

## **Momoya Okura Memorial Symposium-Series: The Languages and Cultures of Asia in Inter-Cultural Dialogue (Image and Text —Text and Image)**

Mainz, February 18, 2020. Organized by Sonja Wengoborski (Mainz) in cooperation with Masako Sato (Tokyo) and Li Wei (Hangzhou)

### **Report by Emily Schmidt**

The series' second symposium discussed the perception of images and their transformation in text-based media as well as the visualization of texts. It was opened by Sonja Wengoborski with a digital greeting from the Vice Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Philology of Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz, Prof. Rainer Emig, a greeting from the Director of the Foundation Yoko Okura Project 360, delivered by Prof. Masako Sato, and a greeting from Prof. Li Wei. Prof. Almuth Degener (Mainz) welcomed the participants and guests in the name of the Gutenberg Institute for World Literature and Written Media – Indology.

The first two contributions were moderated by Ajit Singh Sikand (Frankfurt). Masako Sato (Tokyo) discussed the meaning and context of plum blossoms in Japanese culture on the basis of Japanese poetry and its correlation to Ogata Kōrin's well-known plum blossom depictions; Katharina Hirt (Koblenz) questioned the means by which notions of personification and gender not only manifest themselves through art, literature and advertisement, but are consciously created to achieve the association of certain qualities with an object or product.

In the section chaired by Almuth Degener, Lisa Scholz (Mainz) examined the relation of text and imagery in artistic representations of the *Rāmāyaṇa* over the course of time, suggesting that illustration always includes interpretation; shaped by sociocultural context and/or political or religious agenda of the artist. Christina Ersch (Mainz) further dove into the cultural differences and similarities in pictorial perception when presenting results from her research with language students from Germany and Uzbekistan. In the context of teaching German as a foreign or second language, the description of pictures is usually a standardized part of language proficiency tests; however, the perception of images and the resulting descriptions may differ from the expected results regardless of the test participant's proficiency level. Ersch thus again stressed the need to sensitize prospective teachers to the topic of visual literacy.

The section moderated by Jaspal Naveel Singh (Hong Kong) further thematized the complex interplay between visualization of texts and their conscious or unconscious interpretation. Vanessa Kölsch (Mainz) highlighted the changes possible from one incarnation of a story to the other using variants of the parable of *The Man in the Well*; complementing Scholz' contribution with an excursion into the *Mahābhārata*. The comparison to the popular children's game of *Stille Post* ("Chinese Whispers") comes to mind, which inspired a chain art project presented

by Frankfurt-based artist Angela Ehrlich. The expected process of alteration was condensed to a tangible phenomenon as the 12 participants each had to describe their art piece to the next in line, restricted to oral texts transmitted through phone calls, who then tried to recreate the given image.

Sonja Wengoborski next held a workshop about the imagination and impressions of emotions and their respective illustrations, *Thinking of Rasa*. She highlighted the differences between emotional states, feelings and sentiments by encouraging their depiction's comparison concerning the relation between *bhava* and *rasa* in Indian aesthetics. She continued to moderate the last section of the symposium, which gave an insight into the fluent transition between text and image. Sandra Vlasta (Mainz) drew upon Yōko Tawada's German-Japanese novel *Schwager in Bordeaux* ("Brother-in-law in Bordeaux") to emphasize the blurry boundaries between these two media, as the author intentionally uses Kanji characters in the flow of the otherwise German book. The purposeful decoration of pages with these letters incomprehensible to a wide range of her readers entails gaps in understanding that are just as important to the effect of the novel as the remaining text.

Sonja Wengoborski concluded the event with a summary of the results of the contributions. The next Momoyo Okura Memorial Symposium will take place in Mainz; due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the date is yet to be announced.

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