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Articles

On Decontextualization and Recontextualization in East Asian Cultural Interactions: Some Methodological Reflections

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Abstract

In the history of cultural interaction in East Asia, decontextualization and recontextualization can readily be observed in the exchanges of texts, people, and ideas among the different regions. When a text, person, or idea is transmitted from its home country into another country, it is first decontextualized and then recontextualized into the new cultural environment. These processes of decontextualization and recontextualization I refer to as “a contextual turn.” The present paper discusses methodological problems involved in the study of decontextualization and recontextualization.

Section 1 introduces the paper. Section 2 then clarifies that “East Asia” is not an abstract term ranging over the countries of China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, but rather refers to the dynamic, real process of concrete cultural interactions among these living cultures. On the dramatic stage of these interactions, China plays the role of the significant other to the many other actors. China is certainly not the sole conductor of the symphony of East Asia. Section 3 shows that the methodology of the history of ideas can be used when studying the phenomena of decontextualization. But one can easily become ensnared in what I call “the blind spot of textualism.” Section 4 provides an analytic discussion of an effective methodology for studying recontextualization that involves looking at the concrete exchange of texts, people, and ideas against a specific historical background, and then highlighting the subjective emotions of the intermediate agents in these cultural exchanges as the agents navigate the processes of decontextualization and recontextualization.

This paper concludes by stressing that East Asian cultural interactions are dynamic processes and not static structures. Therefore, in our study of the history of cultural interactions in East Asia, we must seek a dynamic equilibrium between textualism and contextualism, as well as between fact and value or emotion.

Key words: contextual turn, decontextualization, recontextualization,
East Asia, China, history of ideas, textualism, contextualism

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1 Introduction

In the intimate exchange of people, ideas, faiths, and texts among the various countries of the East Asian cultural region, we commonly observe contextual turns. For example, many ideas and texts may originally be produced in one country (e.g., China) and are then transmitted to another country (e.g., Japan or Korea). Upon reception, they are decontextualized, since they are now outside of their native sociocultural setting. As they are recontextualized into the cultural-intellectual milieu of the receiving country, they are then infused with new meaning.¹ After undergoing this contextual turn, these transmitted people, ideas, faiths, and texts receive new meaning and also bear new values.

In studying such a contextual turn in the history of cultural interactions in East Asia, the most effective method is to shift one's focus from the results to the process of such cultural interaction. In this way, the researcher's focus can be shifted from static results to the dynamic developments of cultures in East Asia.²

This change of focus in research from the results to the process of contextualization means that the researcher should engage with texts, ideas, and people as they are reflected *in the process* of cultural exchange, through which decontextualization and recontextualization are exhibited. Yet in analyzing these two kinds of phenomena, the researcher must beware of the problems of textualism and contextualism, and the labyrinthine relationship between facts and values, in the history of cultural interaction.

This paper aims to explore the research methods and related problems in the study of such decontextualization and recontextualization, in order better to understand the relations between text and context, and between fact and value, when studying the history of cultural interactions in East Asia.

1 For a discussion of the contextual turn in the history of cultural exchanges between China and Japan, see Chun-chieh Huang, "On the Contextual Turn in the Tokugawa Japanese Interpretation of the Confucian Classics: Types and Problems," *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 9, no. 2 (June 2010): 211–223.

2 See Chun-chieh Huang 黃俊傑, *Dongya wenhua jiaoliu zhong de rujia jingdian yu linian: Hudong, zhuanhua yu ronghe* 東亞文化交流中的儒家經典與理念：互動、轉化與融合 (Taipei: Taida Chuban Zhongxin, 2010), pp. 3–38; Chun-chieh Huang, "Some Observations on the Study of the History of Cultural Interactions in East Asia," *Journal of Cultural Interaction in East Asia* 1 (March 2010): 11–35.

2 East Asia and China in the History of Cultural Interactions in East Asia

2.1 East Asia as a Synthetic Cultural Body

We can commence our discussion by first considering the term “East Asia” in the history of cultural interaction in East Asia. Recently, Fujita Takao, an expert on East-West cultural negotiation, stressed that East Asia should be viewed as a cultural complex.³ At the same, he recommended going beyond the old nation-centric approach to pioneer the new field of East Asian cultural interaction. It must be emphasized, however, that the “East Asia” mentioned in “East Asian cultural complex” is not a static, unchanging geographical region. Rather, it signifies the dynamic body of cultural exchange among the countries of East Asia. Consequently, studies of the history of cultural interaction in East Asia must focus on the process of cultural exchange rather than on the results that follow from those interactions. For this reason, “East Asia” should be understood as it actually presents in the course of such exchanges among constituent East Asian countries, not as an abstract concept ranging over and above the individual countries.⁴

2.2 China in the History of Cultural Interaction in East Asia

During the past 2,000 years of cultural interactions in East Asia, China tended to play a leading role. We must also note, however, that for the last several thousand years, cultural interactions in East Asia were a complex drama, rather than a symphony. In drama, actors play out their individual roles. So too in the drama of cultural interaction over the past several thousand years, China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam have each gradually established their own cultural and political subjectivities, which they then play out. In other words, each East Asian culture first sprouted an essence that then gradually informed its existence. Cultural interaction in East Asia during the past several thousand years was not like the performance of a symphony, led by China as the musical conductor. On the contrary, in the process of cultural exchange, where the cultures of Japan, Korea, and Vietnam formed their own subjectivities, China was at most a significant other rather than the sole center directing the performances of the cultures on its periphery.

3 Fujita Takao, “Towards the Creation of East Asian Cultural Interaction Studies,” *Journal of East Asian Cultural Interaction Studies* 1 (2008): 9–15.

4 See note 2 above.

3 The Phenomena and Methodology of Decontextualization in Cultural Interactions in East Asia

3.1 Decontextualization and the Methodology of the History of Ideas

Having examined the meaning of “East Asia” and “China” in the process of cultural interactions in East Asia, we are now in a position to discuss the first process associated with East Asian cultural exchange: decontextualization. “Decontextualization” refers to what happens after elements of culture produced in one region. These cultural elements can be texts, such as Confucius’s *Analects* or the *Mencius*; concepts, such as the Han-barbarian distinction, the distinction between humane king and cruel despot, the public-private distinction, the concepts of loyalty and filiality; or personages, such as Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming. In decontextualization, such cultural elements undergo analysis and assessment by the intelligentsia of the receiving region, who view these imports (texts, concepts, personages) apart from their original context and meaning, so that these texts, concepts, and personages are divested of any situatedness in their being accepted, understood, and digested by that intelligentsia.

Naturally, the research methods for inquiring into decontextualization in cultural exchange is diverse and multifaceted; no single approach alone is universally applicable. In the last century, however, a relatively effective and prominent method was formulated and used by Arthur O. Lovejoy (1873–1962). His method was called “the history of ideas.”⁵

Lovejoy mentioned that while many academic disciplines (such as the history of philosophy) are intimately related to ideas, studies in these academic disciplines that pursue the methods of the history of ideas would be more interdisciplinary.⁶ The most important task in Lovejoy’s history of ideas was to analyze the evolutionary process of ideas, for example, the impact of ancient thought on modern thought or the impact of philosophical ideas on literature, art, religion, and social thought. The core task of the history of ideas is interpreting what Lovejoy called “idea units.” Lovejoy compared such analysis of idea units to the sort of analysis done by analytic chemists.⁷

The study of cultural interactions in East Asia presents many concrete cases of decontextualization suitable for investigation using the analytic method of the history of ideas. For example, the term *zhongguo* (central state;

5 Arthur O. Lovejoy, “The Historiography of Ideas,” in his *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1948), pp. 1–13.

6 Arthur O. Lovejoy, “Reflections on the History of Ideas,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1, no. 1 (January 1940): 7.

7 Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 3–23.

contemporary term for China) appears frequently in ancient Chinese classics. This complex idea can be placed in and analyzed within many idea units, such as the geographical *zhongguo*, the political *zhongguo*, the cultural *zhongguo*, the intellectual *zhongguo*, etc. The *Book of Odes* contains many references to a political and geographical *zhongguo*. The three commentaries on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*—*Zuo zhuan*, *Gongyang zhuan*, and *Guliang zhuan*—suffuse the term *zhongguo* with cultural significance and frequently mention the idea of *zhongguo* in the context of the Han-barbarian distinction. In the thought of Confucius and Mencius, the term *zhongguo* is even more abundantly endowed with cultural significance. In their texts, *zhongguo* is used most predominantly in the cultural sense. In the premodern political order of East Asia, *zhongguo* carries the political connotation of Celestial Empire (*tianxia*) and the cultural connotation of a Chinese cultural homeland, thus synthesizing the two idea units of a political and cultural *zhongguo*.⁸

Interestingly, this Lovejoyan idea complex for *zhongguo* (hereafter “central state”) went through new permutations once the Chinese classics were transmitted to Japan. For example, the seventeenth-century Confucian scholar Yamaga Sokō 山鹿素行 (1622–1685) decontextualized the idea of a central state, ridding the political use of the term of its Chinese context by referring to “our court” (中朝, Japan) as “the central state (*zhongguo*).”⁹ Furthermore, the eighteenth-century scholar Sakuma Taika 佐久間太華 (d. 1783) used the cultural connotation of “attaining the mean”¹⁰ to revise the definition of “the central state” and claimed that Japan alone deserved to be called “the central state.” In the eighteenth century, the Korean Confucian Chōng Dasan 丁茶山 (1762–1836) said, “With the rule of Yu, Shun, Yu, and Tang, there was the so-called [political] central state. With the teachings of Confucius, Yan Hui, Zisi, and Mencius, there was the so-called [cultural-ethical] central state. Where is this so-called central state today?”¹¹ He thus synthesized the idea of a cultural central state with the ideas of a geographical and political central state. The above account of the idea of *zhongguo* in

8 Chun-chieh Huang, “The Idea of ‘Zhongguo’ and Its Transformation in Early Modern Japan and Contemporary Taiwan,” *Journal of Kanbun Studies in Japan* 2 (March 2007): 398–408.

9 Yamaga Sokō 山鹿素行, *Chūchō jijitsu* 中朝事實. In Hirose Naruse 廣瀬豊, ed., *Yamaga Sokō zenshū* 山鹿素行全集 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1942), vol. 13, bk. 1, p. 234.

10 Sakuma Taika 佐久間太華, *Wakan meiben* 和漢明辨, in *Nibon julin sōsho* 日本儒林叢書 (Tokyo: Hō Shuppan, 1978), vol. 4, “Disputations,” “Preface,” p. 1.

11 Chōng Yakyong 丁若鏞, *Yōyudang chōnsō* 與猶堂全書 (Seoul: Minjok Munhwa Mungo, 2001), vol. 13, pp. 393–394. [Au: I don’t know Korean. Please check that romanization is correct.]

the history of cultural exchange in East Asia shows the decontextualization process that this idea went through in Tokugawa Japan and later in eighteenth-century Chosŏn Korea. This example offers a vivid illustration of the applicability of Lovejoy's methodology for analyzing idea units in different contexts.

By applying Lovejoy's methodology, we can examine whether the idea of the central state stressed the idea unit of a geographical, political, or cultural central state in the minds of Tokugawa Japanese and Chosŏn Korean intellectuals and officials. Moreover, we can consider whether, in using the term *zhongguo*, they were using one, two, or several of these constituent idea units in their discourses. We need to ask: At what time and place and under what conditions was the term used, and by whom? Was the term *zhongguo* being used in the process of decontextualization or as its product?

3.2 Limitations of the Method of the History of Ideas

The method of the history of ideas regards systems of thought as integrated idea complexes of idea units. For this reason, it is applicable in studying decontextualization in cultural exchange, and for analyzing how the culture or ideas of a particular region can have their original meanings set aside and new meanings added within idea systems.

However, this method also suffers from a serious limitation. That is, it tends to be focused on independently formed and evolved intellectual systems, apart from the impact of external social, political, or economic factors. The development of many thoughts and concepts led to the formation of a "great chain of being."¹² This method is based on a tacit hypothesis about human nature, namely, that human beings can transcend the world and exist independently of their environment. Consequently, it assumes that there need not be any relationship between human concept formation and development, and the world. Such a hypothesis about human nature cannot lead to an understanding of the real world of human affairs, and thus has a number of serious blind spots.

This sort of methodological limitation becomes apparent in the study of cultural interactions in East Asia. In the history of East Asian cultural interaction, intermediate agents, such as intellectuals and officials, were carriers of Confucian values. At a minimum, what they absorbed was a practical family- and community-centered Confucian ethics, and they regarded the common social welfare as their aim.¹³ These intermediate agents shuttled around East

12 See note 7 above.

13 For a recent discussion of Neo-Confucian ethics, see David Wong, "Rights and Community in Confucianism," in Kwong-loi Shun and David Wong, eds.,

Asia reciting passages from the classics, particularly those calling for the management or even saving of the world. The classics were not regarded as lofty, elegant texts beyond common human affairs, and the values and concepts being exchanged were not seen as cold intellectual games. Rather, the cultural texts, people, and thoughts exchanged in East Asia were concerned with Confucian values and interacted intimately with the real world. As Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵 (Xiangshan 象山, 1139–1193) noted, “Even when Confucians touch upon the abstract sphere of the soundless, odorless, shapeless, bodiless, they are chiefly concerned about managing the world.”¹⁴ Although Lovejoy’s method has the strength of analytic precision, we still cannot use it to grasp the this-worldly orientation and contextual turn of the ideas traded in East Asian cultural interactions—a special feature of cultural exchange in this region.¹⁵

In summary, the history-of-ideas method is closely related to semantics. As its leading task, it strives to distinguish the meanings of ideas and always seeks to establish conceptual synonymy.¹⁶ For this reason, such research is always geared toward textualism and inclines away from contextualism (even though establishing the meaning of an idea always involves establishing its linguistic context). The abstract, semantic trend in this method means that the approach of the history of ideas creates many blind spots when applied to the study of cultural interactions in East Asia. The key problem was succinctly stated in Quentin Skinner’s criticism of Lovejoy, namely, that when the history-of-ideas method pursues the development of idea units, it always assumes that different thinkers viewed the same words as having the same meanings. In the process of abstracting idea units out of context, Lovejoy tended to set up ideal types of ideas. In this way, he often tended to take earlier thinkers as paving the way for later thinkers.¹⁷

Viewed from the perspective of the experience of cultural exchanges in

Confucian Ethics: A Comparative Study of Self, Autonomy, and Community (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 31–48.

14 Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵, “Yu Wang Shunbo” 與王順伯, in *Lu Jiuyuan ji* 陸九淵集 (Taipei: Liren Shuju, 1981), chaps. 2, 17.

15 Maurice Mandelbaum pointed out that in Lovejoy’s study of the idea of nature in the Western history of ideas, two categories of ideas can be demarcated: continuing ideas and recurrent ideas. Lovejoy’s treatment of the recurrent idea of nature at least deserves our notice. See Maurice Mandelbaum, “Arthur O. Lovejoy and the Theory of Historiography,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 9, no. 4 (October 1948): 412–423.

16 Nils B. Kvastad, “Semantics in the Methodology of the History of Ideas,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 38, no. 1 (Jan.–Mar. 1977): 157–174.

17 Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 3–53, esp. 11ff.

East Asia (via the exchange of texts, ideas, and people), all exchanges take place in the contexts of society, politics, and culture. Even the languages spoken by the people involved in these exchanges have their specific linguistic contexts. For this reason, people on both sides of the cultural exchange must be viewed as performers on the stage of history, and exchanges should be viewed as historical events.¹⁸ When we begin from this perspective, we can enter into a better method for studying decontextualization in the history of cultural exchange in East Asia.

4 The Phenomenon and Methodology of Recontextualization in the History of Cultural Exchange in East Asia

4.1 Recontextualization: A Definition

In cultural exchange in East Asia, “recontextualization” refers to the process whereby a text, idea, or person, having been transmitted from one region to another and thus decontextualized, is then recontextualized into the receiving region’s intellectual background or cultural context, so that it will be assimilated into its intellectual or cultural environment and become responsive and applicable therein. As an example, consider Confucius’s *Analects*, a classic produced in China’s intellectual culture. The spiritual homeland of Confucius was concerned with managing the world, and yet it also had its broad, deep, and transcendent aspirations. Confucius and his disciples were able to find a spirituality in the ethical relationships of daily life. After the *Analects* was transmitted east to Japan, however, Tokugawa (1603–1868) Confucian scholars discarded the intellectual world of the text’s Chinese cultural context (including such concepts as Heaven, the Way, human nature, and destiny) and recontextualized it in the practical realism that typified Japanese intellectual tendencies. They thereby assimilated the *Analects* to Japanese culture, so that it became a link to the spiritual world of Japanese intellectuals for the next three centuries.¹⁹ Only because it underwent this process of recontextualization by Japanese scholars did the *Analects* become generally congenial to Japanese intellectuals. Additionally, because Japanese scholars had recontextualized the *Analects*, Tokugawa scholars were able to read in new meanings for the age, and thus could infuse the text with a new significance.

Another illustration of recontextualization is Sun Yat-sen’s reworking of

18 Jing Guantao 金觀濤 and Liu Qingfeng 劉青峰, “Lishi yanjiu de keguanxing: Lun guannianshi tuxiang zhong de zhenshi” 歷史研究的客觀性——論觀念史圖像中的真實, *Xinshixue* 新史學 18, no. 1 (March 2007): 87–119.

19 Chun-chieh Huang 黃俊傑, *Dechuan Riben Lunyu quanshi shilun* 德川日本論語詮釋史論 (Taipei: Taida Chuban Zhongxin, 1st ed. 2006; rev. 2nd ed. 2007).

Pan-Asianism, in which he decontextualized a version of that idea promulgated by intellectuals in imperial Japan. On November 28, 1924, Sun Yat-sen delivered a speech titled “Pan-Asianism” to the Kobe Enterprise Association at Kobe Girl’s High School. In his speech, Sun declared, “You Japanese have acquired the hegemonic culture of the European and American powers while keeping the substance of Asian kingly rule. From this day forward, whether the future path of world culture will trend toward the hawks of hegemonic culture of the European and American powers or toward the bulwark of the kingly culture of the East will depend on the careful deliberation and choice of you Japanese.”²⁰ Sun’s idea of Pan-Asianism came from the discussions of Asianism in Japanese intellectual circles from the beginning of the twentieth century. For example, in 1903 Okakura Kakuzō 岡倉覺三 (1862–1913) published *The Ideals of the East* in English, in which he advocated that “Asia is one,” and maintained that while Asian culture pursues the ends of human life (the kingly way), Western culture pursues the means of human life (hegemony).²¹ In the following year, however, Okakura published *The Awakening of Japan*, also in English, in which his advocacy for the idea that “Asia is one” was contextualized into “Japanese hegemonic discourse.”²² In the 1920s, in the context of Japanese discourse, the idea of Pan-Asianism was mobilized in the diplomatic strategy of Pan-Asianism.²³ The 1920s was also the decade when Japan started to look down upon China, causing tensions in Sino-Japanese relations.²⁴ Sun Yat-sen used this idea of Pan-Asianism, which was familiar to everyone in Japan, yet at the same time decontextualized it from that context and transplanted it into the context of Sino-Japanese political relations to persuade the Japanese to abandon their ambitions to invade China and to return to the spirit of the kingly way in Asian culture. Sun’s recontextualizing of the idea of Pan-Asianism in the contemporary history of Sino-Japanese cultural interactions was extremely shrewd and warrants deeper inquiry.²⁵

20 Sun Yat-sen 孫逸仙, “Da Yazhou zhuyi” 大亞洲主義, in *Guofu quanji* 國父全集 (Taipei: Zhonghua minguo gejie jinian guofu bainian danchen choubei weiyuanhui, 1965), p. 312.

21 Okakura Kakuzō, *The Ideals of the East* (London: John Murray, 1903; Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1931).

22 Okakura Kakuzō, *The Awakening of Japan* (New York: Century, 1904).

23 See Wang Ping 王屏, *Jindai Riben de Yaxiya zhuyi* 近代日本的亞細亞主義 (Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 2004).

24 See Yamame Yukio 山根幸夫, *Taishō jidai ni okeru Nihon to Chūgoku no aida* 大正時代における日本と中國のあいだ (Tokyo: Kenbun Shuppan, 1998).

25 Chun-chieh Huang, “Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s Pan-Asianism Revisited: Its Historical Context and Contemporary Relevance,” *Journal of Cultural Interaction in East*

4.2 Methodology for the Study of Recontextualization

In researching recontextualization in the history of cultural interactions in East Asia, perhaps the most effective method is to focus our study on the mutual, interactive influences between intellectual-cultural history and politico-economic history. On the basis of this concrete historical background, we can then analyze the process of recontextualization and the resulting creation of new meanings that take place in cultural exchanges of texts, ideas, and personages.

For example, in examining how Japanese intellectuals recontextualized the Confucian *Analects* within the Japanese intellectual climate, one must pay special attention to Japan's socioeconomic background.²⁶ An example of such care is *Rongo to soroban* (The *Analects* and the Abacus), by the Japanese entrepreneur Shibusawa Eiichi 澀澤榮一 (also known as Seien 青淵, 1840–1931).²⁷ This book recontextualized Confucius's *Analects* in the capitalist socioeconomic environment of early-twentieth-century Japan. Shibusawa, long known as the father of Japanese capitalism, reinterpreted the *Analects* in the intellectual context of the practical learning that had dominated Japan since the Tokugawa era, arguing that the terms *yi* 義 (appropriateness, righteousness) and *li* 利 (benefit, profit) did not stand in mutual opposition. Rather, he advocated that ethics and profit could be synthesized into a harmonious whole, that the principles for being a good person and for managing the world given in the *Analects* could be applied to modern enterprise and business management.²⁸ When studying Shibusawa's recontextualization of the *Analects*, we must also consider the background of Japan's economic development at that time. Moreover, to correctly analyze the meaning of Sun Yat-sen's recontextualization of the Japanese idea of Asianism, we need to consider the background of Sino-Japanese relations during the 1920s and the attitude of the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) toward Japan in 1924.

The strength of this research method is that the researcher selects the relevant factors and operative ideas from the specific, concrete historical background. However, we must also remember here to pay attention to the new life and new meanings created for such texts or ideas after their recon-

Asia 3 (2012): 57–68.

26 In the last century, the renowned scholar of modern European intellectual history Franklin L. Baumer considered the relations between thought, society, and political environment. See his "Intellectual History and Its Problem," *Journal of Modern History* 21, no.3 (September 1949): 191–203.

27 Shibusawa Eiichi 澀澤榮一, *Rongo to soroban* 論語と算盤 (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1985, 2001).

28 See my *Dechuan Riben Lunyu quanshi shilun*, pp.353–370.

textualization in their new settings.

4.3 The Issue of Emotion in Recontextualization

Especially noteworthy in the history of cultural exchanges in East Asia are the potential emotional issues of the self and the other that appear in the intermediate agents involved in interactive recontextualization processes.

In section 2.2 above, we noted that China played the role of significant other in the history of cultural exchange in East Asia. When Japanese monks or Korean and Vietnamese envoys sought to conduct exchanges in China with Chinese court officials and officers, they were required to chant poetry in unison, using the Chinese language, in order to exhibit an emotional identification with Chinese culture. In 1644, after the fall of the Ming dynasty, Korean scholar-officials continued to use the Ming reign-year names, expressing a form of emotional identification with Ming culture.

It is precisely this issue of emotional identification that makes decontextualization and recontextualization necessary in cultural exchange in East Asia. At the beginning of the Tokugawa period in Japan, many Japanese regarded China as the abode of sages and worthies. But by the eighteenth century, Japanese subjectivity had fully matured, and China gradually became the other in the minds of Japanese.²⁹ During the more than 260 years of Japanese sinology during the Tokugawa period, the Japanese style of interpreting Chinese texts became ever more evident. As the Japanese scholar Yoshikawa Kōjiro 吉川幸次郎 (1904–1980) wrote, “Fundamentally, sinology during the Tokugawa period is a sort of Japanese ethnic learning. Therefore, it does not reflect an accurate understanding of China.”³⁰ Tokugawa sinologists had effectively decontextualized Chinese culture and had recontextualized it within Japanese culture. In fact, what they did in this respect is essentially what continues to be done today in the contemporary academic world of Japanese sinology. All Tokugawa-period and modern Japanese scholars are what Mizoguchi Yūzō 溝口雄三 (1932–2010) has called “sinologists without China.”³¹

In the processes of decontextualization and recontextualization, emotions

29 See Marius B. Jansen, *China in the Tokugawa World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 76–88; Peter Nosco, “The Place of China in the Construction of Japan’s Early Modern World View,” *Taiwan Journal of East Asian Studies* 4, no. 1 (June 2007): 27–48.

30 Yoshikawa Kōjiro 吉川幸次郎, “Zhongguo yinxiang zhuiji” 中國印象追記, in his *Wode liuxueji* 我的留學記 (Beijing: Guangming Ribao Chubanshe, 1999), p. 4.

31 Mizoguchi Yūzō 溝口雄三, “Ribei de Zhongguo sixiangshi yanjiu zhi gaige yu jincheng” 日本的中國思想史研究之改革與進程, *Guoji ruxue yanjiu* 4 (1998): 12–26, esp. pp. 16–17.

are highly important leading factors. The Kaitokudō 懷德堂 Confucian scholar Goi Ranshū 五井蘭洲 (1697–1762) compiled a book expressing his doubts about Japanese paying deep respect to Confucian learning. He wrote, for example, “I humbly venture to ask, ‘You were born in this land, you grew up in this land, yet you do not uphold Shinto but follow the foreign teaching of the Duke of Zhou. Why is this?’”³² Although this question was raised by Goi Ranshū in the second person, it still vividly displays how, in the contextual turn and in the course of cultural exchange, emotions are definitely important factors in identification.³³ If many people in a certain era or society share a certain emotional make-up, this will create a certain spirit of the age, or *zeitgeist*, that will affect the direction of cultural interactions.

Emotions also determine the self-representations that intermediaries make toward the other in the course of such cultural exchanges. For example, in the history of Sino-Japanese cultural exchanges, Zhu Shunshui 朱舜水 (Zhiyu 之瑜, Luyu 魯輿, 1600–1682), Li Chunsheng 李春生 (1838–1924), and Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 (a postwar Neo-Confucian scholar who fled from China to Taiwan, 1904–1982) all visited Japan during different historical periods, and thus presented different impressions of Japan in their respective journals. But underlying their different impressions were their differing emotions. In the seventeenth century, Zhu Shunshui lived in exile in Japan following the fall of the Ming dynasty. “Living in exile with scant hope of return, dwelling long in the east [Japan] with tears of hope,” he lamented that “Japan seemed not to have received the teaching of Confucius and Mencius.”³⁴ As for Li Chunsheng, he visited Japan after the Qing court had ceded Taiwan to Japanese rule in 1895. Li travelled to Japan at the invitation of the first Japanese Governor-General of Taiwan, Kabayama Sukenori 樺山資紀 (1837–1922), joining a group of eight elders from his family and visiting Japan for sixty-four days. Li was shocked by what he saw and heard there, and remembered the words of an old Japanese friend: “When you arrive, you are of a different tribe; when you depart for home, you are like a brother.”³⁵ After

32 Cited in Tao Demin 陶德民, *Kaitokudō Shushigaku no kenkyū* 懷德堂朱子學の研究 (Osaka: Ōsaka Daigaku Shuppankai, 1994), p. 271.

33 The eminent American anthropologist Clifford Geertz has said, “In many modern societies, factors like people’s inborn emotions, customs, etc., are important elements in constructing their ‘identity.’” Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 260.

34 Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲, *Nihon zatsujishi* 日本雜事詩 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1968), p. 118.

35 Li Chunsheng 李春生, “Dongyou liushisi ri suibi” 東遊六十四日隨筆, in Li Ming-hui 李明輝, Huang Chun-chieh 黃俊傑, and Li Han-chi 黎漢基, eds., *Li Chunsheng zhuzuo ji* 李春生著作集 (Taipei: Nantian Shuju, 2004), vol. 4, p. 227.

returning to Taiwan, Li composed his “Dongyou liushisi ri suibi” (Jottings on a 64-Day Journey East to Japan), which contains his largely positive impressions of Japanese society, people, customs, etc. In contrast, when Xu Fuguan visited postwar Japan, after Japan’s unconditional surrender to the United States and the Allies, he witnessed the burnt-out ruins of a defeated power,³⁶ and his descriptions stressed how the dark side of a personality can easily be led to dire straits.³⁷ We may also take the experiences of Japanese on tour in China as examples of how emotions determine the self-representations that intermediaries make toward the other. The Kyoto University sinologist Naitō Konan 内藤湖南 (1866–1934) toured China in September and October of 1899. While he experienced a profound nostalgia for cultural China, he wrote that when he “brushed shoulders with ordinary Chinese and their sleeves touched, I did not feel comfortable.”³⁸ Toward the contemporary real China, he could not suppress his feelings of disdain. Hence, the recollections in his travel journal were mostly of the dark side of Chinese society. We find another example in the experiences of Nakamura Ōkei 中村櫻溪 (忠誠, 1852–1921), who came to Taiwan in 1899 to teach Chinese in the school attached to the Taiwan imperial governor-general’s office and stayed for nine years. He wrote, “Oh my! With the passage of nine years, I have grown accustomed to Taiwan’s climate, at ease with Taiwan’s lifestyle, acquainted with Taiwan’s scholars, appreciative of Taiwan’s natural scenery, and fond of Taiwan’s cultural artifacts. Also, I have cultured friends and common friends. On a splendid spring or autumn day, what is better than to sing in harmony with a group of friends?”³⁹ In his writings about Taiwan, he always stressed the beauty of the natural scenery and the warmth and hospitality of the people. It is not farfetched to say that all of these examples show that emotion is truly the font of self-identity. In the course of cultural interactions, emotion is an especially decisive factor not only for representing the other but also for decontextualizing and recontextualizing in cultural exchanges.

36 Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, “Dongxing zagan” 東行雜感, in *Zhongguo wenxue lunji xupian* 中國文學論集續篇 (Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng Shuju, 1981), p. 252.

37 Chun-chieh Huang 黃俊傑, “Zhongguo rujia zhishifenzi de Ribenguan: Zhu Shungshui yu Xu Fuguan de bijiao” 中國儒家知識分子的日本觀——朱舜水與徐復觀的比較, in Shing-ching Shyu 徐興慶, ed., *Zhu Shunshui yu jinshi Riben ruxue de fazhan* 朱舜水與近世日本儒學的發展 (Taipei: Taida Chuban Zhongxin, 2012), pp. 13-24.

38 Naitō Konan, *Naitō Konan zenshū* 内藤湖南全集 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1944), vol. 2, p. 75.

39 Nakamura Ōkei 中村櫻溪, *Shōtō sanshū* 涉壽三集 (Taihoku: Hirashima Tatsutarō, 1908), p. 28.

5 Conclusion

This discussion has centered on the contextual turn in the history of cultural exchanges in East Asia, focusing on research methods for studying decontextualization and recontextualization. I pointed out that while Lovejoy's method (which focuses on the history of ideas and stresses the analysis of idea units in idea complexes) is useful and effective for studying decontextualization, this sort of method cannot effectively grasp how East Asian intellectuals and thought intimately interacted with concrete reality in their managing the world. This paper advocated that when we focus on recontextualization in this history of cultural exchanges in East Asia, the most effective method is to analyze examples of cultural exchange against their concrete and specific historical backgrounds in order to interpret the motives and emotions of the recontextualizing intermediate agents.

From the analysis above, we found that cultural interactions are dynamic processes. For this reason, in researching decontextualization and reconceptualization in cultural exchanges, if we rely solely on Lovejoy's methodology (textualism), we will find ourselves "buried in words," to resurrect the ridicule of Qing Confucians. Yet if we examine the production and movement of new meanings after ideas or texts were introduced into different regions and carefully consider the factors behind the new meanings against their historical background (contextualism), we will be blind to the whole. For this reason, whenever we choose between the approaches of textualism and contextualism, we must strive to seek a dynamic balance between them in order to avoid being either illogical or impractical. I strongly urge students of the history of cultural interaction to consider these points.

Finally, this essay points out that emotions are a key factor in the contextual turn in the history of East Asian cultural exchanges. When intermediate agents from an alien culture decontextualize and recontextualize foreign cultures or thought, they always become involved in emotional issues. In cultural exchanges, the key factors in the choice of values are always personal emotions and the zeitgeist that supports them, and never cold, abstract ideas. These issues merit further investigation.