University of Zurich UZH

Workshop
Contact Zones

Date: **Tuesday, 14 June and Wednesday, 15 June 2011**
Venue: **URPP Asia and Europe, Wiesenstrasse 7/9, 8008 Zurich**
Room WIE F-07

Conference Synopsis

Contact zones are spaces in which people that are geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other, establish ongoing relations, or clash. By spatial and social mobility some borders are overcome while others are redrawn or restructured. Contact zones are, for example, border regions between national or imperial frontiers, port cities, or colonial and non-colonial centres of international trade in Asia and Europe. They can be regarded as specific sites of transition, as „third spaces" in which cultural and social differences are being constantly negotiated. The conference aims at investigating the historical dynamics and present figurations of both mutual exchanges and cultural conflicts prevalent in these zones.

Conference Program

Tuesday, 14 June 2011

09:30-09:45	**Prof. Dr. Andrea Riemenschnitter (University of Zurich)**
	Prof. Dr. Sven Trakulhun (University of Zurich)
	Welcome
09:45-10:30	**Prof. Dr. Sven Trakulhun (University of Zurich)**
	Introduction: Contact Zones in Asia and Europe
10:30-11:00	Coffee break
11:00-11:45	**Dr. Dhiravat Na Pombejra (Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok)**
	Seventeenth century Ayutthaya as a cultural and commercial crossroads: a case study of the trade in Siamese elephants in the Bay of Bengal
11:45-12:30	**Dr. Yue Zhuang (University of Edinburgh)**
	Visionary contact zones - Matteo Ripa's engravings and 18th-century European and Chinese landscape representation: Some initial propositions
	Chair: Prof. Dr. Sven Trakulhun (University of Zurich)
12:30-14:00	Lunch

14:00-14:45	**Dr. Mark Gamsa (Tel Aviv University/EUI Florence)**

Contact zones and border encounters in China and beyond

14:45-15:30	**Wasana Wongsurawat (Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok)**

Home-base of an exiled people: Hong Kong and overseas Chinese activism from Thailand

Chair: Prof. Dr. Angelika Malinar (University of Zurich)

15:30-16:00	Coffee break

16:00-16:45	**Angela Sanders (University of Zurich)**

Titlis, Terrace, Truebsee; A Troubled Paradise? Indian Tourism in the Swiss Alps

19:30	Dinner at Restaurant Neumarkt

Wednesday, 15 June 2011

09:30-10:15	**Tobias Delfs (University of Zurich/Kiel University)**

The Danish colonial city Tranquebar as an Indo-European contact zone

10:15-11:00	**Samir Boulos (University of Zurich)**

British missionary schools in Egypt: a microhistoric view on contact zones

Chair: Dr. Hernning Trüper (University of Zurich)

11:00-11:30	Coffee break

11:30-12:00	**All Participants**

Round table

12:00-13:30	Farewell und Lunch

Abstracts

Dhiravat Na Pombejra (Dept. of History, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok)

Seventeenth century Ayutthaya as a cultural and commercial crossroads: a case study of the trade in Siamese elephants in the Bay of Bengal

Seventeenth century Ayutthaya, a thriving international port city, contained several foreign communities. This lecture will outline the basic factors which made Ayutthaya a considerable commercial crossroads in this period, and analyse why several groups of foreigners chose to reside there.

To give a specific example which will show the ways in which commerce and cultures interacted, I will examine the case of the trade carried on by the "Moors" involving the exchange of Indian textiles with elephants from the jungles of Siam. The extent of the capital's link with its hinterlands, as well as its connection with the Bay of Bengal, will then become evident. The Indian traders of Bengal and the Coromandel, the diplomatic exchanges between India and Siam, and the flourishing of the Indo-Iranian community of Ayutthaya were all closely interconnected. Add to this the nature of the evidence (largely European), and the history of this trade becomes indeed "entangled", involving several ethnic and commercial groups, diplomacy, and court life.

Yue Zhuang (University of Edinburgh)

Visionary contact zones - Matteo Ripa's engravings and 18th-century European and Chinese landscape representation: Some initial propositions

The 28cm x 45cm spatial dimensions of the Italian missionary to China, Matteo Ripa's (1682-1746) series of 36 copper engravings entitled *Views of Jehol* (1711-13) demonstrate landscape representations as visionary contact zones.

In their initial transformation from Shen Yu's woodcuts and thereafter their transference from China to Europe, Matteo Rippa's engravings not only communicated representational methods of landscape between Chinese and European cultures, but also provoked dynamism between Chinese and European ideologies.

For Matteo Ripa, these engravings were the contact zones in which Confucianism and Christianity were fused together so as to embody Matteo Ricci's (1552-1610) renowned syncretism. For the British elite, the engravings provoked a mental journey back through the Golden Age of *Acadia* and the visionary pre-history of Britain, a journey in which the British elite redeemed their identity as cosmopolitan citizens of a new Golden Age.

Mark Gamsa (Fernand Braudel Fellow, European University Institute, Florence/Tel Aviv University)

Contact Zones and Border Encounters in China and Beyond

This paper begins with at outline of scholarly approaches to the problems of regional diversity and local identity in China. It moves on to consider interpretations of historical contact zones, in China as well as in Europe, and the connection between this field of enquiry and border studies. It will be argued that, while contact zones and border / frontier areas have often overlapped in the past, they no longer do today. Some directions as to where "contact zones" can be found in the 21st century will then be suggested.

Wasana Wongsurawat (Dpt. of History, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok)

Home-base of an exiled people: Hong Kong and overseas Chinese activism from Thailand

Sino-Siamese relations in the era of nation-state was never quite straight-forward, partly because, at least up to the end of the Second World War, Siam was the host-country for the largest Chinese community outside of Mainland China. Up to the early decades of the twentieth century, ethnic Chinese made up over one-third of the total population of Siam, according to Chinese and Japanese official sources. While the Siamese economy depended heavily upon the overseas Chinese merchant class, there were always concerns among the ruling classes that the ethnic Chinese might form a fifth column that could lead to the destruction of the Siamese state from within. The Chinese government during the war years also faced a similar dilemma—while Siam declared itself an ally of Japan and enemy of China, the Chinese community in Siam were among the most significant supporters of the Chinese war efforts overseas. It appeared that both sides were locked in a highly problematic love-hate relationship with the overseas Chinese being a most uneasy middle ground.

Things only seemed to get more complicated during the Cold War era. Siam became Thailand, joined the free world camp under the patronage of the United States, and pursued a heavily anti-communist/ anti-Chinese policy throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The Peoples Republic of China was established on the Mainland in 1949, declaring itself an enemy of American imperialism and its vassal states right from the start. The ethnic Chinese in Thailand, once again, found themselves caught between a rock and a hard place. This time, however, there emerged a new middle ground that would complicate matters even further. Hong Kong remained a British colony throughout the Cold War years. While Britain positioned itself clearly within the free world, it attempted to put up a façade of neutrality in its Far Eastern colony. Hong Kong remained a free port yet it was in constant dialogue with Red China. It also allowed itself to serve as the crucial communication link between the ethnic Chinese of Southeast Asia and their extend family back in the ancestral homeland. This tiny colony also became a haven exiled ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs who were suspected by the Thai government for being communist sympathizers and yet would definitely be persecuted by the Chinese state for their capitalist leanings had they chose to return to the PRC. In Hong Kong, they found a lively business arena upon which to foster and develop their enterprises. Those who kept in contact with their extended family found the connection to the Mainland much easier. Last but perhaps most importantly, Hong Kong was a place where they could voice their ideas and express to the world their concerns and difficulties of being a transnational minority 'in between' ideological conflicts between superpowers—a problem that could not be expressed, let alone addressed, in either US-dominated Thailand or the PRC in the 1950s and 1960s.

Tobias Delfs (URPP Asia and Europe/Dpt. of History, Kiel University)

The Danish colonial city Tranquebar as an Indo-European contact zone

The example of the English and Dutch trading companies in mind the Danish King Christian IV. in 1616 founded the first Danish East India Company. Shortly thereafter he acquired the settlement Tarangambadi (Tranquebar) in the Southeast of the Indian subcontinent. Tranquebar became *the* Danish trading centre in Asia until it was replaced by Serampore in Bengal in the 1790s. With its multicultural population structure Tranquebar just as other colonial cities can be considered as a contact zone "par excellence" (Kapil Raj). Accordingly, this paper will focus on the development of the topography within its historical and social context in the 17th and 18th centuries: How has the material and social cityscape of Tranquebar been shaped by Danish or rather European urban planning, economy, administration and political acts in the course of time? Where can we find indigenous influences and where the combination of both? By investigating this minor and therefore comparatively neglected city on the Coromandel Coast the paper sees itself as a differentiating contribution to the debates about the constructed ideal type of the "colonial city".

Samir Boulos (URPP Asia and Europe, University of Zurich)

British Missionary Schools in Egypt: A Microhistoric View on Contact Zones

During the British occupation of Egypt, missionary institutions can be considered as social spaces where closest encounters between Europeans and members of the indigenous societies took place. Catholic and Protestant missionary schools were teaching at least one foreign language and were following a curriculum that was considered modern. These schools enjoyed a very good reputation in the Egyptian society, since the graduates, due to their formation, enjoyed better opportunities on the job market in an economy shaped by the British colonialism. Following Mary Louise Pratt's definition, missionary schools can be considered and studied as 'Contact Zones', referring to "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism".

This paper will examine a British school in Cairo run by protestant missionaries. The English Mission College was founded by missionaries affiliated to the "Church Mission to the Jews" in the early 1920s. It was originally aiming to reach Jewish families, but soon opened for all families who wished a Christian and English education. Most of the children came from a well-educated, upper-middle class background and continued their education at the university.

I have chosen the English Mission College to conduct a case study and micro historic analysis of a contact zone. My study is based on Oral History Interviews with former students of the mentioned school, as well as on archival sources. In particular I will examine processes of cultural exchange. Thereby I will describe the products of these processes, particularly focusing on the history of mentalities. I am interested how concepts, discourses and practices were shaped within this educational institution. Furthermore I will study mechanisms of cultural exchange, i.e. how processes of intermediation, adoption and transformation of cultural elements worked. Eventually, I will discuss the conditions under which exchange processes actually happened and why certain cultural elements have been adopted or refused.