



CENTRE FOR ASIAN AND
TRANSCULTURAL STUDIES



UNIVERSITÄT
HEIDELBERG
ZUKUNFT
SEIT 1386

Photography as Knowledge (Re-)Production in Twentieth-Century East Asia

A hybrid workshop on the history of photography (17th to 19th February 2022)

This workshop aims to explore various aspects of *knowledge (re)production* involving *photography* in twentieth-century East Asia. Our construal of 'knowledge (re)production' is not committed to any particular definition of 'knowledge', and we rather emphasise the practical means by which things are made into 'objects of knowledge'.¹ In our case, this includes the know-how of photographic techniques and print-making, the shaping of various academic disciplines, and, more broadly, the dissemination of political information and public education.

Needless to say, the twentieth century contains turbulent and drastic passages with two World Wars, the Cold War, and numerous protests. It also witnessed crucial artistic movements and scientific revolutions. During all these historical events, photography was mobilised for various purposes via diverse types of publications. Yet, while photography was embraced all over the world, canonised writings on photography rarely consider practices outside of the Euro-American arena. Our workshop, therefore, also functions as an intervention into historical narratives that have long been biased towards photography's 'core history' and towards limited sources, often housed in colonial archives.

We invite **20-minute presentations** from PhD students and post-doctoral researchers who work on 20th-century photography histories through perspectives from East Asia. While having a geographic focus, we acknowledge the significance of transcultural forces in shaping any history of photography. We thus also encourage submissions with a trans-regional focus and attempts to combat methodological nationalism.

We are especially interested in contributions focussing on the practices of photography in relation to the following two themes:

(a) Photography as a tool integrated in various disciplines. We enquire into the interdependencies between photographs' ontological fluidity and epistemological shifts in various fields of study. We welcome both case studies on the use of photography in different fields as well as discussions of meta-questions on photography's possibility to cut

¹ This is in analogy to that tradition of epistemology which does not strive for explications of 'knowledge', but rather reflects 'on the historical conditions under which, and the means with which, things are made into object of knowledge'; see Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *On Historicizing Epistemology: An Essay*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.



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across types, genres, and ‘discursive spaces’.² Contributions may address the following aspects:

- The technological and material conditions of photography
- Photography as a means and method for art history and its role in *art historical* discourse
- Photography's role in shaping historical narratives and historiographies: its strengths and limitations as *historical* sources
- The uses of photography in *other disciplinary domains* such as geography, archaeology, anthropology, etc.

(b) Photography as political practice and other forms of ‘knowledge production’.

The following aspects may be addressed:

- Circulation, publication, and image sharing
- Photography in social and revolutionary movements
- The complexity of photographic truth in relation to journalism and reportage
- Photography as a tool and product of ideologies, such as nationalism, humanism, colonialism, and fascism

Through this workshop, we strive for a **synthesised history of photography**: the workshop will be one of the first academic events to embrace such diverse aspects of photography with a focus on East Asia. We welcome scholars from diverse disciplines to explore the nature of interdisciplinarity in photographic researches. By doing so, we also take the ontological status of photography seriously and re-visit questions raised by Christopher Pinney: Are there many incompatible photographs, or is there a protean photography foregrounded by the changing apparatus and techniques? What was happening that could not be achieved by other media? How can we account for the ‘photographic event’?³ Do formal elements matter? What about the materiality or immateriality of photography?

Through the **workshop format**, we want to strike a balance between formal elements of academic exchange and a collaborative environment that allows for work-in-progress presentations and free dialogue about key themes. We plan a hybrid event with an **in-person meeting in Heidelberg (COVID rules apply)** and an **online option via Zoom**.

² Rosalind Krauss, ‘Photography’s Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View’, *Art Journal*, 42(4), 1982.

³ Christopher Pinney, ‘Seven Theses on Photography’, *Thesis Eleven* 113(1), 2012.



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The workshop will be held in English.⁴ We will have keynote speeches, guest lectures, a book launch event (Oliver Moore, *Photography in China: Science, Commerce and Communication*), and a library tour to one of the richest East Asian magazine collections in Europe (at our CATS campus). The list of speakers will be updated on our website in due course: <https://photoworkshop2022.com>

Participation in the workshop is free of charge thanks to the generous support of the Graduate Academy. Limited funds are available to cover travel expenses.⁵ The organisers can help find free lodgings at private homes of Heidelberg students upon request.

Interested participants should submit their **abstracts of up to 350 words and a full-length CV by 22nd December 2021** to the email address:

photo.workshop2022@gmail.com

Notifications of acceptance will be sent out by 7th January 2022.

Organisers:

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⁴ Presentations in East Asian languages can be accepted depending on the organisers' ability to provide translation.

⁵ Participants who would like to apply for financial support should submit a separate request at the time of application, indicating an estimate of their expenses.