive?”

Finally, in a round-table discussion, all conference participants and invited discussants posed further questions on the problem of national boundaries and on concepts of urbanity (or “glurbanity”), imaginary, network, and materialism and how this may lead to a better understanding of trends’ popular flows.

Text by Xuelei Huang, Heidelberg University
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Barbara Mittler, supervisor of research project B12 “Rethinking Trends”, opens the conference
Laila Abu-Er-Rub talking about “Striving for an International Look: the Trend of Travelling Beauties in Asia”
Liying Sun during her talk about Freikörperkultur in China at the beginning of the 20th century
Julten Abdelhalim talks about Muslim Women in Kerala
TRENDS ON THE MOVE

The audience of the conference listening to Julten Abdelhalim’s talk
Members of the research project
TRENDS ON THE MOVE

Raminder Kaur Kahlon from the University of Sussex giving her lecture
Barbara Mittler, coordinator of research project BI2 “Rethinking Trends”, in a discussion
Barbara Mittler introducing Keynote Lecturer Jing Wang from the MIT
Jing Wang (MIT) talking about “Prosumers as Trendsetters: Change Agents on the Social Web”
Participants of the conference during the keynote lecture by Jing Wang
TRENDS ON THE MOVE

Barbara Mittler and members of the research project
TRENDS ON THE MOVE

Participants of the conference
TRENDS ON THE MOVE

Karl Gerth from the University of Oxford during his talk
Cora Jungbluth talking about “The Evolution of Eco-friendly Consumption in China”
TRENDS ON THE MOVE

Björn-Ole Kamm talks about Japanese Pop Culture
TRENDS ON THE MOVE

Harald Fuess, Rana Mitter, Jing Wang and members of research project B12 “Rethinking Trends”
Lena Henningsen during her talk about coffee consumption of the Chinese middle class
Raminder Kaur, Matthew Johnson and Liying Sun during a discussion
Petra Thiel talking about China’s youth in contemporary Chinese literature and art
TRENDS ON THE MOVE

Lena Henningsen, Barbara Mittler, Jing Wang and Liying Sun in front of the Karl Jaspers Centre
Research project B12 “Rethinking Trends – Transcultural Flows in Global Public(s)”.

Abstract

The project investigates the formation of transcultural trends. We have been trying to find out how a trend gains momentum, how it succeeds or fails to become popular in a new area. Since trends have traditionally been researched in statistics, market research or other areas related to economics but not so much in the humanities, we have named our project “rethinking trends.”

By “rethinking,” we mean that we approach trends from a humanities’ perspective, using case studies and thick descriptions to analyze different trends. Since we, like any other Cluster project, are an interdisciplinary group, we look at trends in different areas, such as literature, history and politics. By taking this qualitative and interdisciplinary approach, we want to go beyond a mere quantitative evaluation of trends, even though statistical data may still serve as a starting point in some cases.

For more information visit www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/en/trends-project
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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).