

Public Bathing: Transformations within Continuity. Toward a Social-Environmental History of Body and City in China

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During my visiting period, I plan to revise my habilitation book manuscript *Hot Springs and Public Bathing: Transformations within Continuity. Toward a Social-Environmental History of Body and City in China* and publish it as a book or various articles. While my current research is mainly focused on China-related topics, I hope that I will be able to pursue interdisciplinary studies in comparative research projects internationally by participating the network of RCC. Eventually I would like to explore the possibility to publish the book or articles on the journals or the environmental history series of RCC.

My second book manuscript investigates the long-term process of reforming, refiguring, re-inventing and rewriting cultural patterns of the social usages and the imagery of hot springs and public bathing in Chinese history. Hot springs and public bathing open up an impressive opportunity for inquiring into the multiple relationships between the environment and urban life, biological and medical systems and physical and spiritual sensibilities, popular knowledge and highbrow literary representations. Unlike existing scholarship, my emphasis is on how, down through the centuries, hot springs have been variously imagined and reconfigured by different historical actors by bringing cultural and social strategies into play. Focusing on Chang'an/Xi'an city (Shaanxi Province), the purpose of the book is to explore the interactions, conflicts and negotiations between the diverse agents involved in conceptualizing the social usages of hot springs and public bathing. These public social activities are closely connected to individual bodily treatments and sensual experiences, yet are also related to conceiving and (re)constructing the natural environment.

The scope of this research is not limited to a specific period. Instead, it delves back in time and examines the long-term process taking it up into the first half of the twentieth century. This undertaking is especially feasible when dealing with Chinese history since throughout its successive dynasties China developed a sophisticated system of historical writing and encouraged the conservation of relics which straddles pre-modern and modern China. To trace the diverse cultural perceptions and social activities in a long-term development, this book re-contextualizes Chinese history as a series of transformations within a continuity, within the compass of the interaction between humans and their natural, social and constructed environments.

This research project builds on my approach of enquiring into the fabric of landscape perceptions and (re)constructions, which I developed in my dissertation. However, it goes beyond my previous research, both in time and space. With its focus directed on hot springs and public bathing, it explores a range of new questions and interdisciplinary issues about the body, urban living and environment (re)constructions, which have so far been neglected. In this endeavor, this research project attempts to establish a new field of social environmental history whose focus is on the body and the city.

Since the spiritual and healing power of natural spring water and the joys of public bathing are widely acknowledged and accepted across the globe, this research also contributes China-specific experiences to the global academic discourse on the body, environment and urban living, thereby providing facets for comparative research. Hence, this study opens up a new vista of doing research about environmental issues in everyday urban life and, in the wider sense, issues of global knowledge transformation.