Abstract Trends project: Henningsen, Lena

Literature Branding / Branding Literature: Branding and Marketing Trends in Early 20th Century Literature

In the early 20th century, many young Chinese travelled overseas to study, starting a transfer of knowledge about what was then perceived as 'the West'. While the resulting flows of ideas and concepts have been widely studied, the travel of goods has been less well researched. Therefore, this project explores the impact of brands in Chinese writing: through writing about branded products in their fictional or non-fictional texts, authors transferred everyday-knowledge to their readers who would never be able to gain such first-hand experience themselves. While these writings should not be taken as authentic ethnographic description of the world, they represent a field of imagination of authors and readers. I thus argue that this imaginary landscape represents the fertile soil out which would grow early 20th century consumer culture (see p.e. Dikötter 2007). I further argue that – as I have shown for the early 21st century (Henningsen 2008) – this imaginary landscape is essential for the success of consumer trends observable in the 'real world'. Literary trends thus reinforce consumer-culture trends – and vice versa. Studying this interplay between imaginary landscapes and the 'real world' while focusing on issues of trend convergence, successions, ambiguity and trend codes will broaden our understanding of the trends concept.

Research Interests
- Contemporary Chinese popular literature
- Plagiarism in China
- Imitation vs. Creativity
- Harry Potter fakes in China
- Chinese music
- Modern Chinese literature and culture
- Early 20th century literature
- Chinese Life Writing