

Conventional wisdom holds that globalisation has made the world more modern, not less. But how has modernity been conceived of in colonial, postcolonial, and post-revolutionary worlds? In *Figurations of Modernity*, an international team of scholars probe how non-European worlds have become modern ones, from the perspective of a broad range of societies around the globe. From vocational education in Argentina to secular morality in Tibet, from the construction of heroes in Central Asia to historical memory in Nigeria, this comprehensive volume reckons with the legacy of empire in a globalising world.

Houben, Schrempf: Figurations of Modernity

Vincent Houben,
Mona Schrempf (eds.)

Figurations of Modernity

Global and Local Representations
in Comparative Perspective



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Introduction: Figurations and Representations of Modernity

Vincent Houben and Mona Schrempf

This collection of essays arose out of an interdisciplinary workshop on *Figurations of Modernity* (07–08.04.2006), organised by the working group ›Modernity‹ at the collaborative research centre *Representations of Social Order and Change* at Humboldt University Berlin. The regions and topics covered in this book concern colonialism and multiple figurations of modernity in Africa and Southeast Asia; education in Latin America; ethnicity and morality in post-Mao China; and hero construction and heritage in soviet Central Asia and Africa. The essays offer a fresh theoretical and empirical perspective on the multiple and complex dimensions of non-European figurations of modernity.¹

To understand our world as ›modern‹ has become something taken for granted, yet ›modernity‹ remains a vexed issue. Modernity encompasses all spheres of human life and, in recent centuries, has unfolded as a matrix for national and global histories, framing our understandings of past, present and future, and of centres and peripheries. Many social scientists have tried to make sense of it, moving more recently from a homogenous concept to one of multiple or alternative modernities. To grasp the phenomenon of modernity, new meanings and adjectives have been attached to it, in an attempt to tackle accelerated change occurring in space, place and time. At the same time, grasping modernity's complex figurations as well as explaining their multiple causes and effects, has helped to situate modernity in different contexts and has added the understanding that it is closely connected with power, subjectivity and insecurity. Although the modernity debate of the 1970s lost some of its dynamics in the 1980s, it has since re-emerged with full vigour under conditions of increasing globalisation, facilitated by the ending of the Cold War. Also, it has acquired important political dimensions in the face of current global socio-cultural and environmental crises.

Modernity is usually understood as a program for socio-cultural change and transformation, originating in the Western world. Standard definitions of modernisation are strongly imbued with the idea of linear change in a particular

1 The editors wish to acknowledge the indispensable help of Deborah Johnson and Toni Huber, as well as Anja Gottschalk, Nike-Ann Schröder, and Felix Herrmann.

direction, involving an ever-increasing degree of functional and structural differentiation on the level of institutions, social groupings and even the individual. Modernisation has thus been grasped as something real, a self-sustaining process that has permeated human existence and becoming manifest in the rise of industrialised economies; horizontally and vertically mobile societies; and, in centralised bureaucratic, socialist, as well as democratic polities.

Modernity presupposes, as is implied by standard historical theory, a particular, rational view of the world that has its roots in Europe, where it can be traced back to ancient Greece and Rome, re-emerging in Renaissance Italy and coming to full bloom during the Age of Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. This meta-narrative has then been extended to include nineteenth century European imperialism in other parts of the world, reaching its culmination in the present condition of globalisation, in which modernity has become a universal phenomenon. Social theorists have focused less on the historical diffusion of modernity instead concentrating on explaining its dominant characteristics in its transformation of human societies. Anthony Giddens has analysed the consequences of modernity, arguing that the separation or ›distanciation‹ of time and space has infused social systems with new forms of control over human activities.² Ulrich Beck argued that modernisation has now deepened to the point that it has turned back onto itself and has become ›reflexive‹ in nature, leading to a second modernity that is, for instance, no longer directed at taking control over nature, but redefines the way in which human agency shapes it.³

Leaving European grounds and departing from a homogenising, universal view, in this introductory essay we argue that modernity can be meaningfully considered as a distinct practice of representation, one resulting from *multiple* figurations that are negotiated through various spaces and in fragmented and potentially conflicting ways by a range of different modernising actors endowed with non-European agency. More than anything, the notion of ›figurations of modernity‹ necessitates a refined reflection on, and comparison of, what it is that links together all of the diverse developments covered by this term. First, we would like to show how in recent scholarly debates the meta-narrative of a singular ›real‹ modernity emanating from the West has increasingly been questioned and what kind of suggestions have been made to overcome the still prevalent bias in the common Eurocentric understanding of it. Secondly, we have to clarify what we mean by representations and figurations of modernity and what are

2 Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford Calif.: Stanford University Press 1990), and Giddens cited in Roger Friedland and Deirdre Boden (eds.), *Now Here. Space, Time and Modernity* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 28–29.

3 Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash (eds.), *Reflexive Modernization. Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).

the benefits of using these terms. Thirdly, we would like to explain what the contributions of the collected essays in this volume add to the ongoing debate.

Critiques of, and new approaches to, modernity

Recent contributions to the modernity debate have moved beyond old structural notions of a single homogeneous (Western) modernity. The bifurcated view of binary oppositions that also underlies the division of the world into the ›West‹ and the ›rest‹, the thinking about what existed before and after modernity, as well as its one-directional impact on particular societies have been challenged. Shmuel Eisenstadt was among the first to question the single nature of modernity. He proposed instead to talk of multiple modernities, and argued:

The idea of multiple modernities presumes that the best way to understand the contemporary world – indeed to explain the history of modernity – is to see it as a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs [...] Western patterns of modernity are not the only authentic modernities, though they enjoy historical precedence and continue to be a basic reference point for others.⁴

Although Eisenstadt departed from a standard interpretation of modernity by stressing its multiplicity and its ideational dimensions, his interpretation still presupposes a singular origin and a distinct point of origin of the many modernities that exist side-by-side. On the other hand, leaving an exclusivist preoccupation with Western modernity behind, he opened up the possibility for its conceptualisation in new dimensions. Critiques of Eurocentrism and Orientalism that prevail in anthropology, non-Western history and so-called Area Studies have in the meanwhile added new understandings of regions and cultures that lie beyond the West, endowing these with agency and different forms of modernity.⁵ Thus, the modernity paradigm has shifted from what Eisenstadt critiqued as the totalising, hegemonic Western-based concept to a plurality of modernities. However, the debate about multiple modernities has barely touched upon the particularities of non-Western societies.⁶

4 Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (ed.), *Multiple Modernities* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction, 2002), pp.2–3.

5 Cf. Marshall Sahlins, »What is Anthropological Enlightenment? Some Lessons of the Twentieth Century«, in: Marshall Sahlins (ed.), *Culture in Practice. Selected Essays* (New York: Zone Books, 2000), pp. 501–526.

6 Cf. Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). Taylor's philosophical analysis understands western modernity as both a ›moral order‹ and as en-

Another strand in the critique against mainstream modernisation theory looks at what it excludes and therefore cannot explain. Eisenstein and many others argue that the classical notion of a Westernised modernity does not provide an explanation for counter-tendencies, such as anti-Western and anti-capitalist movements. Neither does it explain the particular appropriation of modernity by socialist states, such as the former Soviet Union and present-day China that do not fit the classic characteristics of Western modernity, such as capitalism, democracy and individualism. Their common frame of reference, nevertheless, always gravitates towards (Western) modernity.

A further critique of modernity as a universal Western model tries to show that non-European societies also possessed modern characteristics at an early stage in their history. In this vein, Alexander Woodside has recently submitted an intriguing portrait of the Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean bureaucracies, based on merit and being the product of ›rational thought‹ on politics and economics.⁷ Although it is unlikely that a transfer of East Asian bureaucratic models towards Europe ever took place, at least non-Western ›modernities‹ could prefigure Western ones, and have occurred simultaneous with, or possess structural similarities with, Western modernities. This is exactly what Joel Kahn illustrated in his study of the relationship between modernity and exclusionary practices, which developed in a parallel fashion in the three different ›social spaces‹ of Great Britain, the United States and Malaya.⁸

Timothy Mitchell has put the notion of a plurality of modernities itself into question, since the modification by local circumstance still presupposes a singular generic to start with. Also it ignores the ›power of replication and expansion‹ imperialising modernity unfolded, subordinating and excluding elements that appeared incompatible with it. He calls this very process ›representation‹:

Representation does not refer here to the making of images or meanings but to forms of social practice that set up in the social architecture of the world what seems an absolute distinction between image (or meaning, or plan, or structure) and reality, and thus a distinctive apprehension of the real. This effect of the real has been generalized in modern social engineering and the management of nature, in organized schooling and entertainment, in the military, legal, and administrative disciplines of colonialism and nation-making [...] In sphere after sphere of social life, an immediacy of the really real is

dowed with multiple ›social imaginaries‹, among them the economy, public sphere and popular governance.

7 Alexander Woodside, *Lost Modernities. China, Vietnam, Korea, and the Hazards of World History* (Cambridge, Mass./London: Harvard University Press, 2006) passim, in particular pp. 4–6.

8 Joel S. Kahn, *Modernity and Exclusion* (London: Sage, 2001).

promised by what appears in contrast to be the mere abstractions of structure, subjectivity, text, plan, or idea.⁹

Modernity itself therefore becomes something staged, a representation, which necessarily incorporates the production of difference and displacement.

Eisenstadt's ›multiple modernities‹ concept has been extended by notions of particular qualitative features, that have been associated with it. One such quality is ›alternative‹ modernity. Dilip Gaonkar has argued that each transition to modernity has had a different starting-point, which has therefore led to a different outcome.¹⁰ According to him, modernity cannot be escaped but it takes on different forms than in the West and develops differently at every national or cultural site. Thus, modernity is reborn through creative adaptation by post-colonial subjects who are not simply recipients, but agents, of many alternative modernities.

In the critiques of older conceptions of modernity, thinking in terms of binary oppositions had to be overcome. A very dominant way of interpretation, perpetuating colonial projections, was to see the world beyond modern Europe as that governed by ›tradition‹ or as the site of interaction between a rising modernity against that of tradition in decline. However, as the idea of ›modernity‹ has been subjected to further scrutiny, likewise the notion of ›tradition‹ has been substantially modified. As Arjun Appadurai has pointed out, traditional practices are both defended and transformed in the process of becoming modern.¹¹ Furthermore, to be a ›traditionalist‹ is in any case a modern phenomenon. According to Hobsbawm's definition of ›invented traditions‹, modernity is an invented tradition and social process: it symbolically offers social cohesion and collective identity, establishes and legitimises social hierarchies and institutions, and has the ability to socialise people into particular social contexts.¹² Similarly, Jonathan Friedman has described modernity as another ›tradition‹ in terms of its ideological value, as a »charter of a social order rather than an aid to its understanding«. ¹³ Modernity is social order *per se*. Its own discourse and logic is a social construct based on binary oppositions of (progressive) modernity versus

9 Timothy Mitchell (ed.), *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. xii – xiv.

10 Dilip P. Gaonkar, »On Alternative Modernities«, in: Dilip P. Gaonkar (ed.), *Alternative Modernities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 1–23.

11 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

12 Eric Hobsbawm, »Introduction: Inventing Tradition«, in: E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1–14, in particular p. 9.

13 Jonathan Friedman, »Modernity and Other Traditions«, in: Bruce M. Knauft (ed.), *Critically Modern. Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), pp. 287–314, in particular p. 287.

(backward or lost) tradition, and thus needs to be revealed as such. Any analytic understanding needs to take this opposition into account without being trapped by it, asserts Friedman.

Similarly, Prasenjit Duara has rightly highlighted that the depiction of tradition and modernity is a *discursive* representation, i.e. *a way of* thinking about the past, present and future that is crucial for individual identity and state building.¹⁴ Therefore, some figurations of modernity remain something to be sought after, something to be achieved; something that is difficult or impossible to gain access to or engage with as ethnic ›others‹.¹⁵ Thus, Andreas Wimmer maintains that policies that lead to nationalist exclusion and ethnic conflict are no by-products of modern state-formation, but are rooted in modernity itself. Modernity leads to the politicisation of ethnicity as state elites adopt political closure along ethnic and national lines in conjunction with the establishment of modern institutions of inclusion and institutions for the distribution of collective goods.¹⁶

A further binary opposition underlying the construction of modernity has been that of homogeneity versus heterogeneity, which is also connected with identity issues and ethnic conflicts as part of nation building processes. Zygmunt Baumann has characterized modernity as the most ideologically and normatively homogenising production of the nation state. Since national unity connected with state territory is the absolute *conditio sine qua non*, disloyalties and divisions among the population are to be eliminated. Cultural, ethnic, linguistic and ideological homogeneity are subject to the state's social engineering of its own past, present and future, including its power to define and classify its ›natives‹.¹⁷ Modernity is a future oriented project, and thus one that requires constant effort and progress towards its completion. However, its constructed-ness does not depend upon a uniform (Western) model of modernity and its diffusion into, or adaptation in, different parts of the world, but it depends on each particular nation-state and its own ›cultural production‹ of modernity, as well as various internal collective figurations of modernity. Therefore, modernity requires per-

14 Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 90.

15 Cf. Louisa Schein, *Minority Rules. The Miao and the Feminine in China's Cultural Politics* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2000).

16 Andreas Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict. Shadows of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 1–12.

17 ›National states promote ›nativism‹ and construe their subjects as ›natives‹. (...) They construct joint historical memories and do their best to discredit or suppress such stubborn memories as cannot be squeezed into shared tradition. (...) The state enforced homogeneity is the practice of nationalist ideology«. Zygmunt Baumann, »Modernity and Ambivalence«, in: *Theory, Culture & Society* 7 (1990), pp. 143–169, in particular p. 154.

formative acts »that are elaborated and codified in the course of various moments of sociality«,¹⁸

Similarly, the binary oppositions of centre and periphery have been revealed as hegemonic power structures for constructing and reiterating modernity. Urban public spaces and the ›public sphere‹ (media, Internet, etc.) have become national and global centres of modernity, whereas rural peripheries have been constructed as less modern or more ›traditional‹. Friedman extends this model to the global arena by distinguishing central and peripheral societies.

It may be useful to refer to alternative modernities, or whatever term might seem appropriate, to characterize a particular form of articulation between peripheral societies in the world system and centrally initiated capitalist processes. These vary along two axes: one, the degree of transformative integration into the global system, and the other, the representations of the center as future, wealth, well-being, as well as strategies related to such representations.¹⁹

Another qualitative feature of modernity that seems, however, to be rather dominated by the modern – post-modern divide is Bauman's approach based on the idea of two modernities: a ›heavy‹ or ›solid‹ modernity as characterised by Karl Marx and Max Weber with fixed territorial power structures, work places and instrumental rationality; and a ›light‹ or ›liquid‹ modernity of insecurity, risk, mobility and flexibility of organisational forms, de-territorialised transnational politics, economics, as well as a de-socialised individuality and a loss of a sense of community.²⁰ However, his differentiation seems to be implicitly trapped by the divide between an empowered post-modern elite of an intellectual and economically privileged class and the factory workers and rural poor being still stuck in modernity's fixed structures. Transferred to the global arena, we are facing once more a centre and a periphery of modernity and power, although in a de-territorialised form. Thinking in binary oppositions seems to be implicit here, rather than transcending them by shifting to more complex webs of meaning-making by different cultures, societies and social classes.

By emphasising the cultural dimensions of modernity, possibilities for the appreciation of dramatic differences among modernities, that older either Western-based or institutionally focused theories of modernity could not appreciate, have been created and their contingent, situated and relational traits made discernible. Joel Kahn noticed that the recent ›discovery‹ of culture by theorists of modernity allowed for the introduction of subjectivity, for the notion of modernity as a

18 Louisa Schein, *Minority Rules*, op. cit. (note 15), p. 25.

19 Cited in Friedman, Jonathan, »Modernity and Other Traditions«, op. cit. (note 13), in particular p. 308.

20 Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

state of mind. Also, by taking up culture as a constituent part of modernisation, contradictory or conflicting dimensions of modernity came into focus.²¹

Taken together these new theories make figurations of modernity a fruitful approach for acquiring a deeper understanding of the general as well as the unique in each path of modernisation. As Appadurai notes: »Genealogy of cultural forms is about their circulation across region, the history of these forms is about their ongoing domestication into local practice«. ²² Circulation as a consequence of media development and migration has been studied by Appadurai in order to show how historical, uneven and localised the process of modernisation has been. Kahn takes modern social movements and the media as the arena of »middle level discursive formations« in which »popular meanings and performances of the modern condition« are being (re)constructed.²³

Representations and Figurations of Modernity

*Human beings are representers. People make representations.*²⁴

Representations are even more vexed than modernity, eluding a general definition. Yet they are part of the human condition. They also affect human social life. Are they the real thing – reality – or just an appearance, an image created of it? Ian Hacking understands representations as external and as »public likenesses« creating their own reality. Since he defines human beings as primary representers, the question of reality only appears as a secondary after-effect, as an attribute arising out of multiple systems of representations. One particular complex system of representations is modernity. Hacking claims that, contrary to Locke's approach,

we [first] make public representations, form the concept of reality, and, as systems of representation multiply, we become skeptics and form the idea of mere appearance.²⁵

According to Rabinow, representations have taken on a different value in the age of modernity, contrasting them further with the post-modern »self-conscious«, self-reflexive representations. Thus, whatever »we« talk about has to be first read through this lens of modernity as an underlying matrix. Rabinow speaks of

21 Joel S. Kahn, *Modernity and Exclusion* (London: Sage, 2001), in particular p. 11.

22 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, op. cit. (note 11), p. 17.

23 Joel S. Kahn, *Modernity and Exclusion*, op. cit. (note 21), in particular p. 19.

24 Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening. Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), in particular p. 132.

25 *Ibid.*, in particular pp. 141–142.

»discourses and practices of modern representation«.²⁶ Consequently, one has to take into account one's own modern presumptions when it comes to understanding processes of multiple figurations of modernity. »Representations are social facts« concludes Rabinow, by linking the problem of representation to Foucault's emphasis on social and political practices in and of the modern world, with its distinctive concerns with order, truth and the subject.²⁷

We conclude from the above that it is within the relational processes between representational forms and social practices that one has to situate and analyse modernity's multiple figurations. Modernity is both a representation of, and a strategy for, social order. »Figurations of modernity« leaves aside outdated social-evolutionary and functionalist assumptions, which regard modernity as a universal and uniform force of social change, and replaces them with the understanding of the importance of contingency, complexity, timing and context. The case studies in this book demonstrate the particular non-European, historical and socio-cultural situated-ness of diverse modern projects, as well as their constructed-ness, and highlight autochthonous strategies that are traceable through time and space and to different agents.

All the contributions in this book feature non-Western figurations of modernity and have been subsumed under four thematic headings. Part 1 comprises contributions by Vincent Houben and Michael Pesek that deal with the spatial and bodily dimensions of colonial modernity in Indonesia and East Africa. In Part 2 Eugenia Roldán Vera writing on Mexico and Verónica Oelsner on Argentina highlight the transfer of modern ideas by indigenous agents of modernity through formal educational practices. In Part 3, Mona Schrempf and Vincanne Adams discuss ethnic and ethical problems affecting Tibetans in relation to Chinese modernity. Part 4 deals with phenomena of heritage and memorialising the past in Nigeria (Peter Probst), and of Soviet hero construction as means of modernising collective memory in Uzbekistan (Olaf Günther).

In the first chapter dealing with colonial Indonesia, Vincent Houben reviews different indigenous responses to »colonial modernity« in terms of a particular figuration of modernity – that of modern transport and communications technology. With reference to Frederick Cooper, Houben argues that it is most important to show »how the concept [of modernity] is *used* in the making of claims«. Based on our understanding of representation in this introduction, he interprets the relationship between representations and social order as follows:

Representations are culturally bound forms of knowledge that position people as well as

26 Paul Rabinow, »Representations are Social Facts. Modernity and Post-Modernity in Anthropology«, in: J. Clifford and G. Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), in particular p. 261.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 240.

objects within a spatially and temporally embedded social order [...] representations also enable people to establish their own views of the world and to change the existing social order.

Four dimensions of modernity in colonial Indonesia are highlighted: vehicles, advertisements, contestations and the transcending of borders. Using the literary testimonies of local advocates of modernity as well as the comments of critics of the new ›Western‹ modernity, he shows how ›colonial modernity‹ comes to be appropriated and fixed into a more indigenous mould by means of the modern infrastructure of trains and communication technology. Peasants as well as factory unionists and intellectuals reclaim their territory through a re-appropriation of space and, thus, become agents of a new figuration of modernity.

Michael Pesek looks at Eastern Africa in the 1880s where German travellers acted as agents of modernity. Acting out their ›metropolitan habitus‹ during encounters in particular contact zones through their bodily presence, these men were, on the African side, constructed as part of a distinct culture yet at the same time embedded in a variety of representations. For their part, as a result of their obsession with hygiene and discipline, they tried to keep a distance with the ›natives‹, but failed to succeed. With their ›metropolitan habitus‹ in a state of crisis, they were forced to adopt strategies of mimicry, learning from the Africans and adopting their foods and culinary practices. Thus, German colonialism had to base itself on a bricolage of practices, after the ›metropolitan habitus‹ as a marker of difference had failed in the African context. The dependence on the local environment was to lessen with the emergence of a colonial infrastructure, but this offered only temporary relief as Germany was forced to retreat after World War One.

Eugenia Roldán Vera studies the training of indigenous teachers in the post-revolutionary Mexican context of the 1920s and 1930s. The *Casa del Estudiante Indígena* in Mexico City was a site for the promulgation of modernity, where the state pursued a pedagogical program with elements of both homogenisation and individualisation aimed at turning young Indians into healthy, productive and rational human beings, as well as model citizens. After completing their studies, they were supposed to return to their local rural communities in order to modernise the indigenous rural population. The strategies of control applied in teacher training were firmly set within the modernity narrative of Westernisation and nationalism, but also contained ambiguities since Indio folklore was idealised as something pure. On their part, the students of the college modified and adapted the school program by means of selective appropriation and empowerment through resistance and by incorporating dominant representations of modernity while also developing a new consciousness of their own ›traditional‹ values. Although the *Casa* was intended as a model of Mexican modernity, the

way in which the school program and its recipients turned out proved to be highly ambiguous.

In her contribution, Verónica Oelsner discusses the growth of vocational education that accompanied the modernisation of independent Argentina. She focuses on differing representations of progress that were formulated by three of the main actors involved: the national ministry of education, the Society for Industrial Education and the Engine Drivers Union. The ministry promulgated various proposals for legislation aimed at the creation of an industrious people – pitting itself in vain against the prevalent orientation of the educational system towards the humanities. The Society for Industrial Education wanted to promote industrialisation, whereas the union saw vocational training as a means to defend the engine drivers' position against the impact of rapid technological change. Thus, within one national context, various actors competed by formulating different representations of modernity, all taking vocational education as the main avenue to promote it, but differing in how it should be realised.

Mona Schrempf deals with Chinese state family planning policies since the 1980s in the Sino-Tibetan border region of Qinghai province. She focuses on the experiences of Tibetan women and their families and their representations of the impact of the state's modernity project. At one level, as Mona Schrempf argues, there exists a clear contrast between the official representations of family planning programs and the local representations of the consequences of its implementation for Tibetan families. There is a juxtaposition of two different worlds – one of Chinese modernity on the one hand and, on the other, a self-reflexive ethnic identity as part of a Tibetan figuration of modernity. This contrast is judged from the Tibetan side as that between the ›authentic‹ or ›true‹ as against that which is ›false‹; and as ›insiders‹ standing against the forces that come from the ›outside‹. However, Chinese and Tibetan figurations of modernity are not only juxtaposed, but are interconnected and negotiated in daily life. Different intermediaries operate on the fault line between both worlds: local Tibetan cadres, village heads, barefoot doctors and family planning personnel whose personal families are scrutinized even more than ordinary families.

Adams, drawing upon Foucault and Rabinow, points to the ›interstitial spaces between the ›modern‹ Tibetan and his or her (often rural) counterpart who is represented as ›not yet‹ modern‹ in China. In this modern subjectivity she finds exemplified ›a ›figurative‹ approach to modernity more generally‹.²⁸ The gap is characterised by different beliefs in the connection between truth and morality: the rationality of the modern state is based on a secular morality in connection with modern science that refers back to itself rather than to a socially established and moral ›way of knowing the world‹. However, Tibetans' founda-

28 See this volume, p.111.

tional beliefs in karma and morality are based on a particular world-view that is not accepted as ›truth‹ by secular state morality. »In this gap we find clues as to what it really means to be modern and what might be entailed in sustaining it.«²⁹ Tibetans feel this gap as a loss of ›knowing truth‹ and of trust, a feeling that touches upon the more general issue of loss of values as a consequence of modernity, provoking the rekindling of, or search for, new religious meanings, for example. Yet, »what the Tibetan case suggests is the need to read through the back and forth of processes of modernisation that force persons to reflect critically on their ways of knowing and being in the world.«³⁰

Peter Probst examines the global phenomenon of museums and the making of visual heritage as a figuration of modernity. Starting with a »history of visual heritage politics in Europe«,³¹ he takes the case study of a heritage site in south-west Nigeria to exemplify the particular figuration of modernity that it entails. He explains it as being closely connected with representing and implementing both national history and a globalised spacialisation of heritage. »Global organisations like UNESCO ›reconfigure‹ national objects of memory into a universal global heritage«,³² appropriating them as global ›properties‹. This appropriation, however, reveals both the cultural politics of authentication by producing world heritage sites and the conflicted national and local interests in representing ›correctly‹ their own past. Thereby, the role of the media, Probst claims alongside James Clifford, has altered not only visual representations of the past but also the practices and meaning of memory. Representations of the past become the arena for different understandings of modernity with the aim of defining the ›correct‹ way of representation.

The last chapter of this volume by Olaf Günther continues the focus on the connection between representing the past and memory making. His theme concerns the construction of a Soviet hero in Kokand, a city in the Ferghana Valley of Uzbekistan. On the basis of two contrasting examples, he shows how modernity became enshrined within the local collective memory. On the one hand, the life history of the young communist Abdulla Nabiev was gradually turned into that of a modern Soviet hero, whereas the famous nineteenth century local Muslim poet Muqimi was represented as modern in order to preserve an Islamic religious school (*madrassa*). The modernising of Nabiev exemplified a top down state project; the case of Muqimi was a bottom up local project to preserve and get official recognition for a local Muslim hero. This double ›museumisation‹ of modernity was realised by the installation of sites of memory, using objects, rituals and histories as tools.

29 Ibid.

30 See this volume, p.119.

31 See this volume, p.157.

32 Ibid.

During discussion at the conference, three ways of understanding modernity or modernisation were brought forward. In the first, modernisation is understood as a program of socio-cultural transformation within colonial as well as postcolonial nation-state settings. A second, more subtle view defines modernity as a metaphor with several possible readings, something that is future-oriented and constitutes a break with the past, but also includes the need for the continuous recreation of itself. A third understanding of modernity is that of a practice of representation, which produces meaning for a broad range of phenomena. Its features are at the same time multiple, plural, fragmented and contradictory. In this sense modernity is produced through narratives and also needs to be mediated through books, newspaper articles, images, material objects, oral testimonies and performances.

Three essential figurations of modernity were arrived at as a result of our intellectual exchanges, first its embedded-ness and situated-ness, secondly its processual character and thirdly its agency. Embedded-ness was shown to have at least five dimensions: contexts, levels, thematic fields, places and temporal scopes. Our case studies deal with colonial, post-colonial and post-revolutionary contexts as well as that of the intertwined dynamics of globalisation and localisation. A whole range of levels comes into play, ranging from the self, the individual body and mind, to the private and public spheres. Our thematic fields include politics, economics, education, religion, history, literature, medicine and identity. Our places are non-European, situated in Asia, Africa and Latin America. They involve imperial states, nation-states, colonial states, urban and rural sites, sea- and landscapes. In our case studies, particular sites for negotiating the modern are schools, clinics, public places, museums and modern means of transport. Temporal scopes cover the aftermath of turning points, caused by regime change, revolution, violence, civil wars, situations of occupation or changes as a consequence of global power shifts.

Modernity is an ongoing process and not a fixed state of development. This process is fuelled by representations, conditions, perceptions and experiences. Local perceptions of modernity may produce discomfort, contestation and a sense of loss, but also may lead to empowerment. Experiences are of a doxic (or self-evident) nature, such that, as Bourdieu has argued, the processes of modernisation challenge the conservation of the social order through the tendency to see it as natural and self-evident. Socio-economic transformation promotes reconfigurations of the modern condition. Finally, the different ways in which modernity takes shape are influenced by modernising agents, both institutions and human beings, who take an active role in its processes, and include government agencies, civil servants, doctors, missionaries, intellectuals, activists and civilians.

What do the essays in this book reveal? As long as the history of modernity remains largely unwritten, it is hard to decide whether the plurality of figurations of modernity is the outcome of a diffusion of something particular into different settings; or whether separate ›peculiar‹ modernities, be they Islamic, Chinese or Western, developed out of their own contexts. Probably, it is both. The transfers implied in the existence of multiple figurations of modernity entail both a multiplication of a modern core and, at the same time, lead to differences and disjuncture. Modernities are also not neutral, they involve norm-setting as well as loss of a morality that is perceived to be ›false‹ or ›failed‹. Modernity has a strong epistemological side to it, a particular way of being in and understanding the world, as these essays demonstrate.

Furthermore, certain qualities of non-Western modernities stand out when reading the contributions to this volume. They include figurations of modernity which are deeply ambiguous, since they are the result of negotiation, selective adaptation, rejection and alteration at the local level. This seems to imply that modernity is an external force that needs to be adapted in order to be able to become internalised. Once it is internalised or stabilised in a particular context, it becomes an internal process. Secondly, and connected to the previous observation, modernities are based on hierarchical power arrangements, with mostly the state, be it colonial or postcolonial, as the initiator of programs of modernity and the population as its recipients. Thirdly, modernities are strongly set within a moral universe. Depending on the perspective of its human or institutional agent, modernity can be something good that contributes, enlarges, empowers; or, on the contrary, it can be something bad that creates havoc and brings about a decline of autonomy. In most of our cases, however, it is both at the same time: a power that transforms the individual and the society, creating loss on one hand, but opportunity on the other.