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Some Observations on the Study of the History of Cultural Interactions in East Asia

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Abstract

This paper attempts to incorporate the history of East Asian cultural interactions into the field of regional history, and toward that end proposes that certain subjects to be explored. The paper consists of five sections. Section 1 draws attention to the newer fields of regional history and global history, as distinct from national history, which occupied great academic interest in the twentieth century. Section 2 suggests a new way to study regional history: shifting our focus from the results of cultural interactions to the process, thus bringing about a paradigm shift in the study of the history of East Asian cultural interactions. Section 3 raises two problematiques in the proposed field of regional history: the mutual influence between self and other, and that between culture and the power structure. Section 4 proposes three types of exchange for further research: (1) exchanges of persons (especially professional intermediate agents), (2) exchanges of goods (especially books), and (3) exchanges of thought.

The last section concludes that, with the rising of East Asian countries on the world stage in the twenty-first century, the state-centered style of historical study will be redirected to a broader East Asian perspective. By redefining the history of East Asian cultural interactions as regional history, we will be able to undertake the important task of revisiting and reconsidering on our traditional cultures.

Key words: China, Japan, Korea, East Asia, Cultural Interaction

I. Introduction

As historians engage in historical inquiry, a question that often occurs to them is, Should the scope and purview of historical inquiry ideally be national, regional, or global? Since the French Revolution in 1789, studies in

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national history have occupied the mainstream of historical practice. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the first half of the twentieth century in particular, historians tended to take the nation-state (usually their own) as the basic unit of historical inquiry. As a result, studies of national history became the leading trend in the twentieth century, and historians wrote discourses of meaningful historical inquiry based on political or cultural nationalism.¹ Representative of national-historical studies in twentieth-century China is the classic work *Guoshi dagang* (國史大綱, An outline of China's national history; 1939), by Qian Mu (錢穆).² However, as Geoffrey Barraclough pointed out in 1979, since the end of World War II, ethnocentric national histories once in vogue prior to the war became distasteful, with many European intellectuals believing that ethnocentric national histories were among the intellectual origins of World War II.³ In such an intellectual atmosphere, the rationale for national history became weak and dubious. Yet in Asia, although nearly every country experienced the traumas of invasion and colonization during the past century, national history ironically remains the main approach of Asian historians.⁴ While some historians in postwar Japan have sought to stir up nationalistic fervor, all in all the focus of national-historical inquiry in postwar Japan had shifted from state-centered to people-centered studies.⁵

1 Chris Lorenz and Stefan Berger, supported by the European Science Foundation, led a team of scholars from 2003 through 2008 in carrying out the large-scale research project "Representations of the Past: The Writing of National Histories in Europe" (<http://www.uni-leipzig.de/zhsesf/>). The results of this project will be presented at the roundtable "Religion, Nation, Europe, and Empire: Historians and Spatial Identities," at the International Congress of Historical Sciences in Amsterdam in 2010. Afterward, the results will be published in a six-volume set, as well as in ten specialized books, by Palgrave Macmillan.

2 Chun-chieh Huang, "Qian Binsi shixue zhong de 'guoshi' guan: Neihan, fangfa yu yiyi" ("National History" in Qian Mu's historical thinking: Contents, methods, and meanings); Chun-chieh Huang, "Historical Thinking as a Form of New Humanism for Twentieth-Century China: Qian Mu's View of History."

3 Geoffrey Barraclough, *Main Trends in History*, p. 149. For the study of history in the twentieth century, see Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge*, as well as the special issue of *Daedalus* titled "Historians and the World of the Twentieth Century" (Spring 1971).

4 For a recent review on the sorts of historical studies conducted in Asia, see Masayuki Sato, "East Asian Historiography and Historical Thought."

5 See Tōyama Shigeki, *Sengo no rekinshigaku to rekishi ishiki* (Historical studies and historical consciousness in postwar Japan).

While studies of national history dominated historical inquiry in the twentieth century, the study of global history has started to catch the attention of historians in the twenty-first century. Recently Georg G. Iggers and Q. Edward Wang reviewed trends in historical research since 1990 and pointed out five new directions in recent historical inquiry:⁶ (1) culture and language were reformulated together as the “new cultural history”; (2) the women’s movement gave rise to women’s history and feminist history; (3) owing to a strong postmodern critique, historical inquiry and the social sciences became somewhat merged; (4) postmodern criticism went hand in hand with a strong postcolonial critique of national history; (5) global trends gave rise to world history, global history, and the history of globalization. Particularly noteworthy is the rapid rise of studies in global history since 1990. Reflecting on this rise of global history, Hayden White recently pointed out that in the purview of global history, the very notion of a global event has been transformed. This new notion of a global event may serve to deconstruct the abstract concepts of time, space, and causality assumed in Western historical studies.⁷ Adopting a cosmopolitan point of view, Frank Ankersmit harbors doubts about modernist world histories, for they not only tend to exaggerate the impact of nonhuman factors, such as plagues and famines, on the course of human history, but can also dehumanize history.⁸ Edoardo Tortarolo points out that the author who writes world history faces challenges regarding his ideology, as well as the legitimacy of his research.⁹ Be that as it may, as it becomes a major research trend in the near future, global history still has to confront the master narrative assumed in historical studies in the past.¹⁰

Between the national history that flourished in the twentieth century and the newly rising global history, there also exists regional history, area studies of selected regions such as East Asia, Western Europe, North America, Latin America, etc. Regional history in this sense is a new field of history that warrants serious thought and reflection. The main purposes of this paper are, first, to analyze the methodology of regional-historical studies in a given area, the history of cultural exchanges in East Asia, second, to point out issues,

6 Georg G. Iggers and Q. Edward Wang, “The Globalization of History and Historiography: Characteristics and Challenges from the 1990s to the Present.”

7 Hayden White, “Topics for Discussion on Global History.”

8 Frank Ankersmit, “What Is Wrong with World History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View?”

9 Edoardo Tortarolo, “Universal/World History: Its Past, Present, and Future.”

10 At the International Congress of Historical Sciences in Amsterdam in 2010, Chris Lorenz, Dominic Sachsenmaier, Sven Beckert, et al., will hold a panel discussion titled “Global History: An Inter-regional Dialogue.”

problematiques, in studying the history of cultural exchanges in East Asia, and finally, to suggest related new topics for research.

Regional history as a field of historical inquiry can be subdivided into two principal types: one lies somewhere between national history and local history, and the other between national history and global history.¹¹ The former type concerns the history of different regions within a country, such as the history of southern Taiwan, while the latter emphasizes the history of various transnational regions, such as histories of East Asia and Eastern Europe for instance. The regional history examined in this paper belongs to the latter type, as it concerns a transnational region.

II. Reflections on Methodology

A. East Asia as a Contact Zone

Before discussing methodological problems in the study of the history of cultural exchanges in East Asia, we must first look at some overall characteristics of this geographic region. Geographically, the region comprises mainland China, the Korean peninsula, Japan, Taiwan, and the Indochina peninsula, each with its own distinctive climatic conditions, temperature ranges, etc. The twentieth-century Japanese philosopher Watsuji Tetsurō identified three regional types in the world: monsoon, desert, and grasslands. He described people who live in monsoon regions as delicate and rich in emotional life. They willingly face disgrace and humiliation to fulfill a task and have a strong sense of history.¹² Perhaps Watsuji's theory exhibits a dubious form of geographic determinism, yet the East Asian geographic region certainly is distinguished by its distinctive climates, environments, and cultures.

East Asia is the contact zone of its constituent countries, peoples, and cultures.¹³ For two thousand years, under unequal relationships of domination and subjugation, all kinds of exchanges have taken place there. Prior to the twentieth century, the Chinese empire was the dominant power in East Asia. During the first half of the twentieth century, the Japanese empire rose to power, and other countries in the region were invaded by Japan and suffered the trials and tribulations of Japanese colonization. In the postwar period,

11 On these two kinds of regional history, see Allan Megill, "Regional History and the Future of Historical Writing."

12 Watsuji Tetsurō, *Fudo: Ningengakuteki kōsatsu* (Local cultures and customs: Anthropological observations).

13 "Contact zone" designates the social spaces where people of different cultures interact and impact each other. See Mary L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, p. 6.

under the U.S. aegis, East Asia was repositioned in the new Cold War order. The turn of the twenty-first century witnessed the rapid rise of mainland China, which is fast pushing a realignment and rearrangement of the political and economic order of East Asia.

In the East Asian contact zone, the Chinese empire was vast and populous, with a long, continuous history. It not only exerted a powerful influence on the politics, economies, and cultures of East Asian countries, including Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and neighboring countries, but also played the role of the center of this region. 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.¹⁴

Because China played such a crucial role in forming the distinctive character of the East Asian region, the study of the history of cultural exchanges in this region is all the more complex and challenging. In the history of East Asia, China can be described, in the terms of modern national history, as a transnational power in politics, economics, society, and culture. For this reason, in the study of cultural exchanges in East Asia, it is 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.

B. The New Purview in Regional History: The Turn from Results to Process

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, we may proceed to look into some methodological problems in the study of the history of cultural exchange in East Asia. The first noteworthy problem is the shift in focus from the study of results to the study of the process of regional cultural exchanges. This is in effect a paradigm shift in the study of the history of cultural exchanges in East Asia.

To clarify this methodological reflection, let us take a look at an influential compilation of writings by leading Japanese historians, *Iwanami kōza sekai rekishi* (Iwanami series of world history; 1970), edited by Itagaki Yūzō.¹⁵ This massive work in thirty-one volumes was far-reaching and broad-

14 Koyasu Nobukuni, *Kanji ron: Fukahi no tasha* (On Chinese characters: The unavoidable other).

15 Historians in postwar Japan have been enamored of world history. During the quarter century from the end of World War II until 1970, Japanese historians published 14 series titled *World History*. See Gao Mingshi, *Zhanhou Riben de Zhongguo shi yanjiu* (Postwar Japanese studies on Chinese history), p. 48, n. 1. The biggest and most representative work is *Iwanami kōza sekai rekishi* (Iwanami world history series), edited by Itagaki Yūzō, in 31 vols. The first printing was in 1970–1971, and the second in 1974–1975.

spirited. In the Preface the editors first criticized the tendency of Japanese historians during the Meiji period (1868–1911) for treating the term “world history” as synonymous with “Western history.”¹⁶ The editors went on to remark that during the Shōwa period (1926–1989), Japanese historians, under the influence of Marxism, underwent a major change in historical consciousness and a new theoretical approach to world history was born. By then Japanese historians had begun to criticize the Western Eurocentric historical perceptions of previous generations. However, with Japan’s crushing defeat in the Pacific War, the wartime outlook that the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere was Japan’s historical destiny vanished into history. Since the end of the war, world history in Japan developed along new directions both in research and education. The editors of *Iwanami kōza sekai rekishi* sought to critique and assimilate these various forms of world history. In light of the reorientation in Japanese historical consciousness, the editors attempted to compile the latest Japanese research results in world history. In the ensuing work, the editors divided world history into eight spheres, ranging from antiquity to the present: the world of the ancient Near East, the Mediterranean world, the historical world of East Asia, the South Asian world, the world of Inner Asia, the world of Western Asia, the world of medieval Europe, and the modern world.¹⁷

Although this compilation claimed to cover world history, the chapters of

16 The preliminary stage of Western historical studies in Japan lasted from the early Meiji period until the beginning of the Taishō period (1911–1926). At the end of the nineteenth century the History Department at Tokyo Imperial University was gradually laying a foundation and attracting and cultivating eminent faculty. In 1877 the great German historian Ludwig Riess (1861–1928) went to lecture at Tokyo University and was greatly influential. Next in 1891 the Japanese historian Tsuboi Kumezō (坪井九馬三, 1858–1936) returned to Tokyo University from studying in Europe to lecture on history. After 1897 Tokyo University had many specialists in European history, such as Murakawa Kengo (村川堅固, 1875–1946) and Uchida Ginzō (内田銀藏, 1872–1919). Kyoto University established its College of Liberal Arts in 1906 and its distinctive Division of Western History in 1907. On November 1, 1889, Professor Riess’ students established the *Shigakkai zasshi* 史學會雜誌 (History association journal), later rechristened as *Shigaku zasshi* 史學雜誌 (History journal). The direction and focus of the early issues of the journal were set by Professor Riess. In 1908 Sakaguchi Takashi (坂口昂, 1872–1928) initiated the Historical Studies Association, and in 1916 he established the journal *Shirin* 史林 (History grove) to encourage students to study Chinese and Western history in the purview of world history. See Sakai Saburō, *Nihon Seiyō shigaku hattatsushi* (History of the development of the study of Western history in Japan).

17 Itagaki, *Iwanami kōza sekai rekishi*, antiquity 1, preface, pp. 1–9.

each volume were written from the perspective of national history. For example, volume 4, *Antiquity (Formation of the East Asian World, 1)*, contains the following twelve chapters:

1. Formation of the Yellow River Civilization
2. Creation of the Yin and Zhou States
3. Formation of the Ancient Classics
4. Society and State during the Warring States Period
5. The Arguments of the Philosophers and Hundred Schools
6. The Establishment of Imperial Domination
7. The System of Control of the Han Empire
8. The Office of Transport and Equalization, the Bureau of Standards, and the Salt and Iron Monopolies
9. The Establishment of Confucianism
10. Wang Mang's Rise to Political Power
11. The Later Han Empire and the Powerful Clans
12. The Han Empire and the Peripheral Peoples

Each of these chapters was written in accordance with the purview of Chinese national history. So it would have been more appropriate if the original title of this volume was "Formation of the Chinese World."

This compilation suffers from at least two other major problems. First, each volume breaks down into a mosaic of chapters and lacks an overall structure. Since each of the volumes is presented in the context of national history without any context of world history, it cannot avoid what Jack H. Hexter called "the tunnel effect" in the study of history.¹⁸ For example, while the context of Chinese history is relevant and important to the theme of the first volume of *Iwanami kōza sekai rekishi*, the purview of world history would have provided a broader vantage point for considering and weighing the importance and meaning of events and processes taken up.

Second, because of the decontextualization that occurs when world history is presented in this way, each chapter focuses more on results than on process in describing the development of cultures. For example, each chapter in the *Formation of the East Asian World* volume discusses the completed formation of political institutions and economic measures, as in "Creation of the Yin and Zhou States" and "The System of Control of the Han Empire." Only chapter 6, "The Establishment of Imperial Domination," by Nishijima Sadao (西嶋定生) touches upon the relationship between Chinese imperial rule and the

18 See Jack H. Hexter, *Reappraisals in History* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1961), p. 194f. See also David H. Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1970), pp. 142ff.

formation of the wider East Asian world.

The preceding discussion serves to reveal the broader significance of shifting the focus of historical studies of East Asian cultural exchanges from results to process. This transition in approach can stimulate the following three new directions in historical studies:

From a structural to a developmental perspective. Studies of cultural history that focus on results are most likely to be static investigations concentrating mainly on the analysis of selected common essential features of culture. For example, Nishijima Sadao, in his General Introduction to *Formation of the East Asian World*, volume 4 of *Iwanami kōza sekai rekishi*, pointed out four main features of the history of East Asian civilization: Chinese characters, Confucianism, the system of imperial laws and decrees, and Buddhism.¹⁹ These four characteristics reflect the static, structural perspective Nishijima took in viewing the common features of East Asian history. However, by focusing on the dynamic process of East Asian history, we would see these four cultural features in the context of the development of each country—China, Japan, and Korea—and the different concrete contents associated with their contextualization and localization.

From the center to the periphery. The turn from structure to process inclines the historian to turn his eye from the center to the periphery. By taking a result-oriented perspective in viewing cultural developments in East Asia, Nishijima was led to identify static features as the four main characteristics of East Asian culture. Following this thread of thought, Nishijima wrote that in the perspective of world history, the East Asian world was one of many premodern historical worlds that existed as “a self-contained, complete historical world.”²⁰ But as recent studies reveal, from late antiquity on, every known ethnic group has engaged in cultural exchanges. From 2000 to 1000 BCE, West and East had already conducted various exchanges, an excellent example being the exchange in metallurgy by way of the Silk Road.²¹ Thus we can say with certainty that East Asia was not a self-contained, complete historical world.

Nishijima’s methodology was based on the supposition that in exchanges among East Asian countries, there was a sort of abstract common center with essential characteristics that were adopted by the peripheral cultures. This view of the history of cultural exchange in East Asia unconsciously implies a

19 Nishijima Sadao, general introduction, in Itagaki, *Iwanami kōza sekai rekishi*, antiquity 4, p. 5. On Nishijima’s historical approach, see Gao Mingshi, op cit., pp. 44 and 70ff.

20 Nishijima Sadao, *ibid.*, p. 7.

21 Victor H. Mair, *Contact and Exchange in the Ancient World*.

cultural and political monism and assumes that in the formation and development of cultures, the peripheral regions moved toward or away from the development path of the center. It also emphasizes that between the center and the peripheral, there was a sort of “principle of subordination,” but no corresponding “principle of coordination.”²²

However, once we opt to view the history of East Asian culture as a process rather than as results, our focus naturally shifts from the center to the periphery.²³ This enables us to see the processes of cultural exchange between countries in this region and to witness the interactions, conflicts, transformations, and syntheses between the self of one people and the selves of other peoples. Consequently, the common destiny and values of East Asian culture cease to emerge as a unique set of core authoritarian values from a discrete center over and above each country. On the contrary, the common core values of East Asian culture were formed in the process of each country’s interaction with the others. Hence, the history of cultural interaction in East Asia is best viewed as a process of formation of cultural subjectivities in each country. As Chen Huihong has recently asserted, “In the processes of interaction and communication, the interlocking of a multiplicity of diverse viewpoints is the perspective that researchers should adopt.”²⁴ In the wake of the change of focus from results to process, and the consequent movement from the center to the periphery, we can see more clearly the plurality of East Asian cultures. Each region has the common features, as Nishijima pointed out, but also the unique and distinguishing features that set it apart.

From texts to political environments. Once we have shifted our focus from results to process in studying the history of cultural exchange in East Asia, the object of our research also shifts from texts *per se* to political environments. In the following analysis, we will look at the relationship between classical interpretations and political power as a case in point.

Before the twentieth century, when studying the history of East Asian countries, intellectuals tended to pore over the Confucian classics. This was because throughout East Asian history, in the imperial setting, the practice of interpreting and citing the Confucian classics were related in a complex fashion with the political power structure. I recently combed through East

22 The terms “principle of subordination” and “principle of coordination” come from Mou Zongsan. See his *Zhongguo wenhua de shengcha*, p. 68.

23 This is not to say, of course, that China at the center is not historically important. In fact, China functioned as the unavoidable other and continues to exert a major impact on other countries in East Asia.

24 Chen Huihong, “Wenhua xiangyu de fangfalun: Pingzhe Zhong-Ou wenhua jiaoliu yanjiu de shiye” (Methodology of cultural interactions: New perspective on Sino-European cultural interaction), p. 253.

Asian Confucian interpretations of the *Analects*, *Mencius*, and other important classics. I found that certain politically sensitive passages in *Mencius* were excluded from the citations of Confucian classics in dialogues between rulers and ministers during the Han (206 BCE–220 CE) and the Tang (618–907) dynasties, from questions on the civil-service examinations during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), and by imperial tutors in Tokugawa Japan (1600–1868). In exploring these questions, I realized that East Asian interpreters of the Confucian classics tended to combine dual identities, Confucians and government officials, into one. This further confirmed the intimate connection between their role as classical commentators and as imperial officials. In sum, the implications of this dual identity are threefold: First, to a large extent, classical interpretation and political power were inseparable. Second, there was certain competition between these two sides. Third, classical interpreters strove to keep these two sides in balance.²⁵

If we adopt the traditional standpoint for studying the history of East Asian culture, our research themes would focus on the classics themselves and the analysis of how gifted intellectuals of each country interpreted the classics. However, if we adopt the new standpoint, aside from focusing on the classics, we would also pay attention to how the contemporary cultural environment and political situation influenced the interpreter's approach to the classics. Furthermore, we would also keep an eye on the question of how the classics in turn might have influenced or changed the interpreter's environment.

C. The Relationship among Global History, Regional History, and National History

The second methodological problem involved in bringing a regional-history approach to the study of cultural exchanges in East Asia is the relationship among global history, regional history, and national history. To start with, taking a regional-history approach in studying the history of cultural exchanges in East Asia does not involve invoking an abstract conceptual framework that prevails perpetually and ubiquitously. Quite the contrary, regional history involves interlocking interactions within concrete settings of specific times and places. The field of cultural exchanges in history definitely registers people's suffering, such as the suffering undergone by Confucian intellectuals in their political environments. We can picture countries' exchanges of envoy missions on horseback, merchants traveling across

25 Chun-chieh Huang, "On the Relationship between Interpretations of the Confucian Classics and Political Power in East Asia: An Inquiry Focusing on the *Analects* and *Mencius*."

borders to exchange merchandise they possessed for that they were short of, intellectuals from different countries offering new interpretations of the classics in light of their own cultural contexts. Regional history gradually comes to live in the interactive relationships between the national histories of each East Asian country. It is certainly not an abstract sphere over and above each country's national history.

In fact, global history and regional history are two interdependent fields of research. Recently scholars have been speaking more of global history and regarding it as a sphere of research that includes the entire globe. Yet the world history that came into vogue after the Second World War is no different in conception from global history. During the postwar period, the *Journal of World History* was established in 1953, and the journal *Human History* commenced publication in 1963.²⁶ Postwar authors of world history tended to stress that historical studies ought to focus on specific historical events in historically significant regions of the world.²⁷ Historical personages and events of each country and region were to be assessed in the context of global history. According to this standard, regional history comprises a marginal sector of regional experience within global history. But if the unique concrete experiences of peoples in different regions are put aside, global history ends up as an empty abstract concept, devoid of content. Fully recognizing that regional history constitutes fundamental content for a meaningful global history, we can go on to say that global history is more adequately understood as transregional history.

D. The Contextual Turn in the Study of Regional History

The third methodological issue in the study of regional history is the contextual turn. The gist of this methodological issue is that in the history of cultural exchanges in East Asia, all cultural products (including the classics and their values) were produced in specific cultural contexts.²⁸ That is, they came from a specific time and place. Hence, in the history of cultural exchange in East Asia, the transmission of cultural products (especially classical texts) to a peripheral area had to involve a contextual turn to become congenial to the locale.

Yi T'oebye (李退溪, 1502–1571), the sixteenth-century Korean master of

26 International Commission for a History of the Scientific and Cultural Development of Mankind, *History of Mankind: Cultural and Scientific Development*.

27 See, for example, L. S. Stavrianos, *The World to 1500: A Global History*, pp. 4f.

28 The expression “cultural product” was coined by Roger Chartier. See his *On the Edge of the Cliff: History, Language, and Practices*.

the philosophy of Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130–1200), spent half of his lifetime editing *Zhuzi shu jieyao* (朱子書節要, The essentials of Zhu Xi; completed in 1556), in which he emphasized that owing to the differences in time and place between Zhu's China and Yi's Korea, he had no choice but to “cut out the dross” (損約) to make Zhu Xi's words palatable to Korean Confucian readers.²⁹ Although Yi's expression “cut out the dross” originally referred to expunging passages, he was also contextualizing Zhu's writings.

The interpretations of Confucius's *Analects* that appeared in Tokugawa Japan (1600–1868) is another case of contextualization. Contextualization in this case involved the transplantation of various classics, originally rooted deeply in the Chinese cultural context, into the Japanese cultural and intellectual context. The process inevitably led to the production of entirely new interpretations. Such transcultural adaptations worked well in at least two contexts in East Asia—the sociopolitical context (especially across the so-called Han-barbarian distinction) and the context of political theory (especially as regards the ruler-minister relationship)—and gave rise to other transcultural problems in the interpretation of the classics.³⁰

Among the cultural products involved in the history of cultural exchange in East Asia, the Confucian classics in particular underwent contextualization at the hands of Japanese and Korean Confucian scholars and officials in those societies and their political courts, where these Confucians had various functions and played many roles. From the Song dynasty (960–1279), Chinese Confucians played a crucial role in both society and the political arena. After passing the civil-service examination, they were promoted to high officials. Upon retiring from office, they would become country gentry. During the Joseon era (1392–1910), Korean Confucians of various ranks could eventually rise to the Yangban (兩班) aristocracy. The Confucians of Tokugawa Japan played the role of intellectuals in the society and were not separated from the political power structure.³¹

The most representative example of contextualization is the term “Zhongguo” (中國, China, literally, Middle Kingdom), which appears frequently in the early classics. In the context of Chinese culture and history, “Zhongguo” refers at once to a cultural and political identity, which, in the Chinese context, are fused into one. However, when Japanese Confucians of the Tokugawa period read the expression “Zhongguo” in the Chinese classics,

29 Yi Hwang, *Jujaseo jeolyo seo* (Preface to selections of the works of Zhu Xi), vol. 3, p. 259.

30 Chun-chieh Huang, *Dechuan Riben Lunyu quanshi shilun* (A study of Tokugawa Confucians' interpretations of the *Analects*), p. 43.

31 See Hiroshi Watanabe, “Jusha, Literati, and Yangban: Confucianists in Japan, China, and Korea.”

they immediately sensed a gap between the political identity and the cultural identity, because, so far as they were concerned, the term “Zhongguo” denoted the homeland of their spirit and culture, even though the term originally meant another land historically and politically. They were convinced that since Japan had truly obtained the Way of Confucius, Japan was more suitably called “Zhongguo” than geographically central China. Similar examples of the contextual turn show vividly that this is a common phenomenon encountered in the study of the history of cultural exchanges in East Asia. In contemporary Taiwan as well, the expression “Zhongguo” has a dual reference to cultural China and political China.³² Contextualization is an important phenomenon in the history of cultural exchange in East Asia, and it will give rise to many research topics in the field.

Once we begin to view the history of cultural exchange in East Asia in light of contextualization, we are better prepared to know how this history illustrates what Clifford Geertz called “thick description.”³³ Although historians began to pay attention to the problem of cultural history in the 1980s,³⁴ I would still like to emphasize that cultural history as the study of cultural exchanges should not stop at examining and confirming people, places, events, and things exchanged, but should also closely examine them and seek the specific significances of the transactions. As Geertz wrote, “[Holding that] man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be that whole web, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.”³⁵ By studying webs of significance in our study of the history of cultural exchange, we can better appreciate the significances of exchanges between countries in the history of East Asia.

III. Problematiques

Now that we are prepared to discuss regional history in connection with the problematques in the study of the history of cultural exchanges in East Asia, I propose the two following issues for further study in this context: interactions of self and other and interactions between cultural exchange and the power structure.

32 For a more detailed discussion, see Chung-chieh Huang, “The Idea of ‘Zhongguo’ and Its Transformation in Early Modern Japan and Contemporary Taiwan.”

33 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture*, p. 5.

34 Georg G. Iggers, *New Directions in European Historiography*, p. 200.

35 Clifford Geertz, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

A. Interactions of Self and Other in the History of Cultural Exchange in East Asia

In Section II, I pointed out that the focus of the study of the history of cultural interactions in East Asia should be shifted from the results to the process of exchange activities. By adopting this shift of attention, we will be better prepared to register the complex problems involved in the interactions, synergies, and conflicts of each country's self with others.

Many academic studies on the problematique of the self and the other have been published in recent years. In 2006 Richard Sorabji, a renowned expert on ancient Greek philosophy, argued that though the self *per se* is difficult to investigate, everyone still exhibits a self in responding to the world. Though the *conceptual meaning* of "self" is indeterminate, the term "self," we can venture to say, generally *refers* to a facet of our interactive activity. Hence, Sorabji advocates, the self is a sort of embodiment in a person's manifold interactions with the world.³⁶ In the Western tradition, the concept of self is typically associated with those of autonomy and rights. Consequently, comparative ethicists tend to emphasize that the concept of self in Confucian philosophy is incompatible with the more individualized and abstract Western notions of self. Recently, however, Kwong-loi Shun has inquired into the practical domain of the broader concept of man in Chinese and Western thought. In particular, he analyzed the Confucian concepts of mind (*xin* 心), will (*zhi* 志), and vital spirit (*qi* 氣), and found that the Western concepts of autonomy and rights are not necessarily incompatible with Confucian thought, just that in the Chinese concept of person, the social dimensions of the person are stressed.³⁷ In the concrete historical experiences of cultural exchanges in East Asia, the concepts of self and other incorporate gendered, political, social, and cultural aspects, etc. As I have illustrated elsewhere,³⁸ in the spectrum between cultural identity and political identity, one's cultural self is more fundamental and inalienable.

In the history of cultural interactions in East Asia, the perception and construction of self tends to be completed in the course of interaction with the other. During the Eastern Jin (317–420), Guo Pu (郭璞, 276–324) wrote in his preface to *Shanhai jing* (山海經, Classic of mountains and seas), "[Other] things do not regard themselves as other. They wait for me and then become my other. Hence, otherness comes from me; things are not inherently

36 Richard Sorabji, "The Self: Is There Such a Thing?"

37 Kwong-loi Shun, "Conception of the Person in Early Confucian Thought."

38 Chun-chieh Huang, "Zhong-Ri wenhua jiaoliu shi zhong 'ziwo' yu 'tazhe' de hudong: Leixing yu hanyi" (The interaction between the "self" and "others" in the Sino-Japanese context: Tensions and implications).

other.”³⁹ Huang Zongxi (黃宗羲, 1610–1695) said, “There are no so-called ten thousand things filling the midst of heaven and earth. The expression ‘ten thousand things’ was entirely given by me [humanity], just as what I call ‘father’ is just my father.”⁴⁰ Both of these passages maintain that the self constituted before the other is recognized, and that matches the experiences recorded in cultural exchanges between China and Korea during the Joseon period. The critiques of Chinese culture and thought by Korean visitors to China reflect their observations of self and other in concrete cultural exchanges between China and Korea. Such critiques also reveal that Korean visitors’ perceptions of self preceded their perceptions of Chinese others.

In many situations, encounters and interactions with the other aroused important aspects of the self. Thus early in the twentieth century when Japanese sinologists such as Naitō Konan (内藤湖南, 1866–1934), Yoshikawa Kijiro (吉川幸次郎, 1904–1980), Aoki Masao (青木正兒, 1887–1964), and Uno Tetsuto (宇野哲人, 1875–1974) toured China, they all started out with a firm Japanese sense of political and cultural self. In the setting of Chinese politics and culture, they invariably underwent a realization process, from subconscious to conscious.⁴¹ The experience of Uno Tetsuto, Tokyo University professor of Chinese philosophy, provides an excellent example. He felt deep reverence for Confucius, yet while traveling along the Great Wall at Badaling in 1906, he climbed atop the Great Wall to sing the Japanese national anthem.⁴²

Interactions between self and other produced images of the other, especially in the self’s representations of the other—to the extent of sketching “imaginative geographies” of the other.⁴³ These images are particularly evident in travel journals, written accounts of East Asian travelers in neighboring countries. For example, after China ceded Taiwan to Japan in 1895, several Chinese intellectuals and officials toured Taiwan and left firsthand accounts of various aspects of Taiwan, expressed from their Chinese perspec-

39 Guo Pu, *Shanhai jing* (Classic of mountains and seas), p. 1a.

40 Huang Zongxi, *Huang Zongxi quanji* (Complete works of Huang Zongxi), vol. 1, *Mengzi shishuo* (The teachings of Mencius, sec. 7, “Wanwu jie bei zhang” (Myriad things are in myself), p. 149.

41 Huang Chun-chieh, “Ershi shiji chuqi Riben hanxuejia yanzhong de wenhua Zhongguo yu xianshi Zhongguo” (Cultural China and the real China in the eyes of Japanese sinologists in the beginning of the twentieth century).

42 Uno Tetsuto, *Shina bunmei ki* (An account of Chinese civilization). For an account of Uno Tetsuto singing Japan’s national anthem atop the Great Wall, see p. 60 of the Chinese translation. For an account of Uno Tetsuto’s travels in China, see Joshua A. Fogel, “Confucian Pilgrimage: Uno Tetsuto’s Travels in China, 1906.”

43 D. Clayton, “Critical Imperial and Colonial Geographies.”

tive. These works include *Quan Tai youji* (全台遊記, Travelogue of all of Taiwan) by Chi Zhicheng (池志徵, traveled in Taiwan from 1891 to 1894), *Kunying riji* (鯤瀛日記, Kunying diary) by Shi Jingchen (施景琛, traveled in Taiwan from March to April 1919), and the compilation *Taiwan youji* (台灣遊記, Taiwan travelogue) by Zhang Zunxu (張遵旭, traveled in Taiwan from April 4 to 20, 1916).⁴⁴

Sometimes the self's observations or descriptions of the other came from reports of official delegates' interactions, such as the accounts of Tang China by Japanese envoys and the accounts of Ming China by Korean envoys. Occasionally people drifted to other countries because of sudden changes in the weather or by accident. In 1826, after a Japanese ship drifted to Shanghai, the Chinese composed poems dedicated to the Japanese refugees. Japanese also drifted to Guangdong and wrote descriptions of Guangzhou Harbor.⁴⁵ During the Qing dynasty, Cai Tinglan (蔡廷蘭), a presented scholar from Penghu, encountered a storm while riding a boat to Taiwan and drifted to Vietnam in 1835. The following year, after traveling overland back to Fujian, he compiled his observations in *Hainan Zazhu* (海南雜著, Miscellany of the southern seas).⁴⁶ All of these historical records provide important sources concerning the self's representations of others.

B. Interactions between Cultural Exchange and the Power Structure in East Asia

The second problematique in the study of the history of cultural interactions in East Asia lies in the forms of political power that came into play in cultural exchanges among East Asian countries. This issue inevitably leads us to reflect on imperial China's role as the unavoidable other to other East Asian countries. China's vast imperial scale started with the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE) and grew ever stronger and more mature. Once the central Chinese imperial order was established, it produced a comprehensive intellectual infrastructure and system for cultural transmission. Kan Huai-chen has summed up the complex relationships among the imperial order, the Confucian state, and the Confucian school of thought, and has provided issues

44 These three books are collected in *Taiwan youji* 台灣遊記 (Taiwan Travelogues) (Taipei: Taibei Yinhang Jingji Yanjiu Shi, 1960).

45 See Matsuura Akira, *Edo jidai Tōsen ni yoru Nit-Chū bunka kōryū* (Sino-Japanese cultural interaction via Chinese ships during Edo period), pp. 310–344.

46 Cai Tinglan, *Hainan zazhu* (Miscellany of the southern seas). For Cai's biography, see Lin Hao, *Penghu tingzhi* (Stories about Penghu), sec. 14, Yiwen b. For a recent study of Cai Tinglan, see Chen Yiyuan, *Cai Tinglan ji qi "Hainan zazhu"* (Cai Tinglan and His *Miscellany of the southern seas*).

for further study.⁴⁷ According to him, the Chinese political order unfolded as a special East Asian worldview,⁴⁸ and this worldview influenced the theory of royal power throughout the entire region.⁴⁹ Cultural interactions in East Asia unfolded within the interlocking network of imperial power structures.

Related issues to be dealt with include the following: First, after the fall of a center of political power in East Asia, the fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644 for instance, what changes start to appear in cultural-exchange activities? What is its impact on the domestic policies, thought, and culture in other East Asian countries, such as Korea?⁵⁰ Second, in the history of interactions between China and Japan, to what extent and depth are cultural exchanges influenced by the two countries' power structures?

IV. Possible Research Topics

On the basis of the discussion above, I suggest the following three topics for further study: the exchange of people, the exchange of goods, especially texts, and the exchange of ideas.

A. Exchange of People: Professional Intermediate Agents and Their Observations of Others

In the history of East Asia, people of each country traveled along other countries' roads, paying private visits back and forth. Japanese envoys to China can be traced back to the medieval period, as can Korean ministers and intellectuals dispatched to China. There were also exchanges of envoys between Japan and Korea. All of them left quantities of historical materials worth further examination.

Most of the people who actually conducted the cultural exchanges in East

47 Kan Huai-chen, *Huangquan, liyi yu jingdian quanshi: Zhongguo gudai zhengzhi shi yanjiu* (Imperial power, rituals, and interpretations of the classics: A study of traditional Chinese political history).

48 Kan Huai-chen, "Chongxin sikao Dongya wangquan yu shijieguan: Yi 'tianxia' yu 'Zhongguo' wei guanjianci" (Rethinking East Asian imperial power and worldview in terms of the key terms "all under heaven" and "central kingdom").

49 Kan Huai-chen, *Tianxia guojia: Dongya wangquan lun* (On the East Asian imperial power).

50 For studies of Korean reverence for the Zhou dynasty and yearning for the Ming in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and for Korean reflections on intellectual currents in the Ming dynasty, see Sun Weiguo, *Da Ming qihao yu xiao Zhonghua yishi: Chaoxian wangchao zun Zhou si Ming wenti yanjiu, 1637-1800* (Flag and title of the Ming dynasty and small-China consciousness: Research on Joseon dynasty respect for the Zhou dynasty and yearning for the Ming).

Asia were what Yang Liansheng described as “professional intermediate agents” (媒介人物), including merchants, entrepreneurs, purchasing agents, compradors, labor-hiring agents, marriage matchmakers, gatekeepers serving as messengers, envoys, missionaries, pastors, high priests, wizards, teachers, translators, and interpreters.⁵¹ Private intermediate agents were not only prime movers in the political and economic activities of each country, but also important carriers of each country’s social and cultural values. The first manifestation of cultural exchange in East Asia was in the exchange of people. Hence, these agents are worthy objects of study for the history of cultural exchange in East Asia.

B. Exchange of Goods, Especially Texts

The second suggested research topic is the exchange of goods in East Asia. A special feature of cultural exchange in this region was the exchange of books and texts. The export of Chinese literary texts to Japan in the ninth century has been estimated to total about 1,568 titles. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, 70 to 80 percent of the books that Japan imported were written in Chinese.⁵² Among these books, such important classics as Confucius’s *Analects* and *Mencius* had a deep and far-reaching influence on Japanese thinkers.⁵³ Moreover, the Japanese successfully preserved some Chinese classics, and in turn exported them back to China after these classics were lost there. From 1395 to 1443 Japan sent envoys to Korea roughly every year in search of important Buddhist classics, including *Da zang jing* (大藏經), *Da banruo jing* (大般若經), and *Fahua jing* (法華經).⁵⁴ These cases all reflect the intimate cultural relationship between China, Japan, and Korea. Accordingly, Wang Yong suggested that besides the Silk Road, East Asia had another route of cultural exchange: the Book Route.⁵⁵

51 Yang Liansheng, “Zhongguo wenhua de meijie renwu (Professional intermediate agents of Chinese culture)” see especially p. 244.

52 Yan Shaodang, *Riben cang Songren wenji shanben gouchen* (Ferretting out the rare Song literary collections preserved in Japan), pp. 1f.

53 See Chun-chieh Huang, *Dechuan Riben Lunyu quanshi shilun*, and Zhang Kunjiang, *Riben Dechuan shidai guwenpai zhi wangdao zhengzhi lun: yi Yiteng Renzhai, Daisheng Zulai wei zhongxin* (Politics of the kingly way of the School of Classical Learning in Tokugawa Japan: Focusing on Itō Jinsai and Ogyū Sorai).

54 See Kang Chuchin, “Haeje” (Introduction), in *Haehaeng chongjae* (Collections of Travelogues).

55 See Wang Yong, *Zhong-Ri ‘shuji zhi lu’ yanjiu* (The “book route” between China and Japan).

C. Exchange of Ideas

The discussions above on the exchange of people and material goods, especially texts, have significant implications for the exchange of thought and ideas. This is the third recommended theme in the study of the history of cultural exchanges in East Asia. Under this theme we find numerous research problems regarding exchanged texts. Moreover, since China was perceived as the unavoidable other, also worth exploring are how Chinese thought affected Japan and Korea, and how Japan and Korea maintained a self identity despite this influence.

The impact of Chinese thought on Japan and Korea. There always existed a huge gap between Chinese thought and local conditions of the peripheral countries of East Asia. The acceptance of *Mencius* in Japan is a good example. In Tokugawa Japan the political system clearly rejected Mencius's political thought, so as soon as *Mencius* was imported to Japan, this work immediately drew attacks from the Sorai school (徂徠學派) and aroused debates between the Classical Meaning school (古義派) and the Zhu Xi school.⁵⁶ These intellectual waves are worth further scrutiny.

The problem of self identity in East Asian cultural exchanges. In the close cultural relations among countries in East Asia, China, the huge unavoidable other, always stirred up the problem of self-identity in the peripheral regions. A prime example in eighteenth-century Japan is the debates between Tō Teikan (1732–1797) and the National Learning school thinker Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801) over the provenance and nature of Japanese culture. Tō Teikan believed that Japanese cultural elements such as the imperial system, the language, names, etc., originated in Korea, and that the clan Zhen-Han (辰韓, Jin-Han in Korean) was descended from remnants of the vanquished Qin dynasty. Tō Teikan's theory that Japan's culture was largely borrowed from overseas aroused forceful criticism from Motoori Norinaga, who called Tō Teikan a madman.⁵⁷ This dispute is known as the Korea problem in the history of Japanese thought. Throughout this debate one can easily sense the projection of gargantuan China in the background. This important phenomenon in the study of cultural exchange in East Asia is worthy of further study.

In the course of approximately 1,500 years of cultural exchange in East Asia, the range of possible research themes is not limited to the above-mentioned exchanges of people, material goods (especially texts), and thought

56 See Zhang Kunjiang, *op. cit.*, chap. 5, pp. 219–286.

57 See Tō Teikan, “Shōkōhatsu” (Spontaneous thoughts), Motoori Norinaga, “Kenkyōjin” (Madman), and also Koyasu Nobukuni, *Hōhō toshite no Edo* (Edo as method), pp. 16–26.

and ideas. Aside from these, there were also transmissions of political systems (such as the Chinese imperial system to the peripheral countries), of religious faith (such as faith in the bodhisattva Guanyin [觀音]), etc. Any of these would make a good topic for further inquiry.

V. Conclusion

As globalization in the twenty-first century accelerates and unfolds, it is denationalizing and deregionalizing the countries of East Asia.⁵⁸ Yet it is also interconnecting regions of the globe.⁵⁹ These new developments have made a major impact on nation-states, an idea that prevailed in the twentieth century.⁶⁰ Still, it remains the case that in economic activities in the age of globalization, each person remains first and foremost a citizen of a nation; only in a derivative sense can a person be reckoned a citizen of the global village. While recommending a regional approach in the study of the history of cultural interactions in East Asia, I still insist on national history, so that the purview of historical research is properly expanded, and so that the purview of global history will be sufficiently concrete and well grounded in the future.⁶¹

In the second section of this paper I recommended adopting a regional approach to the study of the history of cultural interactions in East Asia. Methodologically, this implies a shift of focus from the results to the process of such cultural exchanges. This adoption of a more dynamic viewpoint in the study of cultural exchange in East Asia would push the focus of such study from the center outward to the periphery, from the original text to the environment in which the text was reinterpreted.

In section 3, I also recommended taking up two problematiques as starting points for research on the history of cultural exchange in East Asia. The first one was the interaction and balance of stress between self and other in the process of cultural exchange in East Asia. The second one was the relationship between the activities of cultural exchange and the power structure of each East Asian country. In section 4, I proposed that, among possible research themes to pursue in this field, it would be fruitful to focus on exchanges of people (especially professional intermediate agents), of material

58 Ulrich Beck, *What Is Globalization?*

59 Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics*, pp. 4f.

60 Peter F. Drucker, "The Global Economy and the Nation State."

61 National history is still being discussed in recent publications. See, for example, Stefan Berger, Mark Donovan, and Kevin Passmore, eds., *Writing National Histories: Western Europe since 1800*, and Stefan Berger, ed., *Writing the Nation: A Global Perspective*.

goods (especially texts), and of thought and ideas, among the countries of East Asia.

With the rise of Asia, and East Asia in particular, in the twenty-first century, and with the globalization currently underway, the state-centered studies of East Asia in the humanities and social sciences has gradually given way to considering East Asia as a whole. For example, Tokyo University used to have a chair in Chinese philosophy, but it has been redesignated as the chair in East Asian thought and cultural studies. The Institute for Cultural Interaction Studies at Kansai University started publishing the *Journal of East Asian Cultural Interaction Studies* (東アジア文化交渉研究) in 2008.

Recently, Ying-shih Yu looked back at Chinese intellectuals' obsession with the Western analytic models of Pragmatism and Marxism during most of the twentieth century, and noted that in the past twenty years a new turn in the study of cultural history has taken place in the international historical community. He hoped that Chinese historians would truly immerse themselves in traditional Asian culture and devise new concepts and methods for tracing the Chinese historical experience with greater probity. Preferably, they would not again employ problematiques and methods from the outside, such as theories and practices adopted from the Western world. Yu asserted that a society and its people merit study not just because they are a part of the larger world but, more importantly, because they bear intrinsic value in their own right.⁶² Taking a regional-history approach to the study of the history of cultural interaction in East Asia represents a way of returning to and immersing ourselves in the cultural traditions of East Asia to appreciate and understand its diversity and richness.

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62 Ying-shih Yu, "Clio's New Turn and the Rediscovery of Tradition in Asia."

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