

LOCALIZING HETEROTOPOI IN JAPAN

BETWEEN PHYSICAL SPIRITS AND SPIRITUAL BODIES

Workshop announcement for
March 21, 2014, 9:15 – 17:45

Akademie der Wissenschaften (OeAW)
Institut für Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte Asiens (IKGA)
Apostelgasse 23, 1030 Wien, Seminarraum 1

About the workshop:

Societies tend to transform and represent their social structures in spatial arrangements, thereby creating places and spaces of social and symbolic significance. This creation process involves a twofold practice of (1) the physical transformation of places and (2) the (re)interpretation of existing places and spaces by connecting them to beliefs, taxonomies, texts, and ritual practices or, by „infusing meaning into the physical environment“ (Kalland). Places of sacred or spiritual significance are perhaps the most intriguing examples of this manipulation of space: they operate with an imaginary realm consisting of spiritual bodies, which obey to social structures of their own. As the spiritual bodies themselves, these imaginary social structures are of course related to but not necessarily identical with the structures of “real” society. Sacred places (created by physical manipulation and re-interpretation) are in this sense the physical aspects of an imaginary world in constant dialogue with living people and their social practices. As Foucault exemplified in his writings, profane spots such as prisons, hospitals, or universities can be equally seen as corresponding to social structures, which they do not simply mirror. Rather they form them according to abstract, ideal – and in this sense allotopic – concepts. We therefore propose the term “heterotopoi” for spaces of such symbolic social significance in contrast to “normal spaces”. While heterotopoi could be profane or sacred, they are building on concepts of “the other”. In this sense, the term “heterotopos” or “heterotopia” could be seen as a tool to highlight the symbolic functions and meanings of places in a multireligious society like Japan.

The workshop is free of charge, yet, due to space limitations the max. number for attendees is limited to 25. We kindly ask you for a reservation in advance via e-mail to: heterotopiaworkshop@gmail.com

Program

9.15–9:30 Welcome Address (any idea who?)

9:30–10:15

Florian Purkarthofer (Vienna)

Religious Realms

Space and Place as Concepts

This lecture deals with “space” and “place” as concepts, instead of ‘neutral categories’ in order to distinguish the different ways space and place are used by religions and social institutions for their advantage. I will focus especially on the forms and structures of topoi and contrasting heterotopias as they represent religious space concepts.

10:15–11:00

Johannes Wilhelm (Vienna)

Infusing Places with Meaning

An Adaption of Heterotopian Categories in Tōhoku

In most cultures, people distinguish elements of the physical environment as special while other elements remain ignored. „In this way the physical environment is infused with meaning, it is transformed into a landscape where the selected elements work metonymically for the whole“ (Kalland 2002:149). In Japan, however, a reduc-

tion of nature’s profusion is regarded a common way to denote such special features in the environment (Kalland and Asquith 1997: 16). From a structuralist viewpoint I will ask, why people infuse environmental elements with meaning and, what emerges institutionally as consequence. In this way, I will try to identify some heterotopoi in human-nature relationship that do not only influence normatively, but, serve as points for orientation in everyday life.

11:00–11:30 Coffee Break

11:30–12:15

Bernhard Scheid (Vienna)

Religious inclusivism and the composite nature of Japanese deities

My thesis will be that there exists something like a structural inclusivism in Japanese religion, which facilitates the accepting combination of seemingly different or heteromorph numinous units (deities) withinto one common spatial entity (temple or shrine). This inclusivism is of course obvious in the case of Buddhism, which offers even theoretical foundations for including such conceptual practices and deities from other traditions. Yet, similar practices exist but also in the case of shrine deities,

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considering that there is virtually no shrine of some historical importance dedicated to one single *kami* only. I will try to make this clearer by referring to a couple of historical examples (the Seven Gods of Fortune, Hachiman, *kiki*-mythology). I am still not sure, to which degree this kind of "inclusivism" is peculiar or typical can be regarded as a typical feature of Japanese religion only, and look forward to discussing this question.

12:15–13:00

Andrea De Antoni (Kyōto)

Hunting the Haunting, Back to the Sacred Competing Discourses, Perceptions and Inscription in Contemporary Osorezan

This presentation will focus on the processes of othering of heterotopoi. From a methodological perspective, it will propose an approach that tries to overcome the dualism representation/practice by focusing on experience. In particular, I will display the ways through which (religious) institutions try to create the "reality" of an "other place", by influencing and organizing the perception of the environment through the strategic inscription (Akrich and Latour 1992) of their discourses in it. In order to do so, my presentation will focus on Osorezan, a sacred mountain in the in the Shimokita Peninsula, the northernmost tip of Honshu. Ivy (1995) highlighted the modern fascination with the mountain, as a passage to the afterlife where the spirits of the dead gather, can appear and communicate with the living especially through the *itako*, female mediums who congregate on the mountain during the festival season. According to Ivy, the mountain operates within a national mass-mediated array of images and ideas about the "folkic marginal" and nostalgia. However, particularly with the diffusion of the internet, Osorezan started to be portrayed as a powerful haunted place in specialized websites and magazines, causing a decrease in the number of visitors. Relying on ethnographic data collected through fieldwork on the mountain in 2008, I will focus on the network of interactions through which the "reality" of the mountain as sacred is constructed. In the first instance, I will present the two above mentioned competing discourses related to the mountain. Secondly, I will focus on the visitors' experiences in the place, and display the strategies through which the Buddhist temple managing Osorezan struggled to organize them, by modifying the environment and inscribing institutionalized discourses in it. Strategies that, as I will show, have turned out to be successful.

13:00–14:00

Lunch (reservation needed in advance)

14:00–14:45

Bernhard Leitner (Vienna)

Of wandering spirits and morbid brains Placing mind and body in the age of psychiatry

The lecture aims at highlighting the development and transformations of heterotopoi of mental deviation in the 19th and the early 20th century in Japan. In a time when psychiatry was being established as a discursive and social agent, conceptual changes concerning theories of the mind and body were introduced. Especially the widespread phenomenon of spirit possession triggered a controversial debate on the nature of mental diseases. I will show that alongside this theoretical discourse, new forms of spaces (heterotopia) had to be constructed simultaneously in order to rearrange body and mind in accordance to the psychiatric-scientific paradigm. But the actual diversity of practices was still not to be abolished by the emerging power of psychiatry. I will focus on religious, cultural and medical mind-body-regimes to analyze their respective relations of power deployed through diverging forms of heterotopia for the mentally ill.

14:45–15:30

Theresa Aichinger (Vienna)

Between village community and towering mountains Thinking Women and the Supernatural in the Tōno Monogatari

My aim is to show how female characters are attributed a location in the *Tōno Monogatari* on one hand and how they become displaced from these locations by interaction and encounter. The „sacred *yama*“ as a heterotopy opens up to the sphere of everyday life through these encounters and interactions across borders.

15:30–15:45

Coffee Break

15:45–16:30

Isabelle Prochaska-Meyer (Vienna)

Sacred Places in Okinawa

The presentation focuses on the cosmology as seen from spiritual healers (*kaminchu*) in Okinawa. What are sacred places? Why are some places temporarily important in a spiritual context? How can topographic violations lead to a state of imbalance and even cause illnesses? The presentation is based on my interviews with spirit mediums, who are often consulted in situations of disorders, misfortune or for cyclic rituals.

16:30–17:15

Discussion Round

17:45–

Closet Party