Newspaper and Transculturality

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Providing a platform to scholars with diverse and innovative approaches to the study of newspapers while gaining an understanding of the various methods of transcultural interplay in the process of newspaper making was the theme of the first graduate students workshop at the Cluster of Excellence, Asia and Europe in a Global context, University of Heidelberg. The conference cum workshop was titled: “Newspapers and Transculturality: New Approaches to Working with Historical Newspapers.” It took place from January 30th to February 1st 2014 at the Karl Jaspers Centre, University of Heidelberg. The three graduate students and organizers, Anna Sawerthal, Johanna de Schmidt, and Rudolph Ng are doing their doctoral studies at the Cluster of Excellence.

The keynote speech by sinologist RUDOLF WAGNER (Heidelberg/Harvard) titled „Getting the Unfeasible Done: The Study of the Transcultural Flow of News and Opinion“ inaugurated the conference on Thursday January 30th. His lecture started with Benedict Anderson’s take on the three criteria of homogeneity, simultaneity and monolingualism of the print media and how these three aspects are more often than not thwarted in practice. The contribution and function of newspapers as rhetorical devices carrying information and opinion included taking part in the daily flow of transcultural and translingual exchange. In order to trace the ‘flow’ of news, opinions, genres and concepts across cultural language borders, access to historical sources such as newspapers and periodicals is essential, stressed Wagner. With a focus on China the lecture mentioned the challenges in accessing newspaper databases and uneven distribution leading to the asymmetry of news circulation between Chinese and foreign newspapers about Chinese society. The digitization of Chinese newspapers as well as foreign newspapers containing news related to internal matters in Chinese society occupied a major part of the lecture with focus on building databases and translation strategies. The talk concluded with delineating the challenges of newspaper research, it had faced in the past and the hope it sees in the future.

The first speaker of panel one was EMILY MOKROS (Baltimore). Offering a glimpse on how a country’s gazette can shape the diplomatic relations of that country with others, her paper focused on the Qing gazette’s unique contribution in producing knowledge as well as propaganda which contributed to the British diplomatic negotiations in China. Taking into account, what the paper called a persistent misunderstanding, that Qing gazette is the Chinese Emperor’s mouthpiece; the British collected and used the translations and transcriptions of the Gazette to further diplomatic interests. Emily Mokros was followed by BRUNO BLONDÉ (Antwerp) and JON STOBART (Northampton) the second speakers of the panel. Their presentation focused on a newspaper’s promotion of consumption through advertisements. They investigated the presentation and cultural value construction of second-hand household goods in England and the Low Countries which was advertised in newspapers. The presentation of second-hand goods as desirable, valuable and useful in the newspapers through the skilful use of the language also contributed to the cultural construction of those goods. The constructed appeal of the second-hand goods threw a major challenge to the grand narrative of the eighteenth century consumer revolution, as was elucidated in the paper.

Construction of narratives in the American colonial press was the theme of the presentation of ANGEL-LUKE O’DONNELL (Liverpool). To study newspapers within globalized communication networks, the speech built itself on the theories of expository and revelatory narratives from Roland Barthes and Hayden White. On the backdrop of American Revolution, the news gathering techniques of newspapers, construction of the popular pro-
Tagonist and initiating public action were the major points of discussion in the paper.

The next presentation was from the Heidelberg Research Architecture (HRA) representative, MATTHIAS ARNOLD (Heidelberg). The presentation was on Digital Humanities at the Cluster of Excellence, „Asia and Europe in a Global Context”. With a focus on introducing digital resources on newspapers and magazines, developed and maintained by the HRA, Arnold talked about the Early Chinese Periodicals Online (ECPO) project which is a collaborative endeavor between Academia Sinica, Taipei, and the Cluster’s MC15 „Powers of the Press”, and the HRA. ECPO’s technical core being the development of a database of women’s magazines and entertainment newspapers, the database covers four major publications and records with analysis of every single item. This intensive analysis offering detailed explanation has been very successful and still continues within the ECPO, asserts Arnold.

The second panel in the afternoon started with MARK LOUDEN (Madison, WI) whose paper focused on tracing the emergence of Pennsylvania Dutch in print. Pennsylvania Dutch is a North American language which took shape through several thousand immigrant German speakers to eighteenth century Pennsylvania. The source texts of discussion were produced in Pennsylvania High German, Pennsylvania Dutch and what the speaker called „Dutchified German“; besides the linguistic aspects of these texts the paper stressed on their content and the revelation about the formation of a distinct Pennsylvania Dutch cultural identity in the heartland of early American society.

The second speaker ANDREAS BEER (Rostock) focused on a bilingual newspaper “El Nicaragüense” published in English and Spanish, edited by the United States mercenaries, to discuss how transculturality was presented by the editors of this publication. The presentation questioned rigid notions of national culture and literature by looking at the transculturality of newspapers among others, to trace their roles in national historiographies. The presentation took into consideration the distribution networks and varied discourses within the newspaper to arrive at the above conclusions.

The last speaker of the second panel, ANNA SAWERTHAL (Heidelberg) talked about the Western and Tibetan perception of ‘news’ and how the ‘western’ tradition of newspaper making entered the Tibetan cultural sphere in the beginning and mid-twentieth century. Concentrated on the foreign news section of Tibetan newspapers, the paper focused on the questions of power, identity and nationalism. The shift of meanings through language usage and translation, lending a transcultural flavor to the newspaper, formed a pivotal point of the article. The paper took into account the role of the editor in controlling what was printed in the newspaper which was posited against the value of newspapers as a cultural product solidifying a cultural frame of reference.

The first presentation of the third panel was given by JOHANNA DE SCHMIDT (Heidelberg). The paper focused on the concept of ship newspapers’ essential contribution to build a bonding mechanism between passengers in ships during intercontinental voyages in the nineteenth century. Ships and voyages had been linking and connecting continents thus becoming a part of the process of globalization. The time spent on the ships, which was also the time of being in transit between two worlds, was felt to be crucial enough to be chronicled. The paper focused on how an onboard community was built by these newspapers while the ship became a microcosm of globalization.

The next speaker was ENE SELART (Tartu) who focused on the development of cultural-geographic relations through Japanese travelogues in Estonian newspapers from the second half of the nineteenth century up until the Russo-Japanese war (1904-05). The period was not only marked by the national, cultural and nationalist awakening in Estonia but also a time of transition in the Japanese society from its isolated feudalism to the modern state. The paper dealt with the issue of thematic construction of Japan in the Estonian seamen travelogues along with focusing on the linguistic and textual devices used to translate personal travel experiences. The paper also dealt with national and cultural references to increase the intelligibility of travel-
ogues to Estonian readers.

The last paper of panel three was SHU HSUAN (JESSIE) KUO (Taipei) who talked about the Illustrations in the Taiwanese “369 Tabloid” during the Japanese ruled period. “396 Tabloid” (1930-35) stood between the serious newspapers and easy-going supplements with sections of light western news and literary creations. The presenter called it ‘a marginal product of marginal people who is ambiguously neither Chinese nor Japanese.’ Transculturality of the tabloid was read from the instances of the collage of Chinese character texts, western style images, Japanese characters, commercial titles and perspective of presenting the news or stories. Containing relatively more illustrations, the tabloid was seen as an attempt of the marginalized people to break through the suppressed culture via visual imagination.

The next day of the conference started with panel four and the paper of CHUNGSE JUNG (Binghamton). To explore the world-historical patterns of protest waves in the global South from 1875 to 2009 was the objective of the paper. The paper analyzed resistance and protests and their characteristics under different contexts in the global South by using newspaper data from “The New York Times” 1875 to 2009 and “The Times” (London) from 1875-2006.

The second paper of panel four was presented by STEFAN HÜBNER (Munich). The paper dealt with the production of new insights on Western and Asian perspectives on modernization and civilization through sports. The Far Eastern Championship games held in 1913 were the biggest regional sports event in the Interwar period which also became a civilizing tool in the hands of the YMCA (Young Man’s Christian Association). The paper looked at the representation of this civilizing mission through sports in the leading newspapers of the day, both Asian and American thereby focusing on the transfer of images and values between Asia and the ‘West’. The analyses in turn also delineated the power asymmetries and shifts in the relation between Asia and the West.

The last paper of the conference was presented by RUDOLPH NG (Cambridge/Heidelberg). His paper showed how the international newspapers covering coolie trade in the nineteenth century had their contributions in fighting against neo-slavery. In the late nineteenth century coolies or Chinese indentured laborers had an enormous impact on the global agricultural production. However this profitable trade which had almost degenerated to slavery came to a halt when the Qing government with its investigative delegation to Cuba confirmed the inhuman treatment of the labourers in the hands of the Spanish and Latin American agents. The paper focusing on the international coverage which the investigative delegation had received, traced how opinion and awareness were generated against the inhuman practice by the international media – thus resulting in the isolation of coolie agent countries like Spain, Peru, Chile etc. on the international forum and helping the Qing government to score a victory against western powers.

The conference ended with concluding discussions summing up the motto according to one of the organizers, Rudolph Ng, „Until now, the spread of news has often been studied at the national level, which is often equated to cultural boundaries. We want to open up the field of research and introduce new approaches of trans-cultural newspaper analysis, beyond traditionally delineated boundaries, using historical examples.“ The presence of junior and senior scholars from around the world, focusing on different aspects of newspapers, news making and its global effect in promoting transculturality had indeed received adequate transcultural attention.

Conference Overview:

Keynote Speech
Rudolf Wagner (Heidelberg/Harvard), Getting the Unfeasible Done: The Study of the Transcultural Flow of News and Opinion

Panel 1, Reception
Chair: Frank Grüner (Heidelberg)
Discussant: Barbara Mittler (Heidelberg)
Emily Mokros (Johns Hopkins), Jingbao and the Development of British Diplomacy in Nineteenth-Century China

Bruno Blondé (Antwerpen) / Jon Stobart
(Northampton), The Language of Value: a Comparative approach to Newspaper Advertisements for Auctions of Second-hand Household Goods in eighteenth-century England and the Low Countries

Angel-Luke O’Donnell (Liverpool), Struensee’s Ghost: Narratives of Pascal Paoli and Ebenezer Richardson in Philadelphian Newspapers, 1767-1776

HRA Presentation
Matthias Arnold (Heidelberg), Presentation on the Digital Humanities at the Cluster „Asia and Europe in a Global Context“

Panel 2, Production: Language
Chair: Johanna de Schmidt (Heidelberg)
Discussant: Rudolf Wagner (Heidelberg/Harvard)

Mark Louden (Wisconsin—Madison), Wir wollen frey und independent seyn! Documenting Pennsylvania Dutch Language and Culture in Early German-American Newspapers

Andreas Beer (Rostock), From the „Highway of the Worlds“: “El Nicaraguense”, Transnational Newspaper and National Historiographies in the Americas

Anna Sawerthal (Heidelberg), Hitler in Tibet: Foreign News in Early Tibetan-language Newspapers

Panel 3, Production: Style
Chair: Rudolph Ng (Cambridge/Heidelberg)
Discussant: Martin Dusinberre (Newcastle/Heidelberg)

Johanna de Schmidt (Heidelberg), Editors and Readers aboard: The connective character of ship’s newspapers in the 19th century

Ene Selart (Tartu), Japanese Travelogues in Estonian Newspapers (from the Middle of the 19th Century till the Russo-Japanese War)

Jessie Kuo (National Science Council, Taipei), The Marginal within the Marginal: Illustrations in Taiwanese “369 Tabloid“ during Japanese Ruled Period

Panel 4, Events
Chair: Giulia Pelillo (Heidelberg)
Discussant: Volker Helbig (Heidelberg)

Chungse Jung (SUNY Binghamton), Mapping the World-Historical Pattern of Protest Waves in the Global South: New Approach to Using Newspaper Data on Social Movement Studies

Stefan Hübner (Bundeswehr University Munich), The Far Eastern Championship Games (1913-1934) in Newspapers: The Transnational Communication of „Modernization“ through Sport

Rudolph Ng (Cambridge/Heidelberg), Fighting Against Neoslavery: International Newspapers Covering the Coolie Trade in the Nineteenth Century

Concluding Discussion