

Review of *Uō to Nihonjin: Chisuishin ga tsunagu Higashi Ajia* (Yu the Great and the Japanese: East Asia Linked by the Sage-King Who Controlled the Flood Waters), by Wang Min. Tokyo: NHK Shuppan, 2014. [禹王と日本人: 「治水神」がつなぐ東アジア／王敏著. 東京: NHK 出版, 2014. 1,242円. 216ページ.]

In China, children's primary-school textbooks often contain pictures of Yu the Great 大禹 controlling the flood waters in order to give them confidence and courage to overcome difficulties. When they grow older, they may learn that Yu the Great was one of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors 三皇五帝, and that his son Xia Qi 夏啟 founded China's first dynasty, the Xia Dynasty. But most Chinese definitely do not know that neighboring Japan has ninety-one sites dedicated to Yu the Great. This is one of the secrets that Prof. Wang Min's book *Yu the Great and the Japanese* reveals.



Prof. Wang Min is the first president of the Chinese Writers Association in Japan, a professor at Hōsei University, and a well-known expert on Japan. Her interest in Japanese worship of Yu the Great began in 2006 at a conference. At the conference, she happened to sit next to Tsuyuki Jun'ichi, head of Kaisei in Kanagawa Prefecture, who told her that the name “Kaisei” 開成 came from the *Book of Changes*, and that within the town there was a stone stele memorializing the Great Yu's controlling the flood waters. After the conference, she immediately went to the site to investigate, and ascertained that the stele was erected three hundred years ago and that the stele had an inscription written by a well-known Japanese Confucian of the time. From then on, she and a local research group studied the relevant Chinese and Japanese historical materials and discovered that the culture of Yu the Great entered Japan at least a thousand years ago. In 2007 Prof. Wang Min, in the Japanese literary magazine *Bungei shunjū*, called for residents to search their local communities for artifacts associated with Yu the Great, and later Ōwaki Yoshio, founder of the research group, traveled all over Japan to investigate

these artifacts. With cooperation from researchers throughout Japan, the group verified and cataloged around a hundred shrines and artifacts dedicated to Yu the Great. Prof. Wang Min's book, *Yu the Great and the Japanese*, gathers together all this research and presents it to the reader.

This book was published at the end of 2014, the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the publisher NHK Shuppan (NHK Publishing). The book—which has an introduction (“The Coming to Japan of the Sage-King Who Controlled the Flood Waters”), four chapters (“How Did Yu the Great Become a God of Japan?” “Why Is Yu the Great Painted on Sliding Doors of the Imperial Palace in Kyoto?” “Why Does Yu the Great Have a Nine-Tailed Fox Accompanying Him?” and “How Does Yu the Great Live in the Present?”), and a conclusion (“Yu the Great as a Common Heritage of East Asia”)—vividly describes and carefully analyzes the Japanese culture of Yu the Great. It is the most complete scholarly treatment of research in this area of the present period.

In the introduction, the author recalls the Japanese belief in sages and describes how she happened to meet a descendent of Yu the Great when, in China, she gave a scholarly report on such belief. She then outlines the structure of the book. In chapter 1, she briefly lists the important sites related to Yu the Great throughout Japan and roughly presents descriptions of Yu the Great in Japanese historical sources. She emphasizes that the culture of Yu the Great entered Japan through the Confucian classics, and she investigates the extent to which Japan preserved Chinese books and the state of Confucian education in Japan. Japan has many important sites memorializing Yu the Great. For example, Minami Ashigara, in Kanagawa Prefecture, has a shrine dating to the early eighteenth century that bears the given name of Yu the Great and is dedicated to “King Xia Yu” 夏禹王. The shrine is called Bunmei Sha 文命社, and the given name of Yu the Great, 文命, is pronounced “Bunmei” in Japanese and “Wenming” in Chinese. Nearby is the Bunmei East Dike Stele 文命東堤碑, commemorating the flood-prevention efforts of Tanaka Kyūgu 田中丘隅 (1662–1729), an expert in agricultural management during the Edo period. Also, Katashina, in Tone District, Gunma Prefecture, has an Emperor Yu the Great Stele 大禹皇帝碑, inscribed in the difficult-to-decipher “tadpole script.” Nearby is a King Yu Stele 禹王之碑 with an inscription that deciphers the difficult-to-read the inscription in the regular script. The tadpole characters came from the Chinese Goulou Stele 岫嶺碑, but the text has been reorganized by an unknown Japanese hand. Again, Kaizu, Gifu Prefecture, has a King Yu Stone Lantern 禹王灯籠 commemorating the efforts of Hirata Yukie 平田鞆負 (1704–1755), elder leader of the Satsuma Domain, in controlling flood waters of the Ibi, Nagara, and Kiso rivers by engineering separate channels for them to flow into the sea. This well-known episode in Japanese

history is called the Hōreki Water Control Project 宝曆治水 (Hōreki = 1751–1764). Such sites memorializing Yu the Great are mostly found in areas of Japan that experienced frequent flooding.

Chapter 2, to describe the sage-king ideal held up for Japanese emperors, focuses on the painting *Yu the Great Swears off Drinking and Guards against Even the Slightest Malfeasance* 大禹戒酒防微圖 on sliding doors in the imperial palace in Kyoto. The imperial palace in the center of Kyoto was used as the emperor's primary residence from 1331 to 1868. It is significant that a painting of Yu the Great appears on the sliding doors of the emperor's residential halls. The story of Yu the Great swearing off drinking and guarding against even the slightest malfeasance comes from "Strategies of Wei" 魏策 in *Strategies of the Warring States* 戰國策: "In the past, a princess of the blood had Yidi make sweet-tasting fermented wine and present it to Yu. Yu drank it and found it much to his liking. He then repelled Yidi, stopped drinking the savory wine, and said, 'Later generations will no doubt have a ruler who loses his kingdom on account of such wine.'" This painting was done by Tsurusawa Tanshin 鶴澤探真 (1834–1893), one of the best painters of the Kanō School 狩野派, the largest school of painters in the Japanese tradition. Yu the Great was a paragon of leadership for Japanese emperors. Indeed, the present Japanese reign name, Heisei 平成, comes from 地平天成 in "Counsels of Yu the Great" 大禹謨, *Book of Documents* 尚書. In the phrase 地平天成, 平 refers to wise management of water and land, and 成 refers to abundant produce. Hence, the whole phrase means that if water and land are wisely managed, Heaven will provide abundantly. A mere four characters vividly expresses the ideal way for a king to govern a country. It is worth mentioning that the publisher, while preparing the book for the press, gained permission from the Imperial Household Agency to use the huge painting *Yu the Great Swears off Drinking and Guards against Even the Slightest Malfeasance* for the cover of the book.

Chapter 3 focuses on King Yu's love story. In the Chinese myth, his wife, Tushan-shi 涂山氏, is depicted as a nine-tail fox. Does the Japanese culture of Yu the Great include a nine-tailed fox? Interestingly, the author discovered that the "Counsels of Yu the Great" steles in Hiroshima and Takamatsu, Kagawa Prefecture, were both erected in areas of Japan with a nine-tailed-fox legend. The "Counsels of Yu the Great" stele in Hiroshima was erected in 1972 to commemorate the changing of the course of the Ōta River in Hiroshima. In the rapids of the Ōta River is a large rock called "Fox Rock." According to a local folklorist, in the legend of the Ōta River Fox Rock, as in the German legend of the Rhine River Lorelei Rock, a siren (a fox-woman in the Japanese legend) seduces boatmen to their deaths. The "Counsels of Yu the Great" stele in Takamatsu was erected in 1673 to honor the water

management expert Nishijima Hachibee 西嶋八兵衛 (1596–1680). The castle town Takamatsu, formerly known as Tamamo-jō 玉藻城, was where the legend of the fox spirit Tamamo no Mae 玉藻前 arose. Tamamo no Mae was the favorite courtesan of Emperor Toba 鳥羽 (r. 1107–1123). Eventually she was exposed as a nine-tailed fox spirit by the diviner Abe no Seimei 安倍晴明 and fled. This confluence of the location of the two “Counsels of Yu the Great” steles and the place of origin of legends of a nine-tailed fox led to their being imperceptibly conflated. Citing chapter and verse, the author of the present work thus tirelessly presents her theses, much to the interest of her readers.

Chapter 4 explores how Yu the Great culture exists in modern society. For instance, the Yu step 禹步, which has its origin in the movements of Yu the Great in tamping dikes to control the waters, is a typical posture in the traditional Japanese sport of sumo. In China, Daoists, in conjuring, follow the Yu step, a hobble hither and a hobble thither, to trace the seven stars of the Big Dipper. Again, legend has it that when Yu the Great cut a channel through Longmen Mountains for the Yellow River to pass through, “carp jumped and swam over the Longmens” 鯉魚跳龍門. Well, in Japan, on May 5, Boy’s Day, all families with sons fly a carp streamer. Because carp are daring enough to jump and swim over the Longmens, the hope is that sons will grow up healthy and overcome challenges like the carp. Today in the private sector in Japan, people are continuously researching and preserving the culture of Yu the Great from China. From 2010 to 2014 Japan has held King Yu Culture Festivals four times, in 2013 the national, private Association for Research on King Yu, the Sage Who Controlled the Flood Waters 治水神・禹王研究会 was established, and it was decided that the King Yu Culture Festival 禹王文化まつり would be held in rotation in cities commemorating Yu the Great. In the concluding chapter, the author points out that Yu the Great, originally a symbol of the East Asian intellectual community, has become an important bridge connecting the present-day cultures of East Asia, and she looks forward to a bright future for research on the culture of Yu the Great in East Asia.

From the 1980s on, regional study of Yu the Great culture has begun in Sichuan, Henan, Shandong, and Zhejiang. But “Yu the Great culture studies” has yet to become a branch of learning, and only local scholars participate in the available research groups, with the result that it is impossible to geographically divide up questions concerning the place of birth, area of water control, and scope of activities of Yu the Great. Prof. Wang Min’s book gives us a completely new perspective on how to research Yu the Great culture with a heightened sense of the unity of East Asia. Also worthy of emulation is the rigorous, detailed approach of Japanese scholars to research.

I hope that Prof. Wang Min's book *Yu the Great and the Japanese* will soon be translated into Chinese and published in China.

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