

Materialities of Medical Culture in/between Europe and East Asia: Towards a Global History of Drugs 4 – 6 July 2019 (TU Braunschweig, Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel)

From the 4th to the 6th of July, fourteen researchers – seven from Taiwan and seven working in Germany – met for the workshop “Materialities of Medical Culture in/between Europe and East Asia: Towards a Global History of Drugs”. This workshop was part of the working program of a project co-funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology, Taiwan, and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.

The participants presented and discussed their ongoing work on a variety of topics related to the history of medicinal substances from an intercultural perspective. Different approaches and different methods of historical analysis were presented and compared between projects and cultures. *Hsiang-lin Lei* (Academia Sinica, Yang-Ming University, Taipei) showed that the successful global mobilization of Traditional Chinese Medicine can be better understood if we focus on the ways East Asian Scientists shifted the Western patterns of drug research, while they shuttled between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ therapeutic strategies and accounts. *Anette Marquardt and Bettina Wahrig* (Technische Universität Braunschweig) presented the exhibition “Pharmakon – Colour – Magic – Poison – Medicine” which is on show at the University’s library, and which documents the key objects and the development of the drug collection at the Braunschweig Division for the History of Science and Pharmacy. They demonstrated that the materiality of traditional and modern mineral and chemical drugs is closely linked to a variety of non-medical applications such as cosmetics, artists’ and commercial paints, and technical chemistry. *Fong-jiun Shen* (National Taiwan University) explained an early (19th century) environmental approach to Malaria control in British Malaya. This paper raised the question of why more recent attempts at controlling the factors influencing the spread of malaria (germs, vectors, patients) did not take into account those early, more complex strategies. *Dominik Merdes* (Technische Universität Braunschweig) presented his ongoing work on epistemological ruptures concerning antimonials and arsenicals, drugs on trial since the late 19th century for controlling parasitical diseases. He developed the concept of the epistemological rupture of overcodification, drawing on works by Foucault, Deleuze/Guattari, Spivak, and Whitehead. *Che-chia Chang* (Academia Sinica, Taipei) presented his current research on the “meetings of medicinal substances in Edo Japan”. These meetings represented both a fair and a grid of classification, besides providing a basis for comparison and evaluation of Chinese drugs imported to Japan. These meetings constituted a platform of information exchange for actors of Edo materia medica, who partly adopted Chinese drug culture. The general discussion at the end of this day revealed that deciphering the meanings of drugs from outside China necessitated a joint effort of East Asian and European scholars. *Shao-li Lu* presented his research on the development of experimental agricultural stations and the role of medicinal plants while Taiwan was a Japanese colony. The blueprints for these stations were

the first German creation of experimental agricultural stations, and the possible personal and institutional links are an object of further research. *Michael Stanley Baker* (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore) contributed via Skype on “Medicine and Religion in China – a Digital Humanities Approach”, demonstrating a data mining project that will help to understand the different mentions, names, and geographical distribution of medicinal plants in China. In a concluding comment to the first day, *Angelika Messner* (Christian Albrechts-Universität Kiel) argued that, in order to create resonances between the knowledge/healing/caring cultures of different continents, we need to conceive of “the other other”. She also pointed to this first day’s experience, where we encountered many instances of the “in-between”. This “being-in-between” could be found both “within” European or Asian cultures and between them. Applications of this insight are possible in concepts of healers/carers and patients/cared-for, but also with respect to the identification and classification of substances. The in-between is an issue both within a certain regional/temporal frame of materialities (e.g. early modern Europe, premodern China) and between those frames.

On the second day of the workshop we moved from TU Braunschweig’s central campus to the Herzog August-Bibliothek’s Bibelsaal, which granted us the possibility to take a closer look at some historical printed works and enjoy a guided tour through the library’s rooms, focussing on the material cultures of books and library-keeping, but also on the library’s rich history of early modern medicine, pharmacy, and alchemy. In her talk on „Dingzi drug“ as gift, *Shi-hsiun Liu* (National Palace Museum Taipei) presented her research on the tradition of Chinese emperors expressing esteem and appreciation towards their clerks and officers by giving them elaborately and artistically designed medicines, thus intertwining medicinal effectiveness, ritual gifts, and artistic tradition. *Jen-der Lee* (Academia Sinica, Taipei) presented her research on the history of Dang gui (*Angelica sinensis*). In addition to her published work on the changing indications for Dang gui and the changes in gender roles in premodern China, she is now investigating into the enigma of Dang gui coming to Europe in the form of Merck’s “Eumenol”, and then returning to China. To date, it is unclear which plant species Merck extracted. It is possible that European “Tang kui” was not identical to *Angelica sinensis*, due to the misapprehension of European pharmacists and botanists who explored Asian materia medica during the second half of the 19th century. *Hsiu-fen Chen* (National Chengchi University, Taipei) presented the human placenta as a material object of many meanings. In some regions it had to be buried in order to prevent misfortune, while in others it was eaten as a health-enhancing substance or turned into a drug. The use of human placenta in European pharmacy/medicine is still to be explored, as are the possible exchanges of knowledge between Europe and Asia. *Britta-Juliane Kruse* (Herzog August- Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel) presented her reading and interpretations of a hitherto unpublished medieval manuscript on surgical dressing. Her findings also became an interesting ground for

comparison between ingredients and preparation methods in the different times/spaces covered by the workshop. *Ayman Atat* (Technische Universität Braunschweig) gave an overview of the most important “East Asian Imported Plants in the History of Arabic Medicine”. Arab traders were instrumental in transferring medical materials from East to West. The utilization of substances varied from aromatics, to medicinal drugs, to cookery.

On Saturday 6th, *Regina Toepfer* (Technische Universität Braunschweig) joined the group for its final, informal discussion. Toepfer explained two of her recent projects, namely the history of infertility in the late European Middle Ages, and the idea of the SPP 2130 “Cultures of Translation in the Early Modern Times”. The discussion focussed on the manifold symbolic meanings of material cultures and social settings of procreation and birthgiving, including the intertwining of rituals and physiologically active substances in Europe and East Asia. When translating medical terminology between English, German, Latin, and Greek, some interesting differences/similarities again raised the previous days’ question of “cultures of the in-between”. When we try to understand different, but yet historically and symbolically interrelated, epistemes and practical settings, categories like comparability, structural analogy, “sameness”, “similarity”, as opposed to “the other” or “difference”, fail to render an adequate interpretation of resonances and interferences between cultures of healing and caring, because these cultures are/were different and diverse in themselves. To give an example concerning herbs moving as commodities from one continent to another: We found evidence that accompanying concepts (of materiality and effectiveness) sometimes travel faster than the actual remedies themselves: beliefs and images attached to certain substances and practices may shift from one substance/practice to another during their journey. The next questions to be asked within this ongoing project are about the asynchronicity of knowledge transfer in a transcultural, transcontinental, colonial, and (post)colonial context. Besides pursuing their case studies, researchers will continue to discuss how to get a better theoretical grip on the topic of cultures and materialities of the “in-between”.