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ASIA MAIOR

Vol. XXXI / 2020

Asia in 2020: Coping with COVID-19 and other crises

Edited by
Michelguglielmo Torri
Nicola Mocci
Filippo Boni

viella

A large, intricate, light-colored floral mandala pattern is positioned on the right side of the cover, partially overlapping the text area. It features complex geometric and organic shapes, typical of traditional Islamic or Persian art.

CENTRO STUDI PER I POPOLI EXTRA-EUROPEI “CESARE BONACOSSA” - UNIVERSITÀ DI PAVIA

ASIA MAIOR

The Journal of the Italian think tank on Asia founded by Giorgio Borsa in 1989

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CONTENTS

- 9 FILIPPO BONI, *Foreword. Asia in 2020: The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact*
- 19 FRANCESCA CONGIU, *China 2020: The successful struggle against the COVID-19 pandemic and the Xinjiang question*
- 45 SILVIA MENEGAZZI, *China 2020: A foreign policy characterized by growing resilience, fading responsibility and increasing uncertainty*
- 71 MARCO MILANI, *Korean peninsula 2020: Overcoming the challenges of COVID-19*
- 103 COREY WALLACE & GIULIO PUGLIESE, *Japan 2020: Abe's well-laid plans go awry*
- 147 SHELDON WONG, *Hong Kong 2020: The downfall of «one country two systems»*
- 181 AURELIO INSISA, *Taiwan 2020: Crossroads of COVID-19 international politics*
- 205 YVAN YSMAEL T. YONAHA & ESTHER MARY L. CALVO, *The Philippines 2020: The gamble of the populist leadership*
- 223 RUI GRAÇA FEIJÓ, *Timor-Leste in 2020: Containing the pandemic in a changing political environment*
- 241 SALEENA SALEEM, *Malaysia 2020: Democratic backsliding amid the COVID-19 pandemic*
- 259 MATTEO FUMAGALLI, *Myanmar 2020: Elections in a pandemic*
- 275 SILVIA TIERI, *Bangladesh 2019-2020: Issues of democracy, disasters, development*
- 305 DIEGO MAIORANO, *India 2020: Under the COVID hammer*
- 331 MICHELUGUGLIELMO TORRI, *India 2020: The deepening crisis of democracy*
- 377 MICHELUGUGLIELMO TORRI, *India 2020: Confronting China, aligning with the US*
- 407 SHAMARA WETTIMUNY, *Sri Lanka 2019-2020: Extremism, elections and economic uncertainty at the time of COVID-19*
- 441 MARCO CORSI, *Pakistan 2020: The PTI government amidst COVID-19 pandemic*
- 465 FILIPPO BONI, *Afghanistan 2020: The US-Taliban peace deal, intra-Afghan talks and regional implications*
- 479 LUCIANO ZACCARA, *Iran 2019-2020: The double impact of crippling sanctions and the COVID-19 pandemic*
- 505 PAOLO SORBELLO, *Kazakhstan 2020: Between a rock and a hard place*
- 521 *Reviews*
- 557 *Appendix*

A GRAND SWEEP OF THE HISTORY OF SINO-JAPANESE RELATIONS

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Teng, Jun, *The history of Sino-Japanese cultural exchange*. Translated by Wu, Li. Routledge China perspectives, Abingdon: Routledge, 2019, 182 pp. (ISBN 9780367663681).

This book is a translation of the author's *Zhong Ri wenhua jiaoliu shi* [中日文化交流史], published by the Peking University Press in 2011. It appears in Routledge's series, China Perspectives, a praiseworthy effort to introduce to a Western readership the ways in which Chinese scholars view topics and issues that we may be too easily inclined to see through the eyes of European or North American scholars and observers.

There is a deeply ingrained historiographic tradition in China: the lessons of history, especially the ethical ones, are a fundamental part of the contemporary ethos. It is thus common for a Chinese author to deal with a topic on the basis of a historical survey from its beginnings and trace developments through to the present. This work traces the interactions between China and Japan up to the early modern period (Qing/Meiji), although Teng extends her narrative into the contemporary period through accounts of field trips in Japan that she undertook during the writing of this book.

The table of contents reflects the traditional approach and the six chapters are given titles from the template, «Sino-Japanese cultural exchanges during the [...] Dynasty». This provides an easy-to-understand pattern for exploring Sino-Japanese relations through history. This approach implies many things, amongst them the persistence of core values through time, causality in historical processes, and the use to which historiography can be put in contemporary times. For this reason, an introduction that set out the author's presuppositions and intentions, would have been very useful, as would a pensive conclusion. As it is, the book ends with an anecdotal account of a trip to Fujisawa (near the better-known Kamakura), where the Chinese *émigré* musician Nie Er 聶耳 (who died there in 1935 at the age of 23) is commemorated. This is a fitting and poignant episode to end the book on, but the author might have articulated more clearly how his tragic death encapsulated the themes that run through the book, especially since international problems are not generally created by well-meaning and open-minded individuals working in local communities. As it is, the final pages of the last chapter read as a list of events and statements that do not hang together well. And anyone familiar with Japan's relations with China through history will balk at the assertion that after the Meiji Restoration

«Japan stopped being a vassal state of China» (p. 161), when one of the distinctive aspects of Japan's historical connexions with China is that it was never a vassal state in the formal sense.

The various chapters furnish a great deal of information about the intercourse between China and Japan at various levels, from diplomatic missions through to individual monks such as Ennin (793 or 794-864) and his companions, and maritime traders. Although Teng has done her readers a service by collating wide-ranging information, she typically does not offer the latest scholarship, which leads to the perpetuation of older information and outdated perspectives. The development of *ritsuryō* (*lu ling* 律令) government in Japan, as well as its Chinese antecedents, a crucial part of the material for her chapter on Sui and Tang, has been extensively studied by Japanese scholars, the doyen of whom, Inoue Mitsusada, started publishing just after the Pacific War.¹ One might also refer to the crucial changes in the Nara period, as traced by Herman Ooms,² or Kūkai's career, her account of which she bases on an insufficiently identified work in Chinese by Liang Rongruo from 1985 (pp. 82ff). On this point, as many others throughout the work, there is by now an impressive body of Japanese and Western-language scholarship that should not be ignored.

The lack of a proper scholarly apparatus will frustrate anyone with knowledge of East Asian languages who might want to use this work as a basis for exploring its fascinating and persistently relevant subject matter. One example, which took me longer to work out than I care to remember, is the reference to an article by Miyake Miyoshi in the *Journal of History* [*sic*] in 1893, which occurs in note 21 of her first chapter (p. 42), during her discussion of the renowned Golden Seal (*kin'in* 金印, not *kinin*, as transcribed by Teng). One assumes that her assistant mis-read the Japanese given name, confusing a Chinese reading for one of the Japanese characters and guessing wrongly for the second, as she is referring to Miyake Yonekichi 三宅米吉, who did indeed publish an article on the subject, but in *Shigaku zasshi* 史學雜誌.³ Joshua Fogel has dealt at length with this scholar's contributions to the riddle of the Golden Seal and even published a translation of this article in his full-length study (Fogel 2013, ch. 3 and appendix A; as an indication of the available scholarship, Fogel's bibliography of works in English, Chinese and Japanese runs to forty-eight pages)⁴. Fogel also cites Kamei Nanmei 龜井南冥 correctly, and not as Teng's Japanese-Korean

1. Inoue Mitsusada 井上光貞, 'The *Ritsuryō* system in Japan', *Acta Asiatica*, No. 31, 1977, pp. 83-112.

2. Ooms, Herman, *Imperial politics and symbolics in ancient Japan: the Tenmu dynasty, 650-800*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009.

3. Miyake Yonekichi 三宅米吉, *Shigaku zasshi* 史學雜誌, Vol. 3, No. 37, December 1892, pp. 874-881.

4. Joshua A. Fogel, *Japanese historiography and the Gold Seal of 57 C. E.: relic, text, object, fake*, Leiden: Brill, 2013 (chapter 3 and appendix A).

hybrid («Nammyeong Kamei»). Indeed, there are numerous instances of names not being identified properly, despite their being well known; e.g. Mr Fujino Uhmkuro (p. 163), Lu Xun's mentor in Sendai, is actually Fujino Genkurō 藤野厳九郎.

The broad knowledge that the author displays throughout the book is commendable but there are far too many statements that are not thought through, not supported by reference to any sources, or mere conjecture, as in the promising section on the young Chinese who went to Japan in the Qing/Meiji period, and were an important part of the modernization of East Asia (pp. 161ff). That section is one of a number of enticing and potentially enlightening materials which should have been pursued properly. For example, chapter 3 ends with «A study of three poems» (pp. 104-6) but Teng merely reproduces them in English translation, with a few lines of descriptive background for the first. And her field visits provide fascinating points (in the geographical sense, too) for pursuing the interactions between the people of the two countries, though again, the value of these sites might have been articulated further. One example is the visit to Kinin [*sic*] Park on Shikano Island (pp. 23f), where Teng mentions conversations with «local experts and villagers» but there is no way of telling how reliable such information might be for the study of the Golden Seal. These anecdotal interludes are interesting in themselves and should be appreciated as efforts to build on gestures of goodwill and friendship between China and Japan, but they offer little of scholarly value.

The translation is credited to Wu Li (East Asian names given family name first), although some individual sections are attributed to various others, and revised by Teng herself. While this is a worthy effort, the draft translation should have been sent to a native speaker of English with scholarly knowledge of the topic, because as it stands the book is riddled with infelicities of style and idiom (not even the description in Routledge's advertising blurb has been checked by a native speaker), as well as the above-mentioned deficiencies in the scholarly apparatus. Also, much has happened in scholarship since the research for the book was done over a decade ago. It is not possible to use this book for scholarly work as the (invariably incomplete) citations give idiosyncratic translations of Chinese works without citing the Chinese title and, crucially, there is no bibliography.

In this light it is difficult to imagine to whom the book is addressed. The general reader would not be able to assess the sources adduced anyway and the scholarly reader would be frustrated at the lack of proper citations, as well as the ignorance of the considerable scholarship in Japanese and various European languages (which in turn would be very useful to the general reader). I assume that the Koreans have produced an impressive amount of scholarship, too, but I am unable to comment on that. In any case, Routledge are offering for sale a ten-year-old 182-page work that has a good deal of useful information but which is shoddily produced. And this

at a hard-to-justify paperback price (and an eye-watering *ker-ching* for the hardback) that will certainly deter any non-specialist who might be interested in studying the history of relations between China and Japan. Since this historical background is an important part of the basis for current relations between the countries of East Asia, it is a great shame that an opportunity has been lost.