



Preface : Japanology as East Asian Studies

著者	Choi Gwan
journal or publication title	Journal of Cultural Interaction in East Asia
volume	4
page range	1-5
year	2013-03
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/10112/10490

Preface

Japanology as East Asian Studies

CHOI Gwan*

I would like to begin with an examination of the designations that have been used for the region to which we belong. The region has been called variously *Kyokutō* 極東 (Far East), *Tōhigashi* 遠東 (Far East), *Tōyō* 東洋 (Orient), *Tōhoku Ajia* 東北アジア (Northeast Asia), and *Higashi Ajia* 東アジア (East Asia). As can be deduced from the fact that the terms *Kyokutō* and *Tōhigashi* derive from the English designation, “Far East,” the words signify an east distant from Europe. That is, the terminology is conceived from a notion of European centralism. The term *Tōyō* (Orient) designates the expanse of area on the eastern side of Turkey, and not simply the regions centering around Japan, China, and Korea. Thus, in many cases, different people intend different parameters by these terms. Further, it can be said that the “East” is a term used in contraposition to the “West,” and as such is a dualistic concept of the West. The terms *Tōhoku Ajia* or *Hokutō Ajia* 北東アジア (both meaning Northeast Asia) are mainly geopolitical concepts that usually include Far East Russia and Mongolia besides Japan, China, and Korea. Lastly, the designation *Higashi Ajia* has been used equally vaguely to indicate the same general region as northeast Asia, but in many cases has connoted cultural concepts.

As I have indicated, it is difficult to settle on one specific designation for the region. The German scholar Reinhard Erich Zöllner in his book, *Einführung in die Geschichte Ostasiens* (Introduction to the History of East Asia) proposes a suggestive theory:

I define East Asia as “a region in which chopsticks are used for eating.” East Asia is not simply a spatial world but a cultural one as well. It is an area in which have existed interregional systems where political and economic interaction characterized by subtropical monsoon and historical cultures and civilizations has consistently occurred.

If the definition of Asia is based on the above points, it includes Mongolia,

* A professor, Department of Japanese Language and Literature, Korea University and President of the Society

the Korean peninsula, the Japanese archipelago, Taiwan, and even Vietnam with China provisionally at the center. We can even define the larger area in its broadest sense as the ASEAN countries (the Philippines, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore), Russia, and a part of central Asia.

In other words, we can say that East Asia until pre-modern times was an area that centered on Chinese culture or was influenced directly or indirectly by Chinese culture. It is a region that accomplished great developments across many fields beyond the Sinitic writing system. For example, in terms of spirituality, it has created the worlds of Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and other religions. For systems, it produced the Ritsuryō (*lūling*) legal codes, the civil service examination system, bureaucracy, and feudalism, among others. For technological advances, such inventions as paper, explosives, printing, porcelains and pottery, and the mariner's compass can be listed as examples. What was the highest standard in cultures in the world at the time spread to surrounding areas. The various peoples in the periphery aspired after Chinese culture, imitating it, digesting it, and sometimes expelling it as they developed their own cultures. From this point of view, the East Asian world had certain parts of Chinese culture in common.

Of course, not all of this Chinese culture was created on the Chinese mainland. If we trace it back to its origins, the cultures of the neighboring northern peoples, Islamic culture, Indian culture, and even Mediterranean culture could be said to be related. I will include these elements as Chinese culture, however, because they were spread after being Sinicized through Chinese script.

Further, this does not mean that the cultures of Korea and Japan, which have different languages and ethnic groups than does China, were completely overtaken by Chinese culture. Indeed, the fact that they repulsed Chinese culture and maintained and developed their own traditional cultures and identities cannot be overlooked. Thus, it could be said that East Asia is a region that strongly manifests a commonly shared Chinese culture as well as each individual country's own unique culture.

In the modern era, most of the region except Japan suffered damage from Western imperialism, and has continued to have opposing ideologies since the end of WWII. Only Japan in Asia succeeded in westernizing, modernizing, and industrializing at an early stage to build itself into a major power. It is axiomatic that Japan concurrently inflicted inestimable damage on Korea, China, and other neighboring states. As mentioned above, East Asia has many problems, but it is now maturing into a central region of world development in conjunction with the dynamic transformation it is undergoing. The motive force behind this maturation process is a long history and culture that was

maintained and developed in the distant past from before the formation of modern nation states. The current success is owing to the wisdom accumulated by the peoples of East Asia through the process of bearing the trials of the modern era.

Through the centuries, the pre-modern states of Japan, China, and Korea took a stance toward each other of admiration and disdain within the paradigm of central, peripheral, and outlying countries. This rubric was completely reversed at the end of the nineteenth century through the disparities of national power that arose from differing degrees of adoption of Western culture and modernization. Now that another century has passed, the structure is again being reformulated under the umbrella of the world's central power, the United States. The three above-mentioned countries of East Asia are being confronted with the necessity to search for a new paradigm in this scenario. If the directions that these three East Asian nations must walk are greatly simplified, they can be defined as follows. 1) Choose the path of building a total regional bloc as has the European Union, and strengthen the political and economic community in East Asia to form a new cultural sphere; 2) Divide into pro-US or pro-China camps, resulting in the East Asian bloc proceeding along divided lines; 3) Japan, China, and Korea taking positions of cooperation and rivalry vis-à-vis each other in different fields and each walking their own separate path.

In spite of standing at the crossroads of such choices, it cannot be said that these three East Asian nations have been actively endeavoring to understand their own or each other's countries in the context of regional dynamics. Compared with Europe or the Islamic bloc nations, East Asia has long had an identity as a single cultural bloc in name only, and there is a strong possibility of growing competition and even antagonistic relations within the region as each nation pursues profits for itself.

It is now the time to consider seriously the region's future based on calmly acknowledging that even if East Asia is classified as one cultural and regional bloc, the region has only a very loose commonality in actuality. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the paradigm that had been maintained of center, periphery, and outlying areas began to crumble. The task of Japan, China, and Korea must be to search for new paths that make prosperity possible both for their own countries and for the region at large. The fundamental premise necessary to achieve this goal, unlike in the past, must be a new sense of values and cultural awareness based on equal tripartite interaction. We must strive to create a common vision of a regional bloc.

From this point of view, we have come to a point when we must seek new paths for new paradigms in scholarship. Up until now East Asia has been researched as an object within the frame of Western scholarship. It is time to

cast off the West-centric, colonial, and racist character intrinsic to early modern Western scholarship and to pursue scholarship that puts East Asia at the core. At the same time, the West and the modern era should not be criticized indiscriminately; neither should we advocate a return to the pre-modern era. We must chart a course that contributes to humankind via East Asia. The long pre-modern history of the East Asian world, its bitter experiences in the modern era, and the knowledge gained from overcoming these experiences will make possible scholarship for humankind as East Asia maintains itself as the main constituent.

It is necessary as a part of our embarking on the path to such East Asian scholarship to reexamine and reconfigure terminology that we have thus far unthinkingly used. For instance, the term racialism (民族主義), which is the translation of the term “nationalism,” has been used in the West for the period after the Napoleonic Wars, but this concept cannot explain the problem of the relationships among East Asian peoples. It is inappropriate to define and argue East Asian society, arts, and literature based on Western concepts.

It is important to grasp East Asian studies not fundamentally as a world divided into units of pre-modern and modern eras, and a period of casting off modernity, but to understand it as a vast, continuous current. This is because East Asian studies is itself a product of the era of casting off the modern period in concert with globalization.

From this perspective the study of East Asia is first, research into the peoples and cultures that comprise East Asia; and second, research into the relationship between East Asia and the external world. For this reason it must be research that is open to inside and outside the region and must emphasize the importance of integrating humanities and social sciences into comprehensive, synthesized whole.

Now is the time that Japanology must adopt a research methodology that is commensurate with the East Asian era, or even the global era. It must first be positioned as a pivot in East Asian studies.

In order to truly comprehend a nation, an understanding must be sought on a fundamental level of that nation’s natural environment, and its historical and social vicissitudes. The overall flow of how its cultural embodiment has existed in its natural environment must be comprehended. Japanology has traditionally consisted of a research methodology that focused mainly on Japan and directly examined its unique culture on a mono-national level.

It is clear now, however, that all cultures have mutual relationships directly and indirectly with neighboring cultures, or in a broader sense, with world cultures. First what is sought is a change in consciousness to comprehend the relationship between Japan and its neighbors, and of the objective characteristics of Japanese culture within the construct of the natural world. It is

necessary to compare the commonalities and differences between Japan and neighboring Korea and China, compare what kind of influential relationships exist between Korea and China, and to indicate somewhat more objectively the distinguishing features that Japan has in the East Asian cultural sphere. We must indicate a directionality through these aspects that understands Japan ultimately within the framework of human culture. That is, we should examine Japanese culture along the lines of understanding the country of Japan, comparing it with China and Korea, understanding it within East Asia, and then as a world culture.

It is for this reason that we must conduct broad, profound research on Japan rather than the detailed, narrow research methodologies common today. We must depart from the era and genre-specific research environment to an approach that was considered taboo until just recently: interdisciplinary, integrated research that is not limited to era or genre. If we proceed in this direction, not only will research creativity have limitless potential, but the unique qualities of Japanese culture vis-à-vis universal qualities will become apparent and Japanese culture will become better positioned within human cultures. Further, this perspective should not be limited to Japanology, but should be applied to Korean studies, Sinology, and other fields to become a foundation for East Asian studies.