



EDITORIAL:

Cultural Contact, Innovation and Tradition

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The current issue of *Interface* focuses on the fields of tension between tradition and innovation. Thus, it reflects the topic of the *INTERFACEing* Conference in Trier, which was held at the beginning of October 2022: “Telling Innovations and Tradition. East and West.” Even the formal organization of the conference showed where we stand today. After the pandemic –natural focus of the previous issue 19– scholars from East and West met again, for the first time in situ, at Trier University in Germany. They listened to the lectures in the seminar rooms, discussed their positions in the autumn sun, explored, quite incidentally, the ancient (Roman) city. At the same time, a number of colleagues who otherwise would not have been able to participate were connected via zoom. Ten years ago, this was considered barely feasible. The term hybrid conference was virtually unknown. Nevertheless, we are wondering: How do we fathom the advantages and disadvantages of digital academia properly? Is this merely a temporary phenomenon? If not, in which direction will we develop communicatively, thus scientifically, hence (and ultimately) socially? And which factors are driving or impeding this development? The current issue of *INTERFACE*, although considerably augmented by papers that were not presented in the conference, is not yet able to provide conclusive answers to these questions, but it does offer some pertinent suggestions. The topics are structured from practice to theory, from the material-historical to the intellectual-historical.

The contribution by Matthias Fechner (University of Trier) opens the discussion by not taking a purely descriptive and historical view of re-

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form phases in education, but by pointing out possible causes of failure in contemporary education. Here, the increasingly scarce time for negotiating implementation processes plays an important role. Digital innovation pushes into society, demands reforms, but - in the (sometimes) chaotic acceleration of processes - simultaneously has a destructive effect, blocking itself, devouring resources. Using historical examples, the author demonstrates in **“Success and Failure. Four phases of education reform in long-term historical contexts in Central Europe (and a short detour to contemporary China)”** quite tangibly that the positive results of comprehensive reforms do not automatically become visible after years or even months, but rather require decades of difficult negotiation to finally bear fruit in society. Moreover, his conclusion is that the current developments of a digitalized education are primarily and, above all, perceptible in China, whereby we are all called upon to counter the tendencies of control and encroachment that occur as a (sometimes intended) side effect, entirely in the sense of the negotiation processes he evokes.

The second contribution, by Karl Akbari (National Taiwan University of Science and Technology), is also devoted to a very relevant topic: **“Innovation in Pricing Mechanisms: An Analysis of the Emergence of Dynamic and Fixed Pricing in Five Countries.”** Akbari takes the volatility of current pricing processes as an opportunity to differentiate and analyze them according to cultural areas. He looks at fixed and dynamic pricing in Japan, China, France, the UK, and the US. The dynamics behind these forms of price formation can have an immediate impact – even more direct than educational reforms – on the societies they affect. The recent rise in energy prices in Germany – as a result of the war-related boycott measures against Russia – has provided a poignant illustration of the impact that dynamic pricing can have in this sector. By comparing historical examples, the author explains how prices develop in the aforementioned countries: Mitsui Takatoshi’s (三井高利, 1622-1694) influence on static prices in Japan, for example; James Lackington’s bookshop in London’s Finsbury Square, where books were first sold (cash only) at a competitive fixed price; Macy’s and Wanamaker’s general stores, later department stores in the U.S. as

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well as Ma Yingbiao's (馬應彪, 1860-1944) department store in Hong Kong. Akbari contrasts this with the concept of dynamic pricing, i.e. prices determined by the factors of variable costs, time, supply and demand, first introduced by Anglo-American airlines in the 1950s (revenue management), later expanded by hotel chains, now widely represented on the market (Amazon, Uber, etc.). A similar development took place in East Asia, however only after a long delay. Finally, cultural and ethical differences, but also advantages and disadvantages of fixed and dynamic prices are clarified. What is clear is that the topic of pricing will become even more important as a result of artificial intelligence and globalization.

It may be surprising, but in fact there is an intersection between the topic of pricing and Sheng-mei Ma's (University of Michigan) **"Bespoke Immigrants in Nisei Murayama, Accented Kim, and Mama Tan."** For success in literature is, among other reasons, determined by supply and demand. Ma reveals (by way of example) how East Asian immigrants are not necessarily portrayed in an accurate or even fair way, in the novels of Milton Murayama ("All I Asking for is my Body," 1988), Richard Kim ("Lost Names: Scenes from a Korean Boyhood," 1998), and Amy Tan (e.g., "The Joy Luck Club," 1989), but conforming to the book market and to politics. Ma uses the positively connoted term "bespoke" to label this constellation. His argumentation, however, is furious, differentiated, and strikes a deep nerve: as with the other contributions, the author is ultimately not only concerned with the topic he deals with on the surface, the deliberately distorted literary portrayal of Asian Americans (by Asian Americans). What is more, he tackles literature (inspired by migration), which sells itself and thus fails, in the very midst of the tension between innovation and tradition.

A slight contrast to this can be found in Duncan McColl Chesney's article **"A Love Letter to Europa: Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer's Grand Hotel Europa."** Here, the focus is no longer on identity in the New World, but also and especially on the identity crisis of Old Europe and its cultural heritage, prior to the Covid pandemic and the associated, now intensifying social tensions, which are also –but certainly not only– caused

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by displacement effects of global tourism and continued migration. Pfeijffer's novel is devoted to the latter issues: In an old grand hotel, the colorful narrator, who also mirrors the author, fathoms them from an ironic distance, humanely, eloquently, imaginatively, and in rich detail. McColl Chesney now forms a further, theoretically underpinned layer on top of this narrative, which skillfully breaks Pfeijffer's fictional reflection of Old Europe, from the position of a North American scholar working in Taiwan. In terms of our thematic issue, this unusual perspective has a surprisingly connective effect, for example when the role of the "Chinese" in the Grand Hotel Europa is analyzed.

Connecting is certainly a term that applies to the contribution that concludes this issue. In their jointly authored article "**Innovation with and against the Tradition. Examples from Chinese, Japanese and Korean Confucianism,**" Marion Eggert (Ruhr University Bochum), Gregor Paul (Karlsruhe Institute of Technology) and Heiner Roetz (Ruhr University Bochum) have not only managed to combine the perspectives of three Confucian cultures, initially presented as papers in the Trier conference panel. In doing so, the authors also used historical examples to demonstrate that Confucianism should by no means be regarded as an impediment to progress. Heiner Roetz, for example, in his part ("**A Rupture in the Origin that Opens again: A Note on Confucianism and Tradition**") refers to Mengzi and the intellectual-historical impact of Confucianism, while including a critical reflection of Western philosophy on Confucianism in his argumentation. Following this, Marion Eggert in "**Traditional resources for integrating new knowledge**" examines Yi Ik (1681-1763) and Yi Chinsang (1818-1886) – an endeavor that seems particularly relevant because Korea has had the reputation of being especially orthodox in its cultivation of Confucianism. Finally, Gregor Paul rounds out the joint contributions with a look at Japan, in "**Catalysts of Innovation and Modernization in Japanese 'Confucianism,'**" focusing on the period between the Meiji Restoration and the end of World War II, when the trends he describes were indeed of heightened geopolitical significance. However, the importance of understanding Confucianism has not changed.

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In that sense, the current issue hopefully joins the series of pertinent contributions from *INTERFACE* to better understand the intellectual and spiritual currents in and behind cultures –East and West.

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