



Asian Postmodernities and their Legacies

Call for papers

for the Graduate Student Workshop «Asian Postmodernities and their Legacies»,
Zurich, 30–31 March 2012

The URPP Asia and Europe and the Department of Sinology of the University of Zurich are pleased to announce the first jointly organized Graduate Student Workshop, which will be held in Zurich in March, 2012.

Description

During the 1990s scholars from various fields engaged in different ways with the topic of modernity. The recent mushrooming interest in modernity might be roughly described as an interaction of three significantly intertwined conceptions: that of the excess called «postmodernity», that of the better understanding of modernity, and finally that of the plurality of ideas, theories and methods.

In the 1970s and 1980s postmodernism emerged as a new influential and transdisciplinary movement in the social sciences and humanities. Postmodern perception did not acknowledge established standards of universal truth and criticized many assumptions of Western philosophy. Among these assumptions were those concerning the structures of western social and political economy, and the concept of historical «progress». Above all, grand theories of development were challenged. Simultaneously and beyond intellectual enterprise, postmodernism, with its fondness for pastiche, playfulness, hybridity, and its scandalous affairs with popular culture, challenged the classical Western aesthetic.

Chinese, and South (East) Asian postmodernities are part of Asian and global modernities. They are inscribed as constant states into modernization projects (Lyotard 1989). Postmodernities involve the ongoing and ceaseless rewriting of modernities in a way that questions both periodization and progress in cultural history. Their proponents do not belong to a new age but they nevertheless rewrite some of the claims of modernity, for example the claim that its legitimacy is grounded on the concept of the liberation of humanity through science and technology (Lyotard 1991). Their legacy includes the critical reflection of key issues such as economical and geopolitical power, modes of production, reproduction and of the implied gendered subject-position.

This workshop will primarily focus on new perspectives on contemporary Chinese and (South) East Asian societies derived from cultural studies, postcolonial studies, literary studies, visual studies and gender studies. It will however be open to other approaches (e.g. historical, political or geographical).

A preliminary list of interconnected issues and research questions to be discussed at the conference is as follows:

- **Political legacies:** Postmodern tendencies manifest themselves as radical skepticism towards the great narratives of general improvement and world progress in the sociopolitical sphere. This emancipative potential has fuelled various social and academic movements such as third-wave feminism, subaltern studies, cultural studies and antiglobalism, to mention but a few. In terms of theory, postmodernities remain inherently indebted to Marxism. What does this mean in the postcolonial, post-socialist space of the Asian hemisphere? What political terminology emerges from the interaction of local political heritage with postcolonial capitalism?



- **Spatial legacies:** Urban spaces are focal points in the postmodern landscape due to their hybrid nature as local centers and simultaneously as spaces marked by a massive concentration of infrastructure and goods that attract and channel global flows. These include flows of commodities, flows of population, and flows of transnational discourse. What might be the contemporary narration of the Asian space re-told in terms of the global, local, central or marginal perspective? How is the mobility or lack thereof distributed and who are the foreigners? How might the new geopolitical cartography of powers be redrawn?
- **Artistic legacies:** Representation, presentation and the unrepresentable are aspects under which a given object of art might be scrutinized. Lyotard's postmodern sublime is the art of negation based on a never-ending critique of representation that does not lead to resolution but to a radical openness (Lyotard, 1989). What is the unrepresentable aspect that contemporary visual arts and literary production in Asian space confronts us with? Which techniques are applied – that of pastiche, parody or others and how are they realized?
- **Embodied legacies:** Modern corporealization of the Asian social subject may be seen as central to the indigenization of elements of western scientism, medicine and eugenics by (semi)colonial intellectuals. The postmodern re-writing of this corporeality has revealed its constructive nature and violent creation according to the heterosexual, essentialist grid. How was the understanding of sex, gender, and the body reshaped by the postmodern movement and by bio-technologies? What are the new queer, creep, hybrid, and cyborg embodied subjects that have become significant?
- **Ethical legacies:** How to deal with the (post)postmodern condition? What are the alternatives to the belief in progress, development and techno-sciences? What are the tools of analysis of subject positions created by the power-relations of global advanced capitalism as perceived in discussions in China, India and South East Asia?

Key themes

Spaces & boundaries, environmental issues, body & gender, theories & methods

The workshop is intended to bring together graduate students in the humanities and social sciences who are (1) developing dissertations proposals or are already in more advanced phases of research or dissertation writing; and who are (2) also dealing with the abovementioned issues in the context of contemporary Asian states and societies.

Format

The two-day graduate student workshop will take place at the University of Zurich and aims to involve 15 participants. It will include presentations by the organizers as well as other participants. Graduate students will be organized in panels, leaving sufficient space for discussion.

The workshop aims to produce a volume or a thematic journal issue, as well as exploring possibilities for interdisciplinary, comparative research projects on the Asian postmodernities and their legacies.

Deadlines for Registration & Abstract Submission

For self-supporting participants: **31 January 2012**

For participants applying for funding from the organizers: **15 January 2012**

Maximum length of abstract: 500 words. Language: English or Chinese.

Registration

Please register with Justyna Jaguscik (UZH URPP Asia and Europe) justynaa.jaguscik@uzh.ch

Papers and program

Program will be uploaded two weeks in advance. Papers should be between 5–8 pages (15 minutes).

Funding

The organizers can provide limited financial support for participants, including accommodation, meals and partial «need-based» travel funds. Students are encouraged to approach their home institutions for additional support.

Further information

Please contact justynaa.jaguscik@uzh.ch