Kickoff-Event of the Momoya Okura Memorial Symposium-Series: The Languages and Cultures of Asia in Inter-Cultural Dialogue/ Auftaktveranstaltung der Momoya Okura Memorial Symposien-Reihe: Sprachen und Kulturen im interkulturellen Dialog

Mainz, August 29, 2019

Report by Sonja Wengoborski

The focus of the symposium-series' opening event was on different aspects of the notion of 'culture', which has been under review and discussion in various fields of research in recent years. It was opened by Sonja Wengoborski with a greeting from the Vice Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Philology of Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz, Rainer Emig, a greeting from the Director of the Foundation Yoko Okura Project 360, delivered by Masako Sato, and a short report by Professor Li Wei on a series of three annual conferences that have taken place at the Buddhist Academy in Hangzhou (China) since 2016.

The notion of culture is currently under critical discussion in Germany and Europe as well as internationally. In her keynote lecture moderated by Ajit Singh Sikand (Frankfurt), Marion Grein (Mainz) advocated sticking to the term 'culture'. In her plea for a transcultural concept, she combined the concept of multi-collectivity with a discourse-analytical approach.

In the section moderated by Baijayanti Roy (Frankfurt), Natalia Blum-Barth (Mainz) highlighted examples of techniques of translating culture as seen with Yoko Tawada, who writes in both Japanese and German. As a wanderer between the two linguistic and cultural worlds, the author analyses the phonetic components of words and reassembles them: For example, the word *Übersetzungen* (translations) becomes *Übersee-Zungen* (overseas-tongues). In her contribution on the transfer of literary texts from Hindi to German, Sonja Wengoborski examined problems of cultural translation using a few examples of semantic gaps in which terminology in the source language either has no or no connotative equivalence in the target language.

In the part chaired by Almuth Degener (Mainz), Christina Ersch (Mainz) and Katharina Hirt (Koblenz) analyzed the culturally influenced image perception in the context of German as a foreign or second language. Ersch emphasized the need to sensitize prospective teachers to this topic, since the description of pictures is part of standardized procedures of language proficiency tests. However, the perception of images and the resulting description often run counter to the expectations of the teacher. Hirt presented results from her research with German and Chinese native speakers. In accordance with the multi-collectivity-concept of culture, the interpretation of picture stories showed not only culturally shaped differences but also cross-cultural similarities. Masako Sato examined the interplay between poetry and pictorial representation in Japan that had developed over a

millennium starting from the eminent poem anthology Manyoshu (8th century) up to the end of the Tokugawa period (also known as Edo period). During this time attention turned again towards these poems in Japan and the well-known master Utagawa Hiroshige depicted the life described in them in multicolored woodcuts.

In the section moderated by Lisa Scholz (Mainz), Almuth Degener (Mainz) gave an insight into the complex system of morphemes to express position and direction in the Nuristani languages of Afghanistan. In her ethnolinguistic contribution, Svenja Völkel (Mainz) considered the often not clearly recognizable interactions of language, culture and cognition. She illustrated this complex interplay using examples from Tongan.

Marion Grein summarized the results of the contributions and moderated the final discussion, in which suggestions for topics of future symposia were collected and discussed. The next Momoyo Okura Memorial Symposium will take place on Friday, February 28, 2020 in Mainz.

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