

Opinion Forum

Nationalism, the Vernacular, and Responses to Western Impact in East Asian Comparative Perspective

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Since coming to Santa Barbara, my job description has been “comparative East Asianist,” rather than historian of China or Japan; as a result, I have had to do a great deal of reading in the histories of the other countries in the region. Among the many things that have struck me in this connection over the past few years are not only how so much of what I initially learned in Chinese history classes has startling resonances with the other major areas influenced by Chinese culture (everybody knows that), but also how remarkably similar was the conceptualization of pressing issues in those countries with China as well as how much less extraordinary China’s historical experience becomes through comparison. The differences as well as the similarities are thrown in a fascinating relief and potentially tell us much about not only high Chinese culture but also the social and economic systems in which it found a home.

I am still very much in the process of sorting all this out toward writing a much longer work in the general area. Here I would like to focus tightly on two manifestations of the larger problem: the linkage between the rise of nationalism and the emergence of the vernacular as a literary vehicle; and the East West mix in the conceptions of modernization. These issues were faced by all four East Asian civilizations and in remarkably similar ways.



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Let me say just one further thing by way of introduction. I think this sort of comparative analysis, whether or not I do it well, leads us to far more important and interesting conclusions than does the imposition of all the foreign origin theories that have been sweeping the field of late—the infestation has been most grotesque in the Japan field in this regard. By the same token, I want strongly and openly to disassociate myself from the regional-cultural approach that has been applied principally by social scientists using hypocrisies like NICS and NIES and Pacific Rim and whatever else.

Modernization and the Rise of the Vernacular

Many scholars in East Asia and elsewhere have identified the rise of nationalism with the transformations characterized by the modern experience. Nationalism has usually been seen as a positive force in China, as well as in Vietnam and Korea, whereas in Japan it has been seen as antecedent to imperialism. I think a more meaningful comparison, which is impossible here, would start with a level playing field and look at Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese nationalism in comparative terms, examine their mutual interactions, and look at the consequences of their emergence over the entire course of the 20th century, not just the first few decades.

One manifestation of nationalism that can be found in all four East Asian nations is the rise of the vernacular in its relationship both to literary Chinese culture (even in China) and to modern political movements. In China the rise of *baihua* (the vernacular) in the New Culture Movement is usually understood as part of the rising tide of nationalism, demonstrating a concern on the part of early Chinese radicals to bring culture to the people, and usually ignoring the fact that China already had traditions of vernacular drama and fiction that had made major strides several centuries before Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu claimed to be pioneering it.

Scholars have tended to stress to excess the differences between *baihua* and *wenyan* (literary Chinese), probably because the latter is so extraordinarily difficult but in comparison to what readers and writers in the other countries of East Asia were working with, the differences recede rapidly. After all, both *baihua* and *wenyan* are Chinese; they are members of the same language group; they occupied clearly delineated spheres as languages; and while use of one or the other might raise political or cultural issues, it brought into question no issues of national or ethnic identity. The effort to bring *baihua* into a monopolizing position as linguistic hegemon early in the 20th century reveals much more a conscious political assault on the elite culture that had so long used (many different varieties of) *wenyan* to communicate.

In the other countries of East Asia, what had taken one step in China would require two or more steps. First, a native written language had to be

invented to compete with the imported literary Chinese—this occurred before the putative modern period—and later, a written vernacular had to be developed to contest with both the domestic literary language and Chinese. But we should keep firmly in mind that, until recent times, Chinese literary culture *was* literary culture to a large extent, and even into our own century it reminded the medium of international discourse within East Asia.

The Japanese were not the first people on the Chinese periphery to imbibe Sinic culture, but they were the first to develop their own written language, the *kana* syllabaries, in general use among the Heian elite by at least the early 10th century.¹

Initially, *kana* were considered fit only for women and were known also as *onna moji* (women’s script), whereas Chinese characters remained the realm of men and were called *otoko moji* (men’s script). But this distinction was never an inseparable divide; high-born women often learned Chinese, and men did in fact write, on occasion, in *kana*.

Skipping ahead to the Edo period, we still find women primarily writing in *kana* and men using both mediums as well as mixtures, though Confucian scholars often wrote in *Kanbun* (literary Chinese) or prepared versions of their writings in both *Kanbun* and *bungo* (literary Japanese), and some even managed to have their *Kanbun* works circulate in Qing China (as did some Koreans and Vietnamese). In response to the need for a uniform educational curriculum taught nationwide in an accessible style, a movement developed over the course of the 19th century to bring the written Japanese language into accord with the vernacular. It aroused acrimonious debate. In 1866, Maejima Hisoka called for the complete abolition of Chinese characters from Japanese textbooks. In part such calls were efforts to spread education, in part they reflected a rising aspiration for Japan to find its own distinctive identity separate from Sinic culture.²

1 Roy Andrew Miller, *The Japanese Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp.120–21, 124–26.

2 Nanette Twine, “The Genbunitchi Movement: Its Origin, Development, and Conclusion.” *Monumenta Nipponica* 33.3 (Autumn 1978), pp.333, 337. See also her book, *Language and the Modern State: the Reform of Written Japanese* (London: Routledge, 1991). The whole picture is muddled, as all historical pictures are, by the fact the some of the most extreme and anti-*bakufu* activists, like Yoshida Shōin and his teacher Sakuma Shōzan were dedicated *Kangakusha* (scholars of Chinese learning) who hoped to bring a Japan derailed by a corrupt and inept *bakufu* back on a proper Confucian course. See Masuda Wataru, *Seigaku tōzen to chūgoku jijō: ‘zassho sakki’* [The eastern spread of Western learning and conditions in China: Notes on “Various Books”] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1979), pp.31–46. My English translation of this marvelous book is being published serially in *Sino-Japanese Studies*. For these pages, see *Sino-Japanese Studies* 3.1 (November 1990), pp.36–46. Chinese friends have informed me that a Chinese translation is also underway.

The movement took the name *genbun itchi* (combining the vernacular and literary languages). In its initial stages, it emphasized the great value of a vernacular in everyday life. Later, in its better known phase, it became the medium for the development of a modern Japanese literature, first and foremost in the pioneering vernacular style of Futabatei Shimei, who published Japan's first modern novel in 1887.³ For all the many efforts to bring the written language into harmony with the vernacular in Japan, though, even when Kanbun was most on the defensive, we see few or no demands for the Japanese people to stop writing Chinese characters altogether *because* they were Chinese; Kanji may have come from China, but they had long become the shared property of all East Asians. We should note as well that this was precisely the period in which the famous 1000 or more two-character neologisms were being coined in Meiji Japan and imported back into China, an event that helped create the vernacular Chinese language.⁴

The Japanese never resorted to Kanbun for fiction, perhaps because Japanese fiction owed its origins to women, and women wrote primarily in kana. Of course, the Chinese themselves never developed a sustained tradition of wenyan fiction either. But they were not the only countries in East Asia. There was recently published a seven-volume series titled (in Chinese) *Yuenan Hanwen xiaoshuo congkan*. The series represents the bulk of the extant novels written by Vietnamese in literary Chinese, usually based on Chinese vernacular fiction or drama and Vietnamized (by changing place names, personal names, and settings). Before the Vietnamese developed their own written language, known as *chū' nôm* (or *nôm*), in the 13th century, and before the Koreans invented the *han'gŭl* alphabet in the 15th century, and indeed well afterward in both cases, both used literary Chinese as the medium for written fiction. A recent Korean scholar's estimate puts the number of extant novels written by Koreans in literary Chinese at about 600. In fact, the high point of *nôm* lyric poetry came only in the 18th century, and *han'gŭl* literature really dates from the 17th century.⁵

3 NaneteTwine, "The Genbunitchi Movement," pp.339, 342, 350, 353-54; George Sansom, *The Western World and Japan* (New York: Knopf, 1950), p.403; Andō Hikotarō, "Miyajima Daihachi to Futabatei Shimei," in *Kindai Nihon to Chūgoku* [Modern Japan and China], ed. Takeuchi Yoshimi and Hashikawa Bunzō (Tokyo: Asahi shinbun sha, 1974), pp.125-43.

4 Tam Yue-him (Tan Ruqian), "Xiandai Hanyu de Riyu wailaici jiqi souji he bianren wenti" [Japanese Loanwords in contemporary Chinese and the issues involved in collecting and recognizing them], in his *Jindai Zhong-Ri wenhua guanxi yanjiu* [Studies in modern Sino-Japanese cultural relations] (Hong Kong: Xianggang Riben yanjiusuo, 1986), pp.327-49

5 Tanaka Yūko, "'Nihon Chūgoku Betonamu'" [Japan, China, Vietnam], *Gekkan Shinika* 2.2 (February 1991), pp.8-10.

Koreans developed their own written language much later than the Japanese or the Vietnamese. King Sejong's explicit purpose in having a written Korean language devised was to enable his people to express themselves in their everyday lives in a medium of their own, because Chinese, he believed, was so difficult for them. The Korean historian Yi Ki-baek has termed the han'gŭl alphabet "the proudest cultural achievement of the Korean people." While the government and the Confucian *yangban* elite continued to use literate Chinese, many works of a wide variety—including women's writings—now began to use han'gŭl.⁶

Traditionalists were never particularly happy with han'gŭl, and han'gŭl was explicitly used by patriotic groups from the late-19th century as a way to make their publications accessible to large numbers of people, just as the baihua movements would attempt several decades later in China. The founder of the Korean vernacular movement Chu Sigyong, aimed at "ending aristocratic cultural slavery to Chinese culture."⁷ He was not attacking the Chinese or even their culture but rather the elite in his own society for trying to remain a class apart from and above ordinary Koreans. Past Chinese dynasties may have demanded tribute, but the inferiority complex attached to the idea of *sadae* (serving the great) was, like the two-character term itself, a Korean innovation. Under the Japanese colonial regime from 1910, only the Japanese language was taught in Korean schools, and thus the thrust of any movement to keep Korean alive was nationalistic by definition. With Japan's defeat in 1945, the nation returned as a whole to han'gŭl (mixed with Chinese characters in South Korea, though fewer than in postwar Japan, and solely han'gŭl in North Korea).

The Vietnamese case bears similarities with Korea and Japan, but Vietnamese followed an even more tortuous path. I noted that Vietnamese invented their own written language, *nôm*, in the 13th century. An individual *nôm* character was usually created out of two Chinese characters, giving it the appearance to Chinese-trained eyes of familiarity and strangeness all at once, much like the Xixia script. *Nôm* was arguably more easily integrated with Chinese than kana or han'gŭl because, while Japanese and Korean are highly inflected, S-O-V languages, Vietnamese more closely resembles the lack of inflection in Chinese although with an altogether different word order. There was no division of language usage along gender lines, though literary Chinese

6 Ki-baikLee, *A New History of Korea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp.192–93, 244; Gari Ledyard, "The Korean Language Reform of 1446: The Origin, Background and Early History of the Korean Alphabet," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1966.

7 Michael Edson Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920–1925* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), p.26, quotation on p.34

(*Hán văn*) was used by Vietnamese Confucians for “serious literature” and *nôm* for “pleasure.”⁸

Like the conservative yangban who disliked use of han’gũl. Emperor Minh Mạng of the Nguyễn tried to oust *nôm* from official documents at court, largely to bring order to the Vietnamese central government. Still, *nôm* remained in use in elementary education (often to facilitate the teaching of Confucianism to youngsters) and in literature, undoubtedly because it was the closest thing to a written vernacular that the Vietnamese had. At the same time, *nôm* had the capacity to undermine the state orthodox culture or at least offer alternative avenues for expression closer to native feelings.⁹

In the 17th century, the famous missionary Alexandre de Rhodes devised a romanization for vernacular Vietnamese, later modified and dubbed *quốc ngữ*, a two-syllable expression that can be found in all four East Asian countries, meaning “national language” and hence four different things. As a medium of written discourse, however, only under the French colonial regime in the latter half of the 19th century did *quốc ngữ* come into its own. The French authorities saw it as a means of severing Vietnam culturally from the rest of the Sinic sphere, because they wanted to draw the Vietnamese elite into the French sphere. They hoped that with the continued use of *quốc ngữ* the texts of the literary Chinese heritage would recede into the dusty past.

Logically precise, but wrong! In the hands of Vietnamese reformers, nationalists, and revolutionaries, *quốc ngữ* —a complex alphabet in which the tones are written as diacriticals but still far simpler to learn than an ideographic language (be it Chinese or *nôm*)—though initially hated because of its origins, became the medium of vernacular access directly to the Vietnamese people. Within a generation, by the early years of the 20th century, *quốc ngữ* newspapers and journals began appearing in major cities, and *quốc ngữ* was closely linked to rising nationalism and radicalism.¹⁰

8 Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Nguyen and Ch’ing Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp.51–53, 335; Wen You, “Lun Zinan (Chữ Nôm) zhi Zuzhi jiqi yu Hanzi Zhi Guanshe” [On the organization of Chữ Nôm and its relationship to Chinese characters], *Yanjing xuebao* 14 (December 1933), pp.201–42; Nguyễn Đình Hòa, “Chữ Nôm: The Demotic System of Writing in Vietnam”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 79.4 (October-December 1959), pp.270–74

9 Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, pp.54–58; David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp.141–44.

10 Alexander Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), pp.78–79; David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885–1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp.214–15; David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, pp.145–46; Hue-Tam Ho Tai,

In addition to having two languages of their own (nôm and quôc ngữ') and one on long-term loan from the north, the French conquest introduced yet another language necessary for social advancement. Unlike colonial Korea, where the Japanese banned the teaching of the native tongue, the French encouraged both quôc ngữ' and French. While French was the language of the hated conqueror, the Vietnamese had had a *long* experience in the use of a language borrowed from a hated conqueror. Furthermore, French was indeed the language of an oppressive, unwelcome regime, but it also turned out—upon further investigation—to be the language of Victor Hugo, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and 1789. Major debates ensued in the 1910s and 1920s over which language—French or quôc ngữ'—was appropriate for Vietnamese to write in, while literary Chinese and nôm did in fact gradually decline in usage.¹¹ All modern Vietnamese nationalists and radicals who came of age in the first half of the 20th century have been at least bilingual in French and Vietnamese; many (including Hô Chí Minh) knew a fair amount of Chinese as well.

Of the four East Asian countries, then, China was the last to adopt the use of the vernacular as a means of reaching the masses in the modern period. The extent to which May Fourth intellectuals may have been influenced by China's neighbors, perhaps through contacts made in Japan, remains an important scholarly desideratum. Many of the leaders of the New Culture Movement had been students in Japan; and Liang Qichao, who lived in Japan for fourteen years and whose writings were highly influential among Chinese and Vietnamese there and later at home, was principally responsible for encouraging linguistic borrowing from the new, rich Meiji vocabulary. I think a crucial link here is the rise of a modern, vernacular press in all the countries of East Asia.

Mixing East with West in Modernization Schemes

Another issue for comparative analysis is the manner in which the elites in each of the four major East Asian countries envisioned the modernizing process, the project of borrowing from the West while retaining the core of their own native civilization. In China this attitude is usually summed up by a phrase attributed—I think incorrectly—to Zhang Zhidong: *Zhongxue wei ti, Xixue wei yong*. In this late-19th-century conception, Western technology

Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp.22–23, 49–50, 112

11 David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, pp.146–50, where these linguistic issues are masterfully laid out. The best overall book on the complexity of linguistic choices for Vietnamese is John DeFrancis, *Colonialism and Language Policy in Viet Nam* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1977).

would be grafted onto or simply used to protect Chinese civilization. It was an implicit statement of China's weakness in science and technology, though turned around so that "science" appeared unessential to what was basic or *ti*. Several decades later, Chinese students were still calling for science (*Sai xiansheng*), though they were now linking it with a failing at the core of Chinese culture, the lack of democracy (*De xiansheng*).

In the generation before Zhang Zhidong and the self-strengthening movement, Japanese reformers were similarly looking for a way to open their country, save it from the fate visited upon China, and yet preserve their own ethicomoral values. Sakuma Shōzan coined the term that typified this approach: *Tōyō dōtoku Seiyō geijutsu* (East Asian ethics and Western technology). Since the Chinese movement apparently failed to produce modernization, its bifurcated approach of mixing East and West in discrete spheres has been seen as a failure by some, reactionary by others, while the perceived "success" of the Meiji Restoration has afforded the Japanese approach a more hospitable reception. However, Professor Min Tu-gi of Seoul National University has demonstrated the remarkable similarity in the intellectual frameworks of the two.¹² If something went wrong with the *yangwu* movement in China, in other words, it must lay elsewhere.

Another slogan coined in the Meiji period, though less widely used, was *Wakon Yōsai* (Japanese soul, Western talent). This phrase derives interestingly in a much older one, allegedly dating to the Heian period, *Wakon Kansai* (Japanese soul, Chinese talent). In the earlier era, when Japan had been for borrowing heavily from China, the slogan was meant to remind Japanese of the need to retain their inner core. Adapted to the later 19th century, *Yō* replaced *kan*, though the force of the slogan in the respective ages of "modernization" remained remarkably similar.

We find a similar development in Korea. In the aftermath of several decades of anti-foreign calls by the yangban elite to 'reject heterodoxy' (*ch'oksa*), inspired by Western and later Japanese aggression, Koreans of a self-styled 'enlightenment' (*kaehwa*) mind began in the 1880s to see the need for some accomodation with things Western while retaining a basic Confucian core. This new idea materialized in the phrase *Tongdo Sogi*

12 Min Tu-ki (Min Tu-gi), "Chinese 'Principle' and Western 'Utility', a Reassessment," in his *National Polity and Local Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp.51-62, 85-88. The salient difference between the Chinese and Japanese slogans for self-strengthening should be noted; namely, the moral values for be preserved in the Japanese case were identified with East Asia and this assumed a Sinic core, while in the Chinese case the fundament was identified with China alone. Both cases bespeak the ongoing acceptance of a common Sinic basis to the entire East Asian ethic realm.

(Eastern ways, Western instruments).¹³ Again, the identification of this dual approach to modernization with enlightenment thought and a rejection of xenophobia bears a strong resemblance to the Chinese and Japanese cases. Korea, though, bore the added brunt of being the victim not only of Western expansionism but Japanese as well.

In 19th-century Vietnam, a permutation of this slogan was not bandied about by the elite, but debate over this *tìyong* (or *thékụng*) style of thinking was possibly more trenchant than elsewhere throughout East Asia. Being a French colony from the 1860s, the issue of whether to resist the French wholeheartedly or adopt their technology so as to be able to expel them at a later date was of much greater immediacy. The Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans were facing a threat of future humiliation; the Vietnamese already had to deal with a conqueror. As Ralph Smith summed it up some years ago: “What attitude ought the Vietnamese to take toward their conquerors? Could anything be gained by cooperation with the West, by seeking to learn from the West? And if so, what was the proper relationship between the culture and institutions of the past, and the ideas and institutions to be borrowed from the West?”¹⁴

Conclusions

More generally, I think our understanding of many other themes in the evolution of modern China can be enriched through this sort of comparative perspective. Being on China’s cultural periphery has allowed the other nations of East Asia a range of options not always available in China, although it has often come at considerable psychological, even physical cost. Using Chinese characters as opposed to a native written language or speaking a language of foreign origin as opposed one’s native tongue were rarely choices that Chinese intellectuals were compelled to make, even during periods of foreign conquest, with the possible exception of the early decades of the Qing. As a result, the issues such concerns forced to the surface—issues of national and cultural identity, issues of determining where one’s own culture ended and Chinese culture began, major issues of self-definition—

13 Ki-baik Lee, *A New History of Korea*, pp.299, 302; *Korea, Old and New: A History* (Seoul: Ilchokak, 1990), pp.208–209.

14 Ralph Smith, *Viet-Nam and the West* (London: Heinemann, 1968), pp.25, 30, quotation on p.29; Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, pp.200, 261. In discussing the Vietnamese students sent to study in China and Japan in the movement pioneered by reformer Phan Bội Châu from 1905, Professor Tai notes that “the students brought by Phan to China or Japan had conceived of Western learning essentially as a technique to fight colonialism; they sought to contain ideas in a strictly functionalist framework, leaving intact their fundamental values and sense of self.” Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution*, p.170.

had, I would argue, less of an impact on the Chinese until perhaps the confrontation with the West in the 19th century. By the time, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam had been working through these kinds of self-definitional problems for centuries, even millennia (the Japanese still are). China simply had no “other” against which to see itself.

The overwhelming influence of high Sini culture in the other countries of East Asia was not only incredibly beneficial to their individual maturations as societies and cultures, but it also provided a natural straw-person against which a nativist movement more directly concerned with issues of self-definition could react. As Maruyama Masao and many others since have shown for Japan, the *kokugaku* (nativist) movement also shared much with the Sinic tradition at which it took aim in Japan; that it perceived its lack of a written textual traditions *as a lacuna* was due to the fact that both the major continental imports, Confucianism and Buddhism, had readily accessible and very thick canons. Without China as “other”, nativism had no meaning in Japan.

No comparable movements developed in Korea or Vietnam, though the absence of a native response to Chinese culture of this sizable sort means neither that such movements were snuffed out in their infancy nor that Chinese culture simply overwhelmed the Vietnamese and the Koreans. Both are logical possibilities, but much more likely are two other scenarios. First, as the case of Korea seems to make clearer, Confucian culture on Korean soil was never seen as an unwelcome or alien intruder. It was not perceived in the same manner as Japanese efforts in the first half of the 20th century to replace Korean culture with Japan’s own. Confucianism was “international.” Second, as the case of Vietnam seems to make clearer, Confucian culture barely reached below the level of the elite, having little to do with everyday lives of the agricultural populace for a variety of complex reasons. The Vietnamese elite did indeed engage in the discourse of Neo-Confucian commentaries and criticism across what we would now call national boundaries, but not (apparently) as prolifically as their East Asian neighbors.¹⁵

Students of Chinese history need not all become comparativists to realize that fresh light is cast on China’s historical evolution through comparisons

15 On Vietnamese Confucianism, see Tsuboi Yoshiharu, “Vetonaumu ni okeru Jukyō” [Neo-Confucianism in Vietnam], *Shisō*, 792 (June 1990), pp.163–78; R. B. Smith, “The Cycle of Confucianization in Vietnam,” in *Aspects of Vietnam History*, ed. Walter F. Vella (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1973), pp.1–29; John K. Whitmore, “Social Organization and Confucian Thought in Vietnam,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 15.2 (September 1984), pp.296–306. On Korean Neo-Confucianism, see Ki-baik Lee, *A New History of Korea*, passim; and especially *The Rise of Neo-Confucianism in Korea*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary and JaHyun Kim Haboush (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

with her cultural neighbors. I would like to go one step further and to argue, though, that little light is shed on our understanding of China's historical development by comparing this or that element or institution with some superficially similar element or institution outside the Sinic cultural sphere. If one is looking for reasons to explain why China failed to develop along Western lines, then comparisons with the West would certainly be in order; however, such questions are fundamentally self-serving and at best turn up conclusions of a highly dubious quality.

Appendix

Contents and Introduction of *Between China and Japan: The Writing of Joshua Fogel*, by Joshua Fogel. Brill Academic Pub., 2015

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Introduction: My Route into Asian Studies

My route into Asian studies is about as normal as it would have been unpredictable beforehand. As a third-generation American—all of my grandparents were immigrants from Eastern Europe in the second decade of the twentieth century—I was neither the first person in my family to get a B.A. nor even a Ph.D. I was, however, the first person to become interested in the history and culture of East Asia. Because there was such a bookish culture in my family, though, it was never seen as an unusual pursuit; in fact, I’m certain that my lefty parents were thrilled that one of theirs was studying China, given what was for them the exciting events in the years immediately preceding my birth in 1950. In fact, many people have commented (and occasionally reached

some far-fetched conclusions) about the natural ties between Chinese and Jews. I personally don't buy any of it, though of course I respect their right to have silly views.

Although born in Brooklyn, New York, I grew up from age seven in Berkeley, California precisely in those now famous years of political turmoil and excitement. Mine was a politically active, left-of-center family, and that meant countless marches and rallies for the important causes of the day: the civil rights movement, the movement in opposition to the American war in Viet Nam War, and many spin-offs of both. I spent my college years at the University of Chicago (1968–1972), continuing in those same activities and there developing a keen interest in modern China.

At the University of Chicago, I studied first with the late Professor Tang Tsou in the political science department and later with Philip Kuhn and Akira Iriye in history. In 1972 I entered graduate school at Columbia University where I initially studied with C. Martin Wilbur and, upon his retirement, with Wm. Theodore de Bary. During those years, I studied Chinese (from 1970) and then Japanese (from 1973) relentlessly, day and night. Americans were unable to study in China throughout most of the 1970s, so that was still a romantic, though never actually a practical, desideratum. Columbia had a rather draconian language requirement (long since watered down), and thus I had taken the equivalent of a fair number of years of both Chinese and Japanese language (including summers) by the time I was searching for a thesis topic.

I forget who first suggested the topic of Naitō Konan (1866–1934), the great Japanese Sinologist, but I jumped at the suggestion. The next thing I knew I was reading my first book in Japanese, cover to cover, a biography of Naitō by one of his last students, Mitamura Taisuke of Ritsumeikan University. And, in late 1976 I was off on my first trip to Asia with support from the Fulbright Foundation and later from the Japanese Ministry of Education. I spent roughly eighteen months at Kyoto University, where Naitō had pioneered Chinese studies at the beginning of the twentieth century, reading through his works, soaking up as much of the Sinological world of Kyoto University as possible, and interviewing Naitō's last students. I also made some of my best friends among the students of that generation in Kyoto at the time.

Historical studies were in those days largely compartmentalized by nations. The idea of crossing borders and working on more than one national entity at the same time was not frowned upon, but it was not exactly encouraged either—anywhere in the world. Diplomatic historians at least paid lip service to working in multiple archives and multiple languages, but in reality few historians, diplomatic or otherwise, working in the West were actually

doing that. Professor Iriye was one of those few and a great inspiration to me.

Many times over the years I have been asked, in East Asia as well as the West, if I am first and foremost a historian of China or Japan. The answer I like to give—and usually do—is that I don't make that distinction. I explain that I pick topics that cross the Sino-Japanese border and go where the research necessitates I go. We now have the language of “border-crossing” and “global studies” and even “globalization,” but that is a relative recent addition to the historian's lexicon.

But, once I sensed the wealth of fascinating but still unstudied topics in Sino-Japanese interactions, I was an immediate convert. Subsequent research topics and books included: the life and work of a Japanese expatriate in China (Nakae Ushikichi, 1889–1942); Japanese travel writings about China (1862–1945); the Japanese community of Shanghai; Japanese historiography (1784–present) concerning the gold seal presented by the founding emperor of the Later Han dynasty in 57 CE to an emissary from somewhere in that space we now call Japan and soon lost before being found in the late eighteenth century; and most recently, the voyage of the *Senzaimaru* in 1862 and the restarting of Sino-Japanese diplomatic and commercial relations in the modern era. Many run-ups to and spin-offs from these (and other) projects are represented in the essays that follow in this collection.

In 1988 I called together a small group which met in my hotel room at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, and we formed the Sino-Japanese Studies Group. There were only about fifteen of us at the time—Sherman Cochran reassured me that there were fewer participants at the first national congress of the Chinese Communist Party—and we weren't exactly sure what we wanted to do, but we agreed that we would try to meet each year in conjunction with the AAS meetings and that I would launch the *Sino-Japanese Studies Newsletter*. It was to come out twice annually. I then sent out hundreds of announcements for subscriptions to this new periodical, and we were off. After two issues, we dropped “Newsletter” from the title. Aside from a short hiatus, we have been bringing *SJS* out ever since. It is now free and online (www.chinajapan.org), and articles are posted as they are run through the reviewing mill and accepted.

I began my teaching career at Harvard University (1981–1988) at a time when there was no normal route to tenure candidacy there. I then moved to the University of California at Santa Barbara (1989–2005). My position in the History Department there was defined as “comparative East Asianist,” a designation I was extremely proud to flaunt. During that time I was blessed with a one-year visiting professorship at Kyoto University's prestigious Institute for Research in the Humanities (Jinbun kagaku kenkyūjo) and

blessed again with a two-year visiting professorship (2001–2003) at the School of Historical Studies, Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. In 2005 I took up my present Canada Research Chair at York University in Toronto.

I had hoped that the kind of “border-crossing” that my research entails would become a broader trend than it has in the larger world of East Asian studies. The systemic problems remain: difficult languages, institutional pressures to work on one country at a time, latent anti-Japanese feelings in the China field, and the like. In fact, many people have overcome these disabilities, though not all of them have come rushing to do inter-East Asian studies. I personally remained convinced that the modern histories of the two entities we now called “China” and “Japan” (to say nothing of “Taiwan” and “Hong Kong”) are so inextricably intertwined that one has to take the other into account when studying virtually any topic. Before the middle of the nineteenth century, this statement is more difficult to sustain, but there are those who are so convinced.

The essays in this collection represent work I have done over the past thirty-plus years, from my last days as a graduate student in the late 1970s through more recent times. The field of Sino-Japanese studies as I understand it can be roughly divided into comparative history and the history of interactions. Most of these essays take up the latter theme, though some address the former or employ both approaches.