

Philologies Across the Asias: The Translation, Transmission and Transformation of Knowledge in the Early Modern World

Online Report of the Zukunftsphilologie Winter School Delhi, 10-21 December 2012



The Berlin-based research program Zukunftsphilologie and the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) in Delhi organised an international Winter School in Delhi from 10–21 December, 2012 entitled: **Philologies Across the Asias: The Translation, Transmission and Transformation of Knowledge in the Early Modern World**.

The winter school explored from the perspective of intellectual and global history the role that textual practices, language studies and archival policies have played in the constitution of knowledge across Asia roughly since 1500.

Almost 30 doctoral and postdoctoral philologists and historians from all over the world gathered for 10 days to discuss the role and future of philology in the global humanities from an interasian perspective. The winter school was steered by a group of scholars, which included **Muzaffar Alam** (University of Chicago), **Rajeev Bhargava** (CSDS, Delhi), **Whitney Cox** (Zukunftsphilologie/SOAS, London), **Islam Dayeh** (Zukunftsphilologie/Freie Universität Berlin), **Rajeev Kinra** (Northwestern University), **Stefan Leder** (Orient Institut Beirut), and **Shail Mayaram** (CSDS, Delhi).

A number of notable scholars also took part in the winter school, including **Ashis Nandy** (CSDS, Delhi), **Sunil Kumar** (University of Delhi), **Dhruv Raina** (Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi) and **Sheldon Pollock** (Columbia University).

The Delhi Winter School built on the success of Zukunftsphilologie's first Winter School held in Cairo, December 2010 on "[Textual Practices Beyond Europe: 1500-1900](#)". The Cairo Winter School focused

mainly on the recovery and recuperation of instances of marginalized textual practices beyond Europe at a time of vast European imperial expansion and the formation of national canons within the context of the history of Orientalism. The 2012 Delhi Winter School, *Philologies Across the Asias*, furthered this research program by shedding light on the translation of texts and the encounter of languages and textual practices across the cultural geographies of Asia - focusing on Arabic, Hebrew, Syriac, Armenian, Turkish, Sanskrit, Kashmiri, Persian, Urdu, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Malay, and Tamil texts and textual practices, among other linguistic and cultural realms.

Over the two weeks that the Winter school convened, there were daily meetings in small groups in which the participants presented their current work. Additionally, there were multiple thematic working groups and plenary discussions, which addressed issues of general relevance and were open to both the participants and to local scholars. These included sessions, for example, on the globalisation of knowledge, historiography and imagination, textual practices across manuscript cultures, Indo-Persian literary encounters, the role of Arabic script in the transmission of written literature, premodern intellectual life in the Indian ocean, the Eurasian history of science, the decolonisation of science and philosophy in India, philology and pedagogy, and the study of non-Western modes of political thought. For a detailed winter school schedule, please follow this [link](#).

Towards an Interasian Perspective on Philology?

The winter school's particular emphasis on cross-Asian philological and intellectual relations was not meant to undermine European encounters with Asia, but rather to consciously provincialise and relativise them, as one among many historical experiences of Asia. The rise of vernaculars and colloquial writing from the courtly cultures and urban spaces of such places like Vijayanagar, Aceh, Seoul, Istanbul and Damascus created new scribal practices, new imaginations of cultural spread and hegemonies, and new ways of opening the world to text and vice versa. The fundamental question that the Winter School asked was: what would a history of Asia without Europe as its single point of reference actually look like? How, for example, was the seventh and eighth century Greco-Syriac-Arabic literary culture viewed by Indo-Persian intellectuals in the early modern period? What role did Arabic script or Arabic intellectual traditions play across various locations - from the Mediterranean to the Malay world - to help bring about a sense of intellectual cosmopolitanism? Looking at any exemplary Ottoman or Chinese literary scholar in the early modern period, what can we deduce about the linguistic tools and methodologies at their disposal? What theories and notions of history, of language, and of cultural heritage determined their vision of translation and transformation from one register to another? What was at stake, in these movements across Asia?

Historiographies of Asia and the Pluralisation of Philology

Participants focused on the historical and cultural dimension of philological practices, underlining the ways in which textual culture (the formation of archives, the circulation of manuscripts, the consolidation of expertise), and cultural imagination informed and governed Asian worlds prior to and during European colonial encounters. By situating such practices in the larger context of the global histories of Asia and the complex geographies and polities through which it was constituted, a doubly necessary discursive and historiographical move was intended: to disrupt any lingering notions of a monolithic Asia fabricated by western imperial imagination, and to challenge any assumption that philological knowledge originated in Europe and traveled - via the colonial encounter - to Asia.

Asias, in the plural, therefore, refers to the countless geographical locations, landscapes and seascapes, maps, boundaries and frontiers that make up the Asian geo-space, and it also refers to the countless number of representations, imaginations and historiographies that continue to shape its contours and delineate its differences. The Delhi Winter School engaged in a transregional and

historical perspective that transcends current national, colonial, religious and ethnic boundaries, real and imagined. As indicated in the title, the Winter School aimed to explore the early modern interconnections and entanglements of the Asias through an investigation of the philologies that connected them and also brought them apart.

Philology, Power and Gender

Taking as its point of departure the basic Foucauldian and Saidian theme of the imbrication of power and knowledge, Zukunftsphilologie has since its inception been concerned with charting the shifting relationship between these; the Delhi Winter School was no exception. Instead of a premature reduction of all philological knowledge to a sinister project of domination, the participants were guided as much by the resistances and aporias that mark the intersection of the work of textual elucidation and interpretation and the wider social world in which it occurs.

Within the course of our discussions in Delhi, another aspect of this wider problematic emerged with particular force: that of gender. First broached in the spirit of friendly criticism by one of the participants, with regard to the steering group of the Winter School itself, the question of the gendered presuppositions of philological enquiry was a recurrent one. For instance, one of the Delhi-based participants, in her research project questions the patriarchal assumptions driving the editorial composition of certain types of female-authored early modern Marathi language devotional writings, while retaining a salutary critical position on the anachronistic hermeneutics of recovery practiced on these materials (and others like them) by a contemporary feminist literary scholarship. The problem reaches into the deep history of the scholarly traditions we collectively study: philology, as practiced in the Asias over the millennia, has been an overwhelmingly male-gendered practice and profession. Tracing the exceptions to this—as in the literati culture of Korea studied by another participant—is only a preliminary step to a self-conscious understanding of the place of gendered social power within intellectual and institutional formation: both what it can elucidate for contemporary scholarship, and what it cannot.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of all participants, we would like to thank Georges Khalil, academic coordinator of the Forum Transregionale Studien, for his unparalleled support, and Stefanie Müller for her efforts in organising flights and accommodation for participants from different parts of the world under very intense circumstances. We are also grateful to our Indian partners and colleagues: Rajeev Bhargava, director of the CSDS, Praveen Rai, Academic Secretary of the CSDS, Ananya Vaypeji, and others, for their hospitality and for making this a truly successful event.

Islam Dayeh (Freie Universität Berlin) and **Whitney Cox** (SOAS, London)

May 2013

List of ALL PARTICIPANTS (in alphabetical order):

- Acri, Andrea** (National University of Singapore)
Heirs to the Vernacular Millennium: Archipelagic Saiva Hybridities in the Early Modern Period
- Alam, Muzaffar** (University of Chicago)
The Question of the Mughal Decline Revisited
- Aydin, Enis Erdem** (Bosphorus University, Istanbul)
Iranian-Ottoman Link to Orthography Reform in the Middle East
- Benigni, Elisabetta** (Zukunftphilologie Fellow 2011-2012/University of Turin)
Seas of Languages: Symmetries and Asymmetries in the Mediterranean and in the Indian Ocean
- Bhargava, Rajeev** (CSDS, Delhi) member of the Steering Group
Panel: "Decolonising Concepts"
- Bhatnagar, Rashmi Dube** (University Hyderabad)
Philological Practice in South Asia
- Cornwall, Owen** (Columbia University)
The Astral Sciences in Early Modern South Asia
- Cox, Whitney** (SOAS, London) Steering Group Member
- Dayeh, Islam** (Zukunftphilologie / Freie Universität Berlin) Steering Group Member
- d'Hubert, Thibaut** (University of Chicago)
Buddhism and Indo-Persian Intellectual Tradition(s) in the 17th and 18th Centuries
- Han, SeoKyung** (Binghamton University)
Roles of the Korean script Han'gŭl of the Literary Culture of Chosŏn Korea (1392-1910)
- Jain, Shalin** (University of Delhi)
Literary Interactions: Jain Community under the Mughals
- Jha, Pankaj Kumar** (University of Delhi)
Reading Vidyapati: Language, Literature and Cultural Values in 15th Century North Bihar"
- Johnston, Elizabeth** (Zukunftphilologie Fellow 2012-2013, Berlin)
The 19th Century 'Wissenschaft des Judentums' and the Future of Philology
- Kaicker, Abhishek** (Columbia University)
Histories of the first anti-monarchical coup in the Mughal Empire
- Kapadia, Aparna** (Ambedkar University, Delhi)
Text, Power, and Kingship in Fifteenth Century Gujarat
- Keshavmurthy, Prashant** (McGill University/Zukunftphilologie Fellow 2011-2012)
Shaikh Sa'di's Gulistan and the commentarial tradition in Mughal India
- Khalil, Georges** (Forum Transregionale Studien)
- Khatun, Samia** (University of Sydney / Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin)
Camels, Ships and Trains: Translation Across the Indian Archipelago, 1870 - 1930
- Kinra, Rajeev** (Northwestern University) Steering Group Member
Indo-Persian Cultures of Translation: Beyond Akbar and Dara Shukov
- Kumar, Sunil** (University of Delhi)
Panel: "Decolonising Concepts"
- Landau, David** (SOAS, London)
Minority Literature in Modern Hindi Novels
- Maurya, Anubuthi** (Bharti College, Delhi University)
The Translation of Rajatarangini in the Eighteenth Century Traditions of History Writing in Kashmir
- Mayaram, Shail** (CSDS, Delhi) member of the Steering Group.
Panel: "Decolonising Concepts"
- Mervart, David** (University of Heidelberg)
Exchanges between the Early Modern Tokugawa Japan and the Outside World
- Mohile, Mudita** (University of Delhi)
Scripting Resistance: Marathi Bhakti Poetry and Women's Agency

Mufti, Mudasir (Zukunftspilologie Fellow 2012-2013, Berlin)
Revisiting Kashmir's Hagiography: Rishis, Sufis and Syncretism

Müller, Stefanie (Zukunftspilologie/Forum Transregionale Studien)

Nandy, Ashis (CSDS, Delhi)
Panel: "Decolonising Concepts"

Obrock, Luther (University of California)
The Sanskrit Yusuf-o Zulaikha: The Aesthetics of Encounter in 16th Century Kashmir

Ollett, Andrew (Columbia University)
Prakrit at the Limits of Sanskrit Literary Culture

Pandey, Rakesh (CSDS, Delhi)
Panel: "Decolonising Concepts"

Petrovich, Maya (Princeton University)
"Urfi would throw his Verse into the Fire": The Ottoman Retreat from Persianness

Pollock, Sheldon (Columbia University)
Public lecture: "Liberation Philology"

Raina, Dhruv (Jawaharlal Nehru University)
Decolonization and the Entangled History of Science and Philosophy in India

Reddy, Srinayani (Jawaharlal Nehru University)
Imaging History, Mapping Culture: Visual Culture and Historical Representation in Asaf Jahi Hyderabad and the Samasthanas

Ricci, Ronit (Australian National University)
The Sri Lankan Malays: Islam, Literature and Diaspora Across the Indian Ocean

Schemmel, Matthias (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin)
The Transmission of Scientific Knowledge from Europe to China in the Early Modern Period

Siddiqui, Hasan (University of Chicago)
Worlds Coming into View: Merchants, Statesmen and the Order of Nature in Early-Modern India ca. 1600-1750

Vajpeyi, Ananya, (CSDS, Delhi)
Righteous Republic. The Political Foundations of Modern India

Vollandt, Ronny (Zukunftspilologie Fellow 2012-2013, Berlin)
Ancient Jewish Historiography in Arabic Garb: Sefer Yosippon among Jews, Christians and Muslims

Pictures





Photos: Erdem Aydin, Islam Dayeh, Georges Khalil, Stefanie Müller, CSDS