



EDITORIAL:

**East Asia and Europe between Innovation and Tradition,
Literary and Literally**

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With the topic “East Asia and Europe between Innovation and Tradition, Literary and Literally”, this issue No. 21 of *Interface* continues the general theme of recent *Interface* issues, following the latest INTER-FACEing International Conference, which took place at Trier University from 30 September to 2 October 2022. This issue highlights how the notions of innovation and tradition often seem to be intertwined in literature and in language, as the etymology of the Latin noun “*innovātiō*” signifies, denoting not only renewal and innovation, but also alteration. In literature, intertextuality is a useful concept to illustrate that innovative writing benefits from an engagement with and reworking of traditional patterns, rhetoric, themes, genres, and texts. Although literature is bound to its specific time and space, it is both related to what has come before and able to resonate with readers and texts in the future—J. R. R. Tolkien refers to this phenomenon of literary stimuli as a “compost heap”, Roland Barthes thinks of authors, texts, and readers as reverberating “echo chambers”. Traces of previous reading experiences may enlighten our current reception of a text and stimulate fresh perspectives on discourses and fields that we may not have been familiar with. The practice of reading itself asks us to use traditional as well as innovative tools in order to make sense of literary texts. This issue explores the interconnections of innovation and tradition in literature between East Asia and Europe.

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The articles in issue 21 can be divided into two sections. The first two papers, written in German, are concerned with contemporary literary texts in German that touch on essential questions of Jewish identity and migration after the Holocaust. These questions are discussed in connection to contemporary German-Jewish authors, whose works bear testimony to a past that can neither be controlled nor escaped and who often seem torn between ambiguous East-West attributions. They are further related to W. G. Sebald's literary texts about Jewish emigrants who left their homeland and whose life stories are marked by alienation, discord, and melancholy. Although different in their approach, both papers deal with problems of belonging in connection to identity and residency in diverse spatial and temporal realities.

The second section of this issue includes two papers written in English that are concerned with rhetoric, philosophy, and language as well as the question of innovation. While innovation usually supersedes tradition, sometimes innovative thinking has to go back to the roots. In the ancient world, the language of innovation was mostly subsumed under the concept of restoration. Especially in times of tumultuous change—such as when the concept of Christianity evolved from prosecuted to tolerated to favoured—the tensions between the dialectic of reformation and innovation prove interesting. An example of this tension is, for instance, the in-depth examination of the critical language of Lactantius, a North African by birth and a professor of rhetoric, who had to move from the so-called East to the so-called West. Another example featured in this issue is the exploration of a question central to Plato's philosophy of art, namely that of the unity of the poet and the reciter of poetry. The contribution asks whether Plato's *Ion* already anticipates the dissociation of the medium (reciter) from the creator (poet) towards the receptor (audience), centuries before Searle's "Chinese room" experiment. It seems that discursive elements are of utmost importance, in ancient times as well as today.

Shoou-Huey Chang (Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages) opens our discussion of literary explorations of Asia and Europe, moving between innovation and tradition with her paper "Identität und Migra-

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tion: deutsch-jüdische Erzählliteratur im Spannungsfeld von Tradition und Innovation” (“Identity and migration: German-Jewish narratives between tradition and innovation”). Her article provides a historical overview of post-Holocaust German-Jewish fiction and examines how the younger generation expresses their identity through their literary works. She outlines how in the late 1980s, young Jewish writers began to be more open about their identity and desire to take a public stand. The socio-historical changes in the 21st century created a temporal and spatial context which particularly encouraged the development of German-Jewish literature; it further initiated a change in how the Holocaust is being written about in the contemporary moment. Shouu-Huey Chang’s paper reflects on the dilemmas that the young generation of Jewish writers experience in the process of identifying with their Jewish culture as they still hover between assimilation and exclusion. Contemporary German-language Jewish literature is multicultural, multidimensional, and crosses borders, she finds. Although the writers differ in their migration histories and respective origins, they are united by foregrounding the theme of identity in their writings.

In her paper “Der Chronotopos der Migration bei W. G. Sebald” (“The chronotope of migration in W. G. Sebald”), Chi-Chun Liu (National Cheng Kung University) relates Michail Bachtin’s idea of a chronotope to the concept of migration in German writer W. G. Sebald’s works. The author takes into focus *Die Ausgewanderten* (*The Emigrants*), which tells the stories of four Jewish emigrants who left their homeland in the twentieth century and whose life stories are marked by alienation, discord, and melancholy. In Sebald, Chi-Chun Liu looks at migration as a testimony to a past that can neither be controlled nor escaped. The underlying idea of her paper is that migration, as a conflict between homeland and uprooting, is a main motif in Sebald’s works. The configurations of time and space that his protagonists find themselves in can be described as a continuum as they remain in an in-between state of departure from the past and arrival in the here and now of their present. Sebald’s writing is structured by the chronotope of migration in terms of discourse, too: he regularly mixes fiction, memoir, essay, and documentary, overlaying genres to create a complex, multi-layered narrative.

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Chi-Chun Liu argues that the description of spatial and architectural constellations is his poetic method to illustrate the temporal entanglements in which migration always takes place.

The contribution “The Chinese room argument in Plato’s *Ion*” by Hippokratis Kiaris (University of South Carolina) examines Plato’s (through Socrates) critique that *Ion*, as a reciter, cannot possess the specific knowledge of the topics that Homer’s poems deal with. One of the earliest of Plato’s dialogues, *Ion* sets a foundation for the philosopher’s subsequent works that express his suspicion of artists, particularly poets, being able to convey true knowledge. *Ion* is considered one of the earliest texts on the philosophy of art that distinguishes between *techne* and artistic creation, with the latter representing a form of divine inspiration which occurs outside the awareness of its creator. Hippokratis Kiaris offers an alternative reading that is based on the dissociation of the poet from his reciter. By operating as a medium, the reciter functions similarly to the person ignorant of Chinese in John Searle’s “Chinese room”: Searle devised a thought experiment in which a person with a detailed manual on Chinese language in his possession can successfully pass a test for Chinese language comprehension without the slightest knowledge of Chinese. The reciter *Ion*, like the person with the Chinese manual that does not know the Chinese language, can elicit emotional responses from the audience without being aware of their meaning and content; he passes as an expert on Homer and his poems. Kiaris proposes that Plato’s specific critique does not apply to the actual creator of the poem but rather to its reciters and argues that *Ion* anticipates the dissociation of the medium (reciter) from the creator (poet) towards the receptor (audience), years before Searle’s “Chinese room” thought experiment.

The fourth contribution to our issue is Laurent Jean Philippe Cases’s (National Taiwan University) paper titled “Lactantius, Diocletian, Constantine and Political Innovations in the *Divine Institutes*”. Considering the historical background of the period in his analysis and interpretation of Latin vocabulary and rhetoric, the author gives a contemporary reading of the fourth century rhetorician Lactantius’s work, especially his Book 5 of the *Divine Institutes*, in which he engages with Roman

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jurists and criticises the Golden Age. Revealing a tension between the memory of the tumultuous periods of the Constantinian and Diocletian dynasties, this paper suggests that the literary context of the fourth century enabled a better reading of the Golden Age to Christians than to the pagan persecutors. The author argues that Lactantius's deployment of the myth of the Golden Age in the *Divine Institutes* does not take on a purely literary, philosophical or theological dimension; rather, he is explicitly critical of the emperor Diocletian, who claimed in his propaganda to restore the *res publica*. Employing innovative language in his critique, Lactantius carefully lays out a diatribe meant to rewrite Diocletian as a reformer.

The four articles in this issue offer a range of perspectives of looking at strategies, the rhetoric, the discourse, and the poetics of innovation and tradition in literary texts. Their diversity implies that many disciplines, ranging from German and Jewish studies to philosophy, the classics, and beyond, may enter the conversation to explore innovations and traditions between East Asia and Europe, literary and literally.