Book Review

Cultural Interaction Studies in East Asia: New Methods and Perspectives, by **Demin Tao and Fujita Takao (eds.).** Göttingen: vandenhoeck & ruprecht, 2021.

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This is a book with something for almost everyone working in the professional humanities and social sciences, but above all it functions, somewhat by accident, as a lively introduction to East Asian Studies for non-specialists. East Asia suffers from the lack of a *lingua franca*; co-editor Fujita Takao admits in his Afterword that "in many cases, English, rather than East Asian languages, has proven to be the most useful medium for understanding each other." This book, featuring translations of 18 Chinese and Japanese articles written *circa* 2010, may be late, but it represents an important milestone in the field of East Asian Studies by giving a global voice to leading East Asian scholars.

China, Japan, Korean Peninsula and Vietnam may be united by a common millennial heritage of Chinese character use, but East Asia is not Western Europe: most of the people active in the Society for Cultural Interaction in East Asia (SCIEA), from which this book project stemmed, are Chinese-speaking Japanese and Japanese-speaking Chinese scholars—a small slice of a much larger expert pool which is tragically unable to communicate. Tao Demin, a Chinese scholar based at Kansai University in Osaka after stints in the United States, has the perfect profile to coordinate the activities of the SCIEA and overcome the communication barriers within East Asia as well as beyond it; echoing early European comparatists like Madame de Staël, he writes of his contact with Japan, for instance, in the following (glowing) terms:

> I was born in Shanghai after the founding of the People's Republic of China, but I never had the chance to learn about Confucianism positively until I came to Japan for doctoral training in the late 1980s. […] It is fair to say that someone may not necessarily be the inheritor of their cultural roots simply through ethnicity or nationality. In order to carry on the tradition to which they belong, they have to learn and be educated, and the provider of that education may not necessarily be in their birthplace or home country.

The editors are nevertheless keen to stress that this is a book about cultural interaction; the word "exchange" (*jiaoliu* in Chinese, *kōryū* in Japanese) is a bit too one-sidedly positive and passive to describe the pulses of cultural influence across

the last 3,000 years of East Asian history. The six sub-sections—"New Directions in Regional Studies", "New Trends in Humanities Research", "Material Circulation and Cultural Transmission in East Asia", "China's Experience of Cultural Interaction with the West", "Transformation of Japanese Scholarship from Early to Modern Times", and "The Wisdom of Selective Adaptation and Constructive Dialog"—reflect the chaotic breadth of the collection as a whole, but allow the specialist and lay reader alike to profit from it: there is much more depth than necessary for an introduction to the field, but this detail evokes further curiosity as all good introductions should. If sentences like "No doubt the official embassy in which Yamanoue no Okura (660–733) participated introduced the Tanabata festival to Japan as a Tang court festival" will leave many readers googling, it will at least be impossible for them to know less East Asian history by the end than when they started.

It is worth saying something very briefly about each of the 18 articles, both to allow the specialist scholar to mine the book more efficiently and to offer the general public some sense of the loose narrative which (just about) holds the book together. Noma Haruo's "The Center and the Periphery in the Magnetic Field of Cultural Systems: New Perspectives on Regional Research" is hardly a welcoming title for a first chapter, but the article does provide some important historical context: the Global Center of Excellence Program at Kansai University (2007–2012), out of which the SCIEA was born in 2009, sought explicitly to "create a new cultural image of East Asia via a peripheral-based approach"; in other words, East Asian Studies is much more than an amalgam of traditional Sinology and Japanology. Noma argues for the corresponding importance of fieldwork at the edge of "East Asia" proper: "The trips to distant places should provide a rich and expanding horizon for cultural interaction studies." Huang Chun-Chieh, meanwhile, offers "Some Observations on the Study of the History of Cultural Interaction in East Asia" itself, citing the elephant in the room before echoing Noma's concerns:

> From the standpoint of the countries on the periphery, China was the source of common elements of East Asian culture, including Chinese characters, Confucian learning, Chinese medicine etc. China stood before them as a gargantuan unavoidable other. […] It is hence more accurate to speak of exchanges between the Zhejiang region and Japan or between the Shandong peninsula and Korea than to speak of Sino-Japanese or Sino-Korean exchanges.

Shiba Yoshinobu's "Japanese Studies into the History of Maritime East Asia" also emphasises local geographies, but above all the shadow cast by Western historiography, most notably the German Ludwig Riess (1861–1928), who lived in Japan from 1887 to 1902. Shiba's chronology of East Asian Studies in Japan goes on to

deal with another still relevant elephant: "With Japan's defeat in 1945, many aspects of the country's previous works of history were criticised severely from both within and without. Ultimately, it is undeniable that prewar historical works were written in an environment of political expansionism and insular nationalistic chauvinism, irrespective of whether the authors were conscious of it or not."

The average Western reader will wonder to what extent the same might be the case for contemporary Chinese works of history; the differences in style and tone between the Chinese and Japanese contributions to this volume—the discrepancy, for example, in rates of citation of Engels—are certainly conspicuous at times, but this ideological variety adds to the overall reading experience, which is too dense and diverse to deliver any boringly monolithic political message. Ge Zhaoguang's "Trends, Positions and Methods: Seeking New Perspectives in Humanities Research", for example, is one of many articles in this volume that delivers more self-criticism and general interest than its title promises:

> Unfortunately, in the past one hundred years, we [Chinese] rarely took conscious effort to clearly differentiate ourselves from our neighbors, such as Japan, Korea, India, and Mongolia, the countries that can also be considered part of the "Other". We are apt to place these neighbors on the periphery of our own culture, and are not accustomed to taking them into consideration. But does this help lead to self-assessment? I have always felt that by comparing and contrasting China with the West, we can only gain a rough understanding of our own characteristics. It is the understanding of the minute differences between us and the neighbors who share our traditions that can give us a genuine knowledge of "Chinese" culture. In the process of globalisation in which the tendency towards unanimity takes hold, we might have a chance to enter […] "an age with many mirrors for self-recognition".

Azuma Jūji's "The Private Academies of East Asia: Research Perspectives and Overview" offers a reminder to contemporary pedagogues everywhere that Confucians have been grappling with the challenge of humanistic education in a hostile world for centuries: Zhu Xi's famed resistance to the pseudo-Confucian Chinese public examination system—a means of instituting the hypocrisy of careerism via mere lip-service to Confucian values—has taken on a variety of interesting forms in China, Japan, Korean Peninsula and Vietnam over the last 800 years, with interesting examples for contemporary business schools and vocational training programs far beyond East Asia. Uchida Keiichi's "The Peripheral Approach in Chinese Linguistics as an Area of Cultural Interaction Studies" further crystallises the book's by now familiar central refrain: "One frequently misses the true nature of things by looking only at the center. In the eye of a hurricane, there is no storm; the wind howls in the periphery." Uchida pleads for a comparative, regionalist approach to linguistics at a level between the national and the universal; citing Zhu Dexi's maxim that "without any comparison, there are no characteristics to speak of", Uchida calls for linguists to avoid the Scylla of "discrete linguistic study (for instance Chinese, Japanese or English linguistics)' and the Charybdis of general

linguistics as a 'guiding theory that can solve all the various issues of discrete languages".

Nakanishi Susumu's "Embassies and Ideas as the Third Type of Cargo", self-explanatory once the first two types of cargo are revealed as "cultural artifacts and people", focuses on the famous Book Road, the Eastern corollary of the Western Silk Road: "Embassies returned home [to Japan from Sui and Tang China] with cargoes and cultural artifacts, culture in concrete form. They also returned home with talented indiviuduals in tow. […] Just as ancient Japan sought culture through books, so it sought culture through men of culture." Nakanishi highlights the example of the Chinese monk Jianzhen (688–763) to illustrate his broader point about cultural transmission:

> Though concrete cultural artifacts—such as calendars, yardsticks, arms, ritual implements, etc.—have their uses, they wear out and disappear. […] Unfortunately, the same is true for individuals, like Jianzhen. […] If others came to believe in the value of monastic discipline and continued the monastic tradition, then Jianzhen's spirit would live on. But failing that, his coming to Japan would be nothing more than a one-time oddity.
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> Hence, what is important is not the cargoes of artifacts and educated individuals, but rather the thought and wisdom that they contained. In fact, the embassies were returning with cargoes that were all the more important even though the goods could not be seen or felt.

Wang Yong's "The Silk Road and Book Road in East Asia" continues the "teach a man to fish" analogy, arguing that "it was the initiation of the productivity and continuity of these fishing skills that is characteristic of East Asian cultural interaction, and that has fostered the uniqueness of Japanese culture". While India and Central Asian nations were chiefly interested in purchasing luxury commodities from China, envoys from Japan "were using silk as currency to buy [Chinese] books". Matsuura Akira's "Chinese Sea Merchants and Pirates", meanwhile, reminds the reader – via an "everything you never knew you wanted to know" chronology – that not all interaction in the East China Sea down the centuries has been so mutually edifying.

Pirate adventures aside, the third elephant in the story of cultural interaction in East Asia is clearly identified, by editors and contributors alike, as "the West". Zhou Zhenhe's "Culture Surmounting Space: Sino-Western Cultural Encounters from the Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries' begins with Ricci and Ruggieri, highlighting the early Jesuits" "adaptive strategies" and the subsequent degeneration of relations between the Vatican and the QIng court, before shifting focus to "Protestant nations" and "the rise of Sinology in the West and Western Studies in China". Zhang Xiping's "Returning to a Dialog of Equals" takes the official Communist Party line that relations between China and the West have been "unequal" for most of the last two centuries; whether the Western reader agrees

with this ideological assessment, she must at least have heard it if she wishes to understand the cultural background to Beijing's 21st-century foreign policy:

> From 1840 on, after a hiatus of three hundred years, the tables were turned, and Sino-Western relations were the reverse of what they were before. Using compasses invented by the Chinese, Westerners aboard warships began plying the waters off the coast of China, and using gunpowder invented by the Chinese in their powerful cannons, they destroyed the fortifications of Humen, in Guangdong Province. In Nanjing, late-Qing government officials signed the first of the unequal treaties on paper invented by the Chinese. There was no longer any dialog of equality. China was no longer admired by the West.

Not listed in the book's index, Edward Said is invoked more than once as an ally by Mainland contributors to this volume in a bid to "drive home", as Zhang hopes, "the point that East and West should return to a stance of equality, to the state that existed in the sixteenth century." A frankly welcome pivot away from this ideological minefield (who decides when the paradise of lost "equality" has finally been regained?), Shen Guowei's "Modern Keywords and the Modern History of Ideas" traces the etymology of specific cultural concepts imported from the West into China and Japan (and into China via Japan), evoking Wang Li's famous 1958 observation that "in terms of vocabulary, the development of Chinese over the past fifty years has surpassed that of the several millennia prior to this period." Whatever the reader's politics, the sheer mindbending scale of East Asia's cultural transformation following contact with the Western Enlightenment should no longer be lost on her.

Choi Gwan's "War, Memory, and Imagination: Japanese Depictions of the Imjin War" represents the only Korean Peninsula contribution to the volume, but better a weakness here than a total *lacuna* (there are, for instance, no Vietnamese voices at all). Choi's overview of works—fictional and non-fictional—relating to "Japan's first war for foreign conquest" can be crudely summarised as follows:

> Whether military chronicles on Korea or dramatic pieces, works portraying battles with foreign peoples in the early modern era in Japan evoked a sense of Japan-centred superiority that transcended the bounds of the domain (*han*) system in which people lived during the Tokugawa period. […] Interest was rekindled towards the politics and military aspects of the Imjin War (1592–1598) during the Meiji period when the country began debating invading Korea. […] After Japan's defeat in World War II, there was no longer any sense of moral authority to engage in wars instigated by the country, and interest in the Imjin War lessened. […] The Imjin War [nevertheless] holds current meaning as living history, a point from which to consider the ideal relationship for both Korea and Japan—and even for China as the three major nations of Northeast Asia.

Suzuki Sadami's "A Reevaluation of the East Asian Modern System of Knowledge" reminds us that East Asians have by and large picked and chosen from Western scholarship in their own interests and in light of their own traditions: "In adopting the knowledge system and values of modern Europe, the regions and countries of East Asia have been creating their own knowledge systems and values. They did this

by comparing their systems and values to those of Europe and America, studying the historical forces driving the process of modernity, and relativizing the modern system to their own histories and geographies." Suzuki walks us through the evolution of such Western imports as "theology", "literature" and "fine arts" in Meiji Japan in particular: "By unraveling such concepts, we can clarify the mutual relations among concepts, the position of each concept, and the values lurking in each concept." Yan Shaodang's "A Reconsideration of Japanese China Studies" makes a bold claim for the future (or rather *non*-future) of one such concept—"Sinology"—by digging into the history of the discipline in post-Meiji Japan and connecting it to a gradual postwar diversification of sources—i.e. away from the old Han monopoly and towards 'the study of Mongolians, Manchus, Tibetans' and others:

> We [often] fail to notice that [Meiji-era Japanese scholars] produced their scholarly works to suit the needs of constructing a national Zeitgeist suited to the modern Japanese nation. Their exposition of Chinese culture and the original significance of Chinese culture itself do not exist on the same plane of thought. […] In light of modern changes in international studies of Chinese culture, I think that the term "Sinology" (*Hanxue*) can no longer cover the modern aspects of the field. […] Under these circumstances, it is appropriate and necessary, I think, to use the term 'China Studies'. […] Sinology (*Hanxue*) is its historical antecedent.

Tang Yijie's "The Coexistence of Cultural Diversity: Sources of the Value of Harmony in Diversity" has not aged well since its original Chinese publication in 1998; few terms have been coopted more egregiously by global business in the intervening quarter-century than "harmony in diversity". The ancient Confucian principle of *heerbutong*, however, translated by Tu Weiming in less clichéd terms as "harmony without uniformity", is identified by Tang as a key principle of healthy cultural interaction everywhere:

> Chinese culture remained Chinese culture and did not lose its distinctive features because it adopted Indian Buddhism. Such cultural exchange and mutual influence serves as an excellent illustration of the principle of harmony in diversity. As a matter of fact, the development of European culture also exemplifies this principle. Bertrand Russell, in *The Problem of China* (1922), wrote, "Greece learned from Egypt, Rome from Greece, the Arabs from the Roman Empire, and Renaissance Europe from the Byzantines." The reason that one culture could adopt another culture was often because the notion of harmony in diversity was embedded in the interactions and negotiations of the two cultures.

Fujita and Tao's own papers ("The Establishment of the Field of 'Oriental History' in Japan" and "Abraham Lincoln's Reception and Destiny in East Asia") round out the 300-page English text. In short, the book lives up to its subtitle with a breathtaking admixture—dizzying at times, but admirable overall—of "methods and perspectives". While it would be rude to dismiss some of the more serious scholarly detail here as coffee-table fare, one would nevertheless be wise to approach the book as both a library-bound tome and a playful encyclopedia. One

hopes that it finds a readership both within and well beyond the confines of academic East Asian Studies.

A final word must be reserved, in this context, for the work of translators Alan Thwaites, Jenine Heaton and Zeng Minhao. It should go without saying that such a project is unthinkable without translators—and yet simultaneously bounded by the strategies they employ. A genuine dilemma exists for Western translators of Chinese and Japanese: either reproduce the original with a high degree of idiomatic fidelity (and create an English text which is really an *interlingua* palatable only to specialists who can read Chinese and/or Japanese anyway), or take each sentence apart like a mechanic and put it back together using fully native English idioms (this offers the target reader a more pleasant, and therefore deeper, reading experience, but may transform the original beyond easy recognition). Leading bilingual figures in East Asian Studies, such as the aforementioned Tu Weiming, tend to refrain from translating their own work in part for this reason: it is very, very hard to do well. A tendency to err on the side of caution and corresponding unreadability prevails in East Asian Studies for a variety of reasons: many translators are non-native East Asian speakers of English, or at least heavy readers of East Asian languages, and therefore overuse East Asian structures in English relative to the general population; native translators may be wary of "transforming" the work of sensitive East Asian professors whose English is at least good enough to recognise when seemingly excessive artistic licence has been taken with their scholarly revelations; and "deep translations" take longer and require more brain-gym (paid translators will therefore tend to take the easier and less time-consuming option). The reader will judge from the above citations how well she thinks Thwaites, Heaton and Zeng have acquitted themselves—very well overall, I would say—but the default conservatism of their approach (standard for the field) is perhaps the one potential brake on broader interest and recognition for a book rich in relevant detail for a variety of readers.