

Veranstalter.....	JProf. Dr. Ralf Hertel
Thema	Visions of the Far East: From Mandeville to Ishiguro [AA-MA4]
Art der Veranstaltung	Seminar III
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Mysterious, exotic, erotic, incomprehensible, drug-addicted and wise – the Far East has long exerted a particular fascination on travellers from the West. Early modern explorers and merchants set out to discover a land full of legendary riches, while politicians hoped to forge an anti-Islamic alliance against the growing threat of Ottoman dominance. In the 17th century, a craze for things Chinese and Japanese – i.e. for chinoiseries and japoniseries, for oriental gardening, but also for news and people from the Far East – set in that allowed a blond Frenchman like George Psalmanazar to parade as a Taiwanese in London – and to get away with his charade.

In the 19th century, and in particular during the opium wars, China crucially put to the test British imperial ambitions. Modernism saw an increasing awareness of Chinese and Japanese aesthetics, and poets such as Ezra Pound challenged Western literary traditions by turning towards far eastern concepts of art. At the dawn of World War II, Mao's proto-communist China became interesting as a political model for leftist British travellers such as Christopher Isherwood and W.H. Auden, while visitors to fascist Japan saw parallels to the nationalistic movements in Europe. As World War II gave way to the Cold War and the iron curtain lowered between the East and the West, China once more turned into a mysterious, sometimes barbaric Other in the public imagination, while the last two decades have seen a re-awakening interest in China that has recently turned into a veritable craze about a country of seemingly unlimited potential for economic growth.

Literature reacts to these changing perspectives on the Far East – and in doing so reveals a great deal not only about British attitudes towards the Far Eastern Other but also about the British self. What is it that fascinates all these writers – and what does this fascination with the Far East tell us about the British themselves? This seminar proposes to analyse texts such as Sir John Mandeville's medieval travels (mid 14th-century) and Daniel Defoe's *Further Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (which, little known, brought Crusoe to China). We will also deal with Ezra Pound's imitations of Chinese poetry, with Isherwood and Auden's *Journey to a War* (1939), and with more recent texts such as Kazuo Ishiguro's (himself a Japanese-born British writer) *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) or Peter Carey's *Wrong about Japan* (2005). Time allowing, we might also address non-literary influences on British culture, such as chinoiseries, tea culture, or more recently, manga-aesthetics.

This seminar is complemented by the conference "Telling Failures: Early Encounters between the Far East and the West" at the Guest House of the University (22-23 May), which students are encouraged to attend.