Cultures of Consumption in Asia and Europe

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„Cultures of Consumption in Asia and Europe" was the title and topic of the summer school organised by the Cluster of Excellence „Asia and Europe in a Global Context" at Heidelberg University from 24 to 29 July 2011. The summer school included over 20 students from a dozen countries, who enjoyed lectures and discussions headed by scholars from a range of disciplinary backgrounds, including cultural and economic history, the social sciences and anthropology. The aim of the four-day programme was to gain a transcultural understanding of cultures of consumption and to explore the ways in which consumer goods and cultural frameworks of consumption have provided crucial interfaces of entanglement between Asia and Europe in a global context.

The Summer School's keynote lecture „Why America Spends While the World Saves" was held by SHELDON GARON (Princeton). He focused on the histories of saving, consumption, and credit in the U.S., modern Europe, Japan, and other Asian nations. He pointed out the differences and similarities of mass consumption and saving between Europe and Japan on the one and the U.S. on the other hand. Adopting a transnational-historical perspective, he argued that the similarities in savings-promotion across the globe resulted from international exchanges of knowledge on how to organise prosperous, powerful nations.

In the session „Introducing Novelty Consumables", FRANÇOISE SABBAN (Paris) gave a talk titled „A New Consumption Pattern – Drinking Milk in Shanghai (1845-1945)". By tracing the consumption of milk in Shanghai from the nineteenth century onwards, she explored the origins of contemporary food practices in China. Before, milk only played a role as a nutritional supplement for the fragile and sick, but was never produced on a large scale. In the late nineteenth century, the production of cow's milk was imported into the foreign settlements of big cities, such as Shanghai, mainly for the consumption by foreigners. Over the time, it became a popular product and was consumed mostly by wealthy Chinese people.

ANJALI ROY (Kharagpur) raised the question „Why is Bollywood Making a Song and Dance about Bhangra?". She explained how Bhangra, a traditional Punjabi harvest rite, became removed from its original cultural context and transformed into national dance music, becoming an important part of modern Bollywood cinema. For Anjali Roy, the contemporary Bollywood film is a metaphor for a globalised India characterised by the ethics of consumption as well as for the image of a new India, selling itself to an American consumerism.

As a part of the session „Gender Images and Consumption", MIO WAKITA (Heidelberg) spoke about „The Locus of Multiple Desires: Women in Yokohama Souvenir Photography". She investigated images of Japanese women in post-1880 Meiji souvenir photography. She focused on the social and cultural statuses of female models, the mediality of photography and female visibility. She examined earlier views of women's statuses in these photographs as commercial products, consumed by western males which cater only to the western expectation of and desires for „exotic" Japanese things. In addition, she embedded these images in the context of Japanese visual culture and looked into the making of images of Japanese femininity in Meiji souvenir photography.

Under the title „The Future of a Modern Woman or Man? Gender Images in German Tobacco Advertisements", KATJA PATZEL-MATTERN (Heidelberg) examined the construction of gender images in German tobacco advertisements, especially during the decades between the 1920s and 1930s and the 1950s and 1980s. She stated that the generations of meanings transported by these images are highly conditioned by the media but give at the same time a deep insight into the historical context of Germany during these peri-

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In the session „Global Patterns of Consumption", JOANNA ELFVING-HWANG (Frankfurt) gave a talk on „Cosmetic Culture and the Practice of Aesthetic Surgery in South Korea". She addressed meanings and practices of cosmetic surgery in South Korea and showed how decisions to undergo aesthetic surgery are influenced by a number of different, sometimes contradictory, and often intersecting factors, which are implicated in both the prevalence of surgery and the types of surgeries practiced.

Moving beyond the traditional assumptions that the process of socio-economic integration in the Pacific Ocean during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was driven by Western European nations and the United States, ROBERT HELLYER (Wake Forrest) presented an alternative view on trade and demand in this area. In his talk „The West, the East and the Insular Middle: Consumption and the Integration of the Pacific, 1750-1880", he traced the influence of reciprocal consumer demands with a focus on forest and marine products.

MANPREET JANEJA (Cambridge) spoke in the session „Contemporary Shifts in Consumption" about „Eating and Not-Eating in South-Asia (and Beyond)". She focused on consumption as a mundane practice as explored through social anthropological accounts of food and eating in South Asia and beyond. She linked issues of agency, place, hospitality, and ownership to a new field that places food as an „artefact" at the centre of its inquiry, using Bengali, Hindu, and Muslim eating habits in India (Calcutta) and Bangladesh (Dhaka) and school meals in Britain as examples.

„Consumer Culture and Changing Attitudes Toward Hegemonic Masculinity in South Korea" was the topic of SEUNGSOOK MOON's (Vassar) lecture. She explored the interplay between experiences of mandatory military service and consumer culture in shaping the masculinity of South Korean men. The focus was laid on men in their 20s, who have grown up in industrialising and democratising Korea because this group has developed ideas and practices of masculinity which are significantly different from those of former generations.

In the session „Reflecting on Japanese Consumer Culture", ANGUS LOCKYER (London) talked about „Golf Clubbing in Modern Japan". He raised questions about how we consume and how we might think about and study consumption. Along with these questions, he pointed out some potential avenues in which one might find stories of consumption that can account not only for the imagined consumers of Europe but the consuming practitioners of Asia as well.

By following the „Flow of Beer to East Asia", HARALD FUESS (Heidelberg) explained how German beer found its way to Japan and became one of the world's most popular beers during the last century. In this process, he argued, imports and foreign-owned companies were gradually replaced, a highly concentrated market structure for beer emerged, a mass market for beer consumption with a high social tolerance for drinking alcoholic beverages was created, and beer markets were enlarged through the inclusion of previously ignored consumer groups, such as women.

The last day of the summer school was reserved for various group activities, organised by Anna Andreeva, David Mervart and Mio Wakita (Heidelberg), to summarize interactively the findings of the previous days. Consumption and consumerism were discussed, focusing on the tension between conceptualisation, cultural settings, agency, meaning, transformation, actual forces and concrete case-studies, as well as on their moral, psychological, political and economic vocabularies and languages.

The summer school, organised by Harald Fuess and David Mervart, received very positive feedback from the participants. Many were very enthusiastic about the variety of topics discussed. The evening programme, which included a guided tour through the old town of Heidelberg and a visit to the German Packaging Museum, was also very much appreciated. These informal excursions provided excellent settings for further social exchanges between the participants. The next summer school of the Cluster of Excellence „Asia and Europe in a Global Context" will be held in July 2012.

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Conference overview:

Session I – Welcome and Keynote Speech

Rudolf Wagner, David Mervart (Heidelberg)

Sheldon Garon (Princeton): Keynote: „Why America Spends While the World Saves?"

Session II – Introducing Novelty Consumables

Françoise Sabban (EHESS Paris): „A New Consumption Pattern - Drinking Milk in Shanghai (1845-1945)"

Anjali Roy (Kharagpur): „Nach Balliye – Why is Bollywood Making a Song and Dance about Bhangra?"

Session III – Gender Images and Consumption

Mio Wakita (Heidelberg): „The Locus of Multiple Desires: Women in Yokohama Souvenir Photography"

Katja Patzel-Mattern (Heidelberg): „The Future of a Modern Woman or Man? Gender Images in German Tobacco Advertisements"

Session IV – Global Patterns of Consumption

Joanna Elfving-Hwang (Frankfurt): „Cosmetic Cultures and the Practice of Aesthetic Surgery in South Korea"

Robert Hellyer (Wake Forrest): „The West, the East and the Insular Middle: Consumption and the Integration of the Pacific, 1750-1880"

Session V – Contemporary Shifts in Consumption

Manpreet Janeja (Cambridge): „Eating and Not-Eating in South-Asia (and Beyond)"

Seunsook Moon (Vassar): „Disciplinary Habitus and Consumer Culture: Masculinities and Korean Men in their 20s"

Session VI – Reflecting on Japanese Consumer Culture

Angus Lockyer (London): „Golf Clubbing in Modern Japan"

Harald Fuess (Heidelberg): „Flow of Beer to East Asia"

Session VII/VIII - Group Work

Anna Andreeva, David Mervart, Mio Wakita, Björn-Ole Klamm (Heidelberg), Ana Goy-Yamamoto (Madrid): „Pandora's Box - The Future of Consumption"

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