Shaping Asians. Connectivities, Comparisons, Collaborations

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6 – 7 February 2018

Over the last two decades, growing interconnections among different Asian locations and the broader forces of globalization have brought sweeping changes in the region, drawing places after places into the “grip of worldy encounter” (Tsing 2005). These come to light in academic, economic or political alliances. Due to new media technologies, the changing demands of capitalist production and labor markets, and fluctuating understandings of politics and fabrics of public spheres and subcultures there is an amazingly rich traffic of people and ideas that contribute to the shaping of Asia, i.e. to processes comprising the (ever changing) notions and practices of exchange and connectivity as well as the dynamics of boundary crossing and blurring, molded by new understandings of belonging and place-making – but also distinction, distance or dissent.

Asia has increasingly attained ‘global prominence’ in the landscape of the new millennium, with Asian leaders embracing the notion of an ‘Asian dream’ (versus that of the alleged ‘American dream’) inscribed with nationalist undertones. Economic growth, scientific and technological innovation, metropolitan development, and artistic production are as striking as the magnitude of climate change, conflicts and rebellion as well as an accentuation of social inequality. The scholars invited to this workshop reflected on key developments in the Asian region, especially in the areas of education, welfare, health, public sphere as well as on the new ways socio-spatial constellations – such as the China-triggered OBOR (‘One Belt One Road’)-initiative – and the question how these are negotiated in transnational contexts. Likewise, studying the entangled histories of Asia in the world is considered as crucial. This conceptual approach, argue Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka and Christiane Brosius (Heidelberg), the speakers of the network and organisers of this Zf-conference, also supported by the DFG, will help to trace connectivities, to compare and to engage in collaborations across epistemic communities and thus enhance our ability to adequately understand past, present and future processes of shaping Asia.