

University Priority Research Program (UPRP)

Asia and Europe



University of Zurich



Varieties of Modernity?

Possibilities and Limitations of a Research
Perspective on Asia and Europe

International Conference,
8–10 September 2009

Conference Organizers:

Sven Trakulhun and
Ralph Weber
UPRP Asia and Europe,
University of Zurich

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Program

Tuesday, 8 September 2009

13:30–14:00

Opening Address: **Sven Trakulhun**

Panel: Conceptual Approaches

Chair: **Ulrich Rudolph**

14:00–15:00

Rolf Elberfeld: 'Cultures' and 'Modernities'. Strategies of Pluralization in World History

15:00–16:00

Ralph Weber: Modernities: An Ambiguous Concept and Its Many Uses

Break

16:30–17:30

Volker Schmidt: Varieties of Modernity? Conceptual Prerequisites and Empirical Observation

Keynote Address:

18:30–20:00

Sanjay Subrahmanyam: 'Nec sit terris ultima Thule': On the Utility of the 'Early Modern' as a Historical Category

Wednesday, 9 September 2009

Panel: Modernities and Religion

Chair: **Angelika Malinar**

09:00–10:00

David L. McMahan: Buddhist Modernism and Hybrid Modernities

10:00–11:00

Gudrun Krämer: Making Muslims Modern: Hasan al-Banna, the Muslim Brothers, and the Project of Islamic Reform

Break

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Christoph Uehlinger: The Status of 'Religion' in the Definition of One vs. Multiple Modernities

Panel: Investigating Modernities

Chair: **Udo Steinbach**

14:00–15:00

Lydia H. Liu: Kaolin, Petuntse, and the Modernity of Experimental Science

15:00–16:00

Bettina Dennerlein: How to Be Traditional in Morocco. Moroccan Responses to Colonial Modernity at the Turn of the 20th Century

Break

16:30–17:30

Tamara Loos: Paragon of Post-modern Transnationalism or Modern Cosmopolitanism? The Case of a Thai Activist Doctor in Africa

Keynote Address:

18:30–20:00

Pheng Cheah: Of Other Worlds to Come

Thursday, 10 September 2009

Panel: Modernities and Temporality

Chair: **Dietmar Rothermund**

09:00–10:00

Harry Harootunian: The Figure of Multiple Modernities and the Problem of Temporal Misrecognitions

10:00–11:00

Andrea Riemenschneider: Chinese New Historicism and the Quest for an Alternative Modernity: Multiple Mythologies Revisited

Break

Panel: Varieties of Modernity?

Chair: **Sven Trakulhun**

14:30–15:30

Wolfgang Knöbl: 'Multiple Modernities' – Promises and Problems of a New Concept

15:30–16:30

Shalini Randeria: Varieties of Modernity – A Research Perspective on Asia and Europe?

Synopsis

The concept of multiple modernities has recently emerged as a central topic of debate in various disciplines, although its roots can be traced back to sociological research of the 1960s. Most of the early theorists of modernization in the 1950s and 1960s, however, understood “modernity” both as a goal and an evaluative standard that held promise and claimed validity for the entire world – without questioning the acceptability of the European paradigm. Since then, the “Western” path of development has lost much of its persuasiveness as the universal paradigm of technological and societal progress. The pre-eminence of Europe and Northern America in world politics is no longer uncontested, and the evaluative schemes of Western norm-systems, world views, and epochal organization have been increasingly called into question. Proponents of the concept of multiple modernities and of similar theorems seek alternative ways for providing non-Eurocentric analyses of the past and for polycentric perspectives of the future. They take up a position between those who want to keep steadfast to the notion of modernity in the singular and those who wish to bid farewell to any notion of modernity.

What is obvious is that notions such as “Indian”, “Islamic”, or “Chinese” modernity today have become commonplace. This would suggest that the specific interaction of basic processes of modernization – e.g. industrialization and rapid economic growth, secularization and democratization, political participation, bureaucratization, and the emergence of civil societies and public spheres – have brought about varieties of modernity across the globe; in each of which distinct cultural styles continue to flourish by means of selective adaptation and partial refusal. The opening up and pluralization reflected in the concept of multiple modernities seeks to capture this diversity of alternative historical experience and cultural practice, but may be hard-won in terms of epistemology. For precisely what is the analytical or heuristic added value of a pluralized notion of modernity? What characteristics does the notion of modernity have in the absence of antonyms, when the notions “pre-modernity” or “tradition” are no longer of use for demarcation? Against what benchmark is the modernity of these modernities to be measured? How workable is the concept of multiple modernities, if the pluralization possibly entails that everything, or perhaps too much, appears to be “modern”? Is there empirical evidence for a plurality of modernity? To what degree is the envisaged polycentrism itself again based on a kind of surreptitious Eurocentrism? Put differently, does the paradigm of multiple modernities not also presume a plurality of modernity in the European context?

The conference "Varieties of modernity?" will address questions such as these in the specific context of Asia and Europe. Countries of the Eurasian continent have been involved in manifold processes of mutual appropriation and demarcation since the beginning of history. This thematic focus not only allows for a comparative view of contemporary Eurasian societies, but also for a diachronic perspective on single historical events and across large periods of time. The conference will bring together proponents and critics of the concept of multiple modernities and seeks to subject the intensive debates on the topic in sociology to an interdisciplinary view. Etiological and evaluative studies of the notion of modernity, theoretical reflections on modernity in the plural, as well as conceptual history or systems theory approaches will be set against and confronted with interdisciplinary empirical research that may be regional or transregional, historical or contemporary, and comparative or focused on cross-cultural exchanges.

Tuesday, 8 September 2009, 18:30

KOL G-201 Aula, Zentrum, University of Zurich, Rämistr. 71

Sanjay Subrahmanyam, University of California, Los Angeles

'Nec sit terris ultima Thule': On the Utility of the 'Early Modern' as a Historical Category

The talk will present a historian's reflection on how the "early modern" (and hence also the modern) can effectively be deployed for thinking through a set of key problems having to do with world history over the last five hundred years or so. Its stance will primarily be pragmatic, and rather than present an absolute defence of the term modern, I will point to how it offers distinct advantages over many of the rival candidates that are available. Further, I will be concerned to argue that once we accept this periodization in world-historical terms, it is useful to look first to significant regional and local differences, and subsequently to national ones. Therefore, while operating under a single rubric, there is still some point – and some analytical purchase – in looking carefully to variations and differences over space.

Objections to the usages "modern" and "modernity" are various: some of these are summed up in quite different accusations of conceptual imprecision, teleological thinking, and empirical unsoundness. What is it to be modern? The central problem is, I believe, that different disciplines cannot agree on a definition. After briefly surveying varying disciplinary takes on the modern (e.g. history of religions, science studies, sociology and anthropology), I will focus on the period from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and argue that largely because of changes in the conception of space, this period demarcates itself clearly from what precedes it. My examples will be drawn from writings of the time in the related spheres of history and geography, and will range from China and India, to the Ottoman Empire and Europe.

Wednesday, 9 September 2009, 18:30

KOL G-201 Aula, Zentrum, University of Zurich, Rämistr. 71

Pheng Cheah, University of California, Berkeley

Of Other Worlds to Come

The contestation of a homogeneous universalistic understanding of modernity through arguments that seek to pluralize or multiply modernity in terms of its different locations and experiences (hence, alternative or multiple modernities) is at heart an argument about the nature of time. What is at stake is a rejection of the linear temporality of universal progress that is infinite because it is perpetually self-renewing and innovative – the modern is that which is always of the “now” – in favor of a world consisting of multiple and overlapping temporalities. The fact that the hegemonic understanding of modernity has coincided with the global expansion of the capitalist mode of production via European colonialism and contemporary developmentalism has endowed these arguments about multiple temporalities with the tenor of anti-Eurocentric resistance. In this paper, I argue that theories of alternative modernities unfortunately often end up in a form of utopianism and/or nostalgia that forecloses the extent to which the contemporary world has been made at every material and experiential level by global capitalist processes and biopolitical technologies. The thoroughly penetrating nature of these processes and technologies means that the alternative modernities in question necessarily subsist within an overarching temporality emblemized by Greenwich Mean Time. I suggest that the disruption of this temporality – the temporality of universal calculative reason – and its opening up to other worlds can be more adequately understood in terms of a transaction with the untimely force that Jacques Derrida calls the to-come (a-venir). By virtue of its curious ontological status, literature is an important site for the communication of this untimely force. This paper examines various examples of literature from postcolonial space that seek to bring about openings of other worlds to come.

Sanjay Subrahmanyam



Sanjay Subrahmanyam is Professor of Indian History at UCLA and founding director of its Center for India and South Asia. He has published extensively on early modernity in India and South Asia, notably *Penumbral Visions: Making Polities in Early Modern South India*

(2001), the two collections of essays *Explorations in Connected History* (2004), and *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400–1800* (2007, with Muzaffar Alam). Before joining UCLA in 2004, he was at the Delhi School of Economics (1983–1995) and at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris (1995–2002). In 2002, Sanjay Subrahmanyam was the first holder of the newly created Chair in Indian History and Culture at the University of Oxford.

Pheng Cheah



Pheng Cheah is Professor of Rhetoric at the University of California at Berkeley. He is the author of *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (2003) and *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights* (2006). He has co-edited several books, including *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (1998), *Grounds of Comparison: Around the Work of Benedict Anderson* (2003) and most recently *Derrida and the Time of the Political* (2009). His work focuses on 18th–20th century continental philosophy and contemporary critical theory;

postcolonial theory, world literature and Anglophone postcolonial literature; and theories of globalization and cosmopolitanism.

Tuesday, 8 September 2009

Museum Rietberg, **Park-Villa Rieter**, Gablerstr. 15, 8002 Zurich

13:30–14:00

Sven Trakulhun, UPRP Asia and Europe, University of Zurich

Opening Address

Sven Trakulhun is Assistant Professor for modern Asian history at the UPRP Asia and Europe and teaches at the history department at the University of Zurich. He specializes in European, Thai and Southeast Asian history and has published a monograph *Siam and Europe: The Kingdom of Ayutthaya in Western reports 1500–1670* (2006).

Panel: Conceptual Approaches

Chair: **Ulrich Rudolph**, UPRP Asia and Europe, University of Zurich

14:00–15:00

Rolf Elberfeld, Hildesheim University

'Cultures' and 'Modernities'. Strategies of Pluralization in World History

In the 18th century the singular term "culture" became an important term to European humanities. It was not until 1868 that the plural "cultures" was introduced into the discussion about culture by Jacob Burckhardt. The plural "cultures" quickly spread throughout European languages. However, till this day sciences debate whether it makes sense to be speaking of different cultures. In exact parallel with the development of the term "culture" the singular term "modernity" was introduced into the discussions of humanities. For the first time in the 1960s one started speaking of "modernities" in the plural. In my presentation I would like to ask about the meaning and the difficulties originating when key concepts as "culture" and "modernity" are put into the plural.

Rolf Elberfeld is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Hildesheim. His research focuses on the philosophy of culture, phenomenology, intercultural aesthetics, philosophy of the body, as well as Japanese and Chinese philosophy. He is also a translator of various works by the Kyoto

School as well as by the Chinese Buddhist writers Fazang and Seng Zhao. Among his many published articles are “Intercultural Modernity: Tradition and Rupture of Tradition in the Horizon of European Expansion” (2006, in German), “Plurality of Modernities – World-Historical Reflections for a Future World” (2008, in German).

15:00–16:00

Ralph Weber, UPRP Asia and Europe, University of Zurich

Modernities: An Ambiguous Concept and Its Many Uses

Current discussions in the context of globalization frequently employ several notions of multiple, alternative, entangled, and other “modernities” – be it as a source for criticism or as a target of criticism. Yet what are we to make of these different uses of “modernity” in the plural? The paper subjects selected contributions to a rhetorical analysis by examining the respective uses of “modernity” in the plural. The focus on the rhetorical dimension aims at reconstructing the purposes underlying these contributions (i.e. who uses what argument to persuade whom). The paper thus seeks to provide an overview of different roles the concept of “modernities” plays in recent intellectual discussion. It is suggested that there may be several different and perhaps incompatible analytical and political agendas. This would have serious implications for the prospects of a common research perspective that rests on the notion of a variety of modernity.

Ralph Weber is *Oberassistent* at the UPRP Asia and Europe and a lecturer at the University of St. Gallen teaching courses on Political Theory and the History of Ideas. He specializes in comparative and political philosophy and has done work on New Confucianism and political philosophy in the PRC. Among his publications is the co-authored article *North-South? Pitfalls of Dividing the World by Words* (2007).

Varieties of Modernity? Conceptual Prerequisites and Empirical Observations

Concepts such as those of “multiple modernities” or “varieties of modernity” are used to shed light on deep-rooted differences that their proponents say exist between modern societies. While intuitively appealing, such concepts are fraught with difficulties that become apparent once we try to operationalize them. One such difficulty concerns the commonalities underlying the diversity, for without specifying these commonalities, we cannot tell whether a particular case is really a variant of the type in question or rather something else. One therefore needs a clear definition of modernity before one can speak of modernities. However, such a definition is hard to come by and, indeed, highly contentious in the social sciences. Next, the reference units for the identification of one or more modernities must be clarified (societies, nation states, cities, etc.). What reasons do we have for privileging states over alternative entities as appropriate units of analysis? Likewise, if our aim is to highlight differences, we need to know what kinds of difference qualify for distinguishing one (variety of) modernity from another. Given that there is no dearth of diversity in the real world, we have to determine the weight that is to be assigned to given differences vis-à-vis other differences. Finally, if more than one (variety of) modernity exists, how many of them are there according to what criteria? These are just some of the issues that need to be addressed if we want to use either of the above concepts in a meaningful way. Following a differentiation theoretical perspective, the present paper outlines the conceptual prerequisites of a theoretically persuasive “varieties of modernity” approach and then considers it in light of comparative Asia-Europe research.

Volker Schmidt has published several critical articles on the conference theme, including “Multiple Modernities or Varieties of Modernity?” (2006), “Multiple Modernities? The Case Against” (2006) and “One World, One Modernity” (2007). His work comprises both empirical and conceptual analyses and focuses on the sociology of justice; health and social policy; social theory; and modernization and development. Before joining the Department of Sociology at the National University of Singapore as Associate Professor in 2000, he held teaching and research positions at the Universities of Mannheim and Bremen in Germany, and during 1997/98 was a Kennedy Memorial Fellow at the Center for European Studies, Harvard University.

Wednesday, 9 September 2009

Museum Rietberg, **Park-Villa Rieter**, Gablerstr. 15, 8002 Zurich

Panel: Modernities and Religion

Chair: **Angelika Malinar**, UPRP Asia and Europe, University of Zurich

09:00–10:00

David L. McMahan, Franklin & Marshall College

Buddhist Modernism and Hybrid Modernities

Buddhist modernism began in the late nineteenth century, emerging out of tensions involving colonization of Asian nations, concerns over Western hegemony, resistance to missionization, and scientific challenges to Christianity. Early Buddhist modernists attempted to reform Buddhism by reconstructing it along the lines of prominent discourses of western modernity: scientific rationalism, romanticism, and Protestant Christianity. These influences remain strong today, yet Buddhist modernism has not assimilated completely to western modernity but has created and contributed to unique hybrid modernities. Examples include the commodification of sacred talismans in Thailand, which combine ancient practices of sacralization of the material with modern capitalism; and recent “socially engaged Buddhism” movements, which draw upon western political and religious liberation movements and adapt them to global and local issues. Such phenomena confound standard accounts of modernity and add evidence to the theoretical conceptions of multiple modernities.

David L. Mc Mahan is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Franklin & Marshall College. He has published thus far two monographs, *Empty Vision: Metaphor and Visionary Imagery in Mahayana Buddhism* (2002) and *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (2008), and several articles among which are “Modernity and the Discourse of Scientific Buddhism” (2004) and “Buddhism and the Epistemic Discourses of Modernity” (2008).

10:00–11:00

Gudrun Krämer, Free University Berlin

Making Muslims Modern: Hasan al-Banna, the Muslim Brothers, and the Project of Islamic Reform

Hasan al-Banna (1906–49) was the founder and lifelong leader of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, for decades the largest and most influential Islamic movement in the Arab Middle East, formed in 1928 and still active in Egypt and many other Muslim countries. Over a relatively short time, the Society of the Muslim Brothers was transformed from a charitable association with a strong Sufi touch to a broadly-based movement of non-elites, with a popular base, style, and agenda, and appealing to the educated and semi-educated middle class (*efendiyya*). The *efendiyya* was defined by their socio-economic status as well as ideas and modes of behaviour that were perceived as “modern” by contemporaries and later observers alike. But, as the example of the Muslim Brothers show, modern is not synonymous with profoundly Westernized or infatuated with Western ways. Against a backdrop of British colonial rule in Egypt, the Muslim Brothers aimed at providing an Islamic education (*tarbiya*) and moral orientation (*tahdhib*) to their fellow Muslims to make them “understand Islam correctly.” Hasan al-Banna did not envisage a simple return to the Golden Age of the Prophet and his Companions, but rather aimed for “a modern Islamic style,” one adapted to the needs and aspirations of the age while remaining firmly rooted in the Qur’an and Sunna. From an early age, al-Banna was influenced by Islamic reformism of the Salafi type, popular Sufism of the “sober” kind, and Egyptian patriotism, as understood and lived in his particular socio-cultural milieu. Inevitably, he was also affected by contemporary Western ideas and institutions, from liberal ideals of self-help to fascist models of mass mobilization. The special blend that resulted from the interplay of these elements comes out particularly well in his advocacy of moral improvement, self-help, and communal solidarity, which will provide the focus of this presentation.

Gudrun Krämer is Professor of Islamic Studies at the Free University of Berlin since 1996 and a member of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences. Her books include *A History of Islam* (2005) and *The Jews in Modern Egypt* (1989). She was a visiting scholar and guest professor at many prestigious institutions around the world (CEDEJ in Cairo, SAIS of John Hopkins University at the Bologna Centre, Sciences Po as well as EHESS in Paris, Islamic University in Jakarta, and the Max-Weber-Kolleg in Erfurt). Since 2007, she is the academic director of the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies.

The Status of 'Religion' in the Definition of One vs. Multiple Modernities

This paper seeks to examine the status of "religion" in the definition of one vs. multiple modernities in three ways: First, I shall investigate the considerable importance attributed by Eisenstadt's "multiple modernities" theorem to the concept of "axial age civilizations" and religious traditions as constituents of "civilizations". Second, the weight attributed to the "religion factor" in alternative approaches to "modernity/modernities" will be discussed. For a historian of religion(s), it is striking to observe how much the discussion among sociologists resembles debates within the study of religions about the concept of "religion(s)"; hence one may ask by way of comparison how the issue of "one vs. multiple" ("varieties of religion" vs. "multiple religions") has been theorized there. It would seem that the more one regards "religions" as separate entities, i.e., distinct from each other, if not incommensurable, the more one will be inclined to postulate multiplicity rather than variety of a kind. Finally, the notion of "modernity" and its career in theoretical discourse can hardly be disconnected from European religious history and may well be regarded as an offspring thereof. This raises the questions whether claims to modernity in non-European, and non-Christian contexts, require some kind of "conversion to modernity" (as indeed postulated by some) and whether thinking in terms of multiple, alternative, or entangled modernities is after all a political as much as a scholarly, let alone logical, issue.

Christoph Uehlinger is a historian of religions with special expertise in the history of ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean religions studied in comparative and traditio-historical perspective; his systematic interests include the aesthetics of religion, the role of visual and material culture in the construction of religious identities, as well as general theoretical issues related to religion. He is Professor in history of religions at the University of Zurich since 2003, founding director of the Department of Religious Studies since 2006, and presently acts as a co-director of the UPRP Asia and Europe.

Panel: Investigating Modernities

Chair: **Udo Steinbach**, University of Marburg

14:00–15:00

Lydia H. Liu, Columbia University

Kaolin, Petuntse, and the Modernity of Experimental Science

My paper reexamines “true porcelain” – also called Chinese porcelain – as an object of scientific research in 18th century Europe. True porcelain, based on a clay mineral called kaolin (kaolinite) and a porcelain stone petuntse, was singled out to represent qualitative difference from European pottery (soft-paste porcelain such as faïence and delftware) according to a new set of scientific criteria (fusibility, vitrification, high temperature kilns, etc.), and the criteria themselves were embedded in the hierarchy of social values determined by collectors, connoisseurs, manufacturers, and merchants who mediated the consumption of chinoiserie in the 18th century. Studies of European chinoiserie have treated porcelain as luxury commodity in early modern global economy, but our knowledge about the ways in which experimental science mediated the arbitration of value, episteme, and self-knowledge in the porcelain trade between Europe and Asia is rather limited. Insomuch as experimental science continues to be evoked as one of the hallmarks of early modernity in Europe, I would like to reflect on an early episode of experimental work at the interstices of cultural exchange which may help reframe the question of “modernity” or put it in interesting perspective. It can be demonstrated that the increased mastery of the technology of vitrification by European scientists and manufacturers of white porcelain in the 18th century became the very ground on which a number of familiar narratives about China’s lag behind modern scientific progress unfolded in the 19th century and beyond. The recursive processes we observe in this competitive negotiation of cultures, technologies, and discourses may help explain how the logic of self and other came to govern the concept of modernity. More importantly, we may understand better why the political structure of difference (and similarity) within the concept of modernity prohibits the thinking of “multiple” or “alternative” modernities at a rigorously conceptual level.

Lydia H. Liu has published several books, among which are: *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity* (1995), *Cross-writing: Critical Perspectives on Narratives of Modern Intellectual History* (1999, in Chinese) and *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (2004). Before joining Columbia University as W.T. Tam Professor in the Humanities and Professor of Chinese and Comparative Literature in 2006, she taught at UC Berkeley and the University of Michigan. In the years 2004–2005, she was a fellow at the

Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin. Her specialization is in modern Chinese literature and culture, critical translation theory, postcolonial empire studies, as well as semiotics and media studies.

15:00–16:00

Bettina Dennerlein, UPRP Asia and Europe, University of Zurich

How to be Traditional in Morocco. Moroccan Responses to Colonial Modernity at the Turn of the 20th Century

Shortly after the country gained independence in 1956, Moroccan history has been the object of more or less radical reinterpretations trying to project back aspects of political modernity to the pre-colonial period. At the same time, the mainstream of academic historiography has left the colonial meta-narrative of Moroccan traditionalism and isolation in part unchallenged. Both, colonial as well as national Moroccan historiography share a view of historical development strongly influenced by the idea of modernity's diffusion posing as its unquestioned telos the modern nation state. While explanations given to the absence of local reformism in the Moroccan case have changed fundamentally, colonial as well as national historiography tends to analyze the refusal of the Moroccan elites to initiate processes of change in terms of the binary opposition between "traditionalism" and "modernity". Based on selected sources from the turn of the century, this paper will question the image of Morocco as closed, dominated by tradition and opposed to change. The paper will look more closely at how modernization – i.e. the introduction of European military, administrative and legal models in the Middle East and North Africa – has been perceived and interpreted by the Moroccan elite. It will be argued that there has actually been an ongoing reconfiguration of established religio-legal norms and discourses as well as a circulation of new concepts between the Middle East and North Africa. Finally, it will be asked if the notions of multiple modernities or varieties of modernity may be usefully applied as heuristic tools to complexify our understanding of Moroccan traditionalism.

Bettina Dennerlein is Professor for Gender Studies and Islam at the University of Zurich since 2009. Before, she held various teaching and research positions at the Free University of Berlin, Heidelberg University, the Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin, and was Professor for Culture and History of the Modern Arabian World at the Asien-Afrika-Institut at the University of Hamburg. Her regional focus is Northern Africa and the Middle East. She has co-edited a special issue of *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* entitled *Continuity and Disparity: South-South Linkages in the Muslim World* (2007).

16:30–17:30

Tamara Loos, Cornell University

Paragon of Postmodern Transnationalism or Modern Cosmopolitanism? The Case of a Thai Activist Doctor in Africa

Dr. Krisana Kraisintu, a Thai pharmaceutical doctor, has singlehandedly saved tens of thousands of lives in Thailand, Africa, and other countries by formulating and manufacturing affordable generic drugs to treat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other maladies that strike the poor in particular. Perhaps more remarkable for its long term consequences is her audacious and unwavering conviction that “teaching people how to fish is better than giving them fish.” She transfers technological know-how (provides gratis drug formulas and pharmaceutical training) to the poorest African countries in order to break the cycle of dependency of lesser developed countries on wealthier countries and multinational pharmaceutical companies. Does Dr. Krisana, whose life story I am writing, engage the condition of modern cosmopolitanism or postmodern transnationalism – the former aimed at an inclusive moral world but sometimes is limited by elitism, while the latter represents more individualistic motives and flows of interconnectivity? I will explore these issues through the life of Dr. Krisana, who positions herself tacitly as a Buddhist Thai in opposition to the West through her forged unity with the poorer countries in Africa. I discuss how Dr. Krisana’s elite but non-Bangkokian Thai family background has influenced her transnational mission in Africa to rescue the poor from Western multinational pharmaceutical policies. She references the Thai nation even as she commits to a life mission outside her national boundaries in “undeveloped countries” – a designation created in opposition to Thailand and the West. This seemingly contradictory nationalist-transnational activism constitutes a unique subjectivity that self-consciously distinguishes the non-western self from both the West and underdeveloped non-western countries.

Tamara Loos is the author of *Subject Siam: Family, Law, and Colonial Modernity in Thailand* (2006). She has been a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University (2002–2003). She is an Associate Professor at the Department of History at Cornell University and is currently engaged in writing a monograph that seeks to incorporate emotions, affect and violence into history generally and Thai history in particular. Her research is largely based on court cases, newspaper sources, personal letters, and novels written since the turn of the 20th century in Thailand.

Thursday, 10 September 2009

Museum Rietberg, **Park-Villa Rieter**, Gablerstr. 15, 8002 Zurich

Panel: Modernities and Temporality

Chair: **Dietmar Rothermund**, University of Heidelberg

09:00–10:00

Harry Harootunian, New York University

The Figure of Multiple Modernities and the Problem of Temporal Misrecognitions

The problem I intend to address in this paper is the crucial question concerning modernity (and the modernizing process) and its temporalities. I am specifically interested in examining the formation of categorical propositions that call for alternative and multiple modernities and their privileging of irreducible differences that seek to distance their claims from the presupposition of modular or “singular” modernities. This interpretative strategy began first with the Japanese call to “overcome modernity” that still persists in versions of postcolonial discourse. It is based on accepting a misrecognition of modern time, which itself is grounded in the presumption of a standardized rectilinear, successive and homogenous time and which in turn empowered the narrative construction of a developmental trajectory. That narrative construction is thus positioned to authorize the making of evaluative judgements of temporal lag against societies that entered the modernizing process later than Euro-America. The misrecognition worked to consign societies on the periphery of Euro-America as “latecomers,” by transmuting a quantitative measure into a qualitative one. By the same token, societies that came late to capitalist modernity appealed to the difference supplied by identity (the valorization of “otherness”) as a form of equivalence capable of offering compensation for experiencing the temporal cleft, which inadvertently reinforced the temporal lag. Yet it will be the argument of this paper to show that modernity means not simply temporal immanence but a shared conception of temporality everywhere that embodies the co-existence of traces of different times and pasts crowded in the same present.

Harry Harootunian is a specialist of Japanese history and historical theory. He was the Max Palevsky Professor of History and Civilizations at the University of Chicago and the former Dean of Humanity at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He was editor of the *Journal of Asian*

Studies and co-editor of *Critical Inquiry*. Among his many publications are *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Commodity in Inter-war Japan* (2000) and *History Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice and the Question of Everyday Life* (2000). Today, he is Professor of History and East Asian Studies at New York University.

10:00–11:00

Andrea Riemenschneider, UPRP Asia and Europe, University of Zurich

Chinese New Historicism and the Quest for an Alternative Modernity: Multiple Mythologies Revisited

Throughout the 20th century, crisis and revolution have constituted the main experiential framework of the Chinese nation. Not gradual change or progress, but endless ruptures and sudden reversals of modernizing strategies were imposed on a clan-structured, largely rural society that had up to the epoch of violent western interference been traditionally counting on continuity rather than change. Apart from unstable economic, demographic and other macrostructural developments, people had to digest the massive influx of different historical narratives and moral values in not generational, but much shorter intervals. This pattern does not only hold true for the Maoist mythicised politics of miraculous progress of civilization. When Deng Xiaoping carried out his vision of a Chinese modernity based on economic reforms, they had to cope with a different set of problems, due to rapid industrial growth in some urban areas, stagnation of (agricultural) development in the hinterlands, and another wholesale sacrifice of their educational canon at schools and universities. After Mao's death, the zhiqing generation of authors, who had spent a considerable part of their adolescence in remote rural areas during the Great Cultural Revolution, ventured to question the dynamics of China's revolutionary movements and explore alternative blueprints of a Chinese modernity in the so-called xungen-movement, thus producing a body of narratives that has come to be subsumed under the label of new historicist fiction which has gained growing popularity during the following two decades. Taking into account that national culture during the 20th century was arguably as much a function of China's recent internationalization as of its long history of isolation before that era, these post-Maoist cultural workers have resorted to polysemic representations of their nation and its subjects. In this way, they participate in and shape a discourse of an alternative, post-, or transnational Chinese modernity that is perceived and represented as an intersection of many different, locally and globally entangled histories.

Andrea Riemenschmitter is Professor of Modern Chinese Language and Literature at the Institute of East Asian Studies at the University of Zurich since 2002. Previously, she was a research fellow at the University of Heidelberg (1998–2002) where she worked on a project dealing with the function of mythological narratives in Chinese literature from the late Qing to the post-Mao era. She has co-edited a book on *Diasporic Histories: Cultural Archives of Chinese Transnationalism*, which has been published this summer.

Panel: Varieties of Modernity?

Chair: **Sven Trakulhun**, UPRP Asia and Europe, University of Zurich

14:30–15:30

Wolfgang Knöbl, University of Göttingen

'Multiple Modernities' – Promises and Problems of a New Concept

The paper will argue that the talk of “multiple modernities” is not the solution to all problems within macro-sociological theory; it only helps to avoid the mistakes of most of the existing macro-paradigms. At the same time it is also clear that the use of the concept of “multiple modernities” only makes sense if certain countries/nations can be plausibly grouped together. My point will be that this can be done only by a combination of arguments from the field of political sociology and the sociology of religion.

Wolfgang Knöbl is Professor of Sociology at the University of Göttingen since 2002. Among his publications are two monographs in German, *Margins of Modernization – The End of Unambiguity* (2001) and *The Contingency of Modernity – Paths in Europe, Asia, and America* (2007), as well as a co-edited volume entitled *The Plurality of Modernity – Decentring Sociology* (2006). He is currently participating in an international research project on “Europeanization, Multiple Modernities and Collective Identities – Religion, Nation und Ethnicity in an Enlarged Europe”.

15:30–16:30

Shalini Randeria, UPRP Asia and Europe, University of Zurich

Varieties of Modernity – A Research Perspective on Asia and Europe?

Taking up the conference theme in its interdisciplinary and avowedly comprehensive thrust, the talk will offer some general thoughts as well as more specific observations formulated against the background of the presented papers. At the close of the conference, some questions naturally need to be addressed: Where do we go from here? Are there specific conclusions to be drawn from the various contributions to the conference concerning the question of a research perspective on Asia and Europe? Do concepts of varieties of modernity break ground for a common research perspective or do they rather suggest a variety of such perspectives?

Shalini Randeria is Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Zurich since 2003. She was a Rhodes scholar at the University of Oxford, a Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, Max Weber Professor for Sociology at the University of Munich and Full Professor and Chair of the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology of the Central European University Budapest. In 2007–2008 she was President of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA). Her regional focus is on South Asia. She has been a constitutive voice in the discussions around entangled histories and modernities.

Conference Venue



Museum Rietberg
Park-Villa Rieter
Gablerstrasse 15
8002 Zurich



UPRP Asia and Europe, University of Zurich

The University Priority Research Program (UPRP) Asia and Europe of Zurich University explores exchanges and encounters that have taken and continue to take place between Asia and Europe in the areas of culture, law, religion and society. It brings together various disciplines and faculties of the University of Zurich to create an expert and comprehensive interdisciplinary research structure, which consists of three thematically and methodologically differentiated research fields: (1) Concepts and Taxonomies, (2) Entangled Histories, and (3) Norms and Social Order(s). It promotes research by young graduate and post-graduate scholars within an interdisciplinary research environment and a structured PhD-program. To ensure that the research keeps abreast of the latest international discourses the UPRP regularly organizes seminars, workshops, and public lectures by eminent scholars (e.g. Jaleh Shadi Talab, Johann Arnason, Kenichi Mishima, Sadiq Jalal al-Azm, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, Gayatri Spivak, Jürgen Osterhammel, and Dipesh Chakrabarty). Upon receiving initial funding by GEBERT RÜF STIFTUNG, the UPRP Asia and Europe took up its activities in 2006. The conference "Varieties of Modernity?" marks the culmination and conclusion of the engagement by the foundation after three and a half years.