

ASIAN CULTURAL MOBILITIES: TRANSITIONS, ENCOUNTERS, HERITAGE

April 27, 2023

Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, LMU Munich



Purpose

This 1-day workshop is funded by the British Academy seed funding programme, awarded to Karen O'Brien-Kop (Religious Studies, King's College London), Xiang Ren (Architecture, University of Sheffield) and Alessandro Rippa (Anthropology, RCC) following their participation in the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the British Academy Knowledge Frontiers Symposium. The main purpose of the workshop is networking and knowledge exchange, and to foster discussion on the key themes illustrated below.

Conceptual background

Connectivity infrastructure and cultural mobilities are intimately intertwined – today, as well as in the past. Such close relationships are frequently mobilized by public and private investors to promote large-scale infrastructure projects: China's new Silk Road being perhaps chief among them. As these projects have received widespread attention in academia and beyond, in this workshop we aim to take advantage of our interdisciplinary expertise to reflect on some of the key terms and notions that we employ to address and understand such dynamics. In particular, we focus on how historical patterns of migration, cultural exchange and material transformation have been constructed across borderlands, into western contexts and continue to reverberate globally today. Drawing from architectural humanities and design studies, social anthropology, religious studies and environmental humanities, this workshop will examine translocal and transnational Asian cultural expressions through infrastructures of trade, religious practice, and architectural practice and built heritage. Some of the key questions that we ask, are the following:

- How do Asian cultures, which are themselves in constant flux, travel from East and South Asian contexts and adapt to their sites, spaces and enclaves in the UK and Germany, and how does such infrastructure of mobilities reshape understandings of culture locally?
- How are current Chinese-led plans to revive 'Silk Road' connectivities influencing how past mobilities are understood and re-enacted? What role do heritage politics play in transnational development programmes in Asia today?
- How have colonial infrastructures determined shared and evolving pathways of heritage, identity and belonging in religious cultures? How do migrating religious knowledge facilitate processes of cultural critique, intersubjectivity or alienation? In what ways have communications technologies shaped religious mobilities along old, new and virtual 'Silk Roads', including emerging digital religions?

Contributions

For this workshop, and in line with its main objectives of networking and knowledge exchange, we do not envision any formal paper. Rather, we ask each participant to prepare a short presentation (max 10 minutes, with or without PPT) that addresses the following two questions:

1. How do you define/approach/conceptualize cultural mobilities? What are the key sources and/or intellectual genealogies that have informed your approach?
2. How does this definition/approach/conceptualization, in turn, inform your work? Discuss one or two empirical cases from your research that reflect this (feel free to consider how such an approach informs work that you are only beginning, are currently in the midst of, or are just hoping to do in the future; in other words, preliminary and experimental discussions are welcome). We are particularly interested in empirical discussions that help us think through broader issues of theorizing and conceptualizing the cultural mobilities in the social sciences and humanities.

Structure

8.30 - 9.00 We meet in the RCC conference room (Leopoldstr. 11a, 4th floor) over coffee and croissants. Karen, Xiang, and Alessandro introduce the workshop/project.

9.00 - 10.30 Session 1, featuring 5 presentations followed by discussion (O'Brien-Kop, Walter, Bhutoria, Mirza, Maertens)

10.30-11.00 Coffee break

11.00-12.30 Session 2, featuring 5 presentations followed by discussion (Ren, Chan, Kramm, Norum, Rippa)

12.30-13.00 final remarks, discussion over possible future collaborations

13.00 - 14.30 Lunch

15.00 - 16.30 guided tour of the Myanmar exhibition at the Museum Fünf Kontinente, Maximilianstr. 42

Additional excursion (April 28, 2023)

For those interested we will meet at the Westpark U-bahn station (U6) at 9.00am. From there, we will walk to Westpark and take a guided tour of the Asian gardens. The tour (1.5 hours) will be followed by lunch at the Cafe Gans am Wasser, in Westpark. Please let Alessandro know if you will be able to join us for the tour as well.

Participants

Karen O'Brien-Kop (King's College London); Xiang Ren (University of Sheffield); Alessandro Rippa (LMU Munich); Roger Norum (LMU Munich / University of Oulu); Anna-Maria Walter (University of Oulu); Carolin Maertens (LMU Munich); Robert Kramm (LMU Munich); Annie Chan (LMU Munich); Abhishek Bhutoria (University of Sheffield); Jaffer Mirza (King's College London)