

Knowledge and Measures of Precaution: Environmental Expertise in South India

Abstract submitted for the panel *Ideas in Transit* at the ADI conference,
November 2010

Frida Hastrup, Post.doc, Department of Anthropology, University of
Copenhagen

This paper addresses the workings of environmental expertise as witnessed during fieldwork among villagers, administrators and environmental scientists working and living in settlements along the coast of Tamil Nadu, South India. By looking closer at various environmental projects undertaken there, mainly with the aim of stopping the neighbouring sea from flooding and eroding the coastal settlements, it will be shown how perceptions of these projects vary according to the perspective of the different actors.

While it is not particularly surprising that different actors harbour different ideas about the environment and the necessary measures of precaution against an encroaching sea, what is perhaps surprising is that the projects somehow *work*, regardless of the fact that they are engaged with by actors with very different bases of knowledge.

I suggest that this is not a failure of communication on the part of either of the involved parties. What is at stake is not that an original idea has been lost or manipulated in the process of transmission from, say, engineers to beneficiaries; it is not a matter for environmental scientists of convincing villagers about the certainty of scientific knowledge, nor for the villagers of rejecting science on the basis of indigenous experience and local knowledge. Rather, taking my cue from Helen Verran (2001), I suggest that to analyse the success of these environmental projects, we must move beyond both a universalist and a relativist stance and acknowledge that world, knower, and knowledge are not separate and given entities. This approach allows for a focus on the projects as emergent and enacted realities across different logics.

Perhaps, then, the environmental projects illustrate what Verran calls 'a postcolonial moment', at which point we can engage with "imaginaries of emergence" and where it becomes possible to envision a future different from the past.

Environmental ideas in flow:

The cultural contextualization of global environmentalist discourse in China

The rise of a Chinese environmentalist public sphere is one of the most important societal developments in the People's Republic of China in the last ten to twenty years. Among this new green public sphere's most striking features is the emergence of new "green" discourses, whose concepts, vocabulary, imaginaries and representations have to a large degree been introduced to China via transnational connections to a global environmentalist movement.

What notions do these new discourses entail in the Chinese context? Have they been adopted comprehensively, has some of their meaning been "lost in translation", or have they deliberately been appropriated in a different form? What are the main factors shaping the acculturation of imported concepts?

These questions belong to a rich field of scholarship that studies the transcultural flow of ideas: In the context of postcolonial studies, Edward Said has written on "traveling theories", while more recently, scholars such as Arjun Appadurai have produced important insights into the dynamics of cultural globalization in the postmodern age. However, as I will argue, many studies too one-sidedly conceptualize the dynamics that motivate transcultural flows in terms of a "push" agency, in which cultural objects are imposed onto others to maintain certain hegemonic power relations. Instead, I argue that in the analysis of transculturality, we should focus more closely on the "pull" dimension, and take an approach which emphasizes the role of social actors in pro-actively attracting, shaping and contextualizing transcultural flows at the receiving end.

I aim to illustrate these theorizations by discussing the dynamics which shape the acculturation of globalized environmental ideas into the Chinese discursive context. I propose an actor-centered field perspective that will emphasize the importance of eclectic appropriation and discursive framing of environmental concepts by different social actors in accordance with their own agendas.

The Flow of ‘Green Ideas’ between Developed and Developing World: The Case of Japan and ‘Developing Asia’

Nilly Kamal El-Amir,
Faculty of Economics and Political Science
Cairo University, Egypt
nkamalm@yahoo.com

Green related concepts such as: green technology, green economy, green jobs already contributed to a great extent in many developed countries’ economies, e.g. in Europe (such as Germany, the world biggest exporter of green technology products), and in Asia, (such as Japan). While some other Asian countries stay behind this scene, e.g. China started thinking of establishing a governmental seat for environment only in 2008!

Since the world is vulnerable to the effects of environment degradation with very limited exceptions, the wide gap between developed Asia and many other countries in the continent concerning ‘learning the green concepts’ raises big question.

On other words, the essential need for dealing with the environmental crises leads to same need for pushing the movement of the idea in the field of ‘green ideas’.

The questions are: HOW can we provide this speed of movement? WHAT makes an idea “new” in a region and “quite old” at the same time in another region or country? WHY a dominant phenomenon like globalization could not push the movement of ideas from developed to the developing world in a quicker or more effective way?

The answers might be: because of the gap of knowledge...the lack of interest.. the imbalance of powers.. the structure of international order.. the priorities of each part of the world.. or because of the R&D policies in each part of the world..

In this regard, this paper aims at examining the state of ideas movement from ‘developed’ to ‘developing’ Asia, taking the green ideas as case study and looking at the main factors that brake or accelerate this movement. The focus will be on Japan, the most advanced economy in Asia, and how effectively Japan uses the ODA for exporting the green ideas to developing Asia either China or the ASEAN countries as a mean of dealing with the environmental problems.

Abstract for 'Ideas in transit', Asian Diversity in a Global Context

By: Anders Blok, Department of Sociology, Copenhagen University (abl@soc.ku.dk)

Greening cosmopolitan urbanism? On the travel of low-carbon formats among European and East Asian cities

While cosmopolitanism is the focus of much recent 'global' (Euro-American) debate, there is a relative paucity of research that examines how cosmopolitanism works as a social force within specific regions, societies, and cities – not least in an East Asian context. This paper aims to develop a theoretical notion of 'green cosmopolitanism', and to position it in the context of travelling formats of low-carbon urban restructuring among European and East Asian cities. As climate change has emerged as a world-wide matter of concern, a variety of trans-local urban climate networks (C40, ICLEI) now interlink cities across and within regional divides – including Europe and East Asia – in attempts to share knowledge and practices for low-carbon urban innovation. The paper outlines a number of characteristics of such 'cosmopolitan' urban networks, including the extensive movement of 'green' ideas, scientists, entrepreneurs and designers; a reflexive openness to urban green innovations taking place elsewhere; and the involvement of emergent global publics formed around major risks such as climate change. Reviewing the literature on urban environmental (and climate) policies in Europe and East Asia, the paper gauges the extent to which socio-material transformations towards a 'greening' cosmopolitan urbanism may be identified in the two regions. Finally, using Copenhagen and Kyoto as preliminary case studies, the paper discusses how 'cosmopolitan' low-carbon formats – for instance, the use of bicycles as means of transport – is negotiated and redesigned under 'local' urban circumstances.

DO WE NEED NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS?

In Asian Human Rights Context

Buhm-Suk, Baek

J.S.D. candidate, Cornell Law School

bb247@cornell.edu

Asia remains as the only region which does not have any regional human rights mechanism comparable to the Europe, the America or the Africa. The purpose of this paper is to examine the framework and related conceptual issues on human rights in Asia-Pacific region with focusing on the emerging of National Human Rights Institutions. While it is commonly argued that a regional political and geographical identity has not established in Asia as a region, there are various analogous regional elements in most Asian countries: 1) the experience of colonialism or quasi-colonialism; 2) the political experience of authoritarian regime after the independence or the establishment of a new state; 3) similar religious basis at the sub-regional level.

This paper attempts to find answers to the following questions: 1) whether human rights are fully alien concepts to Asia and Asia has always not been a participant in the development of human rights; 2) how to describe Asian human rights context in the complex process of transplanting international human rights norms and the struggling process of political and cultural social changes in individual Asian countries; 3) why NHRIs can be a prominent actors for the promotion and protection of human rights in Asian human rights context.

As Louis Henkin mentions, the concepts of human rights are heavily indebted to natural law (jus gentium) and Western philosophical traditions. The values of human dignity in the Asian context, so-called *Asian values*, should be recognized as part of philosophical and cultural component of Asian human rights context. The development of international human rights law in Asia is, however, not just the acknowledgment of the philosophical values but a real process of adopting treaties and conventions which have a binding power on individual states and related actors.

This paper will argue that: 1) as Amartya Sen articulates, fundamental human rights and rights ideas have existed not only in Western cultures, but in Asian cultures as well; 2) Asian countries

have taken parts in the process of legalization of international human rights; 3) While it is undeniable that the historical paths of human rights development in Asia countries were not identical to those in European countries or U.S., most Asian states have embraced the ideas of human rights, democracy and constitutional rights during their struggle against colonialism; 4) People in Asia have also witnessed instances of misuse of the human rights language by authoritarian government; 5) Human rights norms have developed in Asia through a complicated process. Therefore considering such a unique progress, it is important to have a medium institution for the protection and promotion of human rights in individual Asian states to intertwine both top-down approach and bottom-up approach on human rights.

Asian Dynamics Initiative
Copenhagen November 2010
Abstract

**Civilizing Forces of Civil Law:
Legal Transplantation in East Asia in Historical Perspective**

Marie Seong-Hak Kim
St. Cloud State University

This paper discusses the spread and reception of an alien legal order in history, with a particular focus on East Asia. Japan, China, and Korea in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed the transformation of their legal systems from one based on the Sinicized model into a modern Romano-German civil law system, leading to the codification of civil law in 1898, 1930, and 1960 respectively. In all these cases, jurisprudence of custom and reason served as key instruments in bringing new and old institutional arrangements together, and easing the transition to a new legal order without compromising the historical legitimacy of their traditional law. Custom as embodiment of indigenous cultural values and tradition was often pitted against the influence of alien law. But beneath such resistance was an eager and carefully-conceived program led by legal elites to change, systematize, and improve their law by adjusting custom to reason in the natural law tradition so their law could become a “civilized law.” Judges conflated custom and reason and frequently decided disputes according to the general principles of law found in the French Civil Code of 1804. The situation seemed analogous to the legal reception in late medieval and early modern France, in which the concept of Roman law as written reason had allowed the jurists to receive selectively Roman law principles that they viewed as not destructive to French custom. Throughout history, legal transplantation has rarely been a unilateral process. In modern civil law jurisdictions, debate continues today over the questions whether custom has the force of law and whether judicial decisions finding custom should be recognized as precedents. Careful consideration of the reception of civil law in history can contribute to the understanding of the evolution of modern legal systems from comparative and transnational perspectives, without losing sight of particular local conditions and political and social exigencies.

Name: Jarkko Haapanen

University / Department / Unit: University of Jyväskylä (Finland) / Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy / Political Science

Title: Doctoral Candidate

Address: Vehkakuja 2 C 42, 40700 Jyväskylä, Finland

Email: jarkko.t.haapanen@jyu.fi

Mobile: + 358443618921

Conference: Asian Diversity in a Global Context

Workshop: Ideas in Transit

Title of the proposal: The ideas of mutual aid and harmonious evolution in the New Culture Movement rhetoric

Abstract: The current leadership of People's Republic of China often uses the ideas of “peaceful development” and “harmonious society” in their rhetoric when dealing with the rapid rise of China. When we look at the historical background of these ideas we can easily find both Western and Chinese influences. One “Western” author who was widely read in China already before the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921), a Russian anarchist. He wanted to challenge the so called social Darwinist view of evolution by introducing the idea of mutual aid as a central factor of evolution. Many of his works were translated into Chinese in the early decades of the 20th century, but of course Kropotkin was not the only source of these kinds of ideas and his ideas were mixed with others, like the old Chinese idea of great harmony.

This paper explains and analyzes how these themes of mutual aid and harmonious evolution were used in New Culture Movement rhetoric during the May Fourth period (1917–1921 as Chow Tse-tsung has defined it). Many New Culture Movement authors saw that particular time, aftermath of the Russian revolution, as something special and new. They wrote numerous articles about “the beginning of a new age” and about “new trend of thought”. “Mutual aid” and “harmonious development” were seen as parts of this new historical trend.

May Fourth thought and their rhetoric have been studied in many studies before. However, the aim of this paper is to concentrate on their historical argumentation and especially the idea of peaceful and harmonious development towards a world community. As New Culture Movement and May Fourth movement can be seen as the birthplace of Chinese Communist Party (CCP), this paper offers a historical perspective to the present day political argumentation of the CCP leadership.

“What Happened to Lu Xun After He Went to Thailand?”

Martin Platt
Asian Studies / TORS
University of Copenhagen

Thai is among the dozens of languages into which Lu Xun's work, ideas, and reputation have been translated since the 1950s. The official Collected Stories in Thai translation by the Peking Foreign Language Press appeared in 1976, but other translations of particular stories were published in Thailand before and after that date. For Thai readers, Lu Xun's work was most widely known and available between 1973 and 1976, a period of extraordinary political and literary openness and experimentation in Thailand. It was during this time that writings of all hues were culturally transmitted through a translational/interpretational ether into the Thai intellectual world. In part, Lu Xun was made to fit into an existing Thai movement of political consciousness and socialist realism in the arts. Thereafter, however, Lu Xun and his work lapsed into relative obscurity in Thailand, and for more than two decades he was seldom read or mentioned. In the past several years, though, there has been a kind of rediscovery of Lu Xun, accompanied by re-translations, in certain ways, of his work and position.

How was Lu Xun received and understood in Thailand in these different eras? What was/is his significance for Thai readers? Why did he achieve such wide recognition in the 1970s, and then again more recently? What accounted for these cycles of attention? This paper aims to investigate the creation, dissipation, and recreation of Thai meanings of Lu Xun.

Beijing Bicycle – Stories from a transformative space

Abstract

Mai Corlin, University of Copenhagen

Ideas, words, images and stories travel from west to east – and from east to west. Certain stories are chosen and retold in different settings and images, that may or may not represent certain cultural frameworks, are reproduced and appropriated into new contexts – and in new times. Cinema, in this case the mainland Chinese, becomes a space of production and a production of space that reveals how transnational and translocal mechanisms affect the cinematic language, transforming the images and stories chosen for the cinematic representation. Wang Xiaoshuai's *Beijing Bicycle* (十七岁的单车) (2001) is a result of transnational currents that weave a carpet of global influences. *Beijing Bicycle* is thematically similar to Vittorio de Sica's neorealist classic *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) and Akira Kurosawa's film noir classic *Stray Dog* (1949). Both films describe a disillusioned post-war society in an impoverished Italy and a humiliated Japan respectively. The stories told become relevant in a new context – that of the Chinese mainland society in the 21st century. Doreen Massey (2005: 9) defines space as “a simultaneity of stories-so-far”, a space that is constantly exploding and imploding with the influx of new and old stories. Within this theoretical framework Wang Xiaoshuai's work can be understood as the result of stories-so-far, as the cinematic representation of the globalized “space” within the setting of the national. *Beijing Bicycle* is a production of space as well as a space of production, since it tells a new story in the trajectory of stories-so-far and simultaneously is a direct result of these stories.